

Resurrection Impact

Luke 24:13-35; Acts 4:32-37

2nd Sunday of Easter

11th April 2010

I wonder if you read in the news at the end of March that the Large Hadron Collider had had its most successful experimental run to date. The Collider built by the European Organisation for Nuclear Research (CERN) is, of course, the giant underground particle accelerator in the form of a 27 kilometre-long magnetic track near Geneva on the border of Switzerland and France where atoms are smashed into each other, creating huge amounts of energy for cutting-edge scientific research – a project which, by the way, Canada has contributed \$30 million and contributions from 150 of our top scientists.¹

I was musing to myself the other day: Supposing the research doesn't pan out or the money dries up and the Large Hadron Collider has to be abandoned, what else could a huge racing-track-like tunnel that spins things around at the speed of light be used for? The possibilities are endless.

Think, for instance, of the huge amount of the world's washing that could be spun dry instantaneously, whisking it around a huge rate of knots in this great machine.

Or, it could be used for time travel. Just like there seems to be a growing market for private citizens travelling in space, or a market for the ultimate in rollercoasters or for extreme sports, there might also be a desire on the part of many to travel back through time. Theoretically, if people were propelled around a circular track at the speed of light, they would arrive before they left. Just like the woman in Einstein's favourite limerick:

There was an old lady called White
Who could travel much faster than light.
She departed one day
In a relative way
And returned on the previous night.²

Or, maybe the Large Hadron Collider could be used to knock together the heads of people who are deluding themselves or are motivated only by self-interest or in denial of the truth. How about investment bankers with their immoral bonuses? Or,

those politicians that blow up at airport staff? Or, what about some of those ageing members of the Roman Catholic hierarchy who refuse to do the right thing where the abuse of children is concerned? Yes, I think we could find some good uses for the Collider if it ever falls into disuse.

Of course, that's not likely to happen in the near future because, after initial problems, the Large Hadron Collider has had its most successful run to-date at the end of March. Inside the particle accelerator, two counter-rotating beams of hydrogen nuclei were whipped up to more than 99.99% of the speed of light. At four points around the machine the beams were crossed, steering the particles into high-energy smash-ups. According to Einstein's famous equation, $E = mc^2$, the energy released by the collisions can create matter in the form of particles that are observed by the Collider's monitoring equipment. (I wonder if those instruments would be called Kaleidoscopes? ☺)³

The whole point of this huge experiment is, of course, to re-create the conditions that existed in the universe just moments after the Big Bang and so give a better understanding of many of the fundamental questions in physics, concerning, for instance, the basic laws of the universe, the exact nature of space and time, what gives elementary particles their mass, how gravity really operates, the nature of the so-called invisible Dark Matter that makes up so much of the universe and the possible existence of extra dimensions in the fundamental forces of nature - and maybe even parallel universes to the one that we experience.

Of course, no experiment no matter how technologically sophisticated can actually see the Big Bang itself. All science can do is measure the impact of that singular event, the way in which that immense explosion impacted on newly-created subatomic particles as well as the magnetic, gravitational and nuclear forces that were brought into being. Scientists cannot see behind that moment of creation nor see the actual moment of creation itself – a moment which I believe was not

random or chance but a very intentional moment of unique creative activity caused by God himself. No, our human minds, with the aid of the best scientific and technological equipment, can only see the indirect effects of creation, what it did, what it caused, what it brought into being.

Now, in the same manner, that re-creative occurrence we call the Resurrection is only known obliquely by the effects of that event. The actual moment of the Resurrection could not be seen in such a way that it could be analysed and understood in a direct way. But though we can't see it in a straightforward manner, we can perceive it by its concrete and tangible effects. Not in this case, of course, by its impact on physical matter. But, rather, by its impact on those human beings who were immediately affected. By its impact on those who encountered the risen Jesus – people like James, John and Peter, Mary Magdalene, Salome and Joanna, as well as the other disciples and followers, who were totally and radically changed by this singular event.

The effects of the Resurrection were, of course, many. But one in particular that can be observed was the way in which it infused Jesus' followers with a spirit of sharing – something that was quite remarkable considering that, until this point, the disciples had been extremely self-centred and inwardly-focused. Sharing, you remember, was not the first thing on the disciples' minds at times like the Feeding of the Five Thousand when, instead of giving the people something to eat as Jesus suggested, the disciples wanted to send the hungry crowds away into the night.⁴ Nor was sharing top priority when the disciples were discussing who would be first in the kingdom and suggested that the law of the jungle applied, with every man for himself. We can never forget that these would-be followers were very self-preoccupied people indeed.

