

THE
DIVINE ORIGIN
OF
CHRISTIANITY
A HISTORICAL FACT.

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THE DIVINE ORIGIN
OF
CHRISTIANITY

A HISTORICAL FACT.

ONE of the most striking features of Christianity is its historical character. Christianity 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 Sina, 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 Christianity may be summed up in the following syllogism.



1. A religion the origin of which is due to a series of divine facts that cannot be denied without denying historical certainty itself, is manifestly a divine religion.

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

3. Therefore, Christianity is manifestly a divine religion.

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), in which is related the origin of Christianity, are true and trustworthy, 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 necessarily imposes itself upon us is that the religion the origin of which is narrated in these books is a divine religion.

AUTHORITY OF THE FOUR GOSPELS.

THREE principal conditions required to establish the authority of any history which claims to be true and trustworthy are *authenticity, integrity, and veracity.*

Now, according to Sir Isaac Newton, one of England's greatest geniuses, the four Gospels which contain the origin of Christianity 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."

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

I. The Four Gospels are AUTHENTIC.

A book is said to be *authentic* when it really belongs to the author to whom it is attributed, or when at least it has been written in the epoch to which it is generally 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 eye or ear-witnesses of the events referred to, that is to say, by men who lived a few years only after the coming of Jesus Christ, and in the first century of the Christian Era.

The authenticity of a book must be proved chiefly by external evidence, although this may be confirmed by internal arguments. For, as there may be in a book unmistakable signs of *suppositiousness* which are sufficient to deprive it of any authority whatever,

so there may also be such intrinsic characteristics as add much strength to the external evidence. We propose to make use of both kinds of demonstration.

I. EXTERNAL ARGUMENTS.

A. GENERAL ARGUMENT. (a) Direct:—
The evidence of the Catholic Church as a body. The Catholic Church which counts its adherents by millions, and is spread all over the world has asserted publicly, constantly, unanimously, from the remotest age to the present day, and still asserts that she is in possession of the Four Gospels, and that she received them from her Founders. We may add that in this she is supported by all Christian Communion, which though at variance on other points, perfectly agree with her on this. Now such evidence, endowed with such conditions, coming from so wide spread and numerous 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 rests, constitutes a very strong, nay an irrefragable

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:—1. The 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 landed property.

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 are supposititious, that is to say, that they have been written by other authors and at another epoch than those to which they are generally ascribed, you have no right to call in question their authenticity." The Church challenges the production of such proof. In vain have unbelievers in every age, armed with the powerful weapons of science so

called tried to shake the authenticity of the Gospels. All their efforts have proved useless. No objection worth the name has been preferred: are not such fruitless attempts the best demonstration of the authenticity of the Gospels? on the other hand the Church can show a host of writers and learned men, who in every age of her history, even back to the first century, have borne testimony to the genuineness of the Four Gospels.

2. Another undeniable argument is drawn from the **very impossibility** of the Gospels being supposititious.

Let us suppose for an instant that these books are not authentic; we must in this case account for the fact of their having been so universally acknowledged as authentic, and thereby admitting of so huge a fraud? Now 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. Can we bring ourselves to believe that such a fraud could by any possibility have escaped the notice of men who had left all the world holds dear to propagate the truth of the Gospel throughout the world, who were daily facing dangers of every kind and were prepared to endure torments and death itself in defence of the truths they were preaching, can we conceive they could have failed at one time or other to have come across these fraudulent writings, or coming across them, that they would not loudly have protested against the imposture? Surely no event 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 fifty years of the second century? Not more so than in the first century. Why? Because, on the one hand, at that period the disciples of the Apostles and their immediate successors were still alive. 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. For after the second century the authenticity of the Gospels was already universally and unanimously acknowledged, in all the Churches, in the East as in the West. These sacred writings were then extant not only in their *original* the Greek, but in

several *translations*. They were publicly read in all Christian assemblies at least once a week, as Sacred Scriptures, and the Pastors of the Church explained and commented upon them to the faithful, as containing the greater part of the doctrines that Christians were required to believe and of the moral precepts they were bound to observe; so that these Books had 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, these Books unheard of before would have been received without any protest by Christian Churches then already founded everywhere in the Roman world and even in the countries of the East? It is manifest that so general a deception of the Christian world at large, not only of the faithful but

