

As I indicated in my earlier posting, I will make an exception in this case and post these comments on the Public Forum, although normally I reserve my Responses to Critics to the Members Only section of the blog.

As many readers know, Richard Carrier has written a hard-hitting, one might even say vicious, response to Did Jesus Exist. I said nothing nasty about Carrier in my book – just the contrary, I indicated that he was a smart fellow with whom I disagree on fundamental issues, including some for which he really does not seem to know what he is talking about. But I never attacked him personally. He on the other hand, appears to be showing his true colors.

Still, the one thing this bit of nastiness has shown me is that even though I seem to stir up controversy everywhere I go and with everything I write, I really don't like conflict. I would much prefer that we all simply get along and search for truth together. But alas, the world does not appear to be made that way. And I seem to be a lightning rod for criticism. This morning I woke up to the old Stealer's Wheel song in my head, "Clowns to the left of me, jokers to the right, here I am, stuck in the middle with you." It's a good place to be, stuck in the middle, when there are so many outlandish options to the left and right.

I do not plan on spending my next three months going back and forth with Carrier over his criticisms. This is a problem I have with many of the mythicists: they are often so prolix and make point after point after point, that it is impossible to deal with them in short order. One of the things Carrier laments is that I don't deal with the various mythicists all at length – even (this is a special point he presses) those who cannot be taken seriously (he names Freke and Gandy). My view is that there is no reason to take seriously people who cannot be taken seriously: a few indications of general incompetence is good enough.

Anyway, with respect to Carrier's many points, a response consisting of just a few postings is all I have in mind. I had first thought that I would go point by point in detail and explain myself and my views more fully and adequately, and stress where I thought he had gone wrong in his severe critiques. But the more I've thought about it, the more I've realized that the various things he says can be grouped into categories, and so I will try to arrange my responses topically.

A number of his criticisms will strike a number of casual readers as "Bull's Eye Hits." How can Ehrman get out of that one?! That's what he said, and Carrier has shown that it's flat-out false, and so Ehrman must be either lazy, ignorant, or both! Would that life were so simple. The problem in a number of cases is that Carrier has taken my comments out of context, and in some (related) cases that he simply has not read my account very carefully.

A case in point of my "carelessness and arrogance" is the first instance of an "Error of Fact" that he cites, which I assume he gives as his first example because he thinks it's a real killer. It has to do with a statue in the Vatican library that is of a rooster (a cock) with an erect penis for a nose (really!) which Acharya S, in her book *The Christ Conspiracy: The Greatest Story Ever Sold*, indicates is "hidden in the Vatican Treasury" (that damn Vatican: always hiding things that disprove Christianity!) which is a "symbol of Saint Peter" (p. 295).

In her discussion, Acharya S indicates that Jesus' disciple Peter was not only the "rock" on which Jesus would build his church, but also the "cock." Get it? They rhyme! Moreover, the word cock is slang for penis (hard as a "rock," one might think); and what is another slang word for penis? Peter! There you have it. And so when there is a statue of a cock with a rock-hard peter for a nose, this symbolizes Peter, the disciple of Jesus. No wonder the popes have kept this thing in hiding.

My comment on this entire discussion was simple and direct: "There is no penis-nosed statue of Peter the cock in the Vatican or anywhere else except in books like this, which love to make things up."

Carrier attacks my comments with a rather vicious set of comments: “Ehrman evidently did no research on this and did not check this claim at all.... Indicative of the carelessness and arrogance Ehrman exhibits in his book.” But alas, I am unrepentant and will say it again: “There is no penis-nosed statue of Peter the cock in the Vatican.”

What Carrier wants us to know is that in fact this statue does exist and that it is in the Vatican. It does not take much research to dig out this juicy bit of museum lore. Acharya S herself gives the references in her footnotes. And yes, they are both right. The statue does appear to exist. But it has nothing to do with Peter, as any sophomore in college with one semester of Greek under his belt and a course or two in religious studies could tell you.

On the base of the statue are the words SOTER KOSMOU - Greek for “Savior of the World.” No Christian ever thought that Peter was the Savior of the World. Peter was not portrayed in the early church in ithyphallic form. Let alone has an overly-excited rooster. This statue was considered to be of Peter because of crass and irrelevant modern idle wanderings that have nothing to do with real research (cock/rock; Peter and the cock crows; peter = penis = cock; and so on). It in fact is simply a rather unusual Priapus. There are lots of Priapi that have come down to us from the ancient world, and they tend to arouse the giggles of the middle school students with their first exposure to a classical collection in a museum. Off hand I don’t recall any others quite like this, but they may indeed exist. None of them has anything to do with Jesus’ disciple Simon Peter.

And so my offhand statement about this particular one was that the Vatican does not have a statue of Peter as rooster with a hard cock for his nose. Carrier’s response was that the statue does exist. Let me put the question to him bluntly: Does he think that the Vatican has “a penis-nosed statue of Peter the cock” in its collection? I think we can say with some assurance that the answer is no. As I said, unlike a lot of other mythicists Carrier is both trained and smart. But sometimes he doesn’t read very well.

He makes this kind of mistake routinely in his vicious assault on me and my book. The problem appears to be that he sees something that strikes him as a problem, and he isolates it, dissects it, runs with it, gets obsessed with it, and forgets how it was actually said in the first place. Careful reading can solve a lot of problems of misunderstanding.

Let me say, in addition, that this comment of mine was made very much in passing. No major point was being made, other than that Acharya S was not a scholar who could be trusted (in part because she is not a scholar) in the context of eleven rather egregious mistakes that I picked out, more or less at random, in her book. Carrier does not object to any of the other ten. Which means that he appears to be on board with all eleven. That means that his cavil has no effect on my overall argument at this point.

So what is the point? Carrier appears to want to show that he is very much a better historian than I am. This is a repeated theme throughout his scathing critique. I, frankly, did not realize that this was supposed to be a contest between the two of us, and am not interested in the question of who wins. My interest in the book is to discuss whether Jesus existed. I give mounds of evidence to show why he did, and to show why mythicists’ views are almost certainly wrong. The majority of Carrier’s “errors in fact” are this kind of cavil, in which he sees trees (often incorrectly) while missing the forest.



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