

FLAT EARTH MYTHOLOGY AND FACT

The following article is derived from a series of email exchanges that transpired earlier this year over the Internet. The question arose:

It is not uncommon to read in pre-university student essays that people once believed that the earth is flat and even that people who suggested otherwise were burnt at the stake. Is it true that people in the Dark Ages actually believed such a thing?

Reference was made to a book by Jeffrey Russell called *Inventing the Flat Earth*. Here is a description of the book taken from the amazon.com site (where the book is reported as presently unavailable):

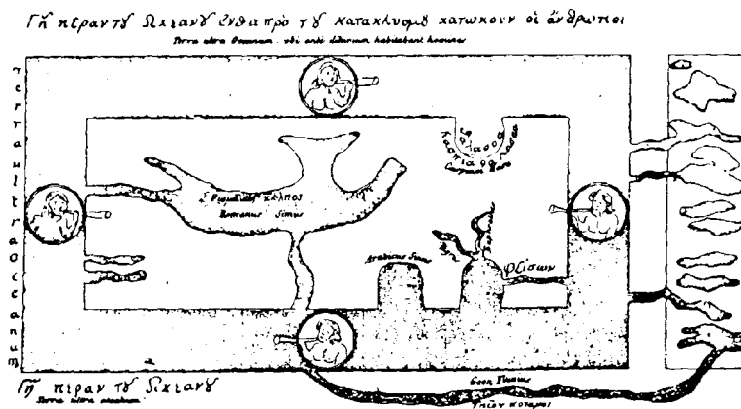
Neither Christopher Columbus nor his contemporaries thought the earth was flat. Yet this curious illusion persists today, firmly established with the help of the media, textbooks, and teachers, – even noted historians. *Inventing the Flat Earth* is Russell's attempt to set the record straight. He begins with a discussion of geographical knowledge in the Middle Ages, examining what Columbus and his contemporaries actually did believe, and then moves to a look at how the error was first propagated in the 1820s and 1830s and then "snowballed" to outrageous proportions by the late 19th century. But perhaps the most intriguing focus of the book is the reason why we allow this error to persist. Do we prefer to languish in a comfortable and familiar error rather than exert the effort necessary to discover the truth? This uncomfortable question is engagingly answered.

Apparently, the spherical-earth theory occupied a similar position to that of most geology and evolutionary biology today: that is, it was an accepted part of mainstream scientific thought and non-controversial among most of the learned, but a number of educated people (and probably a higher proportion of the non-learned who did not publish their views) felt compelled to reject it, some on theological grounds, but most on philosophical grounds. The main difference is that towards the end of the Dark Ages the learned men were right, whereas today they are wrong. In any case, the idea that Church or government authorities in the Renais-

sance would have quarreled with Columbus or Galileo for believing in a spherical earth is indefensible.

People who have looked into this matter conclude that this error originated in the USA from a work by the author Washington Irving (1783-1859). Apparently, the error was also propagated in France about the same time by Antoine-Jean Letronne (1787-1848).

Still, during the early era of the Dark Ages some did believe that the earth was flat. The main example in the Byzantine world is Cosmas Indicopleustis (the same Cosmas who sailed to India). He lived during the sixth century A.D. His book, *Christian Topography*, was widely read. In it, he claimed that the earth was flat, with a large mountain right in its middle. He explained nightfall by the Sun going behind this mountain.



Cosmas took the Tabernacle as a model for the earth, hence its rectangular shape.
The four rivers run from Eden (at right) to water the earth (Gen. 2:10).
(Courtesy, Library of Congress)

Cosmas's view is similar to that of Anaximander and Anaximenes around the sixth or fifth century B.C. In their model, the sun and other planets circle above a flat earth and daily "set" behind a big mountain. Perhaps Cosmas's claims linking Scripture with the flat earth was not entirely based on Scriptural considerations.

Interestingly, the cosmology of the Indian Puranas has the same sort of setup. Could it be a source or a derivation of Cosmas' scheme?

Burning round-earth advocates at the stake?

There is no record of anyone being burned at the stake for adhering to a spherical earth. The only figure burnt at the stake for “scientific heresy” was Bruno, who was burned by the Roman Catholic church on 16 February, 1600, for promoting the idea that:

Innumerable suns exist; innumerable earths revolve around these suns in a manner similar to the way the seven planets revolve around our sun. Living beings inhabit these worlds.



Figure: Bruno.

Bruno further believed that the universe was infinite and that God was the soul of the universe. Thus, his philosophy was a blend of mystical Platonism and pantheism. He is considered a forerunner of modern philosophy because of his influence on the Dutch

philosopher Baruch Spinoza and his anticipation of the theories of monism,¹ later advocated by the German philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz.

There is no record of anyone else being martyred for such “scientific” ideals. Although Socialists like to claim that Calvin had Servetus burnt at the stake for his “scientific” theories, the argument was not scientific but theological, with Calvin in the wrong.

