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Christianity Revealed

Preliminaries

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Christianity Revealed

Personal Introduction

Dr M D Magee

Christian doctrine is... presented as having such unique authority that it must have been made in heaven rather than being the work of thinkers and negotiators, in particular periods in church history, and therefore open to historical criticism and the problems of cultural relativism.

John Bowden, SCM

Scholarly Integrity

I have been interested in the origins of Christianity since the mid 1950s when I was a schoolboy and the discovery of the Scrolls by the Dead Sea had stimulated interest in biblical studies.

My father had been diagnosed with tuberculosis and had to spend a year in hospital, eventually having a lung removed before he recovered. Being of Irish immigrant descent, he had been brought up as a Catholic but, having met and fallen in love with a stubborn Protestant woman, he had declined to bring up his children as Catholics and had fallen out with the church. In the TB sanatorium, no doubt conscious of his own mortality and having lots of spare time, he took to exploring various religious alternatives, none of which he found satisfactory. During his explorations however he read various books that examined the historical origins of Christianity. Amongst them were *King Jesus*, the didactic novel by Robert Graves, *The Nazarene Gospel Restored* by Graves and Podro, *The Other Side of the Story* by Rupert Furneaux and a book about the liberal Babylonian Rabbi, Hillel, the title of which I have forgotten.

When I cycled the seventeen miles to Ilkley to visit him each Saturday, he would tell me about his week's explorations and we would discuss them. It was sufficient to ease his conscience about his split with the church but naturally when he recovered, as a working man, he found less time to continue his studies and his interest waned. I too found myself doing school examinations and eventually entering university to study sciences and my interest also waned. It remained but in attenuated form and I would still read popular books about Christian origins from time to time.

When I retired from government service the chance arose for me to follow these long suspended interests and that is how I came to write these books.

My discoveries astonished me. They seemed so obvious that they quickly led me to doubt the integrity of scholars in the field of biblical scholarship. Trained as a scientist, I looked for rational answers to the questions that arose, but biblical scholars seek to confirm their religious outlook. Experts in biblical studies are usually religious people, whether Christian or Jewish. Those who have no interest in religion turn to physics, molecular biology, music or literature. Though religious people might well opt for any of these subjects too, non-religious students rarely opt for religious studies.

The result is that, whereas normal endeavours of life are practised by a cross section of society in respect of religious views, religious studies are the field of religiously inclined people almost exclusively. So, in biblical studies, a subject that professes to be scientific—nowadays at any rate—the normal checks and balances that allow science to progress do not apply. I speak generally knowing that there are some who try hard to be objective but for most it is either too difficult or they are so indoctrinated in religious belief they do not want to try.

Religious experts are consequently far from a fair sample of society. They are biased towards the beliefs they have grown up with and unlikely to question their basic tenets. Quite the reverse, though they profess to be scientific, they are really apologists for their religious view. When astonishing hypotheses are published which cast doubt on the accepted views of the religious experts they will be ignored. This allows biblical scholars to continue in well-paid careers raking over the same muddy spoil and coming to false conclusions forever. Sometimes the same happens in science but there, new discoveries cannot be ignored for long. Science is too big and scientists too diverse for an important discovery to be ignored. What some group would prefer to go away, another group find is just the link or breakthrough they have been waiting for. Essentially biblical research is monolithic. Everyone wants to confirm God's plan. No one wants to have their lifelong beliefs destroyed.

Strong pressures have always existed for biblical scholars to maintain the status quo—their peers who value the sinecures they have, their own careers within this orthodoxy, their belief that Christians are saintly people and do not tell lies except to glory God and their conviction that they could not have been wrong all their lives and the church wrong for two thousand years.

The key to it all is honesty. Sincere Christians are honest people but Christians since the beginning of their religion have not thought it dishonest to tell a lie—when Christianity benefits! This pious lying has become so accepted since the introduction of state education, with its religious emphasis on Christianity, that not only does no one now think it unusual, few people recognise it.

Truth

The starting point for the Christians was Jesus the Nazarene who is perhaps the most influential person who has ever lived, even though, in scientific historical terms, little is known about him. Whether this is the power of God at work or the astonishing credulity of human beings is the moot point. The authorised accounts, the gospels, suggest that he was active for between one and three years, and within only two generations of the crucifixion, a Christian group, the Docetists, attracted converts saying Jesus had never lived at all, except as a phantom.

It is possible to argue that Jesus indeed never lived but was invented to explain the origins of the belief in a cosmic person called Christ. Yet the gospel stories are not conducive to the idea that the earthly life of Jesus was invented because to have been crucified was a liability to the gentile bishops. It must therefore have been what they had and had no choice about accepting. What they could do was pretend that the stories about Jesus had been confused by their tellers in the confusion of the times. So, we can assume that Jesus did exist, that he was a man of inspiring deeds and a religious leader, that he was crucified, that his followers believed he had risen from the dead and was intending to return to earth in glory.

Beginning in Sunday school or in the religious instruction classroom, worthy Christians embellish arguable stories about Jesus as if they were true. No teacher of infants and juniors stops to consider what truth there is in what they themselves know about the founder of their religion and they then compound the felony by painting astonishing fairy tales based on their own conceptions and not on any evidence. None of it matters to Christian teachers who know they are doing God's work. Psychologically they are telling lies believing it to be God's truth put into their hearts. Jesus himself justified it when he instructed his disciples in Matthew 10:19:

“Take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak.”

It differs from having God's conviction that heretics should burn at the stake only in degree. A mass religious delusion has been created and given social approval. If some pious lie fits the delusion then it is all right by God and society.

There are Christian books purporting to tell the childhood of Jesus, but no one can truthfully say anything positive about Jesus's childhood. These books seem like novels but their writers, if they claim anything, say they are writing inspired or spiritual history. Novels can be quite instructive and they are intended to be entertaining. A novel can indeed be inspiring but, however inspiring it is, it is not history. Do we “believe in” novels?

Christians certainly believe in the inspiration of the spirit or the Holy Ghost. But even the inspired gospels contradict each other interminably. The Christian will consider such pious works of imagination as “God's Truth,” if it does not contradict the mass delusion of our age. If it does, it will be ignored or decried, according to its importance.

Biblical scholars equally build themselves reputations by writing fantasies called doctoral dissertations about a few sentences of some ancient epistle, the significance of the prophet Elijah at the Transfiguration or whether Jesus ascended to heaven after a few days or forty days. Such contributions to knowledge are no different from discussing how many angels can dance on the head of a needle, the example always quoted of how enlightened we now are compared with the middle ages.

All of it is dryly accepted nowadays by Christian and secularist alike. The pious dishonesty underlying Christian belief pervades society to the extent that editors, historians, scientists and literary reviewers accept it and excuse it as tradition, if they find an excuse necessary. Practising Christians in the UK now comprise about a twentieth of the population, but every newspaper will have a “Faith” column devoted to Christian speculations. New Agers, Pagans, Witches, Druids and even Moslems and Hindus do not get this coverage yet together there are more of them than there are Christians. Most people believe in no religion, though many have the habit of answering the question, “What religion are you?” by saying, “Christian.” They run their lives with no recourse to Christianity at all. This is pious dishonesty writ small. It is a legacy of the time when any answer to this question other than “Christian” would have meant a roasting over burning faggots. Or perhaps, like the Romans, people are chary about offending a god.

Religious people will counter me by saying I am being deliberately iconoclastic. I hope I am. I find it hard to believe that, in the modern world, people still believe fairy tales, but the fact that I do not believe them makes me a less biased observer than the experts. Christians have over the years been doing what the modern apologists still do, although with rather greater vigour. Much of the evidence they did not like, they destroyed and the rest of it they altered or obfuscated. That makes it hard, today to get at the truth, and the loss of positive evidence makes speculation essential.

John Bowden, who is an intelligent and liberal Christian, and the chief executive of the SCM, speaks in his valuable book (*Jesus: the Unanswered Questions*, SCM, 1988) of his “passionate concern for the truth of things and what I would dare to call the love of the God of Truth”. It illustrates something about the psychology of Christians. This one is concerned for truth, but truth is too abstract for him, and he finds the need to personify it into the “God of Truth” for him to really love it! Christians have to personify abstractions to make them real to them and therefore important enough to bother about, and they must have the authority of a god behind something for it to count. Why cannot the Reverend Bowden train his Christian readers to value virtuous abstractions like truth for their own sake. Without the supernatural floss they might actually get more of a response in this modern age.

Pious Lies

I was surprised to find the story underlying the Christian religion not hard to discern once it is read critically and with information from other sources. This latter is the stumbling block for most people. Few people even read the gospels these days but those that do have no comparative historical standards to position the tale they are reading. The standards exist and are just the ones that ought now to be taught whenever the gospel stories are taught—but are not. We have always had Josephus, the Romano-Jewish historian, Philo, the expatriate Jewish philosopher, the Christian fathers and the Talmud but now we also have the Dead Sea Scrolls. These have proved such a severe embarrassment to the biblical experts that accusations have been made that their translation and publication have been deliberately delayed by Christian and Jewish authorities scared that their flocks might get sceptical. It is true that it has taken fifty years for the full corpus of the scroll fragments to be released to the general public, but everyone, Christian and critic alike, tries to save face by finding excuses for the absurd delay.

Christian experts have others tacks available lest anyone should begin to think the Scrolls have any meaning for Christian interpretation. While suspending the publication of the Scrolls themselves, they publish books highlighting the reasons why the sect of the Scrolls have nothing in common with Christianity other than what would be expected of contemporaries living in the same place.

Do not believe it! The story of the founder of Christianity can be told in considerable detail from the New Testament, the traditional sources and the fresh information we have from the Scrolls. This is history not faith and it fits into the known history of the times. Christians might protest that we already know all we need to know about Jesus from the gospels. That is just what I was saying above about Christian experts. They believe they have had the story since the first century when it happened, and all that needed clearing up were some confusions which had been accidentally introduced. The truth is that the confusions are not just incidental. They are many and widespread throughout the story.

History is taken from contemporary written sources or later accounts. The problem immediately arises that public records are those which the authorities approve. It has been summarised as: History is written by the victorious. Victors do not give objective accounts of their beaten enemies. Caesar gives a distorted account of the Druids. For Nixon, the Vietnamese were only Gooks—subhumans. Official sources often ignore or give distorted images of whatever they do not like. Yet careful study can reveal what the archivists and official historians have sought to conceal.

The Jewish scriptures, the Old Testament, is not an haphazard compilation of ancient histories collated by God's will as many believe. It was the official history of the theocracy of Judaea—ruled by the second temple priesthood not by God. The Pentateuch, the Jewish Torah, in particular was produced by Judaeans sponsored by their Persian masters as the official law-book of the new Jewish puppet of the Persian Empire. Few Judaeans then were literate but in illiterate countries the oral tradition is strong. The indigenous Jews would still have been familiar with the old tales and especially those who followed older non-Yehouist religions for which the traditional stories had mythological value. For these reasons among others, the priests wanted to incorporate the essence of the old tales, albeit suitably altered to fit new notions brought from Babylon. The old story of Israel's liberation from bondage in Egypt was rewritten to climax in the unification of Israel under David and then Solomon who set up the priesthood which, blessed by God, continued to the time of the founders of the second temple—descendants of Zadok, would you believe? Today historians doubt that the glorious kingdom of Solomon ever existed.

The New Testament is similar. Central to the ideas herein is that the gentile Christian bishops did not tell the truth but deliberately obscured it. Pious lying is not simply an “aberration” of Christianity, it is its very foundation. These original pious lies were not merely whims of over enthusiastic converts but were deliberate deceptions needed to refute the stories about the real Jesus that people were bringing back from Palestine. There never was a Jesus of faith until the first Christians invented him by telling pious lies about another Jesus—the Jesus of history. Again the oral tradition was strong and could neither be ignored nor denied because too many people were telling the truth. In the lead up to the Jewish War and its aftermath, many Jews left Palestine to join their bothers in the wider empire. They knew the story of Jesus the Nazarene and told it freely. It was a different story from that of the first gentile bishops. The bishops had a problem.

They could not simply deny the stories because there were too many of them and they came from different people. Simple denial would have seemed unreasonable, making liars of everyone arriving from the east. They had to refute them by pious lying. The tack of the bishops was to claim that the storytellers were confused and mistaken. Their stories were true but in the context of the War and the jealousies of the Jewish Pharisees, they had been garbled. Of course, they had not, but the bishops then deliberately garbled them! They simply changed a few details of the stories and recast them in a more favourable light.

The flocks were reassured. Such distortions would arise as stories were passed on. They probably played games like the game of consequences just as we do, and could accept that the stories had been given the wrong interpretation in the light of bad feeling. The enemies of Jesus had propagated these tales in the first place to mislead the innocent storytellers.

Old habits die hard. Once the habit of pious lying had started it spread rapidly. Eventually the church had to call a halt to the burgeoning number of increasingly fantastic gospels that were being written under the name of Gnosticism. They picked out the versions that they preferred and started the New Testament canon. All other pious works were rejected. The point of gospel interpretation therefore is to see how a gospel pericope could be reconstructed into something feasible rather than the fantasies invented by the bishops to make Jesus into a superman or even a god.

Jewish Myth

Christians are told by their lying tutors and priests that the bible tells a story that goes back to the beginning of time and was first set down by Moses around 1400 BC. No one now believes it. Moses is supposed to have written the five books of the Pentateuch but they consistently refer to him in the third person and include an account of his own death. Was Moses resurrected so that he could write or finish his books? Scholars hold that the Pentateuch did not achieve its final form until well after the “exile”, though it was based on some earlier sources. It was created from a number of different sources by unknown editors. The bible is therefore not as ancient a book as the preachers make out. Though it draws upon older material, it was written in its present form around 100 BC.

Among the earliest parts of the Old Testament are the creation and flood myths, of which two of each are present in Genesis. They have their origins in earlier Babylonian and Sumerian myths, as everyone now knows except Christian teachers. These older myths did not relate to the Hebrew God, Yehouah, now considered to be God, but to other gods now considered to be devils. So why is God, the Hebrew god, Yehouah, taking stories from earlier idols. Idolatry is or was a sin, according to Jews and Christians.

The content of the books of Kings and Chronicles goes back to about 1000 BC, although again it was re-written around the second century BC. The best that can be said is that the bible contains material that is ascribable to Hebrew tradition and no other going back to about 1000 BC. Not counting apocryphal books, Daniel, written during the reign of the Greek king Antiochus IV, around 167 BC, is the latest.

Christian Sunday school types also like to impress their impressionable charges by claiming the bible was written by over 40 authors including kings, peasants, philosophers, fishermen, poets, statesmen, scholars and so on. The truth—which is known to any Christian preacher unless he is a Martian—is that no one knows who the authors of these books were. The books of the Bible are anonymous, being named simply after the main character and even when the author is named, any honest person would have to consider the practice that was common in those days of writing pseudographs, or books under the name of a famous person to give them credibility. Certainly Christian scholars are well aware of the practice and even earn their living looking into the practice financed by famous US universities willing to endow such relatively pointless work.

The book of Daniel is a pseudepigraph. The author pretends he is the Daniel of Ezekiel 14:14, 14:20 and 28:3, writing about 550 BC, but scholars, including Christian ones, are agreed it was written in 167 BC, 400 years later. Parts of it were written in Aramaic not Hebrew suggesting a time when Aramaic was being used instead of Hebrew and therefore a late date. We cannot apply modern standards to the author of Daniel and say he forged the book, because it was quite acceptable to do this, but modern Christians who still pretend that the book was written in the Babylonian exile and tell their Sunday school classes so, are just lying to little children who have no way of judging.

Moses, Peter, Amos, Joshua, Nehemiah, Daniel, Luke, Solomon, Matthew and Paul are claimed by some Christian liars as authors of the Biblical books. None of these can be substantiated. Some of Paul's epistles might have been written by him but they might have been pseudepigraphs written a hundred years later. Nehemiah was long thought to have been genuine but not now. The gospels are anonymous. Their ascription to Jesus's disciples and their aides is a later Church tradition. There is no hard evidence that Moses, Joshua or Solomon are even real people.

While the later reigns of the kings, from the Assyrian captivity of the Northern Kingdom, down to the Babylonian captivity of the Southern Kingdom, are fairly well attested by external sources, the earlier Kings are not. Obscure references possibly to David have been found but their interpretation is doubtful, and Solomon and Saul are not mentioned in any archaeological monuments yet found. Most scholars are concluding that Saul, David and Solomon are mythological figures, not historical ones.

There are religious texts written before the earliest parts of the Old Testament. The Rig Veda dates from before 1000 BC, possibly as early as 1500 BC, making it probably older than the surmised Old Testament sources. Likewise, the Hindu Upanishads date from sometime between 1400 and 800 BC, again as old as the Old Testament sources. The Hindu scriptures are a vast body of literature, which include such epic poems as the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, including the Bhagavad-Gita as a later insertion.

The collection and writing of the Hindu scriptures continued well into the Christian era, about 500 AD, giving them a span longer than the bible. If Christian preachers want to make something of ancient works collected over a long time, why do they chose the bible rather than the holy books of the Indian sub-continent? The answer, in case anyone remains puzzled, is that Christian priests and preachers will use any ploy to impress children and the gullible, and persuade them that their particular choice of god is the only one worth reading. To do this, they have always felt that any deception and any lie is forgivable as long as it is to enlarge their own god's empire of captives.

New Testament

The books of the New Testament range from about 50 AD for the letters of Paul, to 150 AD for some of the other letters. So, the Christian bible covers works from about 1100 years of history, though the Old Testament was really written in the second century BC and the New Testament from about 50 to 150 AD. It is false, therefore, as Christian teachers persistently do, to claim that the bible was written over a period of thousands of years prior to the gospel evangelists completing the message.

Christian schoolteachers also tell their little ones that the bible is full of harmony despite its many authors over thousands of years and the difficult matters they had to deal with. It is another outright lie. That the ideas in the bible evolved is plain from the bible itself, although the chronology has been mixed up. The Hebrew idea of death originally had no concept of heaven and hell. This is plain in the scriptures. Sexual promiscuity is another example. The patriarchs and kings David and Solomon were outrageous in their promiscuity, and the law of Moses even contained provisions relating to inheritance for the children of multiple wives (Dt 21:15-17), but Jesus says that a man and a woman should cleave together as one (Mk 10:6-12). How is this harmonious?

Even more damning of this lie is that Jesus supposedly abrogated part of the law of Moses (Mk 7:5-9) all of which had been obligatory for the whole of the Jewish scripture. Paul the apostle makes it clear that the whole of the law is abrogated (Gal 2:16) for Christians. And even more so yet, the just and loving God of the New Testament (1 Jn 4:8, 2 Peter 3:9, Jas 1:17) commanding the Israelites to massacre men, women, children and infants of the Amelekites. There are so many more that a great part of Christian “scholarship” is trying to find ingenious ways of harmonizing these discrepancies:

- 2 Kings 4:32-37—A dead child is raised (well before the time of Jesus).
- Matthew 9:18-25, John 11:38-44—Two dead persons are raised (by Jesus himself).
- Acts 26:23—Jesus was the first to rise from the dead.

- Matthew 7:21—Not everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.
- Acts 2:21, Romans 10:13—Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.
- Acts—2:39 Those God calls to himself will be saved.

- Matthew 7:21, Luke 10:36-37, Romans 2:6, 13, James 2:24—We are justified by works, not by faith.
- John 3:16, Romans 3:20-26, Ephesians 2:8-9, Galatians 2:16—We are justified by faith, not by works.

It is not surprising that Christianity is composed of twenty thousand sects, all of which can affirm their particular interpretation of Faith with explicit biblical proof texts, precisely because the bible is such a mass of contradictions, any of which can be quoted to establish different points of view.

The Book of Mormon is studied, read and believed by millions of people despite being known as an amateurish fake. Mormons accept it as true despite evidence it is a fake. Mormons plainly lack the capacity of rational thought, but they are only unusual in that they believe a recent fake. Christians believe a fraudulent book completed almost 2000 years ago but known to be a hotch-potch of incompatible ideas. It does not matter. They just take what they want or what they are taught to take from it and ignore the rest, inconsistencies and all. Christians too lack the capacity for rational thought, but most of them are badly educated, simple and superstitious peasants. What does that make their sophisticated preachers and ministers with their university educations or their radio stations?

The Fashion for Dying Gods

So, pious lying was the foundation of Christianity, going back to its origins in the Roman Empire and explaining many of the puzzles of the New Testament. Why though did this strange new religion, built on a supposedly real figure who had to be hidden to be acceptable, spread at all? The answer was that there was a religious vacuum in the Roman Empire. When the Roman Republic became an Empire, the people became absorbed with unusual events, with the supernatural and with mysteries. Even sophisticated people became less rational. The native Romans did not build mythologies like the Greeks and the Egyptians but instead had the simple idea of spirits—everything had its spirit or “numen,” a power for good or ill. A man had a spirit called his “genius” and a woman's was called her “juno.” The home and the hearth had their own spirits, important to the happiness of family life.

The spirits of men or women of power and influence were favoured by Greeks and later by Romans in the cult of heroes. They said Orpheus and Hercules were once living men just as the Egyptians thought that Osiris and Isis were the original rulers of Egypt. If they were, a complex of myths and legends were attributed to them after they died until they became fully-fledged gods.

But Romans were open minded about religion in a way which we cannot understand, partly because they were indifferent to blasphemy. They were tolerant of religious differences and came to enjoy novelty. Those who derided a god were foolish but Romans did not take personal offence if the god was their own—gods could look after themselves. They did not need a feeble mortal to defend them, indeed it was absurd for a mortal to take up cudgels to defend a god. Romans sincerely believed that the gods were sensitive, petulant, and ready to intervene in human lives. If a man offended a god then the poor fellow had better watch out—he'd find his luck was out, or worse. Romans did worry that angry gods might respond indiscriminately and innocent bystanders might suffer. If a republican Roman thought he had angered a god, he would often commit suicide rather than invite a divine response that might destroy his city or ravage it with plague. A general fear of divine anger not blasphemy invited Roman displeasure with those who taunted gods.

Religious tolerance meant they could freely admit and copy other people's religions. They were impressed by ancient history, and first adopted the Greek gods and then Oriental ones. Native Roman religion was worthy and pious but totally this worldly. It paid no attention to an after life because Romans at first had no thoughts of survival of the personality. On death, Romans simply joined the “Good People” (no singular).

By the end of the republic Roman religion had ceased to be a religion. Its festivals had become occasions of state ceremony. Augustus, the adopted son of Julius Caesar, had formed the Empire. The population was getting more cosmopolitan, culture more varied and the old religion less attuned to the needs of worshippers. People felt dissatisfied and sought novelty in eastern ceremonial, the spectacular and the supernatural. In our chronological reckoning, it was a millennium and similar madresses have followed each thousand years ever since.

