



May 1, 2024

MESSENGER

QUOTE FOR TODAY

"Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously."
2 Corinthians 9:6

INFO

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True Believers Need To Be Doubters First

In 2017, 19-year-old Peter McIndo did something silly that totally changed his life and the lives of many other Gen Z-ers. He went to a public demonstration in Memphis TN that was protesting against a women's rights rally, and he held up a hand-made sign that read "BIRDS AREN'T REAL." He just did it as a "spontaneous joke" to show how far out a popular cause could be. However, somebody took a video of McIndo with his sign, and it very quickly went viral. Other young people got the joke and built on the idea. High school students in various places wrote the slogan on classroom blackboards, and "BIRDS AREN'T REAL" posters began showing up in all kinds of public demonstrations.

McIndo and his circle of friends built on the idea. They "revealed" that during the Cold War, the CIA had systematically exterminated all birds in the US and replaced them with sophisticated bird-look-alike drones that were able to track all sorts of human activity and send information to central intelligence centers where data could be constantly analyzed and responded to. Schematic drawings were "discovered" of the intricate electronics inside each species of bird. It was postulated that when birds sat on electric wires between telephone poles, they were actually being recharged for further surveillance activities.

Soon McIndo and his friends were spreading the word through all sorts of podcasts, and they were developing merchandise that became popular among Gen Z peers. McIndo and his amazing bird discoveries began receiving national attention; he was interviewed by Howard Stern, CBS, NPR, 60 Minutes and The New York Times. He consistently stayed in character as a true believer in the Bird surveillance theories he was promoting. It wasn't until 2022 that he publicly came out as a satirist who made the whole thing up.*

When I was a young Christian, I was warned about something called "easy believism." I learned I should be wary of any preacher or teacher who made it seem too easy to become a follower of Jesus: "All you have to do is" In contrast, Jesus taught that it is the "straight" gate and narrow road the lead to salvation; the wide gate and broad road lead to destruction (Matthew 7:13-14).

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May 1, 2024

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As I've spent my life studying and applying the teachings of the Bible, I've been amazed by the many bizarre versions of Christianity and how they are able to attract followers. The Apostle Paul warned that this would be a repeated pattern in the Church:

*The time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their **itching ears** want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.*

(2 Timothy 4:13-14)

Itching ears like to hear new things all the time. *Itching ears* like the sound of a smooth-talking con-man preacher. *Itching ears* just want to be scratched.

As the Early Church continued to spread, the Apostle John also observed this tendency toward "easy-believism," or short-cut faith. He wrote,

*Dear friends, **do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits** to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.* (1 John 4:1)

How do you "*test the spirits*"? By *doubting before you believe!* Doubt comes first; otherwise, we will believe anything we are told.

So, guys, did you know that BIRDS AREN'T REAL? No kidding! Would I mislead you?

The first step toward true faith is doubt.

Pastor George Van Alstine

* You can learn more about the Birds Aren't Real movement through the following sites:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Birds_Aren%27t_Real
<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/09/technology/birds-arent-real-gen-z-misinformation.html>
<https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2024/04/birds-arent-real-gen-z-politics-mcindoe-adam-faze-fifty-stars.html>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zNtr0RahRqM&t=22s> (2019 interview on Memphis TV station)