In contrast, the Greek Orthodox church never burnt people. The highest punishment for an ordinary person’s gravely serious offence was

¹ Monism is the view in metaphysics that reality is a unified whole and that all existing things can be ascribed to or described by a single concept or system. The doctrine that mind and matter are formed, or reducible to, the same ultimate substance or principle of being.

excommunication. For priests the corresponding punishment was deordination and then excommunication. In any case, the procedure was to call the offender for an “apology.” This means a discussion, as in a court, of the matter. Never was this done under force or pain. The offender, if found guilty, was given the chance to sign a “regret,” in which case the matter was closed.

North American flat earth faith

The following email came from a man who grew up in Zion, Illinois during the closing years of Wilbur Voliva, probably the top flat-earth promoter of at least the first half of the twentieth century:

In response to your email today, I will tell you some details about the history of Zion, Illinois, and the leaders of the “Christian Catholic Apostolic Church of Zion, Illinois,” as it was legally named. This will be a thumbnail sketch so as not to get into the myriad of details that surrounds the histories of John Alexander Dowie, the founder of Zion City, and Wilbur Glenn Voliva, the Overseer and successor to Dowie.

Both of these men preached “divine healing” and both of these men died without “divine healing.” Dowie died at the age of 59 paralyzed, kicked out of the “church” by his successor, Voliva. Voliva’s death will be covered later in this paper. Dowie came from Scotland, and belonged to a Christian Catholic Apostolic Church in Scotland, had attended the University of Edinburgh, went to Australia, then to San Francisco, and then to Chicago where he started making big money from “divine healing” by claiming he had healed over 300,000 people. Like Oral Roberts, he found that he had struck gold. He then bought 100 square miles of land known as “Zion, Illinois.” The giant wooden temple in Zion was decorated with prosthetic devices, row upon row of crutches, and other devices for cripples, which Dowie apparently had purchased at a pawn shop, or even a crutch factory, to ostensibly show how many people he had “healed.”

To live in Zion, no one could own property, except the “church.” You had to sign an 1100-year lease, and pay the market price for your home. The lease bound you to all the dictates of the church leaders. But do not get me wrong, not every rule of the church was “bad” in the sense that truly Biblical rules were followed in many respects, by the faithful, as laid down by the church leaders. The utter moral filth of today’s world was not allowed in Zion. But there were some doctrinal, unbiblical things taught, such as the “flat earth” doctrine, and the “sun soaring 30 miles overhead,” and, as already mentioned, “divine healing,” which we know

from the Holy Scriptures, ended as the “gift” with the Apostle Paul. (“Trophimus have I left at Miletum sick” II Timothy 4:20), contrary to the Kathryn Kuhlman charismatics.

Paul “kept the faith” II Timothy 4:7. The ignorant charismatic always argues that “you don’t have enough faith,” (the Kuhlman excuse). My parents belonged to the “church,” worked in the “Zion Industries” owned by the “church” for very meager wages, and were very obedient to the rules and doctrines taught, which included “no doctors.” My mother died in March 2000, at 101 years of age! She was brought to Zion by her mother, who had heard of the “wonders” of Dowie, as my grandfather on my father’s side, brought my father to Zion, so that my father could be “healed” of his severe crippled condition that he was born with. My grandmother on my mother’s side, died of cancer at age 89. My grandfather died of palsy.

I am telling this history because I have spent many years studying the Holy Scriptures, and many texts on charismatics. Dowie is credited with founding the charismatic movement in the United States, which you will find in histories and encyclopedias of the charismatic movement. It is empirically proven, and a historical fact, that the greatest thing that history proves, is that people never learn from history. They make the same errors all over again that people learned before by the school of hard knocks. Why? Because the charlatan can always develop a following from those who do not doctrinally know one end of the Bible from the other! The charlatan, the multi-million dollar TV preachers can count on scriptural ignorance, as did Dowie and Voliva!

I have counted over 40 warnings against charlatans within the scriptures transcribed by the Apostle Paul alone. The four Gospels, and Acts, are major treatises on the same theme, yet the charismatic, ecumenical movement is a multi-billion dollar gold mine for the leaders of the charismatic movement! Dowie, and Voliva knew what a gold mine “divine healing” is, and as a consequence developed a great money making charade for those who did not understand, or study the Holy scriptures from cover to cover.

The gullible of Zion lived under old testament laws, and not under the grace that God gives in the doctrines of the Apostle Paul. We call them “Matthew Christians.” They never got as far as Acts chapter 9, Romans 15:8, & 16, Acts 15, Acts 20, or Galatians chapter 2 in understanding the differences in doctrine for the Gentiles. “But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 15:24). “Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting” (I Timothy 1:16).

The Matthew Christian, and the charismatic in their ignorance of the Holy Scriptures, have no concept of the differences between Paul's ministry to the Gentiles, and Christ's ministry to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel." I can write a book about the false teachings of Zion, Illinois, which in great respect are being mimicked by charlatans today. But most people will not sit down and carefully and prayerfully search the scriptures daily to see whether those things are so (Acts 17:11). As a consequence you have the Karol Wojtylas, the Billy Grahams, the Oral Roberts, to mention just a few of the charlatans and blasphemers of God's word.

While Paul teaches us: "Whatsoever is sold in the shambles, that eat, asking no question for conscience sake: For the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof" (I Corinthians 10:25,26), the rules of salvation for the people of Zion included the Levitical law of not eating pork, or any animal with uncloven hoof, or that did not chew the cud, or any unscaly fish.

We were taught that we lived on a "flat saucer shaped earth," that you might fall off the edge of the saucer shaped earth, and that the sun sailed over the saucer shaped earth at an altitude of about 30 miles. Please do not think I believe this teaching.

Voliva was an attorney by profession. He knew how to snow people into thinking he knew what he was talking about. He had a vast following and a big money income, and literally had a great voice of authority. He would pray for about one hour, and then preach for another 3 to 4 hours! Not everything he said was wrong, for how else can a charlatan appear to be a sheep, instead of the wolf that he is? "For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock" (Acts 20:29).

In 1937, when I was 9 years old, and the huge old temple was still standing, there was a janitor by the name of Steiner who maintained the old temple with its capacity to seat thousands, and who's wife fell terminally ill. He begged Voliva to come and "heal" his wife, but to no avail. (Voliva knew he couldn't heal a hangnail, if he laid hands, poured oil, and prayed all night!) The janitor's wife died. (If an M.D. could have done anything, or even relieved her pain; yet the church law was NO DOCTORS.) The very distraught janitor's son, because of the loss of his mother, torched the huge temple, and went to prison for arson, but Voliva got away with his con game, and got the gullible faithful to put up the money to build a new auditorium!

My parents continued working in the Zion Industries, marching around the barrel on Sundays, to the oompah, oompah, of the Zion band, in church, in front of Voliva, to clean out the money in their pockets to support Voliva's winter trips to his estate in Miami. He would return in

the spring to his suite of rooms in the Zion hotel, with his liveried chauffeur, limousine, cooks, butlers, and maids, to preach to the faithful.

In 1942, Voliva returned to Zion, to preach his spring message. He had received bad news from his doctor in Miami. He was not long for this world! I was 14 years old as I watched and heard Voliva's confession before the faithful followers, and the orchestra, the band, the huge white robed choir, and the 12 black robed "apostles" who conducted the services during the winter months in Voliva's absence. Voliva confessed his hypocrisy, not only about "divine healing" and "NO DOCTORS," and furthermore, that he embezzled church money. He got away with it. No prison, no prosecution, he simply died that summer in his suite of rooms, while the Steiner boy languished in prison!

This scene virtually closed the "Christian Catholic Apostolic Church of Zion, Illinois." I watched as Mintern, Voliva's assistant, who sat directly behind the pulpit, yanked Voliva's robe and kept saying "SHUSH" to get Voliva to shut up, but to no avail. It suddenly got through Voliva's head that he was now going to stand before God, and that he could not con God as he did the gullible faithful he had conned for years, and who had supported him financially for all those years.

My father, as did many others, left the Zion church in disgust at having been conned for all these years! Voliva, in his confessions, because he was a con man, did not warn the faithful to start studying God's word, and not man's word. My father died a severe cripple a few years ago, a brother in Christ, even though he still had some problems in not discerning the teachings of men over God's Holy and eternally preserved word.

This brief history of Zion, Illinois, is painful to many people who lived under the "church" teachings of Voliva. I was recently "excommunicated" by an internet group of people from Zion, Illinois, because they did not want to hear about the history of Zion and the teachings of men, versus the Holy Scriptures, which need to be kept in mind as historical facts; about what God has to say versus what contemporary charlatans have to say, who claim to be "called to preach," and that they are "preaching God's word" when just the opposite is true!

They tell me, "Let bygones be bygones." Now that is true to God's word, we need to forgive one another, even as Christ also forgave you (Colossians 3:13). But the Apostle Paul, in transcribing God's word, wrote: "Walk circumspectly, not as fools" (Ephesians 5:15). The great whore has persecuted, tortured, and murdered millions of people, and says: "Let bygones be bygones." But in studying the Holy Scriptures we understand what the great whore is doing in the visible church today, and the ecumenical movement.

The old whore is now merging with Lutherans, and Anglicans, and the Assemblies of God, which came out of Dowie's organization in Zion. The charismatic movement is one of the great vehicles that the whore uses in bringing the gullible under its skirts.

Merging with the whore does not mean that the whore will change. Study Revelation chapters 13 to 19, and II Thessalonians chapter 2. The opposite is true. We need to study history with considerable discernment, and we need to study God's Holy word with a believing mind:

“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”

Holy Bible, II Timothy 2:15

Quotable Quotes

Do not pray for easy lives; pray to be stronger men. Do not pray for asks equal to your powers; pray for powers equal to your tasks. Then the doing of your work shall be no miracle, but you yourself shall be a miracle. Every day you shall wonder at yourself, at the richness of life which has come to you by the grace of God.

– Phillips Brooks, (1835-1893)

2000-year old ice 3 kilometers down?

The researchers extracted cores of ice from the Greenland ice sheet to a depth of 3,000 metres. Each contained perfectly-preserved layers of frozen ice representing snow falls from the past 1,500-2,000 years.

– <http://thescotsman.co.uk/uk.cfm?id=TS00137851&d=News&c=uk&s=7>