Foreign gods interested the Romans because they had powerful spirits and a long history. The worshippers wanted to improve their fortune by having a god walking beside them. Astrology became increasingly popular and the idea that gods lived beyond the stars, probably introduced from the Persians via Babylonia and developed by Plato. The stars reflected the actions of the gods and enabled diviners to tell the future, but people sought a way of compelling the gods to help them. Theurgy, magic that made the gods to do the will of the practitioner, became fashionable. Meticulous observation of ritual had always been essential to getting the gods' favour. Eventually the popular imagination was captured by the idea that the gods loved mankind and sought only to help them—they were saviours!

The idea was not new. It had begun beyond the Roman Empire in the countries of the Middle East. Dying and rising gods were known in Egypt, Babylonia, Syria, Phoenicia, Persia, India. In Crete, an empty tomb was displayed as the “Tomb of Zeus”. Epimenides, the Cretan philosopher wrote in the sixth century BC:

“A grave have they fashioned for thee, O Zeus, highest and greatest—the Cretans, always liars, evil beasts, idle gluttons. But thou art not dead, for to eternity thou livest and standest, for in thee we live and move and have our being.”

This poem is cited twice in the New Testament by Paul, in Titus 1:12 and Acts 17:28. The site was latterly marked by a chapel to the Lord Christ!

Marduk or Tammuz, the Babylonian God, was to come to earth as a saviour. Saoshyant was the saviour of the Persian religion and Krishna in India had the same role. The Egyptians as early as 2200 BC expected Osiris, a saviour described as the “shepherd of his people who shall gather together his scattered flocks and in whom there is no sin.” Most often these were dying gods who had originally signified the annual death and revival of vegetation with the seasons. Like the withering vegetation they disappeared into the underworld where dwelt the dead—they died—then when the onset of summer was signalled at the spring equinox, the god was born again to fertilise the crops and stimulate the reproductive cycle.

Professor H Gunkel traced Babylonian myths in the imagery of Genesis and Revelation in his book, *Creation and Chaos*. Gunkel sees in the background of the “Servant of the Lord” in Deutero-Isaiah, the figure of the dying and the rising god, adopted for Judaism.

Arriving from the east, these religions became common in the east of the Empire then spread west to become popular throughout. Today in an equivalent desire for novelty, we find people taking to Buddhism, Druidism, Wicca, Taoism and even extra-terrestrial religions like Raelism and the disastrous Heaven's Gate. Then Attis, Osiris, Tammuz, Adonis, Dionysus and Prometheus all were introduced to Rome as new gods and worshipped as divine victims whose resurrection offered salvation for their mourning followers.

It is no coincidence that, at this very time of change, yet another religion arose in the east in which a god died for the sins of mankind. Pious lying added a sense of realism to the event because, the confused travellers who told the true story confirmed that it had really happened even though they had mixed up the details. The new religion was therefore a religion of a god who really had died and there were people who confirmed it—the story told until this day by Christians. Furthermore, it was a religion that began with an ancient book of prophecy which proved that the god, called the Messiah, was expected. This was the holy book of the Jews—the Jewish scriptures—purloined from them by the first bishops to give their new religion a bogus history.

Finally, Christianity sprouted out of the Jewish community in the Roman world. The bishops had a ready made market for their new religion in the many Romans who had attached themselves to the Jewish religion but were scared to be circumcised—a serious operation for a grown man—as the Jewish religion required. Even more Roman women had attached themselves to the Jewish faith because they had no such worry. At the time of Jesus, Jews constituted as many as ten percent of the population of the eastern part of the Roman Empire—the part that had been part of the earlier Persian empire. Jesus confined his mission in Judaea to Jews, and the first Christians were Jewish. The new religion offered itself as Judaism for gentiles and inevitably had early success.

Gospels

There is no need to suppose that the original followers of Jesus were other than sincere in their belief that he had risen from the dead. They did not tell lies themselves. The lies were told by the gentile bishops a few decades later when the Hellenized Jewish believers in Jesus had told some aspects of the story in the Roman empire away from Judaea.

All scholars, Christians and critics, accept that the gospels were not written as history but to persuade their readers to believe the claims of the church. They are admitting the gospels are not necessarily true. Put bluntly, they contain lies, but they are lies intended to convince people Jesus was the divine saviour, so Christians believe they are acceptable lies. Let the question of the historicity of the gospels be asked and Christians admit to pious lying.

The gospels were not all written at the same time and by independent authors. Few experts disagree that Mark was written first and John last. Matthew and Luke both used Mark extensively, but had other sources too, one at least of which was a collection of wise sayings attributed to Jesus called the Logia—or sometimes just Q. The later these works are, the more suspect they are. The Logia is probably the earliest constituent of the gospels but we do not have it. We have to deduce it from Matthew, Mark and Luke. The earliest text we have in its own right is Mark. Mark is therefore likely to contain the gospel message in its least elaborated form.

Where the other gospels expanded upon Mark, they might be drawing on the same tradition and adding to our understanding of it, but such elaborations have to be considered with care. John's gospel is too late and elaborated to be a reliable source. Christians refer to the author of John as the “Theologian,” which should be sufficient for us to distrust it. Theologians invented pious lies and have made a profession out of elaborating them. If we infer something from Mark or other sources like Josephus or the Dead Sea Scrolls and find support in John's gospel all well and good.

One more point. No scholar will deny that the books of the New Testament have been repeatedly edited. The aim of each editor was to make the story more convincing for potential believers—to add more pious lies to the glory of God. When additions have been made, sometimes it is obvious because the theology or Christology is too advanced for the time being described and the passage can be disregarded. Often we notice a phrase or a whole passage that puzzles us because it does not fit the character of the Christian Jesus. Such passages must be due to editors failing to rewrite or to scratch out the original. No editor would add a passage that contradicts the Christ of Faith. It follows that they must apply to the Jesus of History.

The narratives of Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John were a sort of anti-history—expressions of faith in the crucified and resurrected Christ. The gullible gentile converts had been persuaded that a god had died and been resurrected because the world was soon to be renewed under the direct rule of God. They believed it, converted and waited for the angelic host. Nothing happened but stories began to emerge that their dying and resurrected god was really a Jewish bandit. The bishops suddenly found themselves with a large number of cracks to paper over. They invented excuse after excuse, explanation after explanation, and must have been amazed that many of their flocks believed their excuses.

Previously the new god had had no history. It did not matter because his return would explain all. The need to explain the stories that came from Palestine rapidly gave the new god a history, and beginning with Mark, it was written down as the gospels. Though they are not historically true, Christian scholars suspended their reason and, taking Jesus to be divine, accepted the New Testament accounts as God's Truth. They were false historically but nevertheless true! Some scholars were more honest and rejected all the supernatural events as embellishments. They used the form critical method to judge what was true and what not. Eventually scholars like Bultman and the more recent Jesus Seminar almost totally rejected the gospels as history. They left themselves with only a few of the sayings of Jesus as genuine tradition but the actual context of the sayings was considered irretrievably lost, thus leaving huge gaps for scholarly speculative theses—provided they did not threaten the Christian consensus.

Now, Christian punters mainly believe the Christian bible is infallibly true but biblical scholars think most of it is not true even if they are Christian biblical scholars! They threw out the baby with the bath water, which is perhaps what they intended, because they knew or suspected that Jesus was not really what Christians are taught. Better eliminate Jesus all together as a historical figure and thereby make him impregnable as a religious symbol than to risk it being proved from some alien source that he was not what Christians have always claimed.

Not until Albert Schweitzer (1906) did scholars generally recognised that the obvious was true. If the gospels had any historical value at all, their central figure was in the apocalyptic Jewish tradition. Christians were never pleased with this revelation. After all over a hundred years before Schweitzer, Reimarus had declared Jesus a revolutionary, but that had been ignored. After limply acknowledging Schweitzer for a hundred years they wanted to return to the sagacious old mendicant teacher, kind to children, that they preferred. They are now carrying on in this vein even though the main background to Jewish apocalypticism has been found in the Scrolls of the Dead Sea. Yet simple mendicant country teachers are not the stuff of history. Sages have to have a political role of some sort to be noticed. Scholars failed to consider the political factors of the time that necessitated the involvement of Jesus. Once the political circumstances are understood, the reason for pious lying becomes obvious and the gospels can be explained.

I offer the hypothesis presented here knowing that no Christian will take any notice. There is no persuading irrational people as we can tell increasingly at the millennium when bizarre beliefs of all kinds multiply. Those willing to examine a non-mystical explanation of the formation of Christianity through pious lying might find this book satisfying. There is not the least doubt that some Christian scholars know Christianity was built on lies and would willingly allow the Jesus of History to be exposed so that God's ministers can concentrate on the Jesus of Faith. Perhaps I can be of some assistance.

An Honest Religion

Faith, Tillich argued, is not belief, it is struggling with the questions. Christianity promises joy and peace of mind, and troublesome questions are not part of the Christian prescription. Christians are relieved of mental wrestling by being taught unquestioning belief, and being given ready made answers. Does not the Holy Book say, “Unless you become as little children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven?” Goodness is equated with innocence, and Christ himself is depicted as a bemused child, innocently trying to be good in a wicked world. This stereotype is urged on believers. As children, their minds are made up for them, and ministers supply pre-packaged values and opinions to do it. Christianity aims to keep its lambs child-like, immature and dependent, the better to shepherd them and fleece them.

Christians are taught to see the guiding hand of God in every circumstance. God teaches them lessons through their fate. He punishes them for wrongdoing and rewards them for doing good. No wonder so many people today are criminals—it is rewarding so cannot be wrong! Christianity, for all its concern with free-will, sees people as puppets, and God is the puppet master. Society and ultimately Nature, not God, punishes people for doing wrong, otherwise peoples' fates fall within the normal distribution of events—some are fortunate and some are not, but most lives are neither one nor the other.

The bible is mythical, and when that is accepted its values can be examined with more objectivity and relevance to today. Myths giving people ways of living 3000 years ago are not necessarily any good today, and in practice much of the bible, Old and New Testaments, is ignored while other parts are arbitrarily considered unviolable. Jesus plainly tells us as graphically as possible that there would be far more camels than rich men in heaven. Though Jesus related mainly to men and could see no merit in being rich, for Christians it is far more important not to be homosexual than it is not to be rich.

Religion is a kind of aesthetic experience. Worship is the awe we feel at wondrous things like natural vistas, a storm, beauty, great art or the night sky. Religion exploited these emotions, captured natural awe for its unnatural purpose of propagating falsehood. The mystical and numinous were divorced from their source and presented as evidence of a phantasm instead of our feeling of oneness with Nature. Religion is a creation of human imagination, using human experience of the real world not an imaginary world. Our instinct to be awestruck at natural experience has been hijacked by mental vampires called Christian priests and ministers.

Ministers tell us we can have eternal life, and we imagine it is foolish to refuse such an offer. But we pay now and get the goods after we die, when we are in no way fit to complain that we've been had. We are persuaded that death is life, and attend God's house regularly as insurance. Yet, if any minister assures us he is certain of eternal life, he is either deluded or he thinks we are. How can something beyond the reach of the senses be certain? Meanwhile life is a bed of nails for us to endure to prove we merit the reward of eternal life.

An honest religion is needed that emphasises the life we have, not some pig-in-a-poke of a life when life is impossible. Any decent religion should emphasise our human potential here and now, the protection of our world for the future of our children and their children, and whatever of the natural world we can still protect for them! Our purpose is not to hope for some selfish if deluded personal salvation of nuzzling up to Jesus when we are dead, but to promote our own role as saviours—salvation of life here on earth while we are alive as our duty not some empty right because we have been foolish enough to believe impossible stories. We should be the saviours, saving our world for our descendants when we die. Most of all, we get one chance only!

Christianity Revealed

Historical Criticism and Sacred History

Dr M D Magee

If God, as the almighty, wants to save us, surely He must know of a clear way of doing it. Why then does He use the method of “sacred history”, a type of history that is not subject to the laws of historical criticism and verification—history that the honest historian must reject as unhistorical?

Verifying Truth

Christian theologians advance all conceivable theological grounds to show that the method for verifying events used by historical criticism with regard to biblical narratives—and in particular with regard to the resurrection narratives—is inappropriate. Such objections are variations of the assertion that the historical-critical method is based on arbitrary presuppositions. This accusation is unjustified.

Karl Barth, in his remarks concerning the historical-critical method, refers to its far-reaching application to history as “in fact only a ridiculous and middle-class habit of the modern western mind, which is supremely phantastic in its chronic lack of imaginative phantasy.” Elsewhere he says: “Proper theology begins at the point where the difficulties disclosed by Strauss and Feuerbach are seen and then laughed at.”

Christian Hartlich of Tübingen, in December 1976, commented that this derision betrays Barth’s inability to engage historical criticism in the only field where the truth of statements concerning events can be decided—in the sphere of human discovery of truth. A merely asserted but unverified statement of a historical event can be no more than a possibility. Notwithstanding Barth’s monumental reputation, faith offers no basis for distinguishing true historical statements from false ones.

In determining the truth of statements concerning events from the past, the critical historian does not begin with arbitrary assumptions whether ideological, or conditioned by a predetermined Cartesian, Kantian, Positivist, Atheist or any other concept of history—often used by Christians as refutation in place of argument. As someone concerned with truth, the historian simply applies, in a methodical way, the universal criteria of truth to statements about events from the past. Unfortunately for Christian fears, recognizing this shakes the centuries old systematic defence of the Christian faith.

Hartlich sets out some principles that Christians might well follow. What follows is a freely rendered synopsis of them with additional commentary.

The historian cannot presuppose the truth of statements of events in old documents. Critical procedures must be followed to verify them. The historian must determine whether what such documents affirm did in fact take place and in the way the documents say. The author of a document might have supposed an event occurred and recorded his supposition in good faith, or he might have written what he did to have a particular effect on the readers without regard to its historical truth. Does the historical truth of the event stand independently of the subjective presentation by the narrator? If so, the historian confirms the event as historical and the account of the event as true.

The historian is necessarily critical, and criticism is necessary so long as the possibility for error exists. Equally, it is bad method to presuppose that even the most honest people are truthful in recording history. What they record might be honestly recorded, but there are many ways in which they might have been misled or even deceived. Regarding events found in the bible, the historian is not necessarily questioning the subjective conviction of the biblical authors, though he might well do because their honesty cannot be presupposed either, but simply requiring that what they wrote is verified.

The bible is called “sacred history,” the “history” of beings not known to normal experience, beings of divine, demonic, and supernatural origin yet apparently active in an otherwise natural world. “Sacred history” cannot be verified, and can only be classified as unhistorical. What is supernatural is not natural, and so does not and cannot meet natural criteria. But the evidence for the supernatural is tenuous, and what there is is hysterical.

When in Matthew 28:2ff, an angel descends to earth and moves a heavy stone causing, or by means of, an earthquake, two types of events present themselves. In principle, the earthquake could be verified by the accounts of others who noticed it. The descent of an angel is not verifiable, and is likely to have been a hysterical interpretation of the earthquake, if we must suppose the author is not deliberately exaggerating or deceiving. An angel is fundamentally removed from verification.

Statements about events in the past must be verified in the same way as we verify events today. When they cannot be, then they cannot be admitted as truth. “Sacred history” has to be taken by the historian with a pinch of salt. In the light of all modern experience, supernatural creatures are products of the imagination. It is hard to believe that an omnipotent God would choose such unlikely ways of revealing himself.

Testing the truth of statements concerning events in documents from the past is only possible by means of the historical-critical method. Its stipulations are not arbitrarily chosen, but have been shown in practice to reveal historical truth where it can be revealed. Indeed, because historical knowledge is so determined, it can be argued that historians are able to grasp only a part of history as it really happened. This objection is valid up to a point. Real events can never be fully reconstituted by later historians if only because of the finer detail that is inevitably lost, but—given that observers are not reporting trickery and often they are—knowledge of the reality of events and the actual reality of events must have been correlated originally, and though loss of information loosens the correlation over time, it takes a long time to disappear all together, unless there has been deliberate destruction of data. A possible event only becomes a real event for human beings when they confirm it by proven means of knowing reality.

The accusation of limitation in this matter must be addressed, not to historians and their methods, but to God. If God has made the world such that we can only have imperfect knowledge of the avenues He chooses to use, then His salvific efforts on our behalfs look misplaced. One might feel that conditions for knowledge are unfortunate, but they still do not mean we should seek to deceive ourselves. If God has not made it clear in the reality he has provided, then however we might strive or theologize, we cannot make certain what, according to the way God has constituted knowledge for us, is merely a possibility.

The only criterion for determining whether an event in an old document actually took place is to find it in the framework of experience of history in its present state of knowledge. The discovery of other frameworks might force a review, but until they are discovered, conceivable possibilities do not abrogate the validity of this principle. In old documents, the historian is presented with individual opinions concerning what could be true. The historian's task is to test whether objectivity can be granted to these opinions.

The Roman historian Suetonius reports that, after the death of Caesar Augustus, at his funeral, a highly placed official with the rank of praetor swore that he saw Caesar ascend into heaven as he was cremated. The historian, therefore, has a report from a reliable source in the ancient world of a statement by an eyewitness, an honorable senator, confirmed by an oath. Should the historian accept this as being true? Surely God, or the gods, can take up into heaven the Caesar who had just died? For a being endowed with almighty power, all things are possible. Does the sworn statement of an eyewitness suffice to insert into history as a fact the heavenly journey of Caesar Augustus—a possibility conceivable to those who believe in an Almighty. Then, the historian could write, "After his death Augustus was taken up into heaven, a fact confirmed by a respectable eyewitness, as the near contemporary historian Suetonius reported in his book on the life of Augustus."

No historian who merits the title could conclude this. No instruments of knowledge at the historian's disposal place him in a position to validate such assertions concerning journeys into heaven because they fall outside the continuum of ordinary experience. An event must cohere in principle with other events—stand in a verifiable connexion with them. An absolutely incoherent event is not verifiable as an event, even if it is notionally accepted as possible. The concept of contingency, dear to theologians, is no help in this matter. It is possible to conceive of an event which has no ascertainable connexion with other ascertainable events, but such a contingent event, by definition, cannot be shown to have taken place.

Since historians can grant no objectivity to the Praetor's sworn sense-perception in the story of the ascent of Augustus, they have to examine the subjective conditions which led the Praetor to make his statement. Was it a vision—a psychological impression caused in his grief for Caesar, who already during his lifetime was revered as God and Lord? Stories of such heavenly journeys are widespread. What should the historian make of them?

Dio Cassius relates the same incident and names the official. He adds that Livia, Caesar's wife, paid the Praetor 250,000 denar for his oath! It could be an explanation of an unlikely event, but can the additional information be trusted in itself? The historian has to ask whether Livia would do such a thing, and, if so, why. It might be a derogatory accusation by her political opponents. The historian will have to investigate Dio Cassius's sources for his report, and whether his own historical work, or the sources he used, saw the house of Caesar in a bad light. Even if the Praetor is proved to have been honest, the historian cannot conclude that what the Praetor claimed to have seen is historical.

Considering the statements of events in the New Testament, historians have the same problem with the ascension of Jesus—whether or not it was an objective event. The reasoning and outcome are just the same. The only fact the historians have is the fact of the statement, not the factuality of that which is stated as fact. It matters not whether the tradition is early or late, for the statement is unverifiable in either case. A common false assumption overused by theologians and evangelists is that earlier recorded events are more likely to be true. Even if this were true, it is not the point. If it is unlikely as a late tradition and twice as likely as an early one, it is still unlikely. The evangelists mean not that an early tradition is more likely, they mean to imply it is certain. When an event is deemed unverifiable, an earlier portrayal of the event can claim no higher degree of objectivity than a later.

These observations are wholly valid with regard to the assertion that the event of the resurrection of Jesus is a historically demonstrable reality. P Stuhlmacher asserts as an historical affirmation from a theological perspective, “that only the event of the resurrection of Jesus and the confession to this deed of God fulfilled in Jesus makes the historical development of the primitive Christian mission understandable.” This is to reason backward from the historically demonstrable consequences of the resurrection faith and its history to the factual reality of the resurrection. Historians, who are conscientious about their methodology, would be unable to come to this conclusion unless they were willing to admit the same reasoning in other cases too, opening many impossible myths that accompany religions, cults and beliefs, as foundation legends, as historical reality.

No historian doubts that belief in the resurrection is historically demonstrable as a significant factor in the growth of the Christian faith. It is, though, an error to maintain that the resurrection of Jesus itself is therefore an historically demonstrable fact. The factuality of what is believed cannot be derived from the historical demonstrability of its consequences.

Myths are commonly invented to account for otherwise inexplicable traditions and behaviours. The historical-critical method shows the resurrection of Jesus is not the basis of the Christian faith, but the content. Given that statements of the events of “sacred history” are not objective, the critical historian questions further, concerning the conditions under which statements of this kind could arise at all.

Because “sacred history” was popular in ancient documents, some people conclude that the authors of it had access to higher knowledge. Yet, in other respects, these narrators were subject to the same human conditions as the rest of us. These ancient authors have to be supposed to have had special knowledge in certain sacred things but otherwise were subject to the same laws, and therefore errors as us all. This includes error with regard to empirical facts, making statements in the form of “sacred history” just as subjective as all other human knowledge. The writers of “sacred history” had no source of knowledge that allowed them to make truthful statements about events unknown to ordinary mortals.

Is it credible that “sacred history” is all error, deception, illusion and invention? It might have to be so concluded. What conditions impelled the writers of “sacred history” to relate historical happenings as if they had really taken place, even though they never took place in fact? What concrete, subjective conditions allowed the statements of “sacred history” to become real? How can it be explained that the biblical writers seldom if ever seem disturbed in their accounts by the question that today concerns everyone who seeks to report events truthfully—whether these events in fact took place?

Factuality

“Fact” is a modern word. Its rapid introduction was not accidental, but related to the growth of the scientific and naturalistic methods of investigation. Science created a precise concept for a methodologically verified, confirmed, and demonstrated reality. Earlier, human historical experience had not yet discovered the formal principles of true objective knowledge. They had to be acquired step by step, as the consequence of prolonged, often fruitless searching.

The awareness of verification, as a necessary condition for truth, was first recognized when reason was faced with a multitude of supposedly true but conflicting opinions about reality, when enquiry into all things was popularized by the growth of science. It acknowledged the need for reflexion about the necessary conditions for the validity of such judgments. So long as the conditions for truth were not reflected on in this way, the objective truth of statements could not be distinguished from opinions, hopes and wishes. The concept of factuality was unknown to the writers of “sacred history”. Their way of narrating is naïve, taking place without thorough critical reflexion on what made true events true. In their narrations of events they allow to flow together heterogeneous elements which the historian today must separate.