also of their Pastors, who were at the same time *learned* and *zealous defenders* of the truth, could not be admitted to have taken place without the strongest evidence, and there is not even a trace of such an attempt having been made. 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. For it would be far easier to deceive Academies and learned men, by presenting them with fictitious 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, or the Middle Ages, than to foist upon the Bishops and their flock, apocryphal writings, which had to be publicly read in their sacred meetings, and to become the rule of their faith and conduct.

B. SPECIAL ARGUMENT. **Explicit evidence of the Fathers:**—Let us quote some of the

writers of the first and second century, who received the Books of the New Testament and especially the Gospels as authentic, and used them in their writings.

At the end of the first century and the beginning of the second, we find at least four whose writings sifted in our days by the most severe censors, submitted to all the rules of the most impartial criticism, or rather scrutinized 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 well 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: "Matthew composed the Discourses in the Hebrew dialect and every one interpreted them as he was able." "Mark having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote accurately what he remembered though he did not arrange in order the things which were either said or done by Christ." *

* The Editors of the works of the Apostolic Fathers have made the following computation. In all taken 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 "
St. Barnabas, Apostle,	"	" 13 "

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 A.D. 160—170 a concordance of the four Gospels under the title of *Dia tessaron*, 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.

The Epistle to Diognetes,	quotes the Gospel	2 times.
Hermas,	„ „	46 „
The Church of Smyrna,	„ „	6 „

Some critics more far sighted or 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, and that alone will give us abundant proof of the existence of our Gospels in the first century, and of their authenticity; which it is our object to demonstrate.

St. Theophilus, sixth Bishop of Antioch after St. Peter, († A.D. 186) wrote a commentary on St. Matthew and according to some authors made a concordance of the four Gospels. In his three books to Autolycus, he quotes the Gospel 12 times, the Acts 3 times and the Epistles of St. Paul 28 times.

St. Melito, Bishop of Sardis (about, A.D. 172) quotes the four Gospels several times in his *Key of the Scripture*, a work discovered some years back.

St. Panthenus, (about A.D. 216), the founder of the great School of Alexandria, preached the Gospel in India (Æthiopia), and found there the Gospel of St. Matthew, written in the Hebrew dialect, and brought first to that country by the Apostle St. Bartholomew.

Claudius Apollinaris, Bishop of Hierapolis, mentions the Gospel of St. Matthew, (about A.D. 175).

St. Irenæus, (A.D. 120—202) disciple of St. Polycarp and Bishop of Lyons in Gaul,

martyred under Septimus Severus (A.D. 202) says in his important book "Against heresies:" "Matthew, one of the Hebrews, gave in their own language the Scripture of the Gospel;" and in another place; "There are four Gospels as there are four parts of the world, and four Angels who stand always before God." Iren. C. Heres. III. 11. He quotes the Gospel 350 times, the Acts 38 times, the Epistles of St. Paul, 236 times.*

* In one of its issues (October or November, 1895), the *Quarterly Review* 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. Irenaeus, 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 Gaul (Lyons). The work, still extant, in which the latter sums up the main customs and

Clement of Alexandria, (A.D. 217) wrote commentaries on the Books of the New Testament, and a kind of concordance of 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.

Ammonius of Alexandria, († A. D. 220) wrote a concordance of the four Gospels.

Tertullian, a priest of Carthage († A.D. 245) speaks at length of the four Gospels, and quotes them 1550 times, the Acts 97 times, S. Paul 1124 times.

Now what is the conclusion that imposes itself upon the mind of the thoughtful 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.

unprejudiced reader, after such testimonies coming from men commendable both by their learning and their holiness of life, some of whom sealed their faith with their blood, amidst the most dreadful torments; from men, I say, who belonged to different countries, many of whom had never seen or known the others, and nevertheless spoke in precisely the same way of the Four Gospels, whether at Rome or in Gaul, in Syria or Asia Minor in Alexandria or Carthage? The obvious conclusion is that the Gospels are authentic.

And if we consider that in the very first age of the Church there were countless heretics, who attempted to found their errors upon the Gospels interpreted by *private* judgment; that there were infidels, sophists, such as Celsus, Porphyrius, Lucian, Julian the Apostate, etc., who made the most violent attacks upon the Christian religion, and in order to discredit its followers appealed to the contents of their sacred Books, without ever questioning

their genuiness, our demonstration becomes overwhelming. At that early period, both Christians and non-Christians, faithful and heretics, agreed together to admit the authenticity of the Gospels.

Such is the argument which St. Augustine 1400 years ago urged upon his infidel or heretical opponents.

“O ye unfortunate enemies of your own souls, what writings will ever have any weight of authority, if the writings of the Evangelists and of the Apostles are destitute of it? What will be the book the authorship of which is certain, if the writings which the Church, established by the Apostles themselves and so conspicuously made known among all nations, pronounces and holds to be of the Apostles may be doubted to be of the Apostles? How do we know that the books of Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Varron, and other similar authors, are rightly ascribed to them, but by the non-interrupted evidence of

successive ages? Many have written copiously on the ecclesiastical letters, 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 are the books which are of such authors, except by the fact that at the time each one of them wrote his books, he divulged them and made them known to as many people as he could, and thence by this notice uninterrupted and more widely communicated from one to another to posterity, they came down even to our own age; so that if we were asked to whom does each book belong, we would not be at a loss to give the proper answer? Such being the case, who could be so obstinately blind as to say that the Church of the Apostles, so trustworthy, and the consent of so many brethren, do not deserve that their writings should be faithfully handed down to posterity, even though 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. l. 33, c. 6.)

II. INTERNAL ARGUMENTS.

In the first part we have quoted the evidences of contemporary or subsequent writers in behalf of the authenticity of the Gospels. These are confirmed by the fruitless attempts made by critics to find in them arguments to the contrary. Nay their 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 Hebrews, although they wrote in Greek. The narrative is simple, full of 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.

II. The Four Gospels have been handed down to us in their INTEGRITY, *i.e.* without any substantial corruption.

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 originally written by its author: in other words, when in the course of time it has undergone no change, either 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, changing of synonyms, etc., at a time when printing was unknown, and copies of the holy writings could be had only by means of amanuenses, or copyists.

In order to prove our second assertion, therefore we must establish (a) that the Gospels could not possibly be corrupted in their broad lines, (b) and as a matter of fact, that they were not corrupted.

I. The corruption of the Gospels was not possible.

There are three reasons for it: (1) the nature of the Gospels; (2) the time in which these alterations would have to have been made (3) the persons by whom they might be supposed to have been made.

A. NATURE OF THE FOUR GOSPELS.—What are they? They are sacred writings of the greatest importance to the whole of the Christian society as well as to individuals. From the outset of Christianity, they were looked upon as the celestial archives and the divine constitutions of the Church, containing a doctrine revealed from on High and the rule of Christian life. Upon them depended the nature of those most sacred and difficult duties, which the first Christians were to accustom themselves to. In those early times, there were no, so to speak, born Christians as now;

all who embraced Christianity were converts from Judaism or Heathenism. Therefore, they needed strong reasons to give up their first religion and adopt the new one, with its doctrines so contrary to their prejudices, and its moral prescriptions so hard to nature, so opposed to their inclinations, such as chastity, love of enemies, etc. 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 the new converts would have voluntarily submitted to their new obligations, imposed upon them in the name of God, if they had not had the evidence that the facts related in the Gospels were true, and therefore that the Gospels were authentic and without any substantial alteration?

Again, what were these Books? Sacred writings looked upon by all Christians as Holy Scripture inspired by God, an object of veneration for the faithful, 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

* We have of this a remarkable instance in the opposition the new translation of the Scriptures by St. Jerom, met with every where, 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.

religion. Was then any alteration of moment possible in such books, upon which the defenders and the foes of Christianity alike had their eyes ever jealously fixed to find in them a ground for their respective claims?

