

## ***203 The genius of God – the folly of man***

I'm still trying to work out how a motley crew of eleven fishermen became about a million Christians by AD100 and 44 million by AD500.<sup>[198]</sup> And remember, those eleven lived in one particular place, had one particular language and one specific culture, and yet those 44 million people must have spoken various different languages and had a wide variety of cultural norms.

The sheer genius of God is quite staggering. How did God do that? If we could capture that, we'd have that 'vision for world evangelism' that I've been seeking.

What materials did God use? The disciples started from their sense of 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?' Luke 24:32  
It was the realisation that everything that had happened was 'according to the Scriptures'.

I'm no expert, but here's how I view the progression of the available materials + [numbers of believers]:

OT + oral tradition of the story and words of Jesus [hundreds]

OT + that oral tradition + some letters written by church leaders (the Letters) [tens of thousands]

OT + written accounts of the story and words of Jesus (the Gospels) [hundreds of thousands]

The key to this cross-cultural evangelism is that it is based solely on the story and words of Jesus. Each culture and language group was able to make it real for their own people because story is such a powerful medium for communicating cross-culturally. Genius!

Story is all very well, but how was theological purity maintained, rebutting some of the heresies that were creeping in? The church leaders got together, and the traditional baptismal statements were formed into the Apostles' Creed and later refined into the Nicene Creed – specifying what exactly? Seems to me they speak mainly about the nature of God and the essential points of the story of Jesus; they do mention 'forgiveness of sins' but not the how.

But hang on! 'Campaign for world evangelism'? Didn't Europeans copy the genius of God by creating a worldwide expansion of the Christian faith starting in the 16th and 17th centuries, cleverly piggybacking colonial expansion? Well, sort of.

I'm no historian but here's my vast oversimplification of what happened: Following the Reformation, we had two very definite, clearly defined versions of Christianity, with Protestants having a very clear definition of, and insistence on, personal salvation, and we took those and imposed them on a vast range of different cultures.

Instead of allowing the local cultures to take the story of Jesus and enculture it, as God's genius had done, instead we imposed (or tried to) the western cultural norms and languages onto totally different cultures.

And the rest, as they say, is (messy) history. The genius of God and the massive folly of man!