Whatever was believed to be true was not yet governed by reason, and could without qualm be set down as objective truth. There are biblical stories that relate events that could not have been witnessed, according to the narratives themselves, yet even so are related by the writers as if they had seen it—such are the report of creation, monologues by Yehouah, the burial of Moses by Yehouah. Stories like this show that a distinction between belief about what is real and demonstrable reality was absent from the perspective of the narrator, or that the narrator thought it was absent from the perspectives of his audience. Many Christians do not differ today. They consider their subjective experiences as “truth.”

A concern for the objectivity of sacred narratives was no more crucial for the community which received them than for the writers of “sacred history”. The church accepted narratives into its canon that contradict one another historically showing that it was indifferent to contradictions like this in its canonized histories. These kinds of contradictions are found at the center of christological affirmations, in the genealogies of Jesus and even in the resurrection accounts. Their inclusion in the canon cannot have taken place with any concern for the actual events because then the church would have had to decide which reports were true. It significantly did not do this in the process of canonization, and nor did incongruous accounts become subjects of discussion for the purpose of verification.

These accounts obtained an equal authority through acceptance into the canon, even though they could not all be true at the same time. The attempts to create a harmony of the gospels, beginning with Tatian, show an attempt by some to establish a

However, the rejection of harmonizations by the church shows that the narratives are not to be evaluated according to the criteria of historical truth, but that they pursued an entirely different intention.

The writers of “sacred history” use history as a form to call forth faith. Whoever misunderstands their method, and thus conceives the statements of “sacred history” to be assertions of facts, commits a fundamental hermeneutical error. Narrators of “sacred history” treat history as a plastic substance that can be formed according to the intention of the narrator, one that is not bothered by the concept of facts. Their intention is not directed towards a discerning historical-critical acceptance by the hearer, but appeals to the hearer to grasp the evangelical meaning. Treating the history-like statements of “sacred history” as assertions of fact removes them from their proper context of religious propaganda, and puts them under the scrutiny of modern historical method, the product of recent scientific thinking that must necessarily refute them.

This false hermeneutical perspective causes a disastrous theological error. “Sacred history” is simply a means of missionary expression, but is itself made the primary object of faith. Faith in God is different from holding a story to be true. The New Testament used the form of history to appeal to proselytes to believe. Christian preaching today does not understand “sacred history” as it was meant to be understood. It is not a faithful rendering of objective events, but an indirect appeal for faith using historical narrative as a method.

“Sacred history” is instead made the primary object of faith, and has to be regarded as true. It is this truth which is used by modern preachers to establish faith in God. Faith in God is not primary for the Christian, any more than it is for an atheist or a Pagan. The Christian convert must first have faith in something other than God, in the truth of “sacred history” called the gospels. Faith must be imperfect when Christians have to suspend their critical faculties to believe the bible. The alternative, true faith, is to believe in God without having to believe the sacred histories are true. Many modern Christians are trying to move in this direction, but with opposition from traditionalists.

Hartlich concludes that when the pseudo-historical statements of “sacred history” become dogmatized and made obligatory by churches, paradoxically, the historical-critical method becomes the requirement for Christian faith. Christians cannot honestly ground their faith in the truth of a “sacred history” recognized by natural criteria as pseudo-historical at best, if not false.

In the desire to be justified by holding “sacred history” to be true, Christians forego accepting God Himself in favour of an inadequate support for faith—a form of literary idolatry.

Yet, given that something must be believed without any evidence at all, why must it be God. Nature is the more appropriate choice, and more original. That it manifestly exists and is wonderful ought to be enough.

Revising the Jesus of History for the Future of Faith

R W Kropf in issue #6 of *Dialogos: An Interactive Journal of the Sciences, Philosophy, and Theology*, June 5, 1997, notes that historians have become increasingly important in many fields, but notably religion. For Christianity, history is more central than in any religion because Christians claim Jesus of Nazareth appeared on earth as God incarnate, died and was resurrected, and these are indisputable historical facts. Unfortunately, people, some of them Christians, keep disputing these “facts” of history, and as more people note the alternatives, the Christian world experiences a crisis of faith.

It is not new. Reimarus, the German scholar over two hundred years ago first tried to separate the “Jesus of History” (the Jesus revealed by sound historical scholarship) from the “Christ of Faith” (the mythical saviour of Christian belief). Attempts to separate the two were abandoned when Albert Schweitzer declared the effort hopeless, but in the latter half of the twentieth century, biblical scholarship has revived the “quest for the Historical Jesus” in a rebirth of interest in the truth behind the short life that has dominated the ideas of the West in the past two-thousand years.

There are two opposing views. “Historicists”, like the “Jesus Seminar”, seek to to reconstruct the historical Jesus by separating the words and deeds of the Nazarene from myths, legends, and beliefs added subsequently.

Most Christians, however, take the gospel accounts as divinely inspired and therefore true. The idea that these accounts should be scrutinized according to the rules of historical-critical scholarship, like any ancient writings, challenges their faith. Christians are therefore not subject to reason about these things. Ministers and preachers defend their dishonest living while the punters accept any lie they are offered rather than forego the falsehoods they have been taught and accepted for a lifetime and instead recognise Jesus as a historical figure typical of others in his time.

Some Christians like to argue that they are not concerned with an historical Jesus because “Jesus Lives”—he was after all resurrected. For them just to consider the historical Jesus is to fail to take faith in the resurrection seriously. More orthodox ones follow Paul and still see the death on the cross and the resurrection as the core of Christian belief, but also like Paul, need no details or proof. William R G Loader says the gospels...

“...are their own reality and in themselves contain a world where we meet our Jesus.”

It is hard to know what clearer confession could be given that professional Christians promote a mental fantasy or figment.

As long as punters believe something and think that the professionals have some special power to help them benefit from it, then let the suckers believe anything! What has such a Christian to gain from more detail about Jesus's life? The answer is only embarrassment.

Schweitzer concluded that the one historical fact that was certain about Jesus was that he was an eschatological prophet who saw an imminent end of the world. Since Jesus was manifestly wrong about this, how could he be certainly correct about anything else? The immovable Christians, as they have done for so many other objections to Christian belief, find excuses. No pair of socks or trousers has ever been as patched as Christianity.

The “Jesus Seminar” says this mistaken apocalypticism was the product not of Jesus but of his followers, a totally absurd idea that can only discredit democracy, if that is how the decision was made. Eschatology is thoroughly mingled with the whole concept of the kingdom of God that every Christian assigns to Jesus as his most important message. And, even if Jesus's apocalypticism were to be discarded, the problem remains of which parts of Jesus's gospel messages are historically true.

The Vatican distinguished three stages of tradition in the gospels. The first stage was the recollection of the words and deeds of Jesus. The second stage was the proclamation of the the “kerygma” or original central message that is the essence of Christian belief—primarily the resurrection and its significance. Lastly, the third stage was the elaboration of the kerygma by the different authors and editors.

Is there any criterion by which we might decide to what stage some part of a gospel belongs? If there is none then the same dilemma pertains: what is historically true? Traditionalists and fundamentalists use the unproveable artefact—in short, fiction—of the Holy Spirit, in a circular argument sanctifying all scripture, including those parts that promise the Holy Spirit itself! This Holy Spirit enables any Christian to say anything that comes into their head and maintain it is true because inspired. It is the prime Christian justification for their age old habit of pious lying—and everybody today accepts it without a flinch!

Now it seems strange that a curia of different varieties of professional Christians, like the “Jesus Seminar” should find it so easy to discard most of their historical god as unhistorical. Robert Funk, a leading light of the “Jesus Seminar” readily discards 75 per cent of the words of the gospel Jesus. Rudolph Bultmann, in an earlier time foremost among those who turned aside from the “quest for the historical Jesus” after Schweitzer recommended giving up the task as hopeless, was also trying to “demythologize” the scriptures in favour of a return to faith in Christ.

Faith and Belief

Wilfred C Smith made a distinction between “faith” and “belief.” The first is an unconditional sense of trust in God. The second is an assent to prescribed doctrines or “beliefs.” Note that “faith” is unconditional but “belief” can properly demand confirmation in the form of signs, miracles or persuasion by convincing argument. The two are quite different though confused by most Christians and Christian critics. Faith is entirely personal and needs no mediators in the form of priests or ministers, the quacks who sell “belief” as faith to secure themselves a lifetime of idle sponsorship.

The quacks and mountebanks want to discard the life of Jesus and base Christianity on his faith instead—his unconditional trust or “faith” in God, shown in his certainty of the resurrection of the dead—the basis of the Christian belief that death is not the end. They want to replace Christian faith as a belief in the historical accuracy of the stories relating Christ's post-resurrection appearances with a faith in God's promise to Jesus—the promise that Jesus unconditionally accepted.

Christians like these are trying to demolish the historical Jesus and change the foundation of Christianity from its hitherto historical basis to a purely metaphysical one. Separation of Jesus of Nazareth, prince of Israel, from the dying and resurrected saviour god known as Christ would allow believers to indulge purely in a mystery religion with no embarrassing pretensions to historicity. The trouble is that believers always like to think that the object of their adoration has walked among them. By regarding Jesus as “metahistorical” in the sense that Berdayev used, to describe the resurrection, they can have it how they like without any regard to the facts of history.

It boils down to a sort of extrapolation backwards in time. Whatever it was that gave rise to Christianity cannot, if Schweitzer is to be believed, be known, but there is no denying the huge and lasting phenomena it gave rise to. Their argument is that at some point in the past a spring of truth spilled into the world and gave rise to the Christian faith. So it can be believed by committed Christians even if the historical facts of the life of Jesus turn out to be quite different from former conceptions. The spring of “metahistorical” reality is all that faith requires.

If that is the case, is the resurrection of Jesus itself the product of faith? Indeed it is. Men do not rise from death in nature, but if some people have an expectation that resurrection is possible and even probable under some special circumstances, and if they come to believe that the circumstances have been realised, they can easily come to believe that the circumstances have given rise to what is in fact impossible.

If the empty tomb stories are true, and the subsequent behaviour of the disciples is unexplainable except by their belief that a resurrection has occurred, this is still not historical “proof” that it did.

It is proof though that the disciples believed it was possible under the circumstances. And Schweitzer was correct in stating that the circumstances were that the world was expected to end and righteous people were to be resurrected into the kingdom of God!

What of the third stage, that of theological expression or beliefs? Were “technical terms” like “Christ” and the “Son of God”, proclamations of the status of a Jesus who is “raised.” Only later did these statements become metaphysical statements about a god who “rises” from the dead by his own divine power. But that is not to say that Jesus did not have these terms applied to him earlier in his lifetime with non-metaphysical meanings.

All of humanity are children of God, so “Son of God” is a banal title at root. Of course, it was an honorific title applied to Jesus because he was a priest and a “prince,” both of which were designated as “Sons of God.” Jesus was also “raised” even before he died and was resurrected, because it is the root meaning of the word “prince” that was used of him (“nasi,” a prince or a leader being “one who is raised up!”). “Christ” is the Greek word used to translate the Jewish word “Messiah” and would have been used of Jesus in his life or immediately on his supposed resurrection.

In its hurry to deify Jesus, Christians dehumanized him from the beginning. Despite the insistence of the early theologians that Jesus possessed a complete human nature, for he had to assume human form to redeem humanity, in the early fifth century, Augustine reprimanded a colleague who suggested Jesus might have been tempted in his faith. Since Jesus was a god, he could not have been tempted, he knew all the answers and he could do anything, whence the miracles. In 451 AD, the Council of Chalcedon defined Jesus as both completely human and fully divine—a fatuous contradiction for how can a fully human entity walk on water? So, Augustine's divine Christ prevailed. The human Jesus was all but completely swallowed up by the divine Christ. Christianity effectively denied the humanity of Jesus and became “monophysite”—certain he existed as a god.

Christians should be applauding the work of the “Jesus Seminar” and others who are demolishing the historical Jesus and seeking to return to the divine monophysite Christ of Augustine. The closest they want to come to a human Christ is a Jesus whose unconditional faith committed him unreservedly to carrying out God's will as he understood it, and whose missionary call was that others should follow the path of total trust in God.

They hope what will characterize the follower of Jesus most of all is this trusting faith in God—like that of Jesus himself—not a set of beliefs about who he really was. The “Jesus of History” is he whose life was lived in the loving trust in God throughout doubt and despair. His unconditional faith or trust in God revealed him, to Christians, to be the Son who brings a share in the divine, immortal life, through the power of God's Spirit.

For those who accept this, it will not matter that the historical Jesus in fact got some things wrong. Nor does it matter that little of his teaching was original. What matters to the believers in the “metahistorical” Christ is his call to universal love and service to God and other human beings confident in the face of suffering, that in God all shall live.

The real conservatives of Christianity can even continue to believe everything they presently believe, happy that the veil of history might be drawn but can reveal nothing to the believer in “metahistory” that could dent their faith. We can never be sure about history but “metahistory” stands before us everywhere in the form of churches, priests, preachers and believers.

The whole plan is a brilliant attempt to discard the aspects of Christianity that are getting more and more embarrassing—the very parts that formerly had been the basis of the religion. The trouble for these Christian revisionists is that they have been so successful in the past in getting Christians to believe that black is white and lies are truth that they are finding it no easy task to make their fellow Christians realise that unsafe branches are best pruned.

The race is on between those who would drop the historical Jesus before proof positive is found that he was a bandit or a homosexual, or some other unacceptable reality, and Christianity is thrown into chaos because this Jesus is its core. Far better for these Christians to lop off the limb that is damaged and attacked by termites and dry rot—even if it was previously the main support—and replace it with an unnassailable metahistorical limb that non-Christian insects can gnaw and nibble but never damage.

Christianity Revealed

The Art of Apologetics

Dr M D Magee

Christian religious leaders practised the arcane arts of apology, denial and polemic long before modern politicians discovered them. Here are some of the techniques they use. Take note.

Apologetics

Apology was originally a legal defence and “apologetics” is the methods used to prepare an apology. Apology is now the defence of Christian belief, or as one authority calls it, Christian truth, against secular truth, particularly science and history. If confounded, they will say that religious subjects cannot be investigated by standard methods. Thus lawyers can judge legal matters and scientists can investigate natural phenomena, but neither are competent in God's realm.

Apology is not meant to be fair, any more than the prosecution or defence lawyers in a court of law try to be fair—it is distinctly lop-sidedly pro-Christian. When appearing in public, apologists do so only on carefully prearranged terms, usually such that there can be no counter questioning or free discussion, and preferably with a sympathetic person in the chair. No Christian will allow themselves the luxury of being fair or honest because no modern Christian is able to show their belief is true in any historical or scientific sense. As that devout Christian, Kierkegaard, said in *On Absurdity*:

Faith is the holding of a belief in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary.

So, nowadays Christians set themselves easier tasks than of old. They are content to attempt to show that their belief is not at variance with secular knowledge, an implicit acceptance that secular knowledge is superior whatever their beliefs might be.

Clerics will refuse to consider counter evidence as if it is tainted with a smell of sulphur. The Pope's inquisitors would not look through Galileo's telescope in case they saw the Devil or his works. When clerics state confidently “I have seen no evidence to uphold these assertions”, they might well be speaking the truth, because they have refused even to look at the evidence offered.

Their most popular technique is obfuscation. They will keep their arguments abstract and theological in the belief that their theology will seem to transcend any counter-arguments and refute any contrary evidence. Because churches are rich institutions they publish endless books aimed at confusing the already confused and giving an impression of vast amounts of evidence, but all of it is empty. Theology is purely to bury proper evidence in truckloads of spurious waffle.

The ultimate obfuscation is lying, a hugely successful technique for Christians because they have created a popular illusion that they are honest. It is important not to be beguiled by Christian pretences to honesty. They are not and never were, even when secular knowledge was less well founded. Since ultimately they consider that they are engaged in a holy war against the Devil and his hordes of unbelievers, they will use any method fair or foul to justify their holy view. A lie is merely an untruth to the glory of God and His church.

Apologists will patronize any critic on the grounds that they are poor fools lacking the sense to understand that Christians are speaking for and with the authority of God. They will chuckle as if you are a child asking something vaguely embarrassing out of your naïvety.

They will imply that the critic is lacking something or is malicious in bringing forward their criticisms. They will use dismissive words like “dogmatic”, “confused”, and “erroneous” aimed at suggesting that you are empty headed or out of your depth in this company. They will accuse them of not themselves considering religion either from some fancied inadequacy, bigotry or hatred. If they have written a book expressing their views, they are profiting or seeking publicity. These are ad hominem arguments, or personal attacks that quite often impress unwary listeners.

They depend greatly on people being predisposed, by the continuing weight of Christian propaganda even in our secular societies, to believe what they say and not to be familiar with the counter arguments. Apology cannot work against people who are widely read and have concluded that Christianity is a delusion. Such people are disdained by apologists as “dogmatic secularists”, an example of their ad hominem technique.

They will try to discredit religious skeptics as zealots when they are the real zealots, and the descendants of zealots in fact, and anyone who concludes that Christians are wrong or deluded are “dogmatists”—phenomena known to psychologists as projection—attributing to your opponent your own faults.

They will accuse their opponents of being skeptical about everything, or that they are too material and do not make allowance for the spiritual, another way of saying that you do not agree with them because “the spiritual” means their viewpoint. Instead of spiritual, to give a less ecclesiastical and more philosophical flavour they might say “metaphysical”.

Clerics always demand as proof of criticism far more evidence than it is possible to give, and therefore they can dismiss any evidence offered as inadequate, ignoring the fact that they believe without evidence at all. Proof is difficult to find except in formal logic and bottles of that other kind of spirit. Since no evidence is proof enough, they can always claim there is no proof, and will extend it to mean there is no evidence.

Or, if feeling oppressed by substantial evidence, they will boldly state that evidence proves nothing. Nor does it for them. Their belief is the only proof they will accept. In real life, matters are mainly judged on the balance, or weight, of evidence, and all evidence depends on the world being natural and orderly, not capricious and supernatural. Acceptance of the supernatural is equal to denying real life evidence, as apologists know full well.

The religious apologist is always impressed by authority because he has God's own authority through the bible, and he therefore assumes that others are just as impressed. They therefore will quote biblical texts as though they automatically end the argument and will extend this to quoting prominent co-religionists, hoping for the same result.

“Claims” and Miracles

They will always call criticisms of their view “claims”, as any view contrary to their own is unfounded whereas their own is unquestionable. They will try to counter scientific argument by accusing their antagonist of being “reductionist”, a common insult used against scientists who they want to depict as believing that the whole is no more than the sum of its parts, whereas they pretend they know of parts that scientists cannot find.

“Extraordinary claims demand extraordinary evidence” is a common sense truism. Essentially it means that extraordinary claims will not be believed. Jasper tells us he caught a fish and no one is inclined to disbelieve him because it is not an extraordinary claim. No one would believe him if he says he caught a mermaid unless he produced her for us to inspect.

Nevertheless, clerics assert that their own “evidence” is sufficient for faith and therefore sufficient. They will always insist that their critics will make no allowance for the miraculous, yet they are invariably selective in what they accept as proving it. So, they will quote instances of miraculous cures or faith healing, but will ignore the untold numbers of people who were not cured or even died as expected, despite the supposed miraculous procedure.

So, they insist that religious phenomena have to be considered by separate rules from natural phenomena, hoping to avoid any sort of skeptical investigation. Only the religious will be allowed to investigate religions because, to be effective, the investigator must first believe absolutely. Of course, the believer would not want to investigate critically the religion that he already believes.

Anything unusual they want to try to reserve as a possible miracle, and will accuse those who suggest scientific explanations as “explaining away” or “rationalizing”. In other words, they want everyone to accept the supernatural because religion depends on its acceptance. They will therefore keep it in the news by issuing warnings from time to time about the dangers of Satanism, or the occult, as if such superstitions were dangerous, while doing little or nothing to oppose other popular fancies as astrology, though they have opposed this too in the past.

They will dismiss or distort the bulk of history that refutes their views while highlighting any tiny nugget that can be presented as upholding them. Much of our history is propaganda, but even when the propaganda is exposed, Christian clerics, teachers and journalists continue to teach it, and so it persists. They habitually refer to historical periods with biblical references, like the “time of Christ” and the “time of Solomon”, maintaining the popular feeling that there was a god called Christ and a mighty king called Solomon in history, and it is accepted by all.

They will try to suggest that critics are idiots unaware of the most obvious things, such as that archaeology does not permit the examination of the corpse of Jesus, as if the critics really thought it did. By making suggestions like this, they hope to discredit the evidence that critics have produced.

In the face of the flimsy basis of Christian belief, they have the gall to criticise their critics for using the “argument from silence”. They love the mantra, “absence of evidence is not evidence of absence”, as if absence of evidence was a virtue. Of course, it is when their flocks believe even in the absence of evidence, but the absence of evidence is indeed evidence of absence.

An argument is more persuasive if it appeals to something that the audience already happily accepts, as those who have been teachers are always taught. Paul would not have to work so hard making his case if he appealed to the presumably already accepted teaching of Jesus. That he does not either means he did not know what Jesus taught or he did not want to use it.

If something fails to be present in a place where it should be if it existed, it may not exist at all. Of course, it does not prove it does not exist, and Christian apologists are always demanding proof of others that they cannot offer themselves, but it is evidence. If a writer is making a case but fails to use some well-known fact that would serve him well, then it is fair and logical to deduce that the author did not know of it. Admittedly a single omission might be an oversight or deliberate for some reason, but a profound continual silence must imply that the event or fact was not known to the writers, or they had reason not to speak of it. The same is true in archaeology. While the utter absence of anything that can be identified with a tenth century Jewish empire does not prove that David and Solomon are mythological, it is such a profound silence that it strongly suggests it.

The Egyptologist, Kenneth Kitchen, of Liverpool University is fond of chucking the phrase at those who suggest the curious gaps that occur in the archaeology of various regions are imaginary ones caused by faulty chronology. It is a faulty chronology that is particularly defended by biblicists because it leaves room for Moses, Joshua, the Judges, David and Solomon where otherwise there would be no time to fit them in. The fact that it creates huge gaps in the archaeology of places like Greece and Nubia, is of no concern to those who believe that God wants his bit of free time for his most glamorous prophets and kings.

David Rohl, who is an Adam-and-Ever himself, says that according to Kitchen, “just because there is no archaeological evidence of something it should not be assumed that that something did not happen”. So, the suggestion that primitive men travelled around in spaceships, according to Eric von Daniken, cannot be dismissed merely because there is no evidence for it!

