

Christ's death and resurrection not a myth

The myth argument claims that Christ's resurrection is a myth like the one about the Greek god Hercules. It's been around since the French skeptic Voltaire invented it in the 18th century. Because it has been around for so long, there is a long answer to the myth hypothesis. There's also a short one.

he early witnesses of the Gospel claimed that Jesus of Nazareth, after being crucified by Pontius Pilate on a Friday, rose from the dead the following Sunday. Christians were not telling the world: “We think Jesus was a really nice guy. He was our friend. We think of him as living on in our message”. The first Christians said no such nonsense. They said, “We saw him die. We saw him buried in a tomb. On the third day, the tomb was empty. That same day, we saw him alive. He came to the place where we staying and ate our food. We saw him appear to us many times after his resurrection. After forty days, we saw him ascend into heaven. Before ascending, he told us to spread the Good News about the resurrection and the forgiveness of sins. If you want your sins forgiven, you need to believe that he is the Son of God. You will receive the Holy Spirit.”

That is not the language of myth. That is the language of history. Myth has no witnesses. History does. No one telling a myth claims that the event happened at a specific time in a specific place. The first Christians claimed to know the exact time and place where all the events happened. Myth and history are like oil and water. It is very easy to separate one from the other.

Everyone agrees that Hercules was a myth. The Greeks who idolized Hercules knew it was a myth. The myth-makers never bothered to fix a date for Hercules ascending into heaven because nobody cared. No one ever stepped forward saying, “I saw it happen.” No one ever stepped forward saying, “I lived with Hercules.”

The first Christians knew Jesus personally. They had very clear dates for his death, his resurrection and

his ascension of into heaven—dates which we celebrate every year. This is not the mindset of myth. This is the attitude of people who know something happened because they saw it happen. They asked us to believe what they were saying only because they were sure it happened.

We were not there when it happened. That is why the Bible is crucial to our faith. That is why St John begins his first letter saying: “We are declaring to you what we have seen and heard, so that you too may share our life.”

This article by Fr. Joe Babendreier first appeared in the Sunday Nation in April 2017.

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