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# Why a Divine Revelation

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IT'S NATURE,  
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AND PURPOSE

*John A. O'Brien*, Ph.D., LL.D.

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# Why a Divine Revelation?

**Its Nature, Meaning and Purpose**

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# WHY A DIVINE REVELATION?

## Its Nature, Meaning and Purpose

The goodness and the love of God shine forth in the revelation which He has vouchsafed to mankind. Unwilling to allow His creatures to be without a knowledge of truths which surpass the capacity of the unaided human mind to discover, the Creator has mercifully drawn aside the curtain of darkness from our eyes, permitting us to peer into the radiance of divine truth. While our minds are finite and cannot penetrate to the very depths of the mysteries of religion, they can catch glimmerings of mighty truths which exalt, strengthen and inspire us. For example, we would never know the great truth of the Blessed Trinity if it were not revealed to us. Through revelation God brings us closer to Him in knowledge and in love.

All the works of creation may be said to constitute a revelation of the mind and the will of the Creator—a natural revelation. By the study of such works, we come to the knowledge of the truths of natural religion. But the revelation of which we speak is supernatural one. By a supernatural revelation we mean the communication of some truth by God to a rational creature through means which are beyond the ordinary course of nature.\*

Revelation may be supernatural *in manner*, but not *in substance*. For example, man can deduce the existence of God from a study of the works of creation. This naturally known truth is also supernaturally revealed. Such revelation is supernatural only *in manner*. The revelation of the triune nature of God, however, is supernatural *in substance as well as in manner*.

From the existence of a personal God and of a rational creature, the possibility of revelation is apparent. To say that God created man and then cut His creature off from all possibility of receiving a communication from his Maker is mon-

\*For a complete exposition of this subject and of other fundamental truths of religion the reader is advised to secure *Truths Men Live By*, John A. O'Brien, Macmillan Co., New York, \$3.50.

strous: as a father can communicate with his children, so the Creator can speak of His creatures. What would we think of a father who would never speak to his son? How unnatural would be the son who would never turn a listening ear to the tender and kindly voice of his sire?

God's love for His children far surpasses that of any human father. He manifests that love and solicitude by communicating to His children the deposit of divine truth in all its beauty and radiance. Instead of leaving man at the mercy of his own intellectual faculties, so often impaired by pride, sloth, