

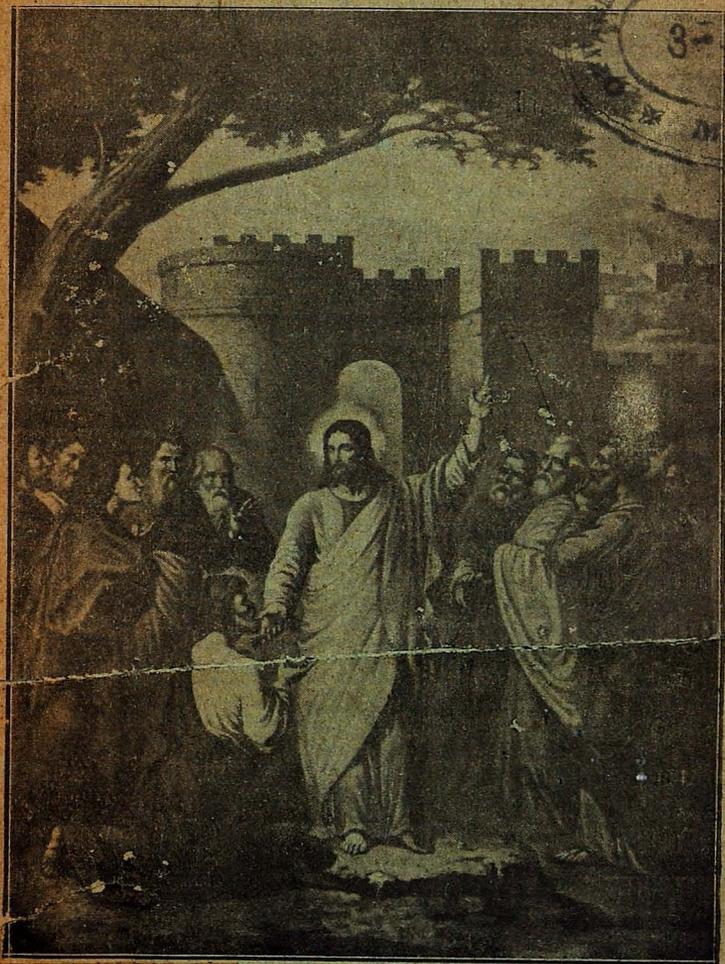
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THE DIVINE ORIGIN OF CHRISTIANITY

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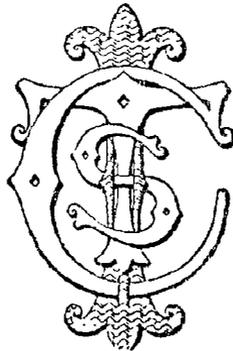
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THE DIVINE ORIGIN
OF
CHRISTIANITY

A HISTORICAL FACT

BY

REV. LEO BESSE, S.J.



CATHOLIC TRUTH SOCIETY OF INDIA.
TRICHINOPOLY. (S. INDIA.)

1930.

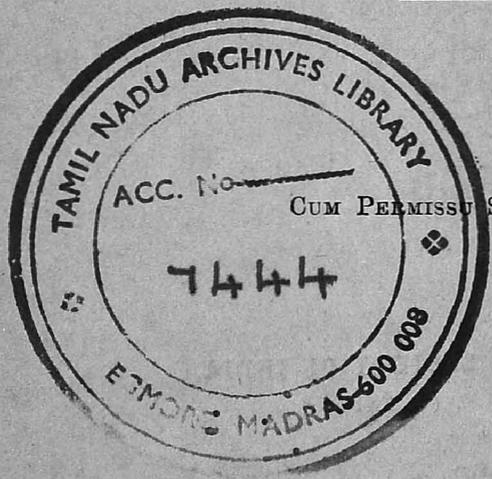
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CUM PERMISSU SUPERIORUM.
Imprimatur:
✠ AUGUSTINUS, S.J.
Ep. Trichinopoli.

INTRODUCTION.

IN QUEST OF A RELIGION.

If my acceptance of a religion as revealed by God is to be in accordance with reason, I must be given sound arguments in favour of that revelation: my belief is not reasonable unless I am morally certain that I must believe the truth in question.

Tokens of revelation.—Hence there must be signs, tokens, or criteria which mark out the religion that really comes from God. These signs may be *internal*, inherent to the truth or *external*, namely accompanying the revelation. (See A. Tanqueray, *Dogma*, 1921 p. 132—7).

1° The internal tokens may be negative, or positive.

(A) *Negative tokens* merely prepare the way or remove obstacles. Such tokens are:—(1) *immunity from error* in doctrine and morals. A revealed truth cannot be in opposition to a tenet of our natural reason, for instance the unity of God, the freedom of our will, the authority of our conscience. (2) *absence of contradiction* between the revealed truths or between revealed and non-revealed truths; and hence a religion that countenances the worship of several gods stands self-condemned. (3) *No fraud* should occur in the manner of revealing truth; for, God cannot deceive.

The presence of all these negative tokens is already a good presumption in favour of a revelation, but we require much more.

(B) The *positive internal notes* are the *perfect agreement* of some truth with sound reason and the *superiority* of that truth as shown by its ability to satisfy the needs and legitimate aspirations of man and its sound influence on morals.

