

Inoculated against Christianity

East Window

Gone are the days when we were expected to believe in God as an old man with a grey beard who lives in the clouds. And yet a recent survey shows that of those questioned, the people most antagonistic to Christianity still thought that was the sort of thing that Christians believe. They had written-off the faith without really knowing much about it. I recently heard an intelligent man saying that there was little evidence that Jesus even existed! Yet that same man would never have dreamed of questioning the existence of Augustus Caesar just because he was a person of antiquity, even though there is less evidence for his existence than there is for that of Jesus.

Most people simply don't know the basic factual information about the Christian faith, but without that they have made their minds up about its authenticity. It doesn't help that it's also the 'in thing' to be critical of the Church, and that makes it difficult for people who want to learn the true facts to enquire without incurring the cynicism and ridicule of their friends. Nor does it help that some Christians do not have enquiring minds, so give the impression that ours is a simplistic faith.

All this results in what some have called "the inoculation of the British against the faith". An introduction to a dose of ill-informed fancies about Christianity inoculates against the real thing! No need to learn the truth about Christianity when you've already written it off.

We may simply despair of this state of affairs, or we could begin to see it as yet another opportunity for mission! For although many people refuse to investigate Christianity they do still count themselves as 'spiritual'. They may take against religion, but they still strongly believe in the presence of a spiritual force or energy. It's just that old man with the beard they find difficult to accept – and so they should! But this means they're open to hearing the truth about the God of mystery.

Second, they also believe that there is more meaning to life than just being born, getting through the daily round and then dying. They want to feel that they have done something of worth – more than just kept the wheels of our economy turning. But whilst vague spirituality makes no demands, the Christian faith inspires us to play our part in building the Kingdom of God here on earth as it is in heaven. So Christianity demands just the sort of responsive engagement they crave.

Third, 'spiritual' people often believe they will continue into some form of after life – so the exciting revelation that Christ is in the midst of our life and Christian community even today, could really make sense to them.

There is much in the true faith which searching people would be pleased to hear, if only there were someone there to explain what the faith really says, rather than leave people with their mistaken fancies about it. The Church must therefore remember that each Christian must be a disciple – a 'student'. We must be up-to-date and informed about our faith so that we can be ready witnesses in word and deed to those who are otherwise inoculated against the faith. There are Christian Education courses galore, available at every level and in every style imaginable – your parish priest can advise.

Christianity is a warm, welcoming and challenging adventure. Let's make sure that all people of good-will know the facts about it!

+ *Laurie Bradwell*