

WHY THINK THIS IS “TRUE?”

Do I Have to Commit Intellectual Suicide to Genuinely Follow Jesus?

How History Works:

Ancient Judaism - Josephus (90 years later)
Alexander the Great - Arrian (400 years later)
Ancient Persian Wars - Herodotus (70 years later)
Middle Ages - St Bede (200 years later)

How Ancient Documents Work:

Very Few Original Documents. Most are Copies.
Copies of Josephus would have been during a time rife with Anti-Semitism. All references to Jesus' Crucifixion or James' stoning will there for be disregarded. Josephus will only be used at time to understand Jewish culture where scholars attest there is little chance of interpolation.

Psalms 2.4-7—The One enthroned in heaven laughs...saying, “I have installed my **king** on Zion, my holy mountain.” I [David] will proclaim the LORD's decree: He said to me [David], “**You are my Son**; today I have become your Father.” (See also verse 12)

Psalms 89.26-29—“He [David] will call out to me, ‘You are my **Father**, my God, the Rock my Savior.’ And I will appoint him to be my firstborn **Son**, the **most exalted of the kings of the earth**. I will maintain my love to him forever, and my covenant with him will never fail. I will establish his line forever, his throne as long as the heavens endure.

2 Samuel 7.13-15—“The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you: When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish **his kingdom**. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish **the throne of his kingdom forever**. **I WILL BE HIS FATHER, AND HE WILL BE MY SON**. . . . Your house and **your kingdom** will endure forever before me; **your throne** will be established forever.”

G. K. Chesterton—The teachings of Jesus have not been tried and found wanting. They have been found difficult and left untried.

William Temple— If our concept of God is wrong, the more religious we get, the more dangerous we are to ourselves and others.

Gnosticism and Constantine

Universal Agreement:

1) In the first third of the 1st Century (30,40,50 A.D.) there is a band of Jewish folks who went out into the world telling a story.

Jesus Christ, a contemporary of theirs, lived an extra ordinary life
Did miracles
Was the Messiah, the “son of God,” and therefore “Lord.”
New Social Order
Distinct Ethical Teachings
He had been Crucified by the established Authority
He had risen from the dead.

2) The original environment within Judaism would have been very hostile to this movement.

3) Was not favored by Rome and experienced periods of violence at the hands of Rome.

4) Find the basic story of this community in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

Story Details vs Teachings

Pliny (111 C.E.)—His letter to Trajan is the first pagan account to refer to early Christ followers, providing some key information on early Christian beliefs and practices and how these were viewed and dealt with by the Romans. Pliny mentions that they meet on a certain day before light where they gather and sing hymns to Christ as to a god. They all bind themselves by oath, “not to some crimes”; rather, they pledge *not* to commit any crimes such as fraud, theft, or adultery, and subsequently share a meal of “ordinary and innocent food”. Pliny eventually forbade any political associations because Trajan saw them as a “natural breeding ground for grumbling” about both civic life and political affairs. Christianity was seen as a political association that

“That the world may be healed.” — John 3.17

All Texts Quoted from the NRSV Unless Otherwise Noted

The Jesus of this first Century Community:

Teacher - Content and Form

Radical Wisdom and Subversive Insight
Gifted at One-Liners and Stories that
Stuck in Consciousness

Passion for a New Social Order that he called
the “Kingdom of God.”

Courage as a Jewish Prophet

Challenged the political, social,
economic, and religious domination
system of his day. He understood where
what he was doing would lead. And he
kept at it for out of compassion for the
oppressed.

“Some ways of being Christian seem to be a
betrayal of Jesus. I wish half of Christians
weren’t.”—Marcus Borg

Example:

Gender Inclusivity
The Use of Torture
Capital Punishment
War
Wealth & Poverty

Community would grow:

Nationalism
Women
Slavery

Today:

This Jesus was executed by established authority
of the domination system of his day.
Is there relevance for us today?

Belief vs. Following

Participation in the Passion and the
Courage of this Jesus.

Tacitus (115/116 C.E.)—“Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judæa, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular. Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind”.

Suetonius (122 C.E.)—“Punishment was inflicted on the Christians, a class of men given to a new and mischievous superstition.”

In Roman usage, *afflicti* was capital, the word *superstitio* refers to any type of ritual observance that could not be incorporated into traditional Roman religious practice.

Lucian, The Passing of Peregrinus (125 C.E.)- after 180 C.E.)—“The Christians, you know, worship a man to this day—the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites, and was crucified on that account. ... You see, these misguided creatures start with the general conviction that they are immortal for all time, which explains their contempt of death and voluntary self-devotion which are so common among them; and then it was impressed on them by their original lawgiver that they are all brothers, from the moment that they are converted, and deny the gods of Greece, and worship the crucified sage, and live after his laws. All this they take quite on faith, with the result that they despise all worldly goods alike, regarding them merely as common property. Accordingly, if any quack or trickster, who can press his advantage, comes among them he can acquire great wealth in a very short time by imposing on simple-minded people.”

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