Nevertheless, when Thomas L Thompson declares that there is no evidence for all the biblical heroes just cited, Rohl takes the same view as Kitchen. They existed because they are God's heroes, so the evidence will turn up. And indeed it does, but no one except the biblicists accept it as genuine. Devotion to a God has always led to pious forgery, and it remains true today, adding to the difficulties of genuine archaeologists.

When Christians have somehow been obliged to consider proper evidence or it has been well publicised, they will attempt to disparage it, telling you it is no more than what so-and-so said 200 years before, or that it is “misleadingly impressive”, but is not dissimilar to what so-and-so claimed, and that is now forgotten. If a claim having some similarity to the case being presented has been discredited, then, for them, it proves that similar cases are equally invalid.

In the ultimate case of some element of biblical history having to be conceded, they will take the credit as the work of biblical scholarship!

In short, they have double standards—they are dishonest—but pretend otherwise. So, they will use rational arguments if they think they will persuade someone to join their church, but they dismiss them if critical.

Christianity Revealed

Is the Bible Fact or Fiction?

Dr M D Magee

The Elastic Truth of the Bible

Christians believe in God and Christ because they believe the bible. They tell us it is the very word of God, and therefore is true in every particular—or at least fundamentalist Christians do, and they are the noisy and dangerous ones in the US. More liberal Christians will accept that the bible is not absolutely true, containing some myths meant to be helpful to simple peasants. Even so, they think it is true in its main historical parts—most of the Jewish scriptures that constitute the Christian Old Testament, and the New Testament about the career of Christ and the formation of the early Christian Church. So, Christians still teach their children at Sunday School that the bible is true history and is mainly itself true reporting.

To establish this, they often stretch the truth more than slightly. This elastic truth is called Christian Truth. The art of stretching the truth in this way is called Christian apologetics, and the practitioners of this black art are called apologists. There are thousands of them on the internet, one such being a man called Paul Billington who writes at:

<http://www.biblemagazine.com/magazine/vol-9/issue-4/evidence.html>

Here the virtues of his elastic are considered.

Fact or Fiction?

Is the Bible Fact or Fiction? Are the accounts of the Bible true? Our answer is a matter of life and death, according to somebody called Paul Billington. The “truth of the bible is of vital importance to all of us,” (he means Christians, not anyone with discernment) because, if the bible is not true, then its promise of life must be false, for “belief and obedience will bring us life, whereas unbelief and sin will result in death” (Dt 30:19; Mk 16:15-16; Rom 6:23; Jn 5:28-29). Moreover, says the bible, the nation that turns its back upon the word of God and His teaching cannot expect His protection or blessing (Gen 12:3; Ps 9:17-20; Jer 18:7-10).

We are back to the heathen hordes who will get no blessing from God, while the Christian nations will. This sort of racist monoculturalism ought to have been rejected even by Christians, but it seems it has not.

Billington wants us to consider the integrity of those who wrote the scriptures, as well as of those who later endorsed them. Of course we should consider their integrity, but there are two possibilities at least—they had it or they did not—and Christians will consider only one. He adds that this includes the recorded statement of the Lord Jesus Christ that:

“Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?” (Jn 5:46-47).

So the question arises as to whether even the words of Christ are to be believed. It is true, but who knows that these are the words of Christ. It depends on the integrity of the biblical authors, and their human fallibility. What would it matter if they were indeed false words? It is only because Christians believe that the bible is true and Jesus was God that they think the words the New Testament records are true and Jesus could never lie. If he were a man then he could, and if Christ were himself a Christian we can be sure he would! If he were a plain man, he could have been mistaken. Christians cannot consider that either, because they are not considering evidence but only testing their own dogmatism.

“Did Moses really exist?” is a perfectly sensible question, but Billington, locked into Christian irrationality, says it “echoes the scepticism and the agnosticism that is both fashionable and respectable with so many leading scholars and academics today.” He is saying that no one should ask questions like that! Christians do not like to be questioned about their beliefs, ultimately because they know they are irrational and ill-founded.

If no one is allowed to question them, then they have no need to defend the indefensible. This was the state of Europe for over a thousand years before the Enlightenment. Why should the emergence from Christendom be called the Enlightenment? Christianity always claims to be light. Yet, history shows that Christian control brought down a profound darkness and it only lifted with the Enlightenment. It proves that even Christian metaphors are lies.

Billington has no idea of how inquiry works, because Christians have never been encouraged to inquire. Christians were expected never to ask anything about what they believed. Never to seek whether it was true, but simply stick to “belief and obedience.” It suited the rulers of society whether it suited God or not. People had to believe it, and that was it. It is not true now, because people have passed beyond this backwards and superstitious phase we had in our history, but backwoodsmen like Billington want to take us back there. He says: questioning “reflects the unbelief which we see in modern society.”

Billington says evidence for the truth of the bible is overwhelming, and offers us over 40 major archaeological discoveries (“and this is by no means exhaustive”) which endorse scripture. Well, we shall look in a moment at the evidence Billington offers, but first let us consider precisely what he is trying to claim. He speaks of the truth of the bible, but what does he mean by this? Is he saying he is refuting some such claim as, “The bible is not true”? What does Billington understand by this, if it is what he is refuting?

Is the film Star Wars true? Is the film Four Weddings and a Funeral true? Is the film Gladiator true? Is the film The Madness of King George true? Is the film The Longest Day true? Of course, none of them are true, although they contain various degrees of truth in them. They vary from purely fantastic science fiction, through everyday fiction set in the modern day to fictional representations of events, that really happened in history, in a more or less realistic setting. Yet all of them are fictional! They are not true, and the realism of the setting does not make them true. It might be that the realism of the setting tells us something about history, but it is only something we can accept because we have independent historical proof.

Thus, in Gladiator, we might note that there was a Roman emperor called Marcus Aurelius, and he had a general called Maximus who finished up as a gladiator. What, in this, is true? We simply cannot tell from the film alone. In fact, there was an Emperor Marcus Aurelius, but he had no general Maximus who became a gladiator. The film contains historic truths but from the film alone, no one knows what they are.

Now Billington, and Christians generally, are so besotted by the book that they have already been told—in their indoctrination into Christianity—is a holy and therefore infallible book, that they believe everything in it. It is not a matter of discernment on their part. It is true! That is the end of it!

Biblical skeptics say no more than that the bible is essentially a devotional literary work, mainly fiction set in a variety of more or less realist settings in the first millennium BC up until the first century AD. The fact that the settings are fairly realistic does not mean that the storyline is true. What is true can only be determined by external evidence, but when it is found in some cases, it does not verify the rest.

Billington rightly says that archaeology puts us in direct contact with the past—and in a different way from written records.

“When a stone monument or clay tablet is unearthed bearing the name of a person in scripture, it provides physical evidence of bible truth.”

To say “because Pontius Pilate in the gospels is a real historic figure, the gospels must be true, and so Jesus really rose from the dead” is obviously absurd, but that is what Christian tricksters like Billington try to make out.

Historical Settings

So let us be clear, because much of Billington's "evidence" is simply that the settings of the biblical stories actually fit the first millennium BC, that such "evidence" does not prove the bible stories to be true. At best all it shows is that the authors made some effort to be sure that the books they were writing for their own political purposes were as historically accurate as they could make them. Since they were originally written by the Persians who had access to the royal and diplomatic archives of Assyria and Babylon, it is true that there is genuine history in the bible, but only verification from outside proves it. All Billington is doing is finding the parts of the biblical setting for which there is external evidence. Rarely, if ever, is it particular evidence. It is general evidence that any intelligent person—of the type likely to be writing such a book—would know at the time, or could find out.

An example of recent battles over historicity has been one concerning the Ebla tablets discovered in 1976. An Italian archaeologist, professor Giovanni Pettinato, epigrapher of the Italian excavation team, was discredited for saying that the Ebla tablets referred to Sodom and Gomorrah and other biblical cities. His successor, Alfonso Archi disagreed. Pettinato identified as Sodom a city mentioned in the Eblaite tablets as Sidamu, but Archi said another tablet placed Sidamu in northern Syria, nowhere near the Dead Sea. Using the vilest calumny, Billington blames the change on to pressure from the Syrian Government, even though he deigns to accept that "professionals" were involved, and he can hardly deny that even the Syrian government could not alter baked clay tablets 4000 years old. Billington even says without a blush:

"Anti-Zionist elements did not want to see any evidence brought to light which might support the book of Genesis—and therefore Israel's early claim to the land of Canaan."

One could claim with equal ease that Billington is doing the opposite. It shows the scandalous depths that supposed Christians will sink to to defend their so-called faith. It is not isolated. Scholars with the temerity to question the validity of scriptural ideas have been faced with this unpleasant and intimidating baloney. The Inquisition is not yet repealed. Let us be clear again. If scholarship finds that the Passion of Jesus was a mystery play, or that Moses was invented by the Maccabees, then scholars must say so. Christian "truth" says otherwise, but scholars should never mix up truth with Christian "truth." Christian truth is too often pious lying, and even Christian scholars should not indulge in it. If they believe in God why do they think He wants them to lie for Him. If He has a purpose in exposing Christianity as a scam, do they want to defy their own God?

Another fierce controversy has raged over the Dead Sea Scrolls, with awkward questions being asked as to why the scrolls were not being published—and why even fully qualified experts were not being permitted to see the unpublished material. Evidence has been presented to show how that the Vatican was at work suppressing scroll material. Hershel Shanks, editor of *Biblical Archaeology Review* defended the Vatican (Nov/Dec issue 1991). If Rome was involved in suppressing evidence, then it has been thoroughly suppressed because, although what remains strongly suggests Jesus was an Essene with an eschatological aim—well outlined on these pages—not enough alters the essence of Christianity, for believers, to damage it. If any did, then it has gone for good!

Billington thinks whether Joshua conquered Palestine (as the Bible says), or whether Israelites lived there all the time because they were Canaanites as claimed by Bible sceptics is a controversial question. The question has been settled apart from dyed-in-the-wool rednecks who will not accept plain evidence because of their faith or politics. Billington deceptively writes:

“When experts themselves cannot agree, what are laymen to make of it all?”

Billington wants to use the close examination of experts as part of his argument for biblical truth, but typically, it has to uphold the bible, otherwise he does not want to hear it, or calls the experts “skeptics.” Thus he says:

“When, as often happens, that evidence is examined, scrutinized and questioned—and yet survives the scholarly critics and sceptics—then we know that it is reliable indeed; far more so than if it had not been subjected to that process. It is not merely a question of certain discoveries supporting the bible’s record, but that those discoveries have been subjected to the most rigorous examination possible by men who are often hostile to the concept of bible truth.”

And, on the other hand, will resist anything contrary to the bible, in many cases, whatever the evidence.

House of David?

In 1993, in Dan, the first inscription apparently bearing the phrases “House of David” and “King of Israel” was found. Billington tells us a critic, Philip R Davies, challenged the claim, saying the inscription had been wrongly translated. “Davies was later roundly defeated by two other scholars.” The skeptic wants to know what position these “scholars” held vis-a-vis biblical truth. Were they objective or did they have the biblical truth axe to grind? The fact of the matter does not need scholars, but can easily be explained for people to make up their own minds.

The inscription says “bytdwd.” The debate is over what it means. It seems to say, as Billington tells us, “House of David,” but it is far from certain. Let us say it does mean that, though. What does “House of David” mean? The bible truth crackpots immediately say it refers to the Jewish founder David, and that House means dynasty. It is nothing less than the line of people that led to Jesus, Christians like to think. But “house” is more likely to mean a... er, house! Or rather, since people lived in tents or simple houses, a house really meant something grander, a dwelling for a god—a temple. Billington actually admits this in his list of examples, hoping that no one will notice. So, it could imply that David, who has never been mentioned as a king of Judah outside the bible in any documents, might have been a god with a temple.

He might even have been a god with followers, if house means followers as it often does. The Assyrians called Israel the House of Khumri, so everyone in the country were of Khumri’s house. Khumri, apparently the biblical Omri, certainly had a dynasty which ruled Israel for a short while, but House of Khumri in Assyrian records did not mean the dynasty but the country. Skeptics are interested in history, not dogma. If David is shown to be a great tenth century prince, they are glad that the evidence is clear. When it is not, only fools and charlatans pretend it is, for their own reasons.

Billington turns again to context, seeking to amaze ignorant Christians by citing the kings of Israel and Judah whose names have been found in Assyrian and Babylonian records. David and Solomon, supposedly the greatest kings of Israel and Judah, are not among them, but he is pleased to announce that by 1870, Omri, Ahab, Jehu, Azariah, Menahem, Pekah, Hoshea, Hezekiah and Manasseh, and several Assyrian kings, several Syrian kings, an Egyptian king, a Babylonian king and several Persian kings found in the bible had been identified in external records. Billington desperately seeks to prove that the bible is not science fiction like Star Wars, but skeptics already accept that it is not!

What he succeeds in doing is showing that the bible was not written until the last of these kings lived, otherwise he could not have been in it. The last one is probably Darius II of Persia, called Darius only, and wrongly assumed by biblicists to be the Great Darius, Darius I. However, a later king is alluded to so clearly that he can be identified without a name. Daniel alludes so plainly to events of the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes of Seleucia that the book can be dated withing a year or two of 164 BC. Christians will tell us it was prophecy, but after 164 BC, Daniel suddenly lost his prophetic skills, because nothing after then can be identified.

Shishak—Sheshonq?

Billington goes on with his citation of kings, not always honestly, naturally:

“In 1799 the discovery of an Egyptian relief depicted Pharaoh Shishak who is mentioned in 1 Kings 14:25-26.”

The Egyptian kings, there are five of them, supposed to be Shishak are called Sheshonq or Shoshenq, not Shishak. The “n” is absent from the Hebrew rendering, but the biblicist Egyptologist, professor Kenneth Kitchen, says that the “n” was silent in the Egyptian pronunciation. Others are less convinced and think that Shishak might have referred to Rameses II, whose popular name was Shisha. The “k” was a deliberate addition by the biblical authors to make the name sound like “Hooligan” in Hebrew. If the “k” was deliberately added, it means that the various Sheshonqs are less likely as Shishak because even if Kitchen is right that the “n” was silent, the “q” was not as well! Shishak is assumed to have been Sheshonq I because he lived at the right time for Solomon, but, if the story of Solomon is a romance, any of the Sheshonqs could have been the model for Shishak.

The best candidate is the last, Sheshonq V who reigned 773-735 BC, and was a contemporary of a Jeroboam, but not Jeroboam I, but Jeroboam II (794-754 BC). It so happens that Shalmaneser IV (782-773 BC) was a strong king of Assyria at this same time, and his name is Solomon (Salimanu-esser, Solomon directs). A king of Phoenicia also at this time was a Hiram. It looks more likely to the skeptic, in the absence of any evidence of the biblical stories of the tenth century, that a set of kings from the eighth century have been written backwards in history as the basis of the biblical romance of the greatness of an Israelite Solomon.

“The discovery of the Moabite Stone in 1868 revealed that 2 Kings 3:4-5 was describing a real event involving real people.”

Billington, like all Christian apologists find it impossible to tell the truth. The Moabite Stone tells a different story from the bible, and, indeed, the two cannot be reconciled according to N P Lemche. The Moabite Stone tells us that certain things were common between Moab and Israel, such as that they both had the same attitude to god, but the Moabite god was not Yehouah!

Billington jumps to Hezekiah of Judah. In about 1850 an Assyrian Prism was discovered which described Sennacherib’s invasion of the kingdom of Judah. The Taylor Prism, which refers to King Hezekiah of Jerusalem by name, is the Assyrian version of the story told in 2 Kings chapter 18 (2 Chr 32:1-23; Isa 36-37). The prism shows that Sennacherib sieged Jerusalem into submitting and Hezekiah paid a large tribute to be spared. There is no mention of a murderous angel killing a large body of Assyrians, but the prism and the bible are unanimous that Hezekiah paid a large tribute.

In 1880 a plaque was discovered in a tunnel in Jerusalem and describes the construction of the conduit that brought water into the city:

“And the rest of the acts of Hezekiah, and all his might, and how he made a pool, and a conduit, and brought water into the city, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?” (2 Kgs 20:20)

“Hezekiah’s” tunnel can be seen by visitors to Jerusalem still today. Billington does not stop to consider that, since it can be seen today, it could be seen by the authors of the bible, who could have reported with no other knowledge that the tunnel was built by Hezekiah. In no way does the biblical mention show that the reports in the bible of Hezekiah are contemporary. Indeed, the single biblical verse is so terse and out of context, some of those skeptics that Billington does not like to open their mouths think the verse was added because the tunnel was built by the Maccabees.

The same applies to the seige of Lachish by Sennacherib. We are now well into recorded history, with the Assyrians keeping concise but well publicised records and drawing bas reliefs of their campaigns. Records like these would certainly have been known by the Persian or Greek authors of the bible as we know it.

Since the skeptics are not questioning the historical background to the bible after about 850 BC—except perhaps that Judah was never a parallel kingdom with Israel, other than in the last decade or so of Israel’s existence, when Judah probably seceded from Israel with Assyrian support—Billington turns to the real points of contention, the history of Israel and Judah before 850 BC—the period of biblical history before the so-called divided monarchy.

Exodus

Scholars say that there is no proof whatsoever that the exodus took place. William Dever, a University of Arizona archaeologist and scarcely skeptical, calls Moses a mythical figure. Even Father Anthony Axe of the Ecole Biblique, Jerusalem, a Vatican institution, admits:

“A massive exodus that led to the drowning of Pharaoh’s army would have reverberated politically and economically through the entire region.”

Billington resorts to the old Christian fall-back, “the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.” He says that those who sensibly think without evidence nothing should be presumed to exist are on the “dubious ground of having to argue from silence.” When something is believed despite the silence, it is impossible to argue rationally for it. Billington therefore leaves it at that, although, he cannot resist returning to it in a few paragraphs.

He does however have a go at British archaeologist, Kathleen Kenyon, a popular pastime for timewasting believers these days. She found no evidence whatsoever of Joshua’s conquest of the city of Jericho. The city was deserted during the time of Joshua. Other biblical critics argue that the Israelites cannot have settled the land of Canaan by conquest because there are no signs of any such conquest that are not better explained by local wars, and most importantly, there is no sign of cultural change in the centuries of deposits excavated around the supposed conquest.

Billington, like most apologists, take comfort in the ramblings of Bryant Wood. A singularly inconsequential man, his only claim to fame is that he contradicts every reputable archaeologist about Jericho, and so regularly gets cited by crooked apologists like Billington. He simply contradicts Kenyon. He did find evidence of Joshua’s assault on Jericho and Kenyon was biased or got it wrong. Archaeologist, William Dever, is no biblical minimalist but says of Kenyon’s work at Jericho (emphasis added):

“Garstang had dated a massive mudbrick city wall to the fifteenth century BC and thus adduced it as evidence of the Israelite destruction claimed in Joshua 6 (relying on the date of c 1446 BC for the exodus as typical of the scholarship of the day). Kenyon, however, showed conclusively that this was the city wall of the last urban Early Bronze phase, c 2300 BC at latest.” (Lutterworth Dictionary of the Bible, sub voce “Jericho”)

To believe Wood against these reputable archaeologists is like believing Uri Geller against Einstein. No one who is sane would do it.

“Nor is it strictly true that there is absolutely no evidence of the Exodus—an ancient Egyptian account of a series of disasters suspiciously like the famous ten plagues came to light several years ago. This evidence was quickly buried...”

Billington often likes to hint at suppressed evidence, implying some sort of conspiracy against the faithful ones. The conspiracy has always been by professional Christians against those who want to get at the truth. Needless to say, it would be remarkable if a civilization as long as Egypt's did not have plagues and pestilence, and obviously they did, but they did not have the biblical sequence of plagues, and especially the last one!

Billington's excuse for the absence of archaeological evidence of Moses and the exodus is that no one really knows just where to look. "The real historical location of Sinai is still largely guesswork." He must mean the mountain, because there is no need to guess where the Israelites had to go to get from the Nile Delta to Jericho. He even tells us among his set of examples that maps have been discovered of their journey. Do not expect biblical apologists to be self-consistent. It is far from being quantum mechanics, but gets pretty hazy from sheer dishonesty.

Billington introduces the same excuse over the conquered city of Ai. "Scholars just aren't sure if they have the right spot!" The truth is that Ai means ruin. The biblical authors knew it as a ruin at best, and otherwise a place called "Ruin" because it had once been a noted ruin, and the name had stuck. The conquest of it is therefore an attempt to explain aetiologically why it was ruined.

Ur or Urfa?

“Ur of the Chaldees—the native city of Abraham (Gen 11:31) has been identified.”

Has it indeed, or is this more chicanery? In the bible Chaldaea is synonymous with Babylon, but the scholars consider it was only so in the last millennium BC, not in the previous one when Abraham is supposed to have founded the patriarchal tradition. The city of Ur is in the very south of Mesopotamia, and most Christians intelligent or curious enough to know this think that this Ur is the one meant in the bible. The fact is that the Moslem tradition, supported by many modern scholars, and implied by the bible is that the city of Ur is really Urfa in modern Turkey, near the border with Syria. This is a neighbouring town to the city of Haran with which many of the patriarchs were plainly associated in the bible. Billington is merely stating his beliefs in that the home of Abraham was the southern Ur rather than the northern one. He simply does not know, but if the scholars find out, he will not want to know.

He asks:

“What reason is there then, to doubt that a man called Abram travelled from Ur, to Haran, and from there to Canaan?”

Especially if the Ur is Urfa, there is every reason to think that a lot of men and women undertook the journey, and it is possible that any of the men could have been called Abram. The route was a regular trade route and was plied with caravans. Haran was famous as a transit and trading city. What is impossible is that the detailed adventures of one of these should have been set down contemporaneously for us all to read 4000 years later. Keeping diaries on tablets of stone was not practical.

Wanderers like nomads and travellers kept each other entertained at night with tall stories just as Chaucer told 3000 years later. Possible also, since the bible implies it, is that ancestor worship developed heroic tales of the ancestors and these became local gods. Abram, Isaac and Jacob were possibly local gods still remembered when the bible was first set down in the middle of the first millennium. It is unlikely and unreasonable to believe that the tales told of them are true history miraculously preserved.

Billington fatuously argues:

“Is it reasonable to claim that the bible account of this is a fable, merely because we have not found any external evidence to confirm it? To reject the Bible on such grounds must, perforce, require pre-conceived anti-Bible prejudice.”

Is it reasonable to claim that Humpty-Dumpty is a fable, merely because we have not found any external evidence to confirm it? To reject Humpty-Dumpty on such grounds must, perforce, require pre-conceived anti-Humpty prejudice.

Going to desperate extremes, Billington claims now that the fact that the bible contains so many identifiable early and widespread myths is proof of it!

