

“Mythicism”

Jim Millar Glasgow Unitarians 22nd August 2010

Address

That our ancestors were intimate and knowledgeable about the night sky is evident from archaeology, whether it be from the alignment of Stonehenge, the temple walls of Karnak or the clay tablets of Babylon. How far back in time this knowledge goes we can only speculate. The suggestion that the character Jesus Christ and many other biblical characters are mythological, not historical, is not new either. Unitarian, Thomas Aikenhead, was hanged in Edinburgh in the late 17th century for denying the Trinity and describing the bible as “Ezra’s fables”. What is new is the extensive research done in the fields of comparative religion and archaeology, in Israel in particular, which has given extra weight to the argument. For example, in Tel Aviv the University has built up a true picture of that region in the Iron and Bronze Ages. This picture is somewhat different to the biblical account. There was no exodus and conquest. The empire of David and Solomon did not exist. The city we now call Jerusalem was a small village at that time. One cannot run an 80 year empire from a small village in the middle of nowhere without an administrative infrastructure, court correspondence and military presence. Work in the field of comparative religion has exposed the recasting of ancient tales time and again by different cultures. These often concern mythological holy men who lived “not so long ago” and whose words were never written down until a time much after their alleged lives.

While we are ready to accept other beliefs as mythology, we are never quite so comfortable when the glare of the same light is shone on our own historic faith traditions. Liberal Christians have no problem in dismissing miracles and other supernatural events as myths, but insist that these myths are based on historical characters. This argument, however, cannot be substantiated by any archaeological or contemporary literary evidence and one is left to conclude, “If it looks like a myth – it probably is a myth”. When one has an understanding of how myths are structured and is able to compare mythology across various cultures, the “historical figure” argument becomes even weaker. Besides, even if a historical character like Christ or Mithras or Buddha really existed, one is tempted to ask “so what?” It is the myth that has survived. The nature of the historical character has long been lost and is now irrecoverable. Let us now consider the Christ Myth.

If I were to ask you who was born of a virgin on 25th December, whose birth was announced by a star, who was adored by 3 kings, was a child teacher at the age of 12, was baptised, began a teaching and healing ministry at the age of 30, was betrayed, crucified between 2 thieves and buried, then rose again on the 3rd day.....you might be tempted to answer “Jesus”. You’d be correct of course. However had you answered, “Horus”, the Egyptian god-man from about 3000BCE you would also have been correct. To understand why so many ancient gods such as Attis of Phrygia, Krishna of India, Dionysus of Greece and many more, all share similar life stories we must turn our attention to the skies.

Due to a slow angular wobble as the Earth spins on its axis, sunrise on the morning of the spring equinox occurs under different astrological signs. This is known as an age. For example, “The Age of Aquarius” and each age lasts a little over 2000 years. To complete a whole cycle takes a bit over 25000 years and is known as the Great Precession, as the signs of the Zodiac move in reverse order. About 6 to 8 thousand years ago it was the Age of Taurus, the bull, when goddess bull cults dominated the Mediterranean and Middle East.

When Moses came down from the mountain to find the Israelites worshipping a golden calf he was not pleased. Moses is the personification of the sun, in the Age of Aries, the Age that follows Taurus. When the "Passover" to the new Age occurs, people must follow the new religion and divest the old. The Persian equivalent is Mithras, who is always depicted slaying the cosmic bull.

Iconically, there is a strong association with sheep/rams and the Cult of Moses. Even today, Jews still blow the ram's horn at special occasions. Jesus, who follows Moses, is the personification of the sun in the Age of Pisces. Indeed the fish, whose letters in Greek stood for "Jesus Christ Son of God Saviour" in early Christianity, was the earliest symbol of the cult, predating the use of the cross, and still seen on the backs of many cars today. When the disciples ask Jesus when the next Passover should be, he tells them to "follow a man with a pitcher of water into a house". This would be like a scene from a Monty Python sketch if taken literally. Cosmologically, the man with the pitcher is of course Aquarius, the Age to follow that of Pisces. Indeed Jesus tells his disciples, "I will be with you until the end of the Age". Jesus has 12 disciples who travel about with him on his annual circuit, these being the 12 signs of the zodiac. Galilee translates as circuit incidentally. Indeed the bible is full of "12's". 12 tribes, 12 kings, 12 judges, 12 prophets and so on. These are all astrological references.

The Jesus story starts with a star in the east, Sirius, which at sunset on 24th December aligns with the 3 stars of Orion's belt, the 3 kings, to point to the place of sunrise on 25th December. The virgin is the constellation Virgo the Virgin. It's ancient glyph being the "m", which is why so many of these god-men have mothers whose names begin with "m"... Mary for Jesus, Myra for Adonis, Maya for Buddha, Mere-Isis for Horus and so on. Virgo is always portrayed with a sheaf of wheat as she is associated with harvest. "Bethlehem" translates as "House of Bread".

Jesus, like Horus, starts his ministry at 30, which is the number of degrees to the next sign, Aquarius, personified as John the Baptist, or Anup the Baptiser the Horus story. As Aquarius disappears over the horizon, "John is put in prison and has his head cut off". The sun then moves into Pisces, symbolised by 2 fish. "Jesus recruits 2 fishermen" and so on through the year and all the signs.. When the sun crosses the Milky Way, Jesus like Buddha, "walks on water". Jesus calms the March storms. He spends 40 days in the desert, (summer), and at the summer solstice he is transfigured i.e. at the height of his power. He raises Lazarus or John the Baptist from the dead as Aquarius rises above the horizon on the other side of the sky. He is betrayed by Judas, for Horus, Typhon, which is Scorpio, who "hands him over" to Sagittarius, the Archer, which in the story is personified as Pontius Pilate. Sun gods are usually nailed to a tree, or stabbed or shot with arrows. Some suggest that the cross, itself an ancient solar motif, is the Southern Cross constellation, but I believe it to be the "World Tree" which was so important in ancient mythology.