Suddenly, though, things changed. These self-centred men were transformed by the presence of the risen Jesus. The writer of Acts says, "No-one said that any of his belongings was his own but they all shared with one another everything they had."⁵ And, though not stated explicitly, it's a fair assumption this was all done – not just to benefit the people of their own group – but for the good of the poor, the hungry and the sick around them.

Word of such change in the disciples'

behaviour quickly spread and, because of it, word that Jesus was still alive. People who had not personally experienced the Resurrection came to accept its reality because they saw its effects on the disciples and how dramatically that impact had altered their lives.

Another effect of the Resurrection was that it produced in the disciples a spirit of excitement. After the crucifixion, they were dull and depressed, weary and worn-out by the traumatic events. But then something happened that energised them and filled them with enthusiasm.

I always like that part of the story of the Road to Emmaus⁶ where the disciples reflect on the stranger who joined them as they journeyed along the way to the town 7 miles outside Jerusalem. As they walk, they tell this man – who seemingly is out of the loop – all about Jesus' death and resurrection. Then when the stranger leaves them, they suddenly realise who he is, and they say, "Wasn't it like a fire burning in us when he talked to us on the road?"⁷

There was something burning not only in these two particular disciples, of course, but in the others too. There was an excitement, a thrill, a tingle, a buzz. They were so eager to tell others about the risen Jesus and how completely he had changed their lives. It was something that blazed inside them and they couldn't get it out fast enough.

There's a story in the book *More than Conquerors* where the writer talks about his friend, the Rev. Eugene Smith, who never sang much in church because he couldn't read music. However, he always wanted to sing the Hallelujah Chorus and, one Easter time, he was persuaded to sing along with the choir. He really got caught up in the last part when they were singing all the "Hallelujahs". He was enjoying himself so much that, just as he was about to sing a couple more "Hallelujahs", suddenly, the organ stopped and the choir stopped. Rev. Smith just about kept singing but stopped himself in time. Later, he complained cheerfully that they stopped too soon. He said, "I've still got a lot of Hallelujahs inside just waiting to get out!"⁸

This is just how the disciples were. They were so thrilled, so charged up, they couldn't get all their hallelujahs out. The result was people around them got caught up by their spirit of excitement. They wondered what it was that so enthralled the

disciples. And they found out that it was the risen Christ. And they came to believe.

Another impact of the Resurrection that can plainly be observed is the courage that it produced in the followers of Jesus in the days after this great event. As they preached and taught and healed, these people were subjected to an immense amount of persecution from the local religious and secular authorities. But they seemed not to be scared because the Resurrection had taken away their fear of death. They were willing to risk all for Jesus because they were sure of their eternal destiny and well-being.

When the former Soviet leader, Leonid Brezhnev died in 1982, a very impressive gesture was made by his wife, Viktoria, on the day of his funeral service in the Red Square. She stood motionless beside her husband's coffin until seconds before it was closed. Then, just as the soldiers touched the lid, she performed what must be one of the greatest acts of civil disobedience ever committed. She reached down into the casket and made the sign of the cross on her husband's chest. There, in the citadel of secular, atheistic power, surrounded by all the members of the fearsome Politburo, the wife of the man who had been in control of an empire that denied the very existence of God, made a courageous public declaration of her faith, a declaration that death did not have the final word, a declaration that could only have been caused by the impact of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ upon the life of this woman.⁹

Today, in 2010, if people are going to hear about the Resurrection, it's not going to be by examining the phenomenon of the Resurrection by some direct scientific means, or looking it up on a religion site on the internet or conducting a theological examination of all the arguments for and against. No, they are going to find out the truth of the Resurrection by seeing such things as sharing, excitement and courage, the effects of the risen Christ in the lives of contemporary Christians – in the lives of ordinary Christian people like you and me.

When they look, I wonder what they will see. Will they see in us a spirit of sharing? Will they see an uncontainable excitement? Will they see an indomitable courage? Will they see the Resurrection impact in our hearts and in our lives? Let us hope

and pray they will because the case for Christ and his church in today's sceptical and unbelieving world depends entirely upon it.

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¹ The Large Hadron Collider, CERN, <http://public.web.cern.ch/public/en/LHC/LHC-en.htm>; Sarah Boesveld, The Large Hadron Collider, A Step Closer To The Beginning of Time, www.theglobeandmail.com 9 April 2010

² There was an old lady called White, <http://www.jupiterscientific.org/sciinfo/jokes/physicsjokes.htm>

³ A Virus Walks Into a Bar <http://blackmaps.wordpress.com/2009/12/07>

⁴ Luke 9:10ff

⁵ Acts 4:32

⁶ Luke 24:13ff

⁷ Luke 24:32

⁸ Gil Bowen, "More Than Conquerors", www.30goodminutes.org

⁹ Brett Blair, "The Good News of Easter", www.eSermons.com 2008