Hence the comparative study of religions may help in discovering the religion that is so transcendental or above all others as to show clear signs of divine interference.

2° *The external tokens*, those drawn from what accompanies a revelation, are either (1) *negative*, if they merely show that the herald of a divine revelation was neither a fool nor a cheat, but an able and honest man; or (2) *positive*, if they are direct proof of divine intervention, such as genuine miracles and prophecies.

* * *

Opinions differ as to the right use of those tokens or criteria. Which method is better—the *historical*, which uses the external tokens, or the philosophic which examines the essentials? It much depends upon the mentality of the inquirer.

In general the historic method is *shorter, easier and safer* :—

(1) *Shorter* because I may and must believe a revelation proved by a few first class miracles in history, for instance the resurrection of Christ.

(2) *Easier*, because those historical events are public, manifest and more accessible to ordinary minds than philosophical considerations.

(3) Lastly *safer*, or much less liable to mistakes because facts are more readily ascertained than doctrines are compared and appreciated.

But the doctrinal or philosophic method is also far from useless.

(1) It may even be *necessary* in order to remove prejudices; a man who looks down on Christianity as less “metaphysical” or “spiritual” is *a priori* blinded to its external and internal evidences, or at least

unwilling to admit their cogency; whereas a correct view of the Christian tenets and practices will invite him to a more careful investigation.

(2) It is *most suitable* to upright inquirers, to the human soul which is naturally Christian, says Tertullian, and to the learned whom a knowledge of systems and creeds enables to appreciate real truth and goodness where they are found.

Yet beware of following the philosophic path to the exclusion of the traditional historic method. Both ways may lead to the harbour of safety, as experience shows. Hence the value of the following proposition:—

**The Catholic Religion is manifestly the Religion
founded by God Himself.**

One of the most striking features of Christianity is its historical character. Christianity¹ is above all a historical fact: the whole of it is founded on divine facts. The prophecies which foretell the advent of the Messiah or Christ, upon earth, the prodigies wrought by Moses, the promulgation of the Decalogue on Mount Sinai, the birth of Jesus Christ, His miracles, the conversion of the world to Christianity by the Apostles, are so many facts; they belong to history.

Our demonstration of the Divine origin of the Catholic Religion may be summed up in the following syllogism:—

1. *The religion the origin of which is due to a series of divine facts that cannot be denied without denying historical certainty itself, is manifestly the religion founded by God Himself.*

¹ The only genuine form of Christianity is the Roman Catholic Church or the Catholic Religion. (Read: *Catholicism* by Fr. Coppens, S.J.—C. T. S. of I. pamphlet, 4 as.)

2. Now, the origin of Christianity is due to a series of divine facts that cannot be denied without denying all historical certainty :

3. Therefore, Christianity is manifestly the religion founded by God Himself.

The first proposition needs no proof ; it is self-evident.

The second alone is to be demonstrated. If we prove that the Books (the four Gospels), which relate the origin of the Catholic Religion, are true and trustworthy documents, nobody can reject *this history*, without being illogical, and giving up all historical certainty. And as this history is *made up of divine facts*, the conclusion which imposes itself upon us is that the religion the origin of which is narrated in these books is *the divine religion*, which God Himself has established for the salvation and happiness of all men.

What we have to do, therefore : is to, establish the authority of the four Gospels.

* * * *

Three conditions and only three are required to establish the historical value of any book that claims to be trustworthy : namely *authenticity, integrity, and veracity.*

Now, according to Sir Isaac Newton, one of England's greatest geniuses, the four Gospels which contain the origin of the Catholic Religion possess these three conditions, in a greater degree than any profane history : "I find," he said "more certain characters of truth and authenticity in the Sacred Books than in any other history." Therefore the Catholic Gospels are perfectly reliable or trustworthy.

Let us demonstrate the truth of this statement by taking each condition in succession.

CHAPTER I.

The Four Gospels are AUTHENTIC.

A book is said to be genuine or *authentic* when it really belongs to the author to whom it is ascribed. Therefore to demonstrate that the Four Gospels are authentic, is to show that they have indeed been written by the authors whose names they bear, and consequently by firsthand witnesses, by men who lived with Jesus Christ, in the first century of the Christian Era.

The authenticity of a book must be proved chiefly by external evidence. It may also be confirmed by internal arguments. For, there may be in a book unmistakable signs of forgery or counterfeit which deprive it of all authority whatever; or, on the contrary there may be such intrinsic marks of genuinity as add much strength to the external evidence. We propose to make use of both kinds of demonstration.

(I) EXTERNAL EVIDENCE OF AUTHENTICITY.

A.—Direct argument: The evidence of the Catholic Church as a body. The Catholic Church which counts to-day 300 million adherents, and is spread all over the world has asserted publicly, constantly, unanimously, from the beginning to the present day, and still asserts that she is in possession of the Four Gospels, and that she received them from her Founders. In this she is supported by all Christian bodies, which though at variance on other points, perfectly agree

with her on this. Now evidence endowed with such conditions, coming from so vast a body of men, on so important a matter, about a fact unanimously maintained through so many centuries and upon which the whole constitution of the Church is built constitutes a strong, nay conclusive argument in favour of the authenticity of the Gospels. It is what is called a witness (*omni exceptione major*) against which no objection can be raised.