“The creation of man, the role of the serpent, the fruit of the tree, the fall into disgrace and the expulsion from paradise, are themes which are found in various forms and in most cultures throughout the world—and those themes are found to be as old as the cultures themselves.”

So, those among you Christians who thought the bible was the unique revelation of God will have to think again. But fear not, Billington notices a potential gaffe here and turns it to his advantage—all world cultures are derived from a common beginning—Noah and his sons (Gen 9:19; 10:32). Noah already had the bible complete in those just post-diluvian times because Billington declares the bible “is the original (as this writer believes),” and other myths must be “corruptions that have evolved from that source.” This sadly simple man says the mythology of India has the Nagas which “usually appear in the form of ordinary snakes,” statues of which “are always placed under a tree.” Buddhism has “the tree of wisdom.”

“Such echoes of Genesis are too close to be missed!”

Anything so foolish can hardly be argued against. The plain original of the Genesis Creation myth has been found in Mesopotamia in more than one version, it seems, and the general set of myths in Genesis obviously originate as a whole from Mesopotamia as the story of Tower of Babel plainly shows, if nothing else. Yet their author was supposed to have been an Egyptian! If the bible preceded all these other myths and they were derived from it, then why were not equivalent myths from the rest of the bible so derived, and how is it that the bible plainly relates historic events up to the second century BC when it was, according to Billington, the original of myths thousands of years older? Prophecy? Even Christians must have difficulty accepting this surely?

Belshazzar and Darius

Billington tells us that Dr Farrer, in 1895, stated: “There is no Belshazzar.” No such king was known and indeed, no such king ever existed, so Farrer, the devout Christian scholar and Dean of Canterbury, thought he was an invention—like Maximus in Gladiator. In fact, Belshazzar was the son and regent of king Nabonidus, and the offer to Daniel that he would be “third ruler” meant just that, because Belshazzar was regent (second ruler) to the king and Daniel would be the next in authority. So, Farrer was proved wrong, and the bible right in this instance, and Billington concludes hopefully:

“The unexpected sometimes shows up!”

What Billington does not want to tell his little luvvies is that Daniel was written 400 years after all these events, some of which had already become legendary. Belshazzar’s feast was well known widely. Xenophon refers to it in Persian times. John C H Laughlin in Lutterworth’s Dictionary, sub voce Belshazzar, says:

“The story of Belshazzar has all the hallmark’s of historical fiction and needs to be read in the light of the Jewish persecution by Antiochus IV Epiphanes...”

Belshazzar was not the king (Dan 5:1), was not the son of Nebuchadrezzar (Dan 5:2) and probably died fighting the Persians rather than while feasting, though he evidently did have a great feast at some point. The conqueror of Babylon was not Darius the Mede (Dan 5:31), like Belshazzar at the start of this section, an unknown man. The Persian king when Babylon fell was Cyrus, but the confusion is that Babylon rebelled at the start of the reign of Darius the Great and he recaptured it in 521 BC. Whoever wrote the romance of Daniel in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, 400 years after the events, mixed up these two conquests of Babylon. So, Billington retireves the historicity of Belshazzar but omits to tell his admiring clappies the rest of the story. That is God’s Truth!

The city of Lachish was one of the few remaining cities prior to the complete collapse of the kingdom of Judea (Jer 34:7). Billington now comes to the Lachish letters, discovered in the 1930s. They mention several names that also appear in Jeremiah—Gemariah (Jer 36:10), Jaazaniah (Jer 35:3), Neriah and Baruch (Jer 36:4), Mattaniah (who is King Zedekiah, 2 Kings 24:17). These letters also refer to a prophet who was seen to be demoralizing the people and instigating a policy of non-resistance to the Babylonians (Jer 38:1-4, or Jer 26:20-21). Billington jumps to the conclusion, with most scholars admittedly, that these are the people mentioned in the bible and he writes:

“The reality of these people and of the situation as described in the Bible is thus confirmed for us.”

Well, the people might have been real, but was the situation the right one, or had Jeremiah done what the author of Daniel and other biblical authors did—written pseudepigraphs, works set in the past but really allegories of the then present day? The Persian period is almost absent in Judah for the simple reason that the bent scholars dated all Persian strata as Babylonian or Assyrian strata. The destruction found at Lachish among which the letters were found was assumed from a comparison with Jeremiah to have been the conquest by Babylon in about 587 BC.

The actual situation might have been 150 years later when the Egyptians, assisted by the Jews, revolted against Persia and had to suffer corrective expeditions which were quite savage. The author of Jeremiah had written his account dated at the time of the previous conquest by Babylon to show that the situation was parallel and so would the fate of the Jews be, unless they came to order!

A number of seals were identified in 1986 which dated to this same time (supposedly 586 BC). The dating is circular in all of these instances. One of these seals read “Belonging to Baruch son of Neriah.” Billington says:

“Without any doubt this is the man who was Jeremiah’s scribe (Jer 36; 45). A finger print on the seal is probably his.”

The seal is dated from Jeremiah, but Jeremiah is dated from its own account. It is like someone dating the Last Days of Pompeii, by Bulwer Lytton, to the first century AD because that is what its contents were about! The seal should have been dated independently and the book called Jeremiah dated from that, if the identities were felt to be secure. One thing is certain, and that is that many more seals and bullae come from the Persian period than from earlier times in Judah!

Another example is a seal-bulla found in excavations in Jerusalem (1982-1983) which reads “belonging to Gemariah son of Shaphan.” This man was among the first audience ever to hear the prophecy (Jer 36:12-13). The seal of Gemariah, together with other seals and bullae, were discovered in a “thick level of soot” according to The Jerusalem Post. The Babylonians burnt the great houses of Jerusalem to the ground (Jer 52:13).

Yet in “the burnt remains of a home” were pig bones and other un-Jewish items! A toilet was also discovered which revealed that the people were infested with tape worms from pork, and other parasites. The biblicists immediately react that it is proof of “idolatry and wickedness.” If the archaeologists have dated this layer correctly, it is proof that before the Persian conquest the religion of the people was not Judaism as it became. If the dating is wrong, and the destruction is from 150 years later in the Persian period, it suggests that the Persians had still not introduced Judaism, or that people being settled in the area by the Persians did not have the same taboo against pigs that the Jews had, or were to have.

Biblicists see in it evidence of the Babylonian siege, and note the absence of grain foods and the presence of pollens. It might indeed be interpreted as a seige, but if one happened in about 450 BC, soon after tha city had started to be rebuilt, that would be the most evident destruction layer.

Some false weights were also discovered, hollowed out to give less than true value. Billington says it brings to life the picture described in Jeremiah 9:2-6. Inded, it does, but that does not date the account. The Persians were sticklers for honesty because of the importance of trade to the empire, and introduced coinage, and fixed weights and measures, to improve trade through improving trust. The tirade of Jeremiah against deceit is far more appropriate for the Persian period that any time before.

Overwhelming Evidence

Let us look at the list Billington gives as his overwhelming evidence of the truth of the bible, remembering that the realistic setting of a novel does not make its storyline true. A lot of the evidence is merely commonplace historical information that was well known when the bible was written, and can not be used as evidence that the events in it actually happened. For this reason, simple historical facts from the bible that have been shown to be historic are simply listed at the end. They show the biblical authors were not dunces, but that ought to be clear enough anyway.

1. “And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, and Erech, and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. Out of that land went forth Asshur, and builded Nineveh, and the city Rehoboth, and Calah, And Resen between Nineveh and Calah: the same is a great city.” (Genesis 10:10-12)

Billington says, these cities, the earliest that are mentioned in the Bible were uncovered by archaeologists over a century ago and have been positively identified. So also the ancient Canaanite and Egyptian civilizations are known. Thus the setting for the Genesis narrative, the call of Abraham and his journey of faith has a historical basis to it that cannot be denied.

Response—Typical Christian trickery. The setting is not denied. The argument is not that the bible is set in an imaginery place. It was written in the ancient near east where these cities were famous cities of ancient civilizations. Why should anyone imagine that the ancient authors did not know about them? The fact that it is set in the ancient near east does not make its content true! Compare the film, *Gladiator*. It was convincingly set in the second century Roman empire, and even had some historic characters in it, but the story and the main characters were still fictional.

2. “And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, saying, On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them, The LORD bless thee, and keep thee: The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace. And they shall put my name upon the children of Israel; and I will bless them.” (Numbers 6:22-27)

Billington says a silver scroll dating to 600 BC quotes this passage, showing that this scripture existed before the date admitted by critics.

Response—This is outrageous trickery. The scroll does not quote this passage but only: “May Yehouah bless and keep you; May Yehouah cause his face to shine upon you and grant you peace.” The trickster wants his converts to think that Moses, Aaron and the Children of Israel are all mentioned. They are not. The scroll has a plain and simple blessing which does not say “the LORD” but Yehouah, a god that no one doubts was Canaanite, but he was one of the Canaanite pantheon of deities. The old scroll shows that the authors of the bible wrote into it a simple, and doubtless well-known blessing.

3. Balaam the son of Beor. (Numbers 22-24)

Billington says an inscription found in 1967 and published in 1976 refers to Balaam Son of Beor and records a prophecy similar to that found in scripture.

Response—The inscription was found in the Jordanian village of Deir Alla, which was Moabite territory in the first millennium BC. This inscription tells of a Balaam ben Beor, known to the locals as a prophet who would receive his prophecies at night. The biblical Balaam was a Moabite, but lived in Mesopotamia, not in Moab. Another minor detail is that there is a 700 year difference between the Balaam in Numbers, supposedly about 1400 BC and the Balaam in the Ammon inscription, supposedly about 700 BC. Most scholars would be troubled by a difference of 700 years but not Christians. Balaam might have been famous locally as an oracle (his donkey talked like Francis, the talking mule) or perhaps even a god (“Lord of the People”) and was incorporated into the Hebrew bible because Moabites lived in Abarnahara under the Persians too.

4. Exodus route maps? (Numbers 33)

Billington says Egyptian maps found at Karnak confirm the geography of the exodus route taken by the children of Israel as recorded in the bible.

Response—Maps? Most of the cities along the alleged route that the Israelites traveled immediately before reaching the Jordan River—Iyyim, Divon, Almon-divlatayim, Nevo, and Avel Shittim (Num 33:45-50)—have not been located, and those that have been found did not exist at the time the bible reports. Yet Charles Krahmalkov notes what are apparently the same names on the walls of Egyptian temples like Karnak, not in any context of exodus. It seems it was part of a standard highway to Jordan. If the places are marked on the temple walls in precisely the same order, and are so obviously places on the way from Egypt to Canaan, then that could have been the source of them used by the much later author.

5. “And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim, and Ashtaroth, and the gods of Syria, and the gods of Zidon, and the gods of Moab, and the gods of the children of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines, and forsook the LORD, and served not him. And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he sold them into the hands of the Philistines, and into the hands of the children of Ammon. And that year they vexed and oppressed the children of Israel: eighteen years, all the children of Israel that were on the other side Jordan in the land of the Amorites, which is in Gilead. Moreover the children of Ammon passed over Jordan to fight also against Judah, and against Benjamin, and against the house of Ephraim; so that Israel was sore distressed.” (Judges 10:6-9)

Billington tells us the earliest known reference to Israelites says that they were “laid waste.” It appears on the Merneptah Stele dating to 1209 BC.

Response—What dishonesties will these Christians not sink to? The passage in Judges does not say “laid waste” but “sorely distressed,” and it has nothing to do with the Merneptah Stele which told us that the Pharaoh, not the Philistines was doing any “laying waste” to be done. If Merneptah laid Israel waste in the time of the Judges, the bible does not record it!

6. An inscription discovered by archaeologists refers to “the House of Yehouah”—Solomon’s Temple at Jerusalem (1 Kgs 6).

Response—Billington assumes that the House of Yehouah mentioned on the inscription is Solomon’s temple. Yehouah was a Canaanite god and will have had more than one “house.” Solomon’s temple is more likely to have been a temple to the god, Solomon (Shalim, the sun). The Jewish scriptures are full of names of temples to gods and goddesses other than Yehouah. They are names like Beth-El (Bethel), the House (Temple) of El.

7. An inscription found at Tel Dan in 1993, refers to the “House of David” and thus shows that David is a real historical character. (1 Kgs 12:19-20)

Response—Billington repeats what has been noted above. Here his juxtaposition of the “House of Yehouah” meaning a temple and the “House of David” meaning a dynasty shows perfectly well why some scholars will not jump to the conclusion that “bytdwd” refers to a historic David. David and Solomon, in the biblical myths, could have been popular gods brought down to earth as heroes, to leave Yehouah as the only “true” god. That would explain the absence of any mention in external annals of any such astonishingly great men in reality.

8. A seal bearing the inscription “Shema servant of Jereboam” is but one confirmation of this king’s existence in history. (1 Kgs 12:20)

Response—There are two Jereboams in the biblical account of Israelite history. One is likely to be historic and one is likely to be a myth, perhaps based on the historic one but set 200 years earlier. This seal is obviously of the historic one.

9. Jereboam's "High Place" was discovered at Dan in 1979. (1 Kgs 12:28-31)

Response—Billington assumes the "bamah" is Jeroboam's. The Canaanites probably set up their temples in high places, and this one might have been there for centuries.

10. Victory relief of Shishak discovered at Karnak in 1799 shows him with prisoners from Palestine. (1 Kgs 14:25-26)

Response—This has already been discussed above. Christians assume biblical Shishak is Sheshonq I.

11. The Royal buildings of Omri and Ahab were found by archaeologists in 1933. (1 Kgs 16:23-24)

Response—Omri is accepted by biblical critics as the founder of the statelet of Israel. The historical setting of the bible approximates more closely to the historic from Omri onwards. The details of Israelite kings will have been taken by the Persian authors of the scriptures from Assyrian annals.

12. The black basalt Moabite Stone discovered in 1868 describes the battle between Mesha King of Moab and Ahab son of Omri. (2 Kgs 3:4-5)

Response—What is surprising, among other things, about the stone is that it does not mention Ahab even though it mentions Omri! The attitude of the king of Moab to his god, Chemosh, is precisely that of the Israelites to their god, Yehouah, including the savage use of the "ban" (herem) whereby whole populations are murdered as a promise to the god!

13. An inscription of Shalmanezar II, known as the "Kurkh Monolith" mentions Ahab the Israelite. (2 Kgs 17:3).

Response—The monolith mentions "Akha-Abbu matu Sir-'la-ai," who, most scholars agree, is Ahab.

14. The Assyrian Black Obelisk discovered in 1846 depicts king Jehu. (2 Kgs 10:31-32)

Response—This is correct and it is the only picture ever found of a contemporary likeness of a king of Israel. The rubric to the relief describes the king as “Iaua (Yehouah) the son of Khumri (Omri),” but the main account around the top and base of the obelisk makes no mention of him. The bible says Jehu was “the son of Nimshi” (1 Kgs 19:16) or he was “the son of Jehoshaphat the son of Nimshi” (1 Kgs 9:14), and not of the “House of Omri,” the dynasty founded by Omri, which he rebelled against!

15. The tomb of the Caiaphas family was discovered in Jerusalem in 1990. Scholars believe that the tomb of Caiaphas himself is among them. (Mt 26:5,7)

Response—What is Billington trying to prove? No one doubts that Caiaphas was the High Priest at least some time during this period. What is in question is what happened when he was.

16. Two separate inscriptions have been found mentioning the name of the Roman governor Pontius Pilate. (Mt 27:2)

Response—What is Billington trying to prove? No one doubts that Pontius Pilate was the Prefect of Judaea. What is in question is what happened when he was.

17. The foundations of Jesus’s synagogue at Capernaum were identified in 1983, it lay underneath a later construction built by Jews around the third century. (Mk 1:21)

Response—This is quite simply Christian trickery at its most elementary and crudest. The Franciscans excavated a site which is most unlikely to be Capernaum, and the foundations are most likely the foundations of the later building, full stop. They are not earlier. Few of the places mentioned in the exploits of Jesus, like Capernaum, are identified, and it is likely that they will never be because they are Essene code names for other places, possibly major cities or possibly simply their own “camps.”

18. The huge platform upon which the temple was built in the time of Herod is there for all to see in Jerusalem today. Archaeologists have also uncovered amazing evidence of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, fulfilling the prophecy of Jesus in this chapter. (Lk 21:5)

Response—The platform there today might be part of Herod’s, but since Jerusalem was completely razed in 135 AD and rebuilt as a Roman city by Hadrian, what we see now is more likely to be the platform of Hadrian’s temple in Aelia Capitolina, the name of the new city. As for the earlier destruction of Jerusalem being a prophecy of Jesus, it was an easy one to write since the gospels were not completed before the temple was destroyed. The earliest gospel written was Mark, and few will deny that it was written at the earliest, during the Jewish War, and so could easily have been revized in the immediate years after it, to include a prophecy that was already fulfilled. Only drunkards and dunces ignore these truths.

19. In 1947 the now famous Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in caves. They demonstrate the accuracy and reliability of the biblical text. (Isa 30:8).

Response—The usual dissimulation. While it is true that the Great Isaiah Scroll, almost the complete text of Isaiah, is astonishingly similar to the present Masoretic version, other texts are astonishingly different considering these are sacred books that are always assumed to be unalterable. The text of Jeremiah from Qumran comes in two versions, one broadly like the Masoretic and the other broadly in agreement with the Septuagint. The Septuagint version is about 12 per cent shorter.

The same observations are true for 1 Samuel which also seems to exist in different versions equivalent to the Septuagint (33 verses) and the Masoretic (58 verses). One of the Qumran versions supports the Greek over the height of Goliath (four cubits and a span) but otherwise seems like the Masoretic. A whole passage missing from all modern recensions but mentioned by Josephus in *Antiquities of the Jews*, is found at Qumran. The versions of the Psalms also differ considerably at Qumran.

Thus we can praise the abilities of copyists to copy the ancient texts correctly most of the time, no one should imagine that there is some divine perfection in the transmission of these sacred works. The clear evidence from Qumran is that originally there were different versions in circulation. Holy Ghost was being slack as it usually is!

The following set of examples have been considered already in the discussion, but were listed separately by Billington. All are examples of the bible being validated by external sources, but none are anything that an educated man writing in the latter half of the first millennium BC would not know. To repeat, biblical skeptics are not saying that the bible is made up in its entirety. It is set in a historical sequence of kings and major events. What is in question is the detail, which is fictional, devotional romance about the intervention of God in human affairs, and little or nothing has so far detracted from that view. The history before Omri, however, seems almost total fantasy.

- A Hebrew seal found bearing the inscription: “belonging to Jehoahaz son of the king.” (2 Kgs 10:35)
- A cunieform text discovered about 1850 is the record of Tiglath Pilezar and mentions kings Pekah and Hosea. (2 Kgs 15:29-30; 16:7-9)
- In 1955 a tablet was deciphered which records the captivity of king Jehoiachin and the appointment of Zedekiah. (2 Kgs 24:10,15,17)
- A Babylonian tablet describes the capture of Jerusalem by king Nebuchadnezzar. (2 Kgs 24:10-17)
- The Yaukin Tablet found at Babylon (1932/3) mentions king Jehoiachin and the rations allowed to him. (2 Kgs 25:27-30)

- A relief discovered at Sennacherib's palace in Nineveh (about 1850) include the seige of Lachish. (2 Chr 32:9)
- The famous Cyrus Cylinder—a clay cylinder of king Cyrus describes the return of captives after the liberation of Babylon. (Ezra 1:1-4)
- A reference to Sanballat, the governor of Jerusalem was found. (Neh 4:1-2)
- In about 1850, the records of Sargon were discovered. (Isa 20:1)
- Evidence of the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah found at Gezer and other locations. (Amos 1:1)
- Reliefs found at Nineveh in the 1850s, and which can be viewed in the British Museum are burnt black by the fires of destruction. (Nahum 3:7,15)

“This evidence—which to any reasonable man would be considered overwhelming—still isn't enough!” (Paul Billington)

This biblical “evidence” is no more convincing that a man rose from the dead than that Bulwer Lytton was able to write a realistic story about the destruction of Pompeii, 1800 years later. Certainly, if anyone wanted to to persuade people of impossible things then they would try not to get elementary things wrong. So, it is with the biblical authors. That they knew some battles and some kings should not easily persuade anyone that the supernatural events in these romances actually happened. Only a gullible fool would believe it. “Any reasonable man” would remain skeptical.

Christianity Revealed

Polemical Trickery

Dr M D Magee

One of the interminable Christian apologists on the web answers questions sent in by naïve Christians plagued by skeptics' assertions. Inevitably his advice to his simple charges is to demand proof from the skeptic. That is pretty rich from people who do not need any proof of their own fancies and untruthful assertions. Ask them for proof that Jesus was the first fruits of the dead and you will get the same old tired citations of dubious New Testament passages. On the basis of the bible, the world was flooded entirely except for the tip of mount Ararat! Does anyone seriously believe this nowadays? Think about it. If this is manifestly untrue, why should anything else in this old book of fairy tales be true? Yet, the Christian apologist tells you to demand archaeological or historical evidence not just speculation.

Why Christianity Must be True!

An innocent wrote asking how he could deal with a nasty atheist who said God was invented to control people. The answer (all emphases capitalised as in the original):

“First, ask him to prove it! Ask him to give you some evidence! There is no evidence... only speculation... If he gives you some more theory, ask for historical evidence! Ask for something from archeology or history, not just a speculative possibility!”

What could be more speculative than Christianity, yet our apologist tells us the critics of Christianity are speculating. On the face of it, these Christian gurus do not understand scientific method, but they know enough for their sheep and try to use it dishonestly against scientists and historians. Science works by making hypotheses, making deductions from them then testing the truth of the deductions. Dishonest Christian evangelists claim that this proves that the critics are only speculating. Christians are not, of course, speculating, they know!

The truth is that all history depends on evidence and has to be tested by the scientific method because we can never revisit a historical moment to decide for ourselves what really happened. Even the most graphic evidence needs to be considered with skepticism. A copy of a newspaper might be proof that Kennedy was assassinated, but nowadays spoof newspapers and even spoof film footages, like the Roswell alien autopsy footage, can look convincing. We need little convincing of the Kennedy assassination because there is masses of evidence that would have had to have all been forged for the assassination to have been untrue. Yet Christians believe from the evidence in four gospels, three of which are not independent anyway, that were written by those who had a vested interest in spreading the story.

Our apologist continues:

“Second, you might point out that if he is right, IT DIDNT WORK VERY WELL! The Jews were never under control by the prophets—they killed every one of them! The prophets wrote the bible, not the controlling leadership! The leaders always killed the messengers of God—even Jesus referred to this (Mt 23.30;37). This is REAL historical data that proves him wrong.”