B. THE VARIOUS PERIODS OF TIME.—No epoch can be assigned when the supposed change could have taken place, the alteration 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 disseminated throughout the whole world, in all the Christian Churches, and any alteration, in order to be universal, would have required the connivence of all the Churches, which owing to the special care of the Pastors, the countless copies made of the originals, and their numerous translations is simply impossible.

Later on the corruption would have been still more impossible. In the great persecutions of the third century, many martyrs, lay as well as ecclesiastics, gave their lives rather than betray the sacred Scriptures, whilst those who by fear of torments handed them over to the tyrants, were covered with infamy, called traitors, deprived of their functions, and excommunicated.

C. THE PERSONS to whom the custody of the Holy Scriptures was entrusted, afford fresh guarantee of their 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 them 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 true Church, would not have failed to accuse the Catholic

of corrupting the Gospels, if they had attempted to do so, for they themselves more than once were charged with doing so for the purpose of giving an inspired ground to 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 becoming 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 with the pretension of dealing with the life of Jesus Christ, and the foundation of the Church. But the Church rejected them all as apocryphal, preserving only the four Gospels received at the beginning. This watchfulness shows how impossible any change in their text was.

II. As a matter of fact the Gospels never were 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 this 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 the last fifty years. The names

of Tischendorf, Cureton, and others are well known, and the result has been that no substantial difference has been found between the texts already known and the ancient manuscripts newly discovered.

III. The Authors of the Gospels are TRUSTWORTHY.

To be trustworthy an Author needs two conditions, **science** and **veracity**.

In other words, we are bound to give credit to an author when we find that he (1) could not have been deceived about the facts he relates, (2) he would not have deceived if he could, and (3) 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 any body; 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. For the writers of the New Testament are eight in number, viz.. four Evangelists, SS. Matthew, Mark, Luke, 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 can be pointed out. Is there any tribunal in the world who would refuse to admit the testimony of eight witnesses who thus agree together? and such witnesses? They are exceptionally serious men; their prudence and wisdom is 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,"

1. **Epistle of St. John, I. 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 consider the **facts themselves** to which they give evidence. These are neither trifling nor hidden facts, such as may easily have given 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 the mightiest importance, as the salvation of mankind depended upon them.

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

II. These witnesses would not have
deceived us, if they could.

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 recommended 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, humility, modesty. They candidly confess even things that might bring shame upon themselves, such as their ignorance, ambition, jealousy, cowardice, fear, abandonment of Christ, the triple denial of St. Peter, the incredulity of the Apostles, especially of St. Thomas, their

sins whatever they be, as the reader can easily understand by recollecting a few passages of the Gospel.

On the other hand, the events are related with great 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 probability of a 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 periods of time, in different places and for various purposes. Nevertheless they agree in the main facts, and differ only as to the style, the elocution and the order of the narrative. St. John Chrysostom judiciously remarks about the four Gospels, 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 common, the enemies of Christianity would have charged them with telling lies." Therefore this agreement which does not exclude all diversity is a sign of their veracity.

4. **Their self-denial.** Fraud and forgery always originate from 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, under ordinary circumstances 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 blasphemous and 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 but too evidently, courting persecution. The instinct of self-preservation ought therefore to have dictated to them quite an opposite course of action, when they saw how dangerous it was to preach and write as they did.

5. **Their martyrdom.** But, on the contrary, far from giving up the preaching of the Gospel, all of them endured the most 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 to corroborate his testimony.

III. These Authors could not have deceived
the world, even if they would.

For the **motives** to inquire into the deceit and the **means** to discover it were at hand, and in sufficient number.

Motives. The Jews, the Heathen and the Christians were equally interested in discarding all false statements and erroneous records about the origin of Christianity.

The **Jews**, because it was to them a question of a most important event, the turning point of their national history, viz., 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 a God, 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? and however, this it was 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 one of the most contemptible people 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 the doctrine taught by this man and his disciples, they would certainly have satisfied themselves of the truth of the Gospel; otherwise, in no other case 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 have they have been satisfied that their contents were true.

Means. The **means** of detecting the falsehood were at hand.