B.—Indirect Argument from Prescription. The Catholic Church believes that these Books are authentic. She is in possession of that truth in the same way as a person or society is in possession of a house, or piece of land.

We may, therefore, in this case invoke the argument of prescription, and answer critics who deny the authenticity of the Gospels thus: "So long as you fail to prove that the Gospels have been written by other authors and at another time than those to which they are generally ascribed, you have no right to call their authenticity in question." It is true that unbelievers in every age, armed with all the weapons of critical science, tried to disprove the authenticity of the Gospels. All their efforts have proved useless. No objection worth the name has been advanced. Are not such vain attempts the best demonstration of the authenticity of the Gospels? On the other hand we find a host of writers and learned men, who in every age back to the first century, have borne testimony to the genuineness of the Four Gospels.

C.—Another good argument is drawn from the very impossibility of the Gospels being a forgery or fraud.

Let us suppose for an instant that these books are not authentic. Then how to account for the fact of their having been universally acknowledged as authentic?—Such a huge fraud is not only incredible; it is simply impossible.

(i) Was such a fraud possible in the first century, when the Apostles were still alive?

Surely not. Such a fraud could not have escaped the notice of men who had left all that the world holds dear to propagate the Gospel, who were daily facing dangers of all kinds and were prepared to endure torments and death itself in defence of the truths they were preaching. They could not have failed to come across these fraudulent writings, and loudly to protest against the imposture. Surely no fraud of this kind could have prevailed in the Christian Community in the days of the Apostles or of their immediate successors.

(ii) Was the fraud possible in the first half of the second century? Not more so than in the first century. Why? Because at that period the very disciples of the Apostles, or their immediate successors were still alive and all of them were well acquainted with the doctrine of their Masters and Predecessors. They had received by tradition every important truth relating to the foundation of Christianity. On the other hand they were not less *zealous* than the Apostles in maintaining and propagating the truth, since most of them sealed their preaching with their blood. The names of Papias, Polycarp, Hegesippus, Ignatius, Clement, are well known to the learned, Christians and unbelievers alike. Therefore the fraud was impossible in the first half of the second century.

(iii) Was the fraud possible in the other part of the second century, or in the following ages? The impossibility is still greater than before:—after the first century the authenticity of the Gospels was already universally acknowledged in all the Churches, in the East as in the West. These sacred writings were then extant not only in their *original* tongue, the Greek, but in several *translations*. They were publicly read in all Christian assemblies every week, as Sacred Scriptures, and the Pastors of the Church explained them to the faithful, as containing doctrines that Christians were required to believe and moral precepts which they were bound to observe. These Books had in fact become for the Christian Community throughout the world by this time both *a code of Laws and a deposit of their Creed*.

Now, allowing for a 'moment that these Books had had no existence previous to this time, is it credible, is it possible, that all on a sudden, they would have been received without protest by the Christian Churches then already founded everywhere in the Roman world and even in the East? So general a deception of the Christian world at large, of the faithful and even of their Pastors, who were *learned and zealous defenders* of the truth, cannot be admitted to have taken place without the strongest evidence. It is simply impossible. We might with greater reason raise doubts about the authenticity of Cicero's, Virgil's, or Cæsar's writings, and reject all historical documents. It would be easier to deceive Academies and learned men, by presenting them with spurious manuscripts supposed to have been discovered in some dusty corner of an old library and to palm them off as belonging to some ancient writer of Greece or Rome,

than to foist upon the Bishops and their flock, apocryphal or spurious writings, which were to be read in their sacred meetings, and to become the rule of their faith and conduct.

D.—**Testimony of many other Writers.** Let us quote some of the writers of the first and second centuries, who received the Books of the New Testament and especially the Gospels as authentic, and used them in their writings.

(1) At the end of the first century and the beginning of the second, we find at least four authors whose writings, sifted in our own days by the most exacting censors and submitted to all the rules of modern criticism by the fiercest adversaries of the Christian faith, have nevertheless been recognized as authentic. These are **St. Clement** of Rome, Pope (A.D. 67—100), **St. Papias**, Bishop of Hierapolis in Phrygia, who suffered martyrdom under Marcus Aurelius, about A.D. 164—167; and is called by St. Irenæus the “disciple or hearer of John” (the Apostle), and a “companion to Polycarp,” and by Eusebius, “a man learned and eloquent, and versed in Holy Scripture.” **St. Ignatius** third Bishop of Antioch (A.D. 70—107) who suffered martyrdom under Trajan,—and **St. Polycarp** disciple to St. John the Evangelist, Bishop of Smyrna, in Asia Minor, who endured martyrdom under Marcus Aurelius, about A.D. 167—169. Each of them quoted the Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles of St. Paul.

St. Papias says in one of the fragments of his writings preserved to us by antiquity: “Mathew composed the Discourses in the Hebrew dialect and every one interpreted them as he was able.” “Mark having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote with care what he remembered though he did not

arrange in order the things which were said or done [by Christ.]”*

(2) In the second century, **St. Justin**, martyr, (A.D. 103—167) speaks of the *Gospels* and quotes St. Matthew 37 times, St. Mark 3 times, St. Luke 16 times, and St. John 22 times, the Acts 14 times, St. Paul 76 times (Edit. Ienæ, by John. Carl. Theod. Otto).