This answer beggars belief, unless you are a Christian of course, when you will believe anything. The prophets are “REAL historical data?” Christian apologist assumes the bible is true, so the prophets must have been true. Sorry, CA, you are being dishonest again—effectively assuming the answer to the question.

The Jewish religion did not exist until the Persians sent some colonists to Judah in the fifth century. They were to control the people and invented the personality, if not the name, of the Jewish god to do it. The whole point about the Persian “returners” was that they presented books that depicted the people as sinners who had to repent or be destroyed by the vengeful god—implying the Persians as God's agents in the world. That is how they were controlled, and the stories of them killing prophets was part of the tale, showing them to be ingrates. Doubtless, the people being subject to this yoke objected for some time, and did kill some of the colonists and officials. All grist to the mill. They were confirming what the recently written holy books said.

There is not one biblical scholar that will deny that the so-called “post-exilic” religion of the Israelites was different from the one they had in Assyrian times, prophets or no-prophets. The proof that the scheme succeeded is that, after about 100 years, the Jews believed the books imposed upon them by the Persians. The Jewish religion had been born!

Our naïve correspondent with the apologetic Agony Auntie said his atheistic heckler had claimed that the bible was a beautifully written piece of fiction. Auntie responded as usual, saying, “Ask for proof!” This is a typical dishonest ploy they use all the time. They adopt tall stories that no sensible person could believe, then insist that the critic should prove them false. They have a buddy Jesus in their skulls and tell critics to prove it is not real. Apologist adds that nobody thought the bible was fiction for centuries in the past, presumably implying that it must therefore be true. People touched wood for good luck for centuries, so is that true too?

But now Auntie gets to the real blatant lies:

“Every historical fact in it bears out in archeology... every detail looks like an eyewitness... the authors died as criminals for their belief that this was true... common people in the 1st century Palestine didn't write fiction! (that was for the elite Greeks and Romans outside of Palestine).”

Archaeology does almost the opposite, showing that whole swaths of the bible is likely fiction because there is not the least evidence, or only highly controversial evidence in a few cases, for such stories as Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Judges, David, Solomon, Esther and so on. If every detail looks like an eyewitness account, it only says something for Christian credulity. Opinion like this is subjective and useless as evidence.

Our Auntie has no idea at all how the authors of the biblical books died because he does not know who they were. By the same token, he would deduce that the Diaries of Adrian Mole were written by Adrian Mole.

Christian apologist tells his naïve charge that common people did not write fiction, apparently presuming to know that these books were written by “common people”. Common people did not write, full stop. These books were plainly not written by common people. The original Old Testament books were written by Persian administrators, and the first century writers he refers to were literate Essenes or, even according to Christian tradition, were mainly educated people—a doctor, a tax collector, the son of a wealthy woman, a man educated in the best Jewish school there was. Common? And since when were the New Testament books written in Palestine? Most, if not all, were not.

Auntie and his types get away with this utter dishonesty because the average Christian punter, like this simple questioner, has no idea where to look for valid information, do not even read honest commentaries on their own bible, and have not the skill to unravel Christian polemical trickery. The safest advice to anyone puzzled about Christianity is:

Do not believe anything that a Christian says. They are incorrigible liars because they think it is acceptable to lie for God.

If God really created the world, he also created the concept of truth. Did he do it so that Christians could lie unrepentantly for 2000 years?

Our Christian apologist had to deal with a question from another innocent who suggested that, if Christianity in the first century was falsely being propagated by rogues for their own ends, then, when the people who knew it was false from their own direct experience had died, evidence that the religion was false would die with them.

Christian apologist tells us:

“The ONLY way this could possibly occur, would be if the people who ‘knew better’ (the ‘opposition’) NEVER TOLD (convinced) another person about the ‘real truth’.”

And, the apologist says, there were lots of people who were opposing the Christians, such as Pharisees, rabbis and scribes in the first century who were organized vocal, motivated by power, had many followers of their own, were successful in propagating their own message and succeeded in preserving disagreements with Christians in their own writings so “we could be rather confident that the Christians did not win because of the silence (and eventual death) of the ruling Jewish hegemony!”

Apologist, therefore, seems to be saying yes the people who knew about the Christians rogues and knew Christianity was false did die out but they told lots of people first, explaining the consistent opposition to Christianity by first century Jews.

“So, at least in Jerusalem, until its destruction (after the NT had already basically been written and circulating), there were strong and vocal anti-Christian movements that would (and did) proclaim disagreement with the early Jewish-Christian leadership (as described often in Acts).”

However, in the wider empire, early Christian missionaries like Paul were at work spreading the phony message about the crucified god among Hellenized Jews and the first gentile converts. More pious traditional Jews often were outraged as Acts suggests, but Hellenized Jews were not—they were used to Pagan religions in which rising gods were common—and the leadership of the Jerusalem Church had to send messengers to counteract Paul's mischief. But Hellenized Jews were much more happy to accept a less rigorous regime that suited life among the gentiles better. And gentile godfearers were delighted. In short, they were not listening to the objections of the hasids because they preferred the looser religion.

Auntie makes the assertion that the New Testament was written and circulating before the destruction of Jerusalem, a statement that is at best dubious, and most Christian would deny—so it is a lie. Some of Paul's letters purport to have been written, but had not been published and probably were not for decades yet. The gospels were not written until after the war—an early draft of Mark, possibly during it.

What then of after the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersion of the Jews. Even more Jews came west and many knew what happened to Jesus personally or at little remove. They began telling the true story of the Christian god—he was a Jewish rebel.

The embryonic church had no option but to counter these travellers tales that were making the missionaries and their converts into a laughing stock. So, they wrote the first gospel about 70 AD to counter the stories being put about. They could not deny all the stories outright because that would undermine the base of reality they had. These Jews were arriving with true stories about Jesus. They were confirming that Jesus had lived.

What the bishops did not like was that the stories were stories about an Essene rebel, not about a god. The Essene leader had rebelled against the Romans and even captured Jerusalem. Plainly that could not have been admitted, so the story of it was converted into the exorcism of the Gadarene swine.

Nevertheless, people knew that Jerusalem had been captured in an insurrection, so the bishops had to concede that it had, but by a bandit called Barabbas. Barabbas was, of course, Jesus, but the bishops pretended he was someone else, and used him to blacken Jewish character by writing that the Jews had preferred the criminal to Jesus, when his many supporters had actually been calling for Jesus himself. So they wheedled their way round the truth sufficiently to convince their flocks, no less gullible then than they are now.

Auntie tells his own flock that the founders of Christianity...

“...had the greatest ability to investigate matters, the best access to literature, information, and travel, AND the most skeptical of dispositions!”

So, Christian apologist says the original gentile Christians would have uncovered any fraud, when these were the very people who were instigating it! Auntie cannot resist quoting to us the evidence that the Christians were honest—the Christian New Testament writings that were published at just this time. He frequently quotes from Acts, a work that shows Paul and his fellow travellers as being extremely unpopular among many Jewish communities. And the verdict of history is that the people closest to the whole affair, the Jews, consistently rejected Christian claims, and mostly still do!

Auntie says to our innocent enquirer:

“It should give you some idea of how easy it would have been for an individual or group to vividly and widely contest Christian claims about Jesus.

“The early history of Church, as described in all the sources we have, is indeed characterized by this vigorous debate, confrontation, accusation, harassment, etc. It is quite safe to say that Christianity did NOT ‘win’ because the opposition remained ‘quiet until they died’!!”

Typically, here at the end we find that Auntie is answering a question that was not asked. The innocent wondered whether the people who knew Christianity was false would die off leaving the confidence tricksters to maintain the fraud. The answer has to be, Yes! Jews never ceased to assert that Jesus Christianity was a fraud, and Christians hardly ever ceased in their attempt to harass the Jews to extinction, but the people who knew the truth died and cannot be called as witnesses, not least because had they written anything to prove their position, the Christians would have burnt it. In Christian Europe, they killed and burnt the bibles of many Jews, as no honest Christian can deny and no historian would.

Chicken or Egg

How did the concept of gods arise? Either humanity invented the idea of gods or, as religious believers would have it, the gods invented humanity. Christian apologist asks how anyone could come to the conclusion that mankind invented God?—not gods! The apologist as usual begins with his belief.

Then he moves on to the impossible proofs ploy, asking what historical or archaeological data supported the idea of gods being invented.

“There is no evidence of development at all in the earliest written records of humanity. Religion already was present in earliest recorded history of civilization, completely full-blown and developed. So, I cannot imagine how you could identify a point in time in which this ‘invention’ occurred?”

This apologist leads his unwary victim into thinking what is not recorded did not happen. History means events that are written down, so when something happened before people knew how to write, it is prehistoric—but it still happened! There is no written record of anyone inventing the stone axe, but it obviously happened. It is true that there is no written record of when the first idea of a god arose, but it obviously happened. The point is that there were no stone axes until someone made the first one. Similarly there were no gods until the first human being conceived of them. Being the first to conceive of the idea of something abstract is inventing it.

Our apologist does not want to think of this so he blurts:

“Not only can we not identify in historical sources a point of ‘invention’ of the concept of god, we cannot even trace a line of development!”

He is adding nothing to his previous faulty argument. He is still pretending that what is not recorded could not have happened. If the idea were invented before recording began, how can we trace a line of development. Credulous Christians seem to accept all this guff as if they had no tongues to ask questions or no minds to think of them. Our apologist now tells us:

“The earliest religious practices on record are from ancient Egypt and ancient Mesopotamia. And these ancient religions have very well-developed theologies, rituals, ethical systems, and even institutions. Even the universality of the flood traditions in all ancient cultures (in which a god or gods judged the world with a flood) represents an essentially ‘modern’ religious outlook.”

The apologist is telling us what happened 4000 years ago is modern enough for us today. The things he speaks of were designed to influence the lives of the ancients by promoting the fertility of crops animals and themselves, and to keep people in order by suggesting that gods were likely to be angered by certain types of behaviour. Is this Christian apologist suggesting that we should follow these practices now? Or is he suggesting that his God was fooling everyone at that early stage of history? He will want to do neither, but does not expect his readers to ask such questions. He wants to give the impression that Christianity was inherent in people even so long ago because they were religious and religion today for Americans is Christianity.

Our apologist betrays this when he refers to the legend of the Flood, but fails to see that the belief in an ancient myth like the Flood is plainly not what he says it is—a modern religious outlook! It is a very ancient religious outlook, and anyone who still believes such things has a primitive outlook themselves. It is hardly surprising that the world is in a mess when there are so many people influential in the most powerful country ever known still believing the ideas of men dead for 3000 years.

We do not however, need to have the history of the evolution of gods to be able to deduce it from what history we have, and from anthropology and psychology. We can see the psychology of it even today in the many people who are convinced that aliens with supernatural powers are interfering with them every night. That is a belief of sophisticated people in a sophisticated world. Primitive people had far more reason to invent such beings—there were many things they did not understand, both harmful and beneficial, that they attributed to intelligent causes. Unsophisticated people believe in spirits suited to the world they inhabit and to their world outlook. Before 500 BC Xenophanes of Colophon wrote:

“If oxen and horses or lions had hands, and could paint with them, and produce works of art as men do, horses would paint the forms of the gods like horses, and oxen like oxen. Each kind would make their bodies in their own form. The Ethiopians say their gods are black and snub-nosed. The Thracians that theirs have blue eyes and red hair.”

Modern Christians have advanced no further. Indeed they find it necessary to say that their conception of a god “created us with a pre-built notion of a disembodied consciousness with virtually unlimited abilities”, so that we would come up with an idea of god to allow the god to communicate with us. It is one of those Christian theories that can be used for anything, but for which they have no proof at all—and these are the people who demand proof! It is just the same argument as those who said god invented fossils to fool us into thinking that evolution had occurred rather than a creation—to test our faith.

Furthermore, he tells us “God as an abstract idea is on the same level many other abstractions that ‘exist’”—consciousness, mind, justice, love, truth. Well, plainly it is not, because no abstract noun can act of its own volition, whereas these people insist that their own abstraction can create a whole world! They are thoroughly dishonest. Do not be beguiled by them.

Christianity Revealed

An Overview

Dr M D Magee

The Christianity of the first century was, and yet was not, the Christianity of the fourth century. The Christianity of fourth century was, and yet was not, the Christianity of the feudal Europe. The Christianity of feudal Europe died at the Reformation, and was born again in Protestant Christianity.

Prof J A Froude, Short Studies: Origen and Celsus

Christianity Revealed takes a historical and non-supernatural look at Christianity, showing how it arose out of its own circumstances and how it continued in history getting more and more horrible until the Enlightenment.

Since then, it has gradually been forced to retreat, but today we see, in Protestant Fundamentalism, the evil of Christianity making its last bid for control of the world. Insane Fundamentalists control the most powerful country in the world. Greater miseries await us all unless reason prevails. The world is being mugged and rationalists are passing by on the other side.

Judaism and the Jewish Scriptures

Judaism differs from the tribal cult which preceded it. Its inspiration is the Babylonian and Persian monotheism brought from Mesopotamia from 586 BC which the Persian administrators imposed upon the original mythology. Monotheism was at first esoteric but became popular through the efforts of Zoroaster in Persia and from there it influenced the civilizations of the two rivers and the religion of the Jews in exile. A tribal god, Ormuzd in Persia and Yehouah in Palestine, was declared the God of all and a class of priests was formed to administer the new religion. These were bold moves and in justification they ascribed the changes to a traditional law giver, respectively Zoroaster and Moses.

Deuteronomy is certainly late because a sect of Egyptian Jews at Elephantine on the Nile did not know of Deuteronomy in the fifth century BC. It could not therefore have been written by Moses some seven hundred years before. It was written either in Babylonia or in Palestine after the Persians set up the temple and attributed to Moses to give it authority. Such books, not really written by their supposed authors, are called pseudepigraphs and are common in the Judaeo-Christian tradition—indeed in eastern tradition generally.

The Jewish priesthood at this time were really inventing Judaism under the protection of the Persian kings who had sponsored them to set up a theocracy provided they gave service to Persia. The Persian kings at the request of the Jewish priests issued edicts to all Jews subject to Persia. They laid down the rules of the new religion with its temple and priesthood established in Jerusalem. Thus Judaism was set up by the Persian kings.

A school of priests led by Ezra rewrote the legends of the old Hebrew cult, adding the extensive codes of law needed by a centralized priest-led religion. The prophetic works were later pseudepigraphs critical of the acceptance of cultural incursions by Greeks from the time of Alexander, not Chaldaeans or Assyrians, though they drew upon Jewish legend. These pseudepigraphs were illuminating problems of the day from the third century BC not in the eighth century BC.

Apart from plainly late books like Daniel and Ecclesiastes, the Hebrew bible is improbably uniform philologically for a library supposedly covering several thousand years. Its linguistic and stylistic uniformity suggest it was not written over thousands of years but merely a few hundred. The books of Isaiah, Ezekiel and Jeremiah were written or adapted from earlier works by schools of prophets, possibly Essene or Hasidic, from the third century BC. Like most of the Jewish scriptures, they contain fragments of old history, legend and myth, not all Jewish, but have been essentially rewritten with problems of the day in mind.

The enemies of Israel described in them stood for the Seleucid Greeks of Mesopotamia and Syria though not in any direct way, the books being moralistic romances rather than precise allegories. Their messages were directed not merely at the people but also at the official priesthood who were being Hellenized, at least in part, despite the elaborations of the Levitical code. Thus they were essentially the work of dissenters.

The Yehouah set up by the Persians was the god, not merely of the Jews but of the whole world, he was the Almighty God who rewarded righteousness, punished iniquity and did not require sacrifice, apparently defying the whole *raison d'être* of the Jerusalem temple and its priesthood, according to dissenting sects that came to see Yehouah as an exclusive God. The priesthood under the Greeks continued the universalisation of the religion, much to the annoyance of the dissidents. Foreign influence strengthened and with it collaboration and Hellenization.

Pseudepigraphy was not merely a disguise but was meant to strengthen the message by having it uttered by a great man of the past. Their authors were based on scriptural figures like Samuel, Elijah and Elisha and would have been familiar as larger versions of the village hasid.

They had little immediate effect but pious Jews like the Essenes revered them, accepting the books as true history, modelled themselves on them and took it upon themselves to continue the tradition in a formal way, sending out men like John the Baptist and then Jesus as righteous leaders to bring the people back to the ways of their fathers. They also knew they had a message relevant to their own time and spent much effort treating the books as allegorical—containing coded messages from God. Later the writing of prophecy was superseded by the writing of apocalypses.

The first was the Book of Daniel written in 164 BC when Hellenism tried to subdue Judaism. In the third century, the prophets had attacked in a veiled way the pervading influence of Greece, called Babylon or Assyria, and its pantheon of strange Greek gods, called idols, but the attack at the time of the author of Daniel was more direct, Antiochus Epiphanes, the king of the Syrian Greeks putting a statue of Zeus in the Jerusalem temple—the abomination of desolation. Daniel was a protest and a call to action against this forcible Hellenization, though the real problem was the voluntary Hellenization that had been proceeding apace.

The author pretended he was a seer, Daniel, in exile in Babylonia 400 years before. It became the model apocalypse. Its real nature as history disguised as prophecy, as a pseudepigraph, was realized by a polemicist against Christianity, Pophyry, whose works are typically “lost”. As Renan observed, the Book of Daniel offers an early philosophy of history. The Jews stood in the way of all the great empires of the first millennium BC and were trampled by them in turn. They were ideally situated to note their rises and falls, fearing their rises and gloating over their falls.

Daniel observes this and notes that the purpose of it was ultimately a world theocracy, a kingdom of god led by Israel, God's Children as its priests and princes. The kingdom would be brought about by a messiah, a son of David, who would triumph over all for God. The messiah was necessarily a triumphant figure but after the death of the Christian God in particular, scriptural passages which seemed to point to a suffering messiah were highlighted and the Rabbis conceived of a messiah ben Joseph who would suffer to account for them and wrote him into the Talmud.

In fact, they were nearly all personifications of Israel itself as a suffering people, though some might have been historical references to the Essene Righteous Teacher who was evidently murdered around 100 BC and added subsequently to the scriptures as annotations. Otherwise there is no mention of a messiah ben Joseph in the Qumran sectarian literature.

The prophetic writers seemed to have no concept of immortality, national and individual justice being meted in fleshly life. Early Hebrew religious ideas reflected in Genesis had the notion of soul as the breath of life which, after death became the shadow of the man meandering aimlessly through Sheol, the Jewish Hades, unaware of God. God was the god of the living not the god of the dead and the zenith of prophetic writing concerned itself with life not after-life.

Not that fears or superstitions of “ghosts”, the shade of the personality, lingering on earth before departing were not held in the popular imagination. But this was merely a shadow—it was no life. Perhaps it was the root from which the idea of a future life arose but the future life was conceived as a life on earth, a purified and renewed earth but an earth no less. God rewarded the righteous by renewing their earthly body into an everlasting heavenly world.

First, God sent His messiah to judge and purify the world. He and his saints would subjugate all the nations and submit them to the universal theocracy based on Jerusalem. The wicked among the dead are ignored or raised and punished. The wicked among the living which included most gentiles, were punished by fire, the agent of the process of purification which only the righteous would endure.

An important link between Judaism and Christianity was Alexandrine Judaism which was formulated in the cosmopolis of Alexandria where Jewish and Greek ideas came into intimate contact in the 200 years preceding the present era. Philo expressed the product of the interaction around the time when Christianity was founded, but even books in the scriptures—the Wisom literature—seem to show Greek influence.

Personalized abstractions like Wisdom, Spirit and Word were conceived as the means by which God acted on the material world, and Philo attempted to elaborate them. Jews in Alexandria were able to avoid offence and participate in the debate with the Greeks by supposing that some elements of God's revelation to the Jews had passed into the Greek world through the Greeks' long-time interest in Eastern religions. Some Greeks had therefore been able to arrive at a philosophic monotheism apparently through reason but really because the idea had come to them indirectly from God's revelation to the Jews. Jewish thinkers were able thus to retain their conviction that they remained the people chosen for God's revelation when the Greeks had actually come to monotheistic views independently—or perhaps both had a common source in Persia.

This conviction was sufficient to allow worldly Jews to proselytize among the gentiles and seek ways of subsuming their world view to the Jewish. Western people then, as they do still, saw the East as the source of religious mystery and the Jews could feel they were fulfilling their destiny as the light of the world. The Sibylline Oracles were composed in Greek identifying the universal God with the Hebrew God, assuming the superiority of Judaism and the falseness of other gods, and expressing the basis of messianism. The connexion was strong enough for Celsus to call the Christians, the Sibyllists.

Another factor was the translation in Alexandria of the Hebrew bible into Greek as the Septuagint. Hebrew was dead in everyday use even in Palestine although its persistence in Judaea as a religious language still made its mark in common speech which was Aramaic. But diaspora Jews in the Roman empire spoke Greek and it was for them that the Jews of Alexandria translated the scriptures into Greek.

Naturally that was a boon to proselytizing Jewish teachers for they could direct their admirers to the sacred books, saying that they, and not the mystery religions of Phrygia or Egypt, contained the true revelation of God. These popular religions of the time, brought from the east were those in which a god suffered, died and were mourned by their devotees before being resurrected.

The concentration of sacerdotal energy at the Jerusalem temple was another obstacle to the spread of Judaism in the empire, both in the insistence on the sacrificial ritual and its complexity and in the exclusivity of Jerusalem depriving others of the reassurance of a ritual contact with God. The Essenes had started the movement away from the temple ritual that the Christians completed. But the real victory could only come with the destruction of the temple as a ritual centre after the Jewish war in 70 AD. This was no loss to the Essenes and their progeny, the Christians, who were to assume the authority of the Jerusalem Church and add their own sacred books to the scriptures.

Christianity

A common stratum of the religions of the middle-east was that of the dying and resurrected god who manifested himself in several forms—Attis, Adonis, Osiris, Tammuz, Mithras. Judaism officially had no such god or hero but Christianity was to provide it. Though the new religion of the Persian “returners” frowned on the reverencing of Tammuz and actively tried to suppress it, it did not entirely succeed and the emotional power of the dying god might have persisted as an undercurrent even at the height of temple worship.

This emotional appeal was particularly strong to women, as Christianity has proved, and it is unlikely that the idea did not penetrate into Israel. The wailing of the women of Jerusalem for the dead god Tammuz at the city's gates, mentioned in Ezekiel 8:14 is proof that it did.

The Jews also had the idea of a saviour king, another concept brought in from “exile.” The messiah would subjugate the nations which had oppressed Israel and set up a theocracy. The idea of the messiah arose in exile when the people were despairing and then seemed to be realized when Cyrus the Persian destroyed the Babylonian oppressor of the Jews and allowed them to set up the theocracy they desired. In the scriptures Cyrus is regarded as a messiah.