1. The facts recorded in the Gospel were altogether recent and contemporary. They were also public and known to thousands of men. Consequently innumerable witnesses were still alive among both 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 these 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, heretics, heathen, priests, philosophers, politicians, magistrates.

The language they used, except St. Matthew, was the Greek, which was then spoken throughout the whole 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, as in their addresses to the Jews, they sometimes appealed to the evidence of their hearers. See **Act.** 2. 22 ; 26. 26. etc.

3. Finally, they published their books before a highly cultured generation, in the age of Augustus, so famous in the history of Letters and Arts. The consequences of the high doctrine and of the moral teaching of the Gospel were so important, bearing on what is most opposed to human passions, entailing

the most difficult duties, that it could not but be 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, ignorant, should have so efficaciously persuaded 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.”

APPENDIX.

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

1. Everybody admits that the sublimity of the Gospel has no parallel in any other book whatever. In 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 calls in doubt, are less attested than the facts about Jesus Christ.

Indeed to admit this is to postpone the difficulty, without resolving it. It would be 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 would Jewish writers have hit upon such tone and such moral doctrine. The Gospel exhibits such characteristics of truth, so great, so striking, so perfectly inimitable, that the inventor thereof would be more astonishing than its hero." (J. J. Rousseau, *Emile*, IV).

2. Profane books, written even 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 name Christ was, under Tiberius Emperor, put to death by the Procurator Pontius Pilate."

Thalus, a Greek writer of the same century, attests 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 hundredth and second (202) 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 so changed into the darkest night, that 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's 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 doubt, but they attribute them to magic, or try to find contradictions between 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 several other facts mentioned in the Gospel. These facts were so notorious that the first Christian apologists, 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. Lucien** priest of Antioch, in his interrogatory before he endured martyrdom, said to his judges: "*Requirite in annalibus vestris: invenietis, temporibus Pilati, Christo patiente, fugato sole, interruptum tenebris diem.*" "In-

quire in your annals: you will find, that in the time of Pilate, when Christ suffered, the sun vanished and the day was interrupted by darkness."

Tertullian in his Apology, with the same boldness sends his contradictors to the archives of Rome to ascertain both the birth and the death of Jesus Christ. Of the death he says: "*Et tamen eum mundi casum relatum in arcanis vestris habetis.*" However that event of the world (the eclipse of the sun that took place at the death of Jesus Christ) is related in your secret archives." Of His birth he says: "*De censu denique Augusti, quam testem fidelissimum Dominicæ nativitatis Romana archiva custodiunt.*" "The Roman archives preserve the census made under Augustus as a most faithful witness of the birth of the Lord." (Tert. l. cont Marcion, c. 7.)

St. Justin appeals to the Acts of Pilate, 1st Apol. n. 34 and 35.

After relating Christ's Passion and death, he adds: "*Atque hæc ita gesta esse ex Actis sub Pontio Pilato confectis discere potestis,*" "and that these things thus happened, you may learn from the Acts written under Pontius Pilate."

Shall we add that all the monuments of that period that are still extant give a full confirmation to the narrative of the Evangelists? old coins, medals, stones, inscriptions, slabs, sculptures and pictures of the Catacombs, narrate in their way the same facts. But that proof would lead us too far. Let it be enough to say that the learned Bultet wrote a book to prove the divinity of Christianity by its foundation, borrowing his testimonies only from pagan and Jewish authors of the four first centuries. We shall quote the last words of his work which shall be the conclusion of ours:—

"Jews and pagans make a twofold avowal: they acknowledge expressly the prodigies of

Jesus Christ and His disciples, and supply us with the facts with which we have composed the history of the establishment of Christianity; but these facts suppose of necessity the reality of those miracles.

“Now facts acknowledged by those who have the greatest interest to deny them, must be considered as indisputable. The miracles of Jesus and His disciples attain therefore the highest degree of certainty.

“It is proved that God is the author of these miracles. God therefore has authorized and founded the Christian religion, and a religion that is approved by God, and is the work of God Himself, is certainly true.

Therefore the Christian religion is true.”