Tatian, († A.D. 180) makes about the year—170 a *Harmony of the four Gospels* under the title of *Diatessaron*, which has been handed down to us by antiquity.

Athenagoras, in his petition to Marcus Aurelius and Commodus (A.D. 177), quotes the Gospel 20 times, the Epistles of St. Paul, 17 times.

St. Theophilus's sixth Bishop of Antioch after St. Peter, († A.D. 186) in his three books to Autolycus, quotes the Gospel 12 times, the Acts 3 times and the Epistles of St. Paul 28 times.

St. Pantaenus, († A.D. 200), the founder of the great School of Alexandria, preached the Gospel in Æthiopia, and found there the Gospel of St. Matthew, brought to that country by the Apostle St. Bartholomew.

St. Irenæus, (A.D. 120—202) disciple of St. Polycarp and Bishop of Lyons in France, martyred under Septimus Severus (A.D. 202) says in his valuable book “*Against Heresies*” : “*Mathew wrote a Gospel for the Jews in their own language ;*”

* The Editors of the works of the Apostolic Fathers have made the following computation. All together, they refer to the Epistles of St. Paul 196 times.

| | | | | |
|---------------------|--------|------------|----|--------|
| St. Clement of Rome | quotes | the Gospel | 31 | times. |
| St. Ignatius | “ | “ | 26 | “ |
| St. Polycarp | “ | “ | 14 | “ |
| Hermas | “ | “ | 46 | “ |

Some critics more severe, such as Father Cornely, S.J., admit only about 50 quotations of the Gospels in the works of the Apostolic Fathers. We may well accept this figure ; it gives us abundant proof of the existence of our Gospels in the first century, and of their authenticity ; which it is our object to establish.

and in another place: "There are four Gospels just as there are four parts of the world, and four Angels who stand always before God." Iren. C. Heres. III. II. He quotes the Gospel 350 times, the Acts 38 times, the Epistles of St. Paul, 236 times.*

Clement of Alexandria, (150-215) wrote commentaries on the Books of the Old Testament, and on the Gospels. In those of his writings which are still extant, we find 577 quotations from the Gospel, 19 from the Acts, 488 from St. Paul.

Tertullian, a priest of Carthage (160-240) speaks at length of the four Gospels, and quotes them 1550 times, the Acts 97 times, St. Paul 1124 times.

Now what conclusion forces itself on the mind of the impartial reader, after such testimonies from men commendable for their learning and their holiness of life, some of whom sealed their faith with their blood, amidst dreadful torments; from men, I say, who belonged to different countries, many of

* The *Quarterly Review* (October 1895), gives a vivid picture of the primitive Church, in an article based on the researches of Bishop Lightfoot and other recent students of early patristic literature. It is very remarkable on how many disputed points the Catholic Tradition is confirmed by the candid investigation of the eminent Anglican divine.

"The life of St. John, who survived to the reign of Trajan, according to an Epistle of St. Irenæus, was the direct connecting link between the Apostolic and Sub-Apostolic ages of the Church. His immediate disciple, Polycarp, who lived beyond the middle of the second century, transmitted the teaching received from him to Irenæus, afterwards Bishop of Lyons. The work, still extant, in which the latter sums up the main customs and doctrines of Christianity in his days, thus carries on the tradition of Christianity without any break in continuity from its very foundation. A body of writings, dating from the end of the first or the beginning of the second century, have been made known to us by modern research, which prove, according to the *Quarterly Reviewer*, that the Catholic conceptions of Christianity exist, in a somewhat inchoate form it may be, yet clearly and definitely as early as this." (*Tablet*.)

whom had never known the others, and nevertheless spoke in precisely the same way of the Four Gospels, whether at Rome or Lyons, in Syria or Asia Minor in Alexandria or Carthage? The obvious conclusion is that the Gospels are authentic.

(3) Even *the early enemies of Christianity*—the Jew, the heretic, and the pagan—while perverting the Gospels, yet never dreamt of denying their genuinity, for they realized the utter impossibility of so futile an argument gaining credence.

In other words, if we consider that in the very first age of the Church there were heretics, who attempted to found their errors upon the Gospels interpreted by *private* judgment; that there were infidels and sophists, such as Celsus, Porphyry, Lucian and Julian the Apostate, who made the most violent attacks upon the Christian religion, and who in order to discredit its followers appealed to their sacred Books, without ever questioning their genuineness, our demonstration becomes overwhelming. *At that early period, both Christians and non-Christians, together admitted the authenticity of the Gospels.*

Such is the argument which St. Augustine urged on his opponents, 1400 years ago.

“ O ye unfortunate enemies of your own souls, what works will ever have any authority, if the writings of the Evangelists and the Apostles have none? What will be the book the authorship of which is certain, if the writings which the Church, established by the Apostles themselves and known among all nations, holds to be of the Apostles may be suspected as not coming from the Apostles? How do we know that the books of Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Varro and others are rightly ascribed to them, but by the unbroken evidence of successive ages? Many have written copiously on Catholic doctrine and morals, not with a canonical authority, it is true, but with the scope of either aiding their brethren or acquiring learning. How do we

know what books are of such authors, except by the fact that when each one wrote his books, he made them known to as many people as he could, and thus communicated them to posterity, down to our own age; so that were we asked to whom each book belonged, we would not be at a loss to give the proper answer? Such being the case, who could be so blind as to say that the Church of the Apostles, so trustworthy, and the consent of so many brethren did not deserve that their writings should be faithfully handed down to posterity, since they have occupied the sees of the Apostles by a most certain succession down to the present bishops, and since this privilege is so easily granted to the writings of any author whatever, both out of the Church and in the Church? ” (Contra Faust. I. 33, c. 6)

(II) INTERNAL EVIDENCE OF AUTHENTICITY.

