

Smoky Mountain Reflections, April 2013

The Gospel is always under attack, such as "it is one among many", or "corrupted over time". These are two arguments that can be responded to with a simple examination of the mountains of ancient manuscript evidence. This evidence affirms what the church has always held to be true, that Matthew, Mark, Luke & John are the Gospel.

The attack I would like to address this month is the claim that Christianity is a religious myth among many myths that have all evolved over time by sharing and plagiarizing ideas from each other. This is actually a relatively young attack on the gospel. It did not even exist 150 years ago. It was first proposed by "The History of Religions School" in the 1800's. Albrecht Ritschl (1822-1889), one of the groups' scholars, felt they were freeing Christianity from the tyranny of scholastic philosophy, but in so doing pulled the rug out from under scriptural authority. They did not care what the Bible said because in their minds Christianity was a product of religious evolution. Evidence of the weak nature of this particular argument is that there are no religious departments in any accredited institution of higher learning anywhere that are continuing the work of "The History of Religions School". However the group's conclusions are sadly parroted in most comparative religion classes today. These conclusions are being stated as fact with no evidence to support such claims because there is no evidence. Here are some clear reasons why no work is being done to assert these false claims:

1. Christianity pre-dates most of the "religions" it is supposed to have plagiarized or evolved from.
2. Ancient writings that pre-date Christianity are: the Old Testament, which is fulfilled in Christianity; Confucianism, Buddhism and Hinduism which have no parallels from which to plagiarize.
3. There are however three examples, often sited, with parallels that do pre-date Christianity; the Baal-Mot epic, the Isis cult, and Mithraism. Here are some of the supposed parallels; **Christ** and (Mithras), **Virgin birth** (born from a rock), **a teacher with 12 disciples** (a leader with lots of followers), **Crucifixion** (sacrificed a bull), **Resurrection** (no record), **logos** (no record). When you place these side by side they don't look very similar.
4. The nail in the coffin though is the faulty reasoning that parallels equal plagiarism and borrowing. This is known in the philosophical world as the "*post hoc fallacy*" also called *false cause, coincidental correlation*. It can be expressed this way: "A occurred, then B occurred. Therefore, A caused B." But correlation does not equal causation. You may ask yourself why scholars would use a method of argumentation that is so flawed. Those who make these assertions do not care if it is logical because it suits their needs. Here is a great example of how flawed this line of reasoning is. This example compares two well-known individuals, Lincoln & JFK. Both were: elected to the House in '46; to the presidency in '60; defeated the incumbent VP; their predecessors retired to Pennsylvania; their successors were Southern Democrats named Johnson born in '08. They both fought for civil rights, were shot in the head from behind on a Friday, a companion was wounded. Both had a son die during their presidency. Lincoln was shot at Ford's Theatre, Kennedy was shot in a Lincoln made by Ford, their last names have 7 letters, Booth ran from a theatre to a warehouse; Oswald ran from a warehouse to a theatre. This list proves nothing but, using this line of reasoning, in two thousand years someone could argue that JFK did not exist but was plagiarized from the historical accounts of Abraham Lincoln.

The problem is there are a lot of people today who knew and witnessed all of the events that surrounded JFK's assassination. The same is true for the account of the crucifixion and the resurrection. The crucifixion of Jesus Christ is an historical fact by all historical standards. The empty tomb is an historical fact by all historical standards. There are post resurrection witness accounts by hundreds of individuals. The credibility of the witnesses and their accounts is without blemish. Most of the primary witnesses were martyred confessing Christ. They gave their lives as evidence of the truth of their claims. (people do not give their lives for what they know to be a lie) Christianity rose and grew in its first few hundred years in a hostile environment. The first witnesses to this truth were woman, in a society that did not value a woman's testimony. Some witnesses recorded these truths from outside the faith like Josephus, Suetonius and Tacitus. Why are so many things both good and bad in the record?...because that is the way it happened. God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son to die and rise for you! Have a blessed Easter!

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The bulk of this article is based on a lecture given by Dr. Adam Francisco Professor of History at Concordia University in Irvine CA. On the internet radio program "Fighting for the Faith" titled "Eyewitness accounts and myth" 8/3/12