Christianity arose by a merging of the two ideas, triggered by the crucifixion of a revered apocalyptic leader who believed himself to be the messiah but died knowing that he was not. Jesus was a profoundly religious Jewish leader who made a deep impression on his faithful followers who were mainly apostate Jews who had adopted a largely Greek culture, collaborated with the gentiles or were plain sinners and wanted to be saved because they sincerely thought, as did Jesus, that the end of the sinful world was nigh.

He meant to lead them to a kingdom of God through a revolution against the Roman enemy which he was certain would prove to God that His children preferred Him to the usurper. Jesus was a defender of Judaism but not of the temple hierarchy and a rebel against the foreigners whose alien culture he abhorred. In trying to create the conditions that he felt God needed to prove Israel worthy of His intervention, he had to lead his followers in rebellion against the foreigner and the Jewish sycophants who pandered to them.

As irregular soldiers they could not always follow the strict requirements of the law and Jesus taught them not to fear God's annoyance in such circumstances because purity of spirit was more important than ritual purity. In short, he held strictly to the Essene interpretation of the law but also showed his followers that, when circumstances prevented strict application of the law, it could be abrogated as a temporary measure as long as the man was pure of heart.

This temporary lifting of legal requirements, for practical reasons in revolutionary circumstances, as long as the devotee was of pure intention, was extended by the Christians into a permanent abrogation of the law. After Jesus's crucifixion, his followers expected a long period of strife before the kingdom came, and it was not hard for some of them, not used to the strictest adherence to the law to use the continuing battle as an excuse justified by Jesus to backslide. These temporary circumstances were extended until the original qualification on the suspension of the law was forgotten. After about half a century Jesus's concessions to the needs of the hour had crystallized into a firm abrogation of the law for all. This combined with the Essene rejection of sacrifice and the temple ritual in favour of sweet scents and prayer amounted to the reforms desired by gentile godfearers.

Jesus, a strict Jew, will have been surprised to find that he had become a reformer of the law, and the reforms allowed gentiles free access to the Jewish God. Quite different was the teaching of Paul for whom the law was unimportant and Jesus an example of the dying and resurrecting god of the east whose teachings were irrelevant.

Thus, a strict upholder of the law became a liberalizer of strict Judaism for his gentile or Hellenized followers, the early Christians. Christians then began to maintain that Jesus had been a reformer all along. He was transformed from a strictly Jewish revolutionary into a reforming universal ethical teacher. And the myth has stuck.

Christians believe that Jesus was an ethical teacher, a reformer of Judaism, who was cruelly treated and slain by the old guard, jealous of their tradition. Ethically there was little in it that did not exist in classical philosophy but it brought with it the features of the oriental mysteries that were already popular in the empire and in particular the Jewish scriptures which impressed the Greeks with the sense of purpose shown by the oriental God over an apparently long period of time.

Christianity was never an ethical movement in its origins in the sense that Christians like to think it was—a movement to reform Judaism led by a charismatic ethical teacher who came to be seen as an aspect of God himself. The ethics of Christianity began with the ethics of post-exilic Judaism, particularly that of the sect of the Essenes, then adopted an outlook that subjugated freedom and personality to the state, initially the mighty Roman empire, in return for protection.

In ethical teaching, Jesus differed from the mainstream only in the sense that Essenes differed from them. He abhorred the corruption and Hellenization of the temple, accepting that God preferred prayer to sacrifice according to the prophets. Otherwise he was an apocalyptic Jew, expecting the kingdom of God imminently, and his followers accepted that the kingdom remained imminent even after his death.

Such teaching of Jesus that we have is not original but, as we might expect of a strict Jew, comes from Hebrew sources in the scriptures. Jesus's sayings are essentially scriptural though Christians like to claim that they have been given a freshness. Often it is the omission of the scriptural reference and the retention of the context that makes them seem new. The sentiments of most of it were not even original to a Greek as Celsus pointed out. The Golden Rule is not exclusively Christian but exists in all major religions, whether in its positive form or not, even so far away as China. It was found among the Greek writers and was noted in its negative form by the famous liberal rabbi Hillel a hundred years before the crucifixion.

Nor was the ascetic side of Christianity distinctive until it degenerated into fakirism. It came from the ideals of the monastic Essenes but had its equals among the Pagans who it must have seemed to have been imitating. The Essenes were likened by the classical writers to the Pythagoreans who did not drink wine or eat flesh and remained chaste. These were ideals adopted by the Orphists who were strictly vegetarian out of compassion for animals, a compassion not found in Christianity until Francis of Assisi a thousand years later despite Jesus's expression of God's concern for sparrows. Indeed, Paul sneered, with a possible reference to the Persian religion:

“Does God take care of oxen?” (1 Cor 9:9)

Nevertheless, converts were not required to accept the teaching, at least in the orthodox branch of the church, but to believe in the miraculous resurrection of the saviour. The earlier stage, that of the Essene sectaries required devotees to live according to their peculiar interpretation of the Mosaic law and their own additional precepts, but the peculiarities of the transmission of Christianity from Essenism lost this history and made it seem as if Christianity sprang from the incarnation of one man.

The discovery of the scrolls has allowed the connexion of the Essenes and the Christians to be pieced together, the link being the band of converts of backsliding and Hellenized Jews known apparently as Nazarenes. The faith of the early Christians was a confession that a certain Jesus, of which stories spread from Palestine, was the messiah—the Christ. The gentile converts of Syria and Asia Minor could not check the stories, and can they have been expected to?—they had converted because of their faith!

The evangelists converting them persuaded them that belief without proof was a virtue. Indeed, it was proof itself of the strength of their faith! Faith in this belief of the Jewish messiah's appearance, as promised by God in the scriptures, guaranteed eternal life in a mystical kingdom of God. Unbelief meant destruction or even eternal torture. These were simply the beliefs of the Essenes transferred to a messiah which had appeared rather than one which was expected.

The Essenes expected the kingdom of God to appear on earth but it was always a mystical kingdom because it was uncorruptible and free of sin—it was heaven on earth. This was soon moved to an entirely other dimensional world when the messiah did not return on cue. The original messengers, the Jews, were soon rejected as murderers of a god, and before long St Augustine was advocating persecution of those who were unwilling to join the Church because the servants of the Lord must:

“Compel them to come in.”

The Christian community preceded its canon and its literature was selected from works which were often conflicting, but the criteria of inclusion were not truth and accuracy but whether they favoured orthodoxy or heresy, and control or expression. Probably the correct translation of the beginning of Luke is that it is a narrative of what is “most surely believed among us” rather than “fulfilled among us”, the “us” being, like Theophilus, the Christian converts. In this translation, the author of Luke frankly declares that the narrative is not history but what the first Christians believed. It was considered too dangerous to allow people to choose on merit the books they would like to read.

Mark was constructed as a series of pericopes or incidents which have been put together to form a narrative. The pericopes are not necessarily in the right order and their meaning has been deliberately changed. Renan remarks on the terrible nature of the miracles in Mark's gospel, surely a reference to them being only thinly veiled in their violence. But it is not necessary to interpret every pericope correctly for the truth to be revealed. The weight of evidence is not a chain of logic but accumulative.

The pericopes were partially, at least, mixed up, some must be missing and some could be spurious insertions. One can attempt to explain them all but if one goes too far in one instance it does not invalidate the rest as a false link in a chain of argument would. The explanation of the death of John the Baptist could be pure fairy tale but it has features which could be Essene so it is included. If it should prove to be pure fairy tale, the general interpretation is not thereby invalidated.

A parallel between the despair of the Nazarenes followed by their elation at their realization that the missing body meant the general resurrection had begun with its first fruits occurs in Seneca's *Hercules Oetaeus*. At the hero's death, his mother, Alcmena, at first sorrows but when she realizes that her son had become a god equal to his father, Jupiter, and had ascended to heaven, she is triumphant.

Rome and Christians

Not for the first time men were abandoning hard won democratic rights for authoritarian regimes over which they had little control. The political form of civilization of the West, democracy, had evolved differently from the absolutism and priestly cultures of the east. The Greek city states had developed a rational and humanistic form of government compared with the rigidly hierarchical, religious based systems of the east. There was interplay and overlap but the systems developed differently.

The Roman Republic had furthered the original ideal based on fifth century BC Athens but the statesmen of these later times saw that the system was in decline and tried to delay its end. It was impossible, of course, and men chose the Caesars rather than the Republic which was considered anarchic. And the first form of anarchy the tyrant rids himself of is opposition leaving the worse anarchy of the petulance of power.

Under the early empire the Roman Senate retained some powers, limiting the absolutist tendencies of the Caesars, but Julius Caesar with his typical flair sought to have himself made Pontifex Maximus to utilize religious as well as secular power. Julius Caesar, though thought of as noble, could not tolerate opposition, and his successors were often worse.

Christianity arose shortly after the Roman republic had been overthrown in favour of the emperors. Romans were proud people and could often be relied upon to respond to patriotic calls in the name of the Republic to defend Roman liberty. Under the emperors this liberty was lost for the bulk of the people as emperors became more capricious and civic life and justice fell apart. Though sick of despots, they had no will to return to democracy. Christianity took advantage of this political weariness and ultimately it survived the Caesars and the Roman empire.

Through suspicion of political parties, rather than demanding liberty, Romans condemned themselves to the dual tyranny of the Chi and the Kappa, the absolutism of religion and monarchy, no doubt feeling in their ignorance and superstition that somehow God would curb the excesses of the emperors. Out of Kappa, Chi expresses the modelling of Christ's institution on that of the Kaisar (Caesar). Christianity's reflexion of the organization of the empire in its own set up encouraged the idea and the perpetuity of the "divine right of kings". Its ethos supported authority against freedom. The Caesars were respected against those who would defy them.

So, absolutism returned first, as monarchy, with the Caesars and then, as theocracy, with the triumph of Christianity. Not that theocracy had been eliminated in the west for the Celtic kings and chiefs had been supported by the powerful theocracy of the Druids, but a thoughtful and generally logical system had mainly prevailed before giving way to the forces of absolutism radiating from the east.

The frightful tyranny of Domitian stimulated in the Senate a revival of interest in the Republic and the principles of liberty and the emperors of the second century temporarily reverted to republican ideals. Marcus Aurelius repudiated Caesarism and a vision of a monarchy, republican in spirit, prevailed into the third century AD. Thus, most emperors were not absolute rulers in the eastern sense, having to work according to the law and the common good.

Curiously the liberal emperors' only real blot was their treatment of the Christians even though Christians were the most sycophantically obsequious to the Roman authorities in all respects except worship. Despite the persecutions of the emperors, philosophic opinion remained critical of it and even when Julian later attempted to revive Paganism he forbade violence from Pagans or Christians.

In religion, the Roman idea was to try to absorb foreign cults into the framework of the existing civic religion. Human sacrifices had been abolished and as long as a foreign cult was otherwise respectable it was allowed to practise, though many educated Romans considered them as superstitions. Such practically minded men knew the predilection of the common people for fanaticism and religious frenzy.

Civic religion had been tamed and brought within the confines of the state system. Pageants and parades were controlled and served to release tension and enhance a life that would otherwise be dull and empty for many. State officials would have been suspicious of eastern cults, one of which was Christianity, and would try initially to suppress them, and then to control them.

When Tacitus, writing about 120 AD, describes the Christians murdered by Nero after the great fire of 64 AD, he accuses them of "hatred of the human race" which should be sufficient to show that these were not Christians at all but messianic Jews, probably Essenes. Tacitus knew the Christians of his own time and their own explanation of their origin in the crucifixion of a holy man in the time of Pontius Pilate the cruel prefect of Judaea. He was not confirming the truth of it but merely stating it by way of explanation of who this sect were.

Tacitus might have disliked them but could hardly have described them as hating the human race. The Essenes however regarded it as virtuous to remain apart from gentiles except for necessary commerce which they undertook only according to strict rules and under the eye of a mebaqqer, or guardian. Since Essenes felt that even their fellow Jews were sinners and backsliders, let alone the gentile races, they could fairly be described as hating the human race.

Since Christianity stemmed from Essenism and the early Christians would have sought friendship in their mother sect, there is a vestige of truth in Tacitus. But the word Christian was used about the Essenes because they were messianists, and Christ is simply the Greek for messiah. If the troubles which led to Nero's excessive reaction were disputes between messianic Jews, Essenes, and other Jews then it would be easy to suppose the instigator had been a man called messiah or Christ.

This is the error made by Suetonius writing about messianic disturbances in the time of Claudius which led to the expulsion of Jews from Rome which is found in the New Testament. Tacitus makes essentially the same mistake writing about the events of twenty years later. For messianic Jews like the Essenes, the arrival of the messiah and purging of the world was imminent. Plainly they were excitable and would react to rumours that the messiah had arisen, rumours that were not infrequent as we know from the Acts of the Apostles.

Rome was a large city with a majority of foreigners in its population, many of whom were Jews, some skeptical of and some believers in the messiah. In the seething tenements of the Roman slums rumours were rife and trouble could flare up easily. Thus, the persecution of Christians meaning followers of Jesus, by Nero is almost entirely false, the bulk of the people suffering being Jews. Indeed from Juvenal, Nero used the opportunity to rid himself of enemies whatever their religious or national origins.

The one characteristic of the Christians of the time which was certainly true was that they were not interested in social or political opposition. They were disliked for their exclusive stand on religious worship but always took to heart the rule of rendering to Caesar what was his, though it was a call to defy Caesar when Jesus first uttered it in Palestine.

Tacitus records that, before the fall of Jerusalem, a supernatural voice was heard in the temple proclaiming the departure of the gods (not God)! Few found this alarming because it was widely believed that the scriptures prophesied that the east would be strong and men from Judaea would possess the world. Jews in the diaspora continued to believe this, only slightly discouraged by the events of the Jewish War, and continued to proselytize in the empire for many more years through two further Jewish revolutions until the third, that of Bar Kosiba, led to such severe reprisals that Jews withdrew into that social exclusiveness from which they have yet to return.

Juvenal writing before this did not mention Christians at all implying only Judaism to have been proselytized. Later it was only the Christians. So, for about half a century after the Jewish war, Jews remained optimistic that their destiny was to possess the world. Among the expatriot Jews were those of the Essene sect who were ever excitable about the prospect of a messiah emerging.

The Christians had an almost identical view, the difference only being that they were expecting the return or parousia of their messiah to cleanse and judge the world. As an explanation of the scriptural references to a suffering messiah, it perhaps offered advantages to many messianic Jews and the godfearers who admired them. There was nothing unbelievable in Pilate crucifying a man, he was remembered as cruel, and yet it was not difficult in gullible times to dissociate Jesus from the true stories about him which some travellers brought back with them.

For over a normal lifetime the Romans had crucified many Jewish rebels, none of whom had any but the most incidental success, and the gentile bishops became masters at denying and distorting the true accounts of Jesus's unsuccessful revolution when it suited them, or blaming explicit outrages on other messianic failures. The Acts of the Apostles even mentions some of these.

Fraternalities for the sharing of certain mysteries were widely accepted in the empire. Even the Jews joined in fraternities to celebrate the Seder in Jerusalem, just as the apostles were reported to have done, and variant sects like the Essenes habitually met to share a sacred meal. Such collegia were common among the devotees of the eastern religions like those of Dionysos and they could become politically powerful. The Roman authorities were therefore suspicious of such circles as being bands of conspirators and demanded that they be registered. Those that were were collegia licita, legal gatherings, and those that were not remained illegal—collegia illicita.

Curiously at this time the Romans were so tolerant of sectarianism that, once they had discovered and investigated an illegal gathering, provided that it was not involved in clandestine activity, it was tolerated even though it was illicit. Though the collegia were supposed to be authorized, if innocent they were not treated as illegal, even if they did not register. The Jewish religion was licit.

Even Christian collegia were never declared explicitly and solely illicit though they were sometimes persecuted under more general rules. Each new college had to obtain authorization by proving to the authorities that it had no political objectives. Only in its earliest days would the church have been able to do this. Once it had grown beyond a certain size, its administration and organisation declared it a reflexion of the Roman secular state. That could only be interpreted in political terms.

At Antioch the converts to the new sect called themselves followers of “The Way” using the expression used by the Essenes of themselves in the scrolls. Legend has it that Peter was their first bishop, the word bishop being the Greek translation of the Aramaic word also used by the Essenes for their community leaders. Keen to gain respectability the new sect promoted its ethical monotheism and the purity of its morals as conducive to the obedience of Roman law.

The fable that Tiberius wanted to deify Jesus officially but was stopped by the Senate was typical of the Christians' appeal to the absolute authority above the democratic one. It labels the Senate as the enemy of Christianity while the despot was its friend. The Christians buttress tyrants with the doctrine of the Divine Right of Kings and eventually, in the Middle Ages, both the Pope and the Holy Roman Emperor could be called “God on Earth”.

Opposition to Christianity was based on Romans educated in the free schools, the last bastions against Christian totalitarianism in Greece in the sixth century AD, as was the Senate earlier in Rome. The fairness of the second century emperors is shown by Marcus Aurelius who was philosophically a Stoic but who endowed chairs in all the schools of philosophy without favour to those he preferred himself.

The repression of Christianity is largely Christian myth and, to the extent that it occurred at all, its basis remains unclear. Cases described as Christian persecution seem to be simply punishment of illegal acts. The justice of the punishment can be argued but mostly Christians were not persecuted for being Christian but for breaking the law. Significantly such persecution as did occur tempered as the absolutism of the emperors increased—from the time of Commodus on.

Gibbon showed conclusively that Christians experienced no serious persecution before Diocletian and this was a last splutter of a weak candle. The Chi of Christ was ultimately victorious with the Kappa of the emperor Constantine and the oriental court favoured by Diocletian was permanently adopted by the latter. Absolutism was on the march even in its birthplace, the east. The Greek influenced dynasty of the Parthian Arsacids gave way to the intolerant despotism of the Sassanids.

Paulinism

Paul, who was not a Palestinian Jew if he was a son of Abraham at all, saw the opportunities offered by the death of the popular rebel and began to tout it as a new religion combining the various elements mentioned above.

Paul is remembered better than the other apostles precisely because of his self-imposed task of evangelizing the gentiles. The original branch of the Nazarenes was to die out, pushed by the Jewish War into the desert where it influenced Mohammed before succumbing to his revolution. Paul travelled west and became well-known in the Roman empire, the victor in the Jewish War.

Most of the other apostles, the ones who had known Jesus in life and possibly greater men than those we know of, remained in Palestine and were destroyed without trace with the Jerusalem Church. None of the other apostles, other than Peter has any substance, and we know much, much less about Peter than we do about Paul. It is possible that some of Peter's experiences have been transferred to Paul in the Acts of the Apostles to boost the apostle to the gentiles, Paul's trial before Annas, for example.

Paul himself seems to have evolved from having an apocalyptic outlook to being gnostic. 2 Thessalonians 1:7-8 is purely apocalyptic, the apocalypse however being postponed until after the parousia. In Acts 3:27, we read:

“Every soul that will not hear the new prophet shall be destroyed.”

He seems to have consistently denigrated the Jews, preached abrogation of the law and propagated the saving power of belief in the dying and resurrected god. He therefore became the hero of those gentile Christians who by the turn of the second century were departing from the Essenic beliefs of their founders.

Paul was not an associate of Jesus and it appears he had little contact with the chosen Apostles. Yet his writing is littered with words and expressions favoured by the Essenes, more so than any other New Testament writer. It seems he must have been an Essene or so closely associated with them that he could pick up their argot. Having done so he used it ostentatiously perhaps aware that it gave his speech a prophetic quality and gave him a suitable gravitas.

Paul demanded that converts have “faith” that Jesus had come as “Christ”, died and been resurrected. He announced that God had given men “grace” to believe. These three key words, faith, Christ and grace, are all favourites of the Essenes, though Paul gives them a new meaning.

The faith of the Essene was that God would gather the righteous into His holy kingdom under the leadership of His messiah. Faith for Paul was that the messiah had come in the person of Jesus. For the Essene the messiah was a noble leader supported by God but, for Paul, Christ, the Greek word meaning messiah, was a new form of the god who died and in three days was resurrected to save believers—a god like Tammuz and Attis.

Grace for Essenes was holiness or piety which had to be practised without let by the righteous aspiring to the kingdom of God. The judgement was with God but Essenes trusted God not to be capricious in His judgements and so a life of righteousness and good works could be expected to be acceptable to Him. In Paul's outlook the decision of God seems much more whimsical. God decides whether faith has been true enough but no one knows what the criteria are. Faith is necessary but not sufficient for salvation, the final judgement being God's, but seeming to be arbitrary.

The original Jesus myth required Jesus to be resurrected because that was Essene belief—the righteous dead were resurrected into this life in renewed bodies which were incorruptible because earth had now been joined to heaven. Jesus was the first of the righteous so to rise and thus proved that the kingdom of God was beginning.

Paul it seems had his doubts about this. He had been brought up in a Greek city not a Jewish one, and was probably a Jewish proselyte or first generation Jew rather than of the seed of Abraham as he claimed. Paul seems to have served the three years required of an Essene novice but never to have completed the novitiate. His training and upbringing had made him familiar with Greek thought, eastern mystery religions and Jewish apocalypticism.

He had difficulty in accepting that putrified flesh could be renewed. His epistles show him to be inclined towards “docetism”, the belief that the risen Jesus was a phantasm that only seemed real. He could not wholeheartedly accept the notion of a resurrection of the flesh and compromised with a tendency towards docetism that was later picked up by the gnostics in their philosophical mythology.

Of course, the original believers accepted the resurrection as just that because they were Jews and that was the earliest tradition. The orthodox Church took this to be the proper tradition and they opposed docetism. This has been written into the gospels, the apostles being depicted as doing absurd and revolting things to prove that Jesus was indeed flesh and blood and not a ghost.

The Jews of Alexandria knew of a personified creative reason called the Logos or the Word which was a mediator between God and man. In John's gospel we find essentially the same concept as a pre-existent Logos, an emanation of God that was God, which the gospel immediately identifies with Jesus Christ who was also the Son of God. Thus the Father and the Son were united in the Logos yielding two thirds of the Trinity.

Philosophical speculators of the time liked trinities and they had a respectable ancestry in trinities of Gods like the Egyptian trinity of Osiris, Isis and Horus. Always syncretic, Christianity could not allow such an attractive prospect to pass by. Paul had virtually invented the divine trinity, the third aspect of which was the Holy Ghost.

The Church's investment in Jewish tradition and monotheism was too strong to allow the Hebrew God to splat into three fragments, and instead the theologians worked overtime on some nifty verbal dance-steps to allow Christians to enjoy three gods and one, at the same time! They composed the Nicene Creed.