In the first part we have quoted the evidence of contemporary or subsequent writers in behalf of the authenticity of the Gospels, and that is confirmed by the fruitless attempts made by critics to find arguments to the contrary. But a new proof comes from the Gospel contents themselves:—the style and the way in which facts are related exhibit all those characteristics which betray writers of that period. The style is full of Hebraic idioms, which fact shows that the writers were all Jews, although they wrote in Greek. The narrative is simple, full of concrete details, as becomes eye or ear-witnesses. In a word their contents wonderfully agree with all that is known to us from profane and sacred history, ethnology and archæology, about the religious and civil customs of the Jewish nation at the period referred to. No later writer, chiefly after the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, could have been so exact in every detail about persons and things.

CHAPTER II.

The Four Gospels have been handed down to us in their **INTEGRITY**.

1. A book is said to be **entire** and without corruption, when nothing has been added to, nothing taken away from, and nothing mixed with what was written by its author: in other words, when in the course of time it has undergone no change by *addition*, by *suppression*, or by *interpolation*.

2. When we affirm the integrity of the four Gospels, we mean only the *substance* of the narrative, as that is quite sufficient for our purpose. For it cannot be denied that, as time went on, not a few slight and accidental alterations were introduced into the primitive text, such as the dropping of words or changing of synonyms, at a time when printing was unknown, and copies of the holy writings could be had only by means of amanuenses, or transcribers.

No books have been more read, copied, translated and commented on than the Gospels. Even the very changes or *variants* found in Manuscripts rather confirm than militate against the integrity of the text. For, they leave the material parts of each phrase intact and no attempt is made at changing the sense of any passage.

In order to prove our second assertion, therefore, we must establish (a) that the Gospels could not possibly be corrupted; (b) and that as a matter of fact, they have not been corrupted.

(I) THE CORRUPTION OF THE GOSPELS WAS NOT POSSIBLE.

There are three reasons against that corruption: (1) the **nature** of the Gospels; (2) the **time** in which these alterations ought to have been made; (3) the **persons** by whom they might have been made.

(1) NATURE OF THE FOUR GOSPELS.—What are the Gospels? They are sacred writings of the greatest importance to the Christian society as well as to individuals. From the outset they were looked upon as the celestial archives containing the divine constitutions of the Church, a doctrine revealed from on High and the rule of the Christian life. Upon them depended the sacred and difficult duties, to which the first Christians were to accustom themselves. In those early times, there were no Christians from infancy as now; all who embraced Christianity were converts from Judaism or Heathenism. Therefore, they needed strong reasons and the soundest credentials to give up their first religion and adopt the new one, with its doctrines so contrary to their prejudices, and its moral prescriptions such as chastity and charity, so opposed to their inclinations. Mark that not seldom they had to practise heroic acts of virtue and to endure martyrdom rather than renounce their faith. Is it credible that these converts would have voluntarily submitted to new obligations, imposed upon them in the name of God, if they had not gained the evidence that the facts related in the Gospels were true, and therefore that the Gospels were authentic and unadulterated?

Again, what are these Books? Writings looked upon by all Christians as Holy Scripture *inspired by God*, an object of veneration for the faithful and of the most zealous care for the Pastors of the Church. They were books well known to all, since they were read publicly in the Meetings, on Sundays. Their text was so familiar to all that the writers of the primitive Church, seem naturally to weave into their speech and their writings innumerable passages of the Gospels, quoted from memory. As to the faithful they were

able to correct the mistakes of the reader, and to protest against any change made in the translation used by the Latin Church.*

They were books to which all Catholics, heretics and pagans alike, were accustomed to appeal in their controversies, either to defend the truth, or to attack the Christian religion. How was any alteration of moment possible in books upon which the defenders and the foes of Christianity alike had their eyes ever fixed to find in them a ground for their respective claims?

(2) THE VARIOUS PERIODS OF TIME.—No epoch can be assigned when the supposed change could have taken place, or the alteration have been made. In the first century and the beginning of the second, the Apostles and their immediate disciples, the authors of the Books and their successors, would have raised an outcry against the falsifiers.

In the second century, the Gospels were already spread throughout the world, in all the Christian churches. Any alteration, in order to be universal, would have required the connivance of all the churches, But the care of the Pastors, the countless copies of the originals, and their numerous translations made this simply impossible.

Later on the corruption was still more impossible. In the great persecutions of the third century, many

* We have of this a remarkable instance in the opposition the new translation of the Scriptures by St. Jerome, met with everywhere, merely because, though the meaning was the same, many new words had been introduced. The same is evinced by the fact that the Christians of Hippo in Africa, though mostly fishermen, were able to correct St. Augustine, while preaching, when he used one word for another.

martyrs, lay as well as clerical, gave their lives rather than betray the sacred Scriptures, whilst those who through fear of torments handed them over to the tyrants, were covered with infamy, called traitors, deprived of their functions, and excommunicated.