The 2 thieves are the 2 equinoxes who steal time from each other. The autumn equinox mocks Jesus. The spring is promised paradise. The crown of thorns is the sun's rays. The sun "dies" on 21st December and does not appear to move again until; 25th Dec when it moves 1 degree North and is "born again". This resurrection is celebrated at the Spring Equinox, when the days become longer and the victory of "Sol Invictus", the unconquerable sun, is manifest. The synoptic gospels are designed to be read over a year and marry up well with what is going on in the sky (or at least the sky at the time of their writing). The character of Jesus or Yeshua may be a Graeco-Roman adaptation of the earlier Joshua character who took over from Moses, or even that of King Josiah who destroyed the cult symbols of Moses and "re-

formed” the religion, but that is an argument for another day.

The Jesus story also fits Campbell’s classic “Monomyth”. These stories are structured in a similar manner. First the hero has an unusual birth. Like Moses or Jesus, but otherwise lives a fairly mundane existence. Moses is a shepherd, Jesus a carpenter. Then the call to adventure comes. Some characters, like Moses, don’t go willingly. “How can I be a spokesman for Israel when I have a speech impediment?” pleads Moses. Luke Skywalker has a farm to run. Others, like Jesus answer the call willingly. They are usually given supernatural aid to help them in their quest. Arthur has Excalibur, Moses his magic staff, Theseus a ball of wool, Perseus his winged sandals, Jesus the Holy Spirit. Thus armed, the hero crosses the threshold into a new life ready to undergo a metamorphosis.

The hero often undergoes a name change as he crosses into this unknown world. Setanta becomes Cuchulainn, Saul becomes Paul and Abram becomes Abraham, Jesus becomes the Christ. The hero undergoes a series of challenges and temptations, usually assisted by mentors and helpers, often with one special friend or helper. Moses has Aaron, Jesus – John, Krishna – Arjun, Frodo – Sam, until they are ready to meet the final challenge. Moses must face Pharaoh, Jesus the cross, Theseus the Minotaur. Then the Abyss....death and resurrection, whether physical or allegorical, after which the character is transformed. Victory is won but the hero is not out of danger yet. He must escape. Moses must flee Egypt with his people. Jesus must ascend to the heavens. Next, atonement with the father followed by a return to the known world armed with some prize or elixir to benefit all. For Moses it is Torah. For Percival, the Holy Grail. For Jesus, the gift of eternal life for all believers.

This Christ myth fulfils the function of providing a moral code, best summed up as “love your neighbour as yourself”. Indeed the concept of “agape” or brotherly love permeates the New Testament. This fosters a strong sense of community. The downside of course, is that this love is often not extended to those outside the community, because of their sexuality or their refusal to accept the religion. Of course Christianity is not alone in this. In my opinion the problem is that so many major religions were either created by or sponsored by empires and their successor states, Islam by the Arab Empire, Buddhism by the Ashoka Empire in India, Judaism and Zoroastrianism by the Persian Empire and Christianity by the Roman Empire. When this occurs, history has shown time and time again, that faithfulness to the religion becomes equated with loyalty to the state itself and the social structures it supports. “*Ein Volk, Ein Reich, Ein Furher*” and the Aryan Myth being a recent example. Indeed if George Bush is to be believed, being an atheist is downright un-American. The Christ Myth like other Abrahamic myths is weak in that it lacks the goddess or strong female characters of earlier myths, perhaps reflecting the diminished roles that women were expected to play in life within these societies. Second, there is the highly questionable moral concept of “scapegoating”, whereby individual guilt is transferred to another, usually an animal. This seems highly suspect morally. Surely we must accept responsibility for our own actions, face the consequences and make reparation on our own rather than allow others to face the music for us. Even if it is the god.

From a mythological viewpoint, the fundamental weakness with the Christ Myth is not the myth itself. It is the absolute insistence by the conservative church itself to insist that the myth be understood literally. In this it robs the myth of its first function of awakening us to the wonder of the universe, instead requiring of us to suspend all reason and brings us into conflict with science and our understanding of the real world we live in. Perhaps this entrenched attitude will lead to its demise. Perhaps the religion is only meant to last until the Age of Aquarius anyway. We shall see.

So I conclude. Can we live today without myths, Christian or otherwise? Of course we can. We can also live without poetry, art and music, but we would be the poorer for it. Like poetry, art and music, myths are the product of the creative human mind and like poetry, art and music can inspire, comfort, amuse and console us. What we must always remember is that these are myths. Allegories. Symbols. Metaphors. They are neither science nor history. If you want science, read a science book. If you want history, read a history book. Even the idea of god itself, according to Campbell is a metaphor. A mask we construct in our minds to describe the indescribable. Understood as such this is fine, but the mask itself is only a construct. It is not real. Campbell said, "*Myths are public dreams*". I commend the ancient myths to you. Return to them with fresh eyes and enjoy a little dream time.

Sources/Recommended Reading

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