Regrettably, the female principle was lost in this because the Holy Ghost was conceived of as masculine or neutral in sex, whereas the female gender of the Hebrew word suggested the femininity of the idea. The Fathers of the Church had succeeded in excluding women but they left a void into which popular devotion eventually placed the Virgin Mary who began to take on the attributes of a goddess.

Both the orthodox Church and the gnostics wanted to appropriate Paul but his inclination towards docetism led to his adoption as the Father of Christian Gnosticism. The use made of him by the gnostics led to his being derided in the second century by some as the "Apostle of the Heretics". Basilides and Marcion, hoping to rid Christianity of its Jewishness, rejected all the chosen apostles. For them there was only one apostle, "the Apostle", Paul. Was Paul known not to be a true Jew? That he was favoured by those who hated Jews might help confirm our suspicion that he was no son of Abraham.

The objectives of the Catholic church and the gnostics were always quite different. The gnostics were seeking a philosophic religion allowing for great variety and putting emphasis on personal revelation. The Catholic church set out to become the Holy Roman Empire—not the German Bund invented later to replace the lost Western Empire but a religious Roman empire in parallel with the secular empire of the Caesars. The importance to success of having clear objectives is illustrated by the triumph of Catholicism. The practical minds of the church office holders enabled them to fulfil, in a sense, age old prophecy and rule the world as a modified Jewish priesthood.

Soon heresy and schism were to be denounced as crimes to be punished not by God in judgement but by men with torture. The ideas of enlightened minds that had conceived of freedom and emancipation were quashed; slavery was endorsed; tyranny was upheld; women were subjugated; pie in the sky was promised in compensation to the oppressed provided that they suffer silently on earth.

The unforgiveable sin against the Holy Ghost of Jesus and the Essenes became defiance of church authority. This was the system that succeeded in the fourth century in becoming the only religion of the empire—the culmination of the syncretism of the emperors. Perhaps nothing would have been substantially different if the winner had been the church of Mithras or Isis because the political objective had been to bring them all together as a mighty state religion.

The fact remains that the Christian Church nominally came out on top and it did because it had set out to do so as the partner of the secular power. In the west, dual political systems arose with the secular and spiritual arms of kings and bishops. In the east, the system was that of absolute theocracies of unshakeable internal strength.

It was not until 1917 that an eastern theocracy was overturned by rebellion rather than by an external enemy. And what was achieved? The philosophy of personal servility to the almighty state which the Bolsheviks introduced was merely more of the same.

The Later Church

In the sixth century AD, the intolerance of Christianity had its ultimate triumph over the long standing classical quest for knowledge of the Pagan schools. Against the power of the autocrats the Pagan schools had been unable to disseminate knowledge and had remained exclusive. The mob were ignorant and hostile to learning and, though mostly they were also not interested in Christianity, the other-worldly threats and promises of its creed impressed their superstitious minds. Combined with the Church's readiness to administer sustained torment to dissenters in God's name assured it of victory against more critical minds.

Imperial contenders were offered support in return for which the church hierarchy demanded favourable treatment for the orthodox and persecution for opponents. Old Roman laws against witchcraft and magic were invoked against devotees of rival religions whose gods were called devils. In the epistle 2 Peter 1:20, the evangelist forbids any novice to interpret scripture himself. Believers had to believe what they were told, not what they themselves read. To make your own interpretation might have been heresy, a “treason against God.” For Christians, conscience was not “the most exacting confessor and it only can forgive your sins” as Kant was later to say.

To expose any such heresy legitimate proof could be had by torture—no person was safe, of whatever class or status, the Christian concession to democracy! In Greece, Justinian closed the Pagan schools and stole their endowments. In Alexandria, the library was burnt to a toast. Freethinking was proscribed. The gnostics had also lost out and those compelled to join the universal church had to curse their former affiliations, saying:

“I anathematize those who say that Zoroaster and Buddha and Christ and Manichaeus and the Sun are one and the same.”

The Manichaeans followed the earlier gnostics in following Paul. Even after the victory of the church, groups called Paulicians after some unknown leader called Paul but glad to be associated with the “Apostle to the Heretics” survived in pockets and had their effect in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The Paulician heresy was stamped out with brutality and atrocity for they held gnostic beliefs.

Plotinus in the third century founded the last of the great Pagan schools in the midst of the growth of Christianity, and its philosophy became known as neo-Platonism. We know of no books of Plotinus that attack the church, although gnosticism is attacked. Perhaps Plotinus saw the church merely as deceivers with no intellectual substance but saw the gnostics as having intellectual pretensions. Plotinus saw no merit in the gnostics regarding everyone other than themselves as having no divine spark, indeed possessed by devils, but saw in them Platonic elements.

The new philosophy seems to have been favoured by intelligent Christians for whom the barbarism of ritual and creed were unsatisfactory. They enrolled in the schools and learnt about Platonism and Stoicism from them before they were eventually closed down, and thus profoundly were to affect Christianity at its incipient intellectual growth points. Since then much that passes for Christianity is really Platonism or Stoicism.

However the neo-Platonists stayed starkly divided from Christianity in believing that the allegorical adventures of gods and heroes were never real. They distinguished myths from history and science. Myths were useful in illustrating a point, but the point should never be lost in the myth. Primitive people were perhaps unable to express themselves in abstractions, because the words for them did not exist or because such language was too arcane for popular consumption. They therefore illustrated their important truths with myths. In many scriptural myths it is not hard to educe the moral, and one is faced then with the decision about whether the moral was the original purpose. If it was, the story is not true as history or science.

Though Christians like Marcion would have liked to have been shot of the Jewish tradition, others saw it as a valuable asset and sought a philosophical framework to support the mythology. Only the Greek schools had the erudition to supply it—neo-Platonism supplied the theory of the immaterial soul. The plain and simple reasoning of mere men with their gift for thought had to supply the rational and moral basis for the assertions of the revealed religion.

What though was to be the higher, rational philosophy or the superstitions of a popular religion? The answer was superstition and rational thought was relegated for a millennium to the footstool of a religion which revered images of a human sacrifice suffering torture nailed on a cross.

In 1 Corinthians 3:18-19 Paul writes:

“If any man thinketh he is wise among you in this world let him become a fool, that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.”

Whether Paul, if it is not an anti-gnostic insertion, meant this literally or metaphorically, it was taken literally by Christians. In the sixth century, a Christian expounded a treatise on this text saying:

“Philosophers set forth opinions without harmony or congruence.”

Justinian, who always wanted money like most Christians since Christ, accepted that the philosophical schools were useless and closed them down, pocketing their funds, as Christians always did.

Simplicius, a philosopher of the neo-Platonist school of Athens fled to Persia hoping to continue the Pagan tradition. Highlighting the ignorance of Christians, he said they understood nothing of what they had read, and hypocritically ignored their own innumerable divisions about subjects of such practical importance as how the godhead was to be understood.

Science was lost and absurd arguments on angels and needles replaced them for the duration of the Dark Ages. Even today long into a scientific revival, scientists feel obliged to make self-conscious references to God or to biblical myths of no scientific relevance, purely, apparently, out of a need not to ignore religion. A surprising number of scientists remain Christian, renewing for themselves the verbal gymnastics of earlier times. It shows the astonishing power that the shaman has over society.

Elizabeth Maclaren (*The Nature of Belief*, Sheldon, 1976) shows how Christian faith has altered over the centuries. Jesus who has the message in the gospels became Jesus who was the message in Paul. Ever since, Christians have ignored whatever messages Jesus seemed to have had in favour of Paul's message. First century Christianity was based on the Jewish scriptures. In short, it was primarily Jewish. The gospels were written later in the first century and were not in general circulation until the second, so Christians learnt about Christ mainly from whatever the first Christians deemed were prophecies of him in the scriptures. Matthew's gospel was a modification of the basic collection of stories about the historical Jesus in Mark to highlight scriptural prophecy.

First century Christianity was Judaism for gentiles except that the appearance of the messiah in the form of Jesus heralded the kingdom of God. Four centuries later, God existed as the Trinity, the second part of which, the Logos, had incarnated on earth as the Son or Christ, living and dying as a man called Jesus—meaning Saviour—whose presence on earth united humanity with God, offering them the benefit of immortality. By the twelfth century, the doctrine was that humanity had sinned against God in arrogant pride and ought to have had the treatment experienced by the generation of Noah. Instead, God sent his son to die for man's sins. Thus divine justice is done and Satan is foiled as long as people accept the sacraments of the Church!

In the twentieth century, for the Western liberal Christian, God is the focus of life and hope, which Jesus expressed in the mythology of his time in a message of love and liberation that transcended his death and continues to be interpreted today. God does not intervene by miracle—nothing is supernatural—but Jesus exemplifies love and the purpose of life.

Christianity has changed continuously in the last 2000 years as culture has changed, and now exists in as many varieties as there are believers. There are around 30,000 denominations of Christianity, and it seems fair to ask with Ninian Smart (*The Phenomenon of Christianity*, Collins 1979) what the Amish of Pennsylvania have in common with the Zulu Zion. Jesus has become everyone's personal Good Luck Charm. Once they look beyond the rabbit's foot, they meet problems:

- The Inquisition, once the organ of the Christian God's divine providence, is considered by most modern Christians as barbaric.
- Crusades were once considered the Christian armies out to save the world from the infidel, but few people today can see them as anything other than bands of savage xenophobic robbers off to the east to plunder Christian and infidel alike.
- Many modern Christians can see only intolerance of the cultures of others in the Christian doctrine of considering other religions as heathen and false, and imposing the need to send out missionaries to “save” them.
- Slavery was once approved by Christianity but now is not.
- Sexual freedom was always decried by Christians but today few see much harm in it.
- Formerly, priests and bishops happily served as military chaplains and blessed armies and battleships, whereas today it is fashionable for liberal Christians to be pacific.
- Christianity began with communistic ideas of property ownership, yet, under Protestantism, has promoted capitalism and the exploitation of the earth.

Traditional Christianity, so far as its claims to truth are concerned, to those looking at it from outside, is in the same boat as Marxism, fascism, or any other ideology. Some of the parallels between it and them become dangerously close. Christianity too has re-written history to suit itself. Christianity too has murdered opponents in large numbers. Can its justification be any different, or is any crime acceptable in the interests of the Christian God?

These examples illustrate that Christianity amounts to believing anything! To be able to believe anything is to believe nothing. Christianity is meaningless and it is time, after 2000 years, that people found something worth believing.

Christianity Revealed

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The Mystery of Barabbas

From time to time we read of churchmen scaring us with accounts of the spread of paganism, by which they usually mean worshipping Satan. Pagan religions were really the religions which preceded Christianity in the lives of the citizens of the Roman empire. When Christianity became the state religion all Pagan religions were banned and Pagans were persecuted. So it has been ever since, only in the last few hundred years has Christianity adopted a mask of liberality.

The author decided to explore the origins of Christianity, an exploration that eventually took him into the book, *The Hidden Jesus*, and he found that there is little that can be identified in Christianity that did not have its origin elsewhere. Christianity is itself Pagan insomuch that it has adapted its ceremonies and liturgies from the Pagan precursors that it professes to decry as the work of the Devil. *The Mystery of Barabbas* can be thought of as a companion volume to *The Hidden Jesus*.

“Dr Magee's claims are pure rubbish.” (Mary Whitehouse)

The Gospel According To Barabbas

“...the God of Israel has called out the sword against all the nations, and He will do mighty deeds by the saints of His people.” (The War Scroll)

Jesus Barabbas had no intention of changing Jewish laws—only expectations. He was a fanatically dedicated Jew of an apocalyptic order, the Nazarenes, who believed that God had begun to create his kingdom on earth. He stoutly defended the Law of Moses as the gospels illogically admit. The Jewish people were fed up and hoping for their enemies to be overcome. Jesus Barabbas was one of many men who thought he could lead his people into the kingdom of God. He could only do this if he believed that he was God sent. He did and accepted the crown of David.

He began by urging people that they should prepare for the coming kingdom just as John the Baptist did. Only the Righteous could enter the kingdom so he invited Jews to sincerely repent and symbolically purify themselves through baptism and prepare themselves for the coming battle. In doing this he was metaphorically casting out evil spirits, making the blind see and healing the sick. Those who were thus purified could enter the kingdom and were the soldiers in the messianic army. He made no claim to be the Messiah.

Jesus believed that God helps those who help themselves. So the kingdom of Heaven has to be won by the Righteous showing that they were ready to take on their enemies, then God would intervene with a miracle. He knew it would not be easy for it was prophesied that those called to the messianic kingdom would have to face the might of the heathen. They had to sustain these tribulations to prove themselves faithful.

Jesus gathered together an army in the desert. He knew that by alerting the faithful and gathering an army he would be also alerting the authorities. He was the Nasi, the Prince, a leader of the Davidic mould who would assert the authority of God's Righteous, and that consequently one "like unto the Son of Man", who the prophet Daniel told would come on a cloud from God, would arrive to institute the kingdom. After some remarkable successes the uprising was a failure, no "Son of Man" appeared, people asked them to leave them alone and Jesus and the disciples had to flee from Antipas's soldiers to Phoenicia.

Jesus hid, then ventured back into Antipas's country. He had come to believe that his mistakes were that God has ordained him the Messiah, the Melchizedek, and that the kingdom of God required him to capture Jerusalem and the Temple. Then God would intervene with a miracle. He became transfigured—crowned as Melchizedek. His band proceeded to Jerusalem disguised as Pilgrims. No one could address him by any title that might draw attention to the spies of the authorities.

However at the entry into the city he purposely revealed himself by fulfilling the prophesy of Zechariah, captured the city and controlled the Temple. The Roman garrison in the Antonia barracks probably withdrew to await reinforcements from Caesarea.

Pilate's troops counter attack after a few days, kill the Galilaeans in the Temple and batter the Tower of Siloam where some were holding out. The Romans had recaptured the city and still there was no miracle. Jesus and his generals in hiding take a last supper together—a messianic meal of the Essene type. Jesus, convinced that he had done all that God required and that a miracle was still in the offing, says he expects to be eating his next meal in the coming kingdom. He tells his men that they must remain armed. The next day was the Sabbath and also the Passover, a likely occasion for a miracle. They went to the Mount of Olives where, according to prophesy, the miracle would take place and Jesus urged his men to keep watchful—not for the enemy but for signs of God's intervention. It did not occur. A body of the Temple Guard arrived instead and arrested Jesus.

Jesus, the God, and Barabbas, the bandit, were both tried and crucified. Jesus, the God, knew his role in God's plan and as he expired whispered (Jn 19:30):

“It is finished.”

But Barabbas, the bandit, still believed that God would intervene—until, despairing, he called out with his last breath (Mk 15:34):

“My God, My God, Why hast thou forsaken me?”

Available at good bookshops at £9.99—add £1.00 p&p UK and Europe—or \$20 inc shipping and dollar conversion (US). Or by mail order (order form online, payment with order): AskWhy! Publications Selwyn 41 The Butts Frome Somerset BA11 4AB.

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The Hidden Jesus

- Was Jesus an Essene? Christians deny it. There are some similarities, they say, but too many differences. This book shows Jesus was indeed an Essene, and one of their leaders, and explains why there were differences from the Essenes described by Josephus, the Roman historian.
- What is the meaning of the word, Nazarene? Does it really refer to a previously unknown hamlet, as Christians believe, or was this an invention to hide its real meaning?
- Did Jesus really try to tell every Jew in Palestine at the time to love their Roman oppressors? Why then do even the gospels contradict this? Was his message intended only for Jews and meant to be a rallying cry against gentiles? The Christian universal faith depends on this being untrue.
- Why do demons get driven out of opponents of Jesus when he and his henchmen arrive on the scene? Why are these people torn and left for dead? Was it because the disciples were doing the tearing and beating to silence the opposition?
- Why are Jesus's main apostles given such thuggish nicknames? Could it be that they really were thugs, or zealots as they came to be known? Christians pretend they were pacifists but is that because the early church had to paint such a picture to disguise the opposite, and has done so ever since?
- What did Jesus consider to be God's when he, according to Christians, agreed to pay the tribute money, saying, "render unto Caesar what is Caesar's and unto God what is God's"? Aren't the only characteristic possessions claimed by God, His Children and the land he promised them? Jesus was refusing to pay tribute when he uttered this famous sentence.
- What was the unbindable, savage demon that Jesus rendered impotent when it revealed itself to be really 2000 Gadarene swine and to have the name Legion? Is Gadarene, an inland town the correct name for these swine?
- What was the Field of Akeldama where guts were spilled, gentiles were supposed to have lain asleep and had the nickname the field of blood? Who were the Galilaeans whose blood was spilt in the temple?
- Why did Jesus curse an innocent fig tree? Could it have had anything to do with the fig tree being a symbol of Rome?

Why have these questions not been adequately answered? Forget the obfuscations of the Jesus Seminar. All these and many more questions are convincingly and controversially answered in "The Hidden Jesus" which can be ordered from good booksellers and libraries (ISBN 0-9521913-2-6).

In this remarkable book Dr Michael D Magee peels off the pious accretions and interpretative wrappings added by the earliest gentile bishops to the story of the exploits of Jesus to make the gospels acceptable to the Romans and the basis of a universal religion. The truth is peculiarly transparent in the bible, although two thousand years of conditioning and the invention of spurious translations of Greek words to suit Christian belief in the so-called New Testament Greek have succeeded in blinding even the most critical of scholars.

The gentile bishops of the embryonic religion were faced with travelers' tales from Palestine that Jesus was not what he seemed. This oral tradition was strong because Jews were already widespread in the Empire and after the defeat of their rebellion in the Jewish War and their dispersion in 70 AD many more arrived from Palestine. Pericopes, individual stories about Jesus, kept coming to the bishops and when they did not match their preferred image of a saintly Son of God, had to be "corrected". The bishops had to say to their flocks, "Ho, Ho, Theophilus, how silly you are. It was not quite like that. No, this is what really happened". Then they would change a few subjects and objects and retell the tale such that a core remained but the sense favoured the view they were propagating rather than the truth.

It still happens today. There never was a gate in Jerusalem called The Eye of a Needle but it was invented by clerics to allow the rich to be saved when the plain sense of Jesus's aside was that it was impossible for the rich to be saved. Dr Magee explains parables and the healing miracles, and such difficulties as the cursing of the fig tree, the meaning of Nazarene, the cleansing of the temple, the release of Barabbas, Peter's triple denial, the tribute money and the Gadarene swine.

This book is a tour de force. For honest reasoning people, though not those who are irrational or emotionally dependent on the traditional image of Jesus, gospel stories will never be the same again-they now make sense. Oddly, the message of many modern Christians is upheld-that God is not an external supernatural entity ready to interfere with the world at a whim or a prayer. Jesus believed an external God was ready to intervene-he was forsaken or rather mistaken-but Christians have made the same mistake ever since, teaching people to blame devils instead of facing up to their own responsibility for their actions. Our gods and devils are within us and there we must seek and come to terms with them.

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e-mail: staff@askwhy.co.uk

Who Lies Sleeping?

The Dinosaur Heritage and the Extinction of Man

Mankind seems to suffer from an inability to recognize and understand what it is doing to its own environment. In this book Dr Magee considers the extinction of the dinosaurs 65 million years ago and shows that its symptoms were just the symptoms of the mass extinction which is occurring at present. Is it possible that the dinosaurs developed intelligence and destroyed themselves just as present day humans seem to be doing? The author examines the evidence in detail and shows that the dinosaurs gave every indication of being ready to become intelligent. Some species of dinosaur somewhere had all the attributes considered necessary for intelligence in the intelligent mammal. The latter has used its gift to begin the destruction of the world within 200 years of inventing technology. If the intelligent dinosaur had done the same, all that would remain of it in the fossil record would be an oily smear, polluted with heavy metals and exotic compounds. That is just what we find when the dinosaurs died.

“A book to savour... Deserves all the hype it can get.” UFO Magazine

“Stretches my imagination.” Nick Owen, BBC Good Morning

“Valid and credible theories... An intriguing and compelling read.” Alien Encounters

“More Sensational than Jurassic Park.” Daily Star

“A terrific writer... Compelling as any first rate thriller.” Bath Evening Chronicle.

Summary And Contents

This book is about the mass extinction of species. One technologically superior species of mammal reached domination over the planet at the end of the 20th century: one species of dinosaur achieved human-like intelligence at the end of the Cretaceous Period. In only a moment in geological time, each destroyed the majority of co-existing higher life forms.

From early days, experts of various persuasions have demonstrated their prejudices and incompetence. A non-expert should not feel obliged to accept an expert's opinion, nor feel inhibited about trespassing on the experts' demesne. Our future might depend upon confronting the experts.

We examine details of the lifestyles and physiology of dinosaurs. Our hypothesis depends on the dinosaurs not being the ponderous, cold-blooded lizards of common belief. The dinosaurs were physiologically sophisticated. Otherwise the suggestion that "reptiles" could achieve intelligence would be rightly laughable.

The growth of intelligence in the mammals, culminating in mankind, highlights features necessary for intelligence to develop in animals.

We seek in dinosaurs the features of the intelligent animal. Dinosaurs often had the necessary features and indeed owed their superiority over the mammals for millions of years to having evolved them.

Similar answers to evolutionary problems arise repeatedly. Convergence suggests that the solution of the problem of the evolution of intelligence in mammals and dinosaurs would yield similar features in both.

By making deductions from convergence we can reveal otherwise unsuspected possibilities. Humans have many characteristics of aquatic animals, pointing to an extended period of partial submergence which could explain a gap of four million years in our fossil record.

Evolution can occur astonishingly quickly. Intelligent dinosaurs could evolve, as *Homo sapiens* did, in a geologically short time. Because evolution and extinction were rapid they left few traces.

We ponder briefly on the possible appearance and nature of the intelligent dinosaurs (called *Anthroposaurus sapiens* to emphasise their similarity to the intelligent mammal).

Puzzles in old rocks could be remains of the dinosaurian civilization. Though this should be the most important evidence, it is poorly documented, having been glossed over or ignored by the experts. But even without it the circumstantial case remains strong.

We review the welter of theories concerning the end of the dinosaurs and from them identify underlying causes.

The destruction of the dinosaurs compares with that going on in the present world. We show how today's extinctions have the same underlying causes and warn of experts who ridicule public fears and distract attention from genuine concerns.

Perhaps we are doomed to self extinction like the anthroposaurs because we have inherited some self destructive traits from them. We attempt an initial diagnosis of the dinosaur heritage in human psychology.

Why are we constantly interested in monsters like dinosaurs? Are the squamous anthropoids that preceded us lying sleeping, awaiting their opportunity to retrieve the world they lost? A subliminal awareness of this might explain our obsession with monsters.

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