(3) THE PERSONS to whom the custody of the Holy Scripture was entrusted, afford fresh guarantee of its being preserved from corruption. For it is not credible that men who considered the Gospels as sacred Books written under the inspiration of God, and who were ready to suffer death rather than allow those books to fall into the hands of infidel tyrants, would have deliberately consented to the least alteration in them.

But further, the heretics, who were always on the look-out to attack the Church, would not have failed to accuse the Catholics of corrupting the Gospels, if ever they had tried to do so; for, more than once the heretics themselves were charged with doing so for the purpose of finding an inspired authority for their errors. So by the very fact that the Gospels were in the hands of both Catholics and heretics, no change was possible, without its being at once detected.

An additional proof is supplied to us in the fact that the Church has always been extremely careful in admitting books into her catalogue or *canon*. Many books were written after the first century, bearing the names of some of the Apostles, and quite a literature sprang up dealing with the life of Jesus Christ. But the Catholic Church rejected them all as *apocryphal*, which means unauthentic, preserving only the books received at the beginning. This watchfulness shows how impossible any change in their text had become.

(II) AS A MATTER OF FACT THE GOSPELS
HAVE NEVER BEEN CORRUPTED.

According to the rules laid down by critics, a book is said to be without notable corruption (1) when the most recent copies of it compared with the most ancient offer no serious difference; (2) when the number of copies thus compared is very great,; (3) when the copies are compared not only with other copies, but also with numerous versions and commentaries in various languages, and are found to agree substantially. Now this work of comparison has been very carefully done in respect of the four Gospels in the nineteenth century. Learned critics, mostly Germans and English, have with indefatigable patience, ransacked old libraries for ancient manuscripts of the New Testament, and not without success. It would take a volume to relate all the discoveries made in fifty years. The names of Tischendorf, Cureton, and others are well known. We have now about 500 manuscripts of the Gospels dating from the fourth to the sixteenth century. They agree in all essentials. No substantial difference has been found between the texts already known and the ancient manuscripts newly discovered.

CHAPTER III.

The Authors of the Gospels are **TRUSTWORTHY**.

To be trustworthy an author must fulfil two conditions: he must possess knowledge and **veracity**.

In other words, we are bound to give credit to an author when we find that (1) he could not have been deceived about the facts he relates, (2) he would not have deceived if he could, and (3) he could not have deceived even if he would.

Now the authors of the four Gospels **knew** so well the facts related or alluded to by them, that they could not have been deceived; they are so **candid** in their writings that they could never have intended to deceive anybody; and they wrote at such **times** and in such **places**, that their fraud would have been detected at once, if they had but attempted to deceive the world. Therefore, the authors of the Gospel are trustworthy.

(I) THEY KNEW THE FACTS WHICH THEY REPORTED, AND COULD NOT HAVE BEEN DECEIVED ABOUT THEM.

1. The writers of the New Testament are eight in number, viz., four Evangelists, SS. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and four writers of the Epistles, viz., SS. Peter, Paul, James and Jude. (We mention here all the writers of the New Testament, as the veracity of the Evangelists receives an additional proof from their testimony).

They agree together so substantially in their relation of the same events that no contradiction of

any moment can be pointed out. What tribunal in the world would refuse to admit the testimony of eight witnesses who thus agree together? And what witnesses are they! They are exceptionally serious men; their prudence and wisdom are manifest in their very writings; and what history teaches us of their personal character and judgment places them above ordinary witnesses.

Five of them SS. Matthew, John, Peter, James and Jude, as being Apostles of Jesus Christ were eye-witnesses of the chief events they record, and the three others SS. Luke, Mark and Paul, were immediate disciples of the Apostles, their contemporaries, and heard from their mouth, and from those who had lived with Jesus, as for instance from Mary, the Mother of Jesus Christ, such facts as they may not have witnessed personally.

Let us add that the narrative of each, although brief and concise, is nevertheless accurate and exact, and often corroborated by others.

No wonder therefore, if they confidently put forward their quality of witnesses, for instance St. John, 19, 35: "He that saw it hath given testimony, and his testimony is true, and he knoweth that he said true, that you also may believe," and 21, 24: "This is that disciple who giveth testimony of these things, and hath written these things, and we know that his testimony is true."

First Epistle of St. John 1—3: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life.....

That which we have seen and have heard we declare unto you.”

That constant preoccupation that they were speaking as witnesses of the facts narrated in the Gospels and alluded to in other books, is visible throughout the New Testament. (See St. Peter, 2 Ep. 1-16; St. Luke, 1, 1-2; Acts, 1, 21;—2, 32;—3, 15;—4, 20;—5, 32;—10, 39, 41;—13, 31;—9, 28;—1 Cor. 11, 22;—15, 5—8; etc.)

2. We know the witnesses. Let us now consider the facts themselves about which they give evidence. These are neither trifling nor obscure facts, such as may easily give room for deception. They were obvious, sensible and easily perceptible by any one who enjoyed the right use of his senses.

They were mostly public and of the widest notoriety; they were not observed, in passing or by chance, but of set purpose and during several years, and they were of supreme importance, as the salvation of mankind depended upon them.

It is impossible that eye or ear-witnesses should be mistaken about such facts.

(II) THESE WITNESSES WOULD NOT HAVE DECEIVED US, EVEN IF THEY COULD HAVE DONE SO.

This character of theirs is illustrated chiefly by the holiness of their life, their candour, their unanimity, their self-denial, and their martyrdom.

1. **Their life.** As we know from their history, these witnesses were not only honest, in the vulgar sense of the word, but they reached a high degree of sanctity, and commended by their examples the sublime doctrine they preached to the world.

2. **Their candour** shows itself in their writings. Their narrative breathes throughout a wonderful sincerity, simplicity, and modesty. They candidly confess even things that might bring shame upon themselves, such as their ignorance, ambition, jealousy, cowardice, abandonment of Christ, the triple denial of St. Peter, the incredulity of St. Thomas, as the reader can easily understand by recollecting a few passages of the Gospel.

On the other hand, the events are related with clearness and ingenuity. There is no rhetorical display; no appeal to the imagination and the senses. Everything is addressed to the intelligence. They speak of the marvellous and surprising actions of Jesus Christ, of His incredible sufferings, with such equanimity and calmness that they seem to be free from human passion. Are these the characteristics of witnesses capable of deceiving voluntarily?

3. **Their unanimity.** This is the crucial test of the veracity of witnesses. If they are numerous and agree together, without any previous understanding, we may rely upon their deposition.

Now such previous understanding is altogether improbable and we may say never took place. The authors of the New Testament, eight in number, wrote their Books at different times, in different places and for various purposes. Nevertheless they agree on the main facts, and differ only in style, in elocution and the order of the narrative. St. John Chrysostom judiciously remarks that "if the four Evangelists had said the same things to a word, nobody would have believed they had written at different times and places. Had they been at variance so as not to relate anything in common, the enemies of Christianity would have

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charged them with telling lies." Therefore this agreement, which does not exclude all diversity, is a sign of their veracity. ¹

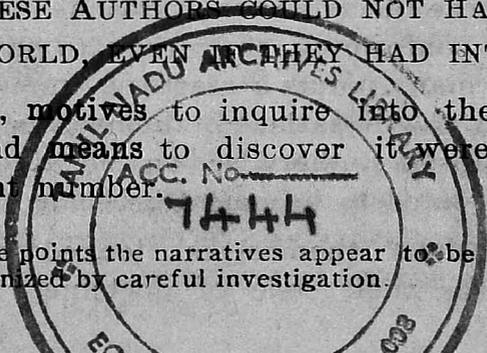
4. **Their disinterestedness.** Fraud and forgery always originate in self-interest. Now the authors of the New Testament had no interest in deceiving the world by giving a false history of Jesus Christ. Nay, their very interest would have deterred them from such a fraud. For, in publishing their writings they knew but too well what opposition they would encounter both from the Jews and the Heathen. For, the Jews looked upon them as impious men, whereas in the eyes of the Heathen they were but contemptible fools. They were therefore by their writings, as the sequel indeed has shown, courting persecution. The very instinct of self-preservation should have dictated to them quite an opposite course of action, when they saw how dangerous it was to preach and write as they were doing.

5. **Their martyrdom.** But, on the contrary, far from giving up the preaching of the Gospel, all of them endured dreadful torments and death itself, in confirmation of the facts they preached. Now there is no stronger mark of the veracity of a witness than his dying in corroboration of his testimony.

(III) THESE AUTHORS COULD NOT HAVE DECEIVED THE WORLD, EVEN IF THEY HAD INTENDED IT.

Indeed, motives to inquire into the supposed imposture and means to discover it were at hand, and in sufficient number.

¹ At some points the narratives appear to be irreconcilable, but can be harmonized by careful investigation.



Grave motives. The Jews, the Heathen and the Christians were equally interested in discarding all false statements and erroneous records about the origin of the Catholic Faith:—

The **Jews**, because those facts were for them a most important event, the turning-point in their national history, the coming of the Messiah whom they had been expecting for fifteen centuries. Add to this that having been the authors of the death of Jesus Christ, they had every interest in contradicting the narrative of the Gospel, and in showing that they had sentenced to death, not God made man, as is said in the Gospel, but a mere man, a false prophet, an impostor. Finally they expected a Messiah who would rid them of the Roman yoke, and give them sway all over the world. How could they have consented to admit of a crucified God, and of what St. Paul calls the scandal of the Cross? Yet this is what they had to admit on the authority of the Evangelists.

As to the **Heathen**, they had to believe that their salvation depended on the merits of a God crucified as a criminal by a Roman Governor; of a Jew, then a contemptible man in the eyes of the Greeks and the Romans. Before admitting what St. Paul termed the folly of the Cross, before believing the divinity of a crucified man, before placing their hope of salvation in a Jew whose doctrine was preached by ignorant people, before conforming their lives to that doctrine which was on many points a startling innovation, they must certainly have satisfied themselves as to the truth of the Gospel; otherwise, on no account would they have consented to become Christians.

The **Christians** themselves looked upon those Sacred Books as their code of doctrines and morals.

Therefore, if they were careful not to receive books written by others than the disciples of Christ, much more must they have been satisfied after a judicial examination that their contents were true.

Also **various means** of detecting the falsehood were at hand.

1. The facts recorded in the Gospel were altogether recent if not contemporary. They were also public and known to thousands of men. Consequently innumerable witnesses were still alive among the Heathen and the Jews who could have borne testimony to the massacre of the Innocent children, the adoration of the Kings, the public life of Jesus Christ, His Passion, Death and Resurrection. Had all this been untrue, it would have been denied and contradicted on all sides. (*Read 1 Cor. 15.*)

2. These writers did not publish their books in secret, but in the face of the world, before Christians, Jews, pagan priests, philosophers and politicians.

The language they used, except St. Matthew, was the Greek, which was then spoken throughout the Roman Empire, at Rome, Lyons, Alexandria and in Asia Minor; and soon after their books were translated into the vernaculars. They were so sure of their statements that they appealed to the testimony of *their readers* themselves, just as in their addresses to the Jews, they sometimes appealed to the evidence of *their hearers*. (*See Acts 2. 22; 26, 26. etc.*)

3. Finally, they published their books in a highly cultured generation, in the age of Augustus, so famous in the history of Letters and Arts. The consequences of the lofty doctrinal and moral teaching of the Gospel were so important, bearing as they do on what is

most opposed to human passions, and entailing many duties, that it was most desirable to reject them by proving the insincerity and falsehood of the writers of the Gospel. But nobody contradicted them, nobody accused them of being at variance with history. On the contrary the world on examination was convinced and believed them.

“There are, says St. Augustine, three things quite incredible, which however have actually taken place. It is incredible that Christ should have arisen from the dead with His flesh, and with His flesh ascended into heaven;—it is incredible that the world should have believed a thing so incredible;—it is incredible that men of mean condition, men of nothing, few in number and ignorant, should have so thoroughly convinced the world at large, even the learned, of so incredible a thing. Of these three things, our opponents refuse to admit the first, but they are compelled to witness the second, without being able to account for it, unless they believe the third.”

On the other hand the verdict of the impartial reader can only be in favour of the Gospels.

APPENDIX.

Various Supplementary Evidences.

In order to make our demonstration more complete, let us add a strong confirmation given to the truth of the events related in the New Testament.

1. Everybody admits that the sublimity of the Gospel has no parallel in any other book. On the assumption that all the facts related therein are false, how could they have been invented? How could rude fishermen, Jews without learning, have conceived and described the person of Jesus Christ, a character so beautiful, sublime and divine that to its likeness no ancient philosopher ever approached? How could they have hit upon such pure and admirable moral doctrine?

“Shall we say that the history of the Gospel is a pure invention? My friend, it is not so that tales are invented, and the facts about Socrates which nobody holds in doubt, are less attested than the facts about Jesus Christ. Indeed to suppose as much is only to shift the difficulty, without solving it. It is more inconceivable that several men of their own accord, should have forged this book (the Gospel), than that one man should have supplied the subject thereof. Never could Jewish writers have hit upon such moral doctrine. The Gospel bears characteristics of truth so striking, so perfectly inimitable, that the inventor thereof would be more awe-inspiring than its hero.” (J. J. Rousseau, *Emile*, IV).

2. Books that were written by Jews and Pagans confirm many of the facts mentioned in the New Testament.

Tacitus, (Annals, l. 15. n. 44) relating the martyrdom of many Christians at Rome under Nero, says: "The author of this creed, Christ was, under Tiberius Emperor, put to death by the Procurator Pontius Pilate."

Thalus, a Greek writer of the same century, certifies that in the eighteenth year of Tiberius, in which Christ died, a sudden darkness was seen at full noon.

Phlegon, the favourite of Adrian, bears witness to the same fact. "In the fourth year of the two hundred and second Olympiad (the eighteenth year of Tiberius, in which Christ suffered), there was an eclipse of the sun, surpassing all those which had taken place previously. The day at noon was changed into the darkest night, the stars appeared, and an earthquake destroyed the city of Nice." (Tertul., *Apol.* c. 21).

Suetonius, *vita Claudii* c. 25, *vita Neronis*, c. 16.

Pliny the Younger, (l. 10, *Ep.* 97) in his letter to Trajan.

Macrobius, (*Saturnal*, 2. c. 4), relating the murder of the holy Innocents mentions the judgment passed by Augustus on king Herod's cruelty "that it was better to be the swine of Herod than his son."

Chalcidius, in *Timæo*, mentions the apparition of a star when Jesus Christ was born, and the adoration of the Kings.

Celsus, Julian the Apostate, and others speaking of the miracles of Jesus Christ, do not call them in question, but attribute them to magic, or try to find contradictions in the four Gospels.

Flavius Josephus, (*Antiquities* l. 18. c. 3; l. 17. c. 7; l. 20. c. 8.) speaks of St. John the Baptist, of Jesus Christ and of several facts mentioned in the Gospel. These facts were so well known that the first Catholic writers in their Apologies offered to the Emperors on behalf of the Christians, were not afraid to appeal to the public archives of the Empire in order to confirm their statements. **St. Lucian**, priest of Antioch, at his trial before he endured martyrdom, said to his judges: "*Requirite in annalibus vestris: invenietis, temporibus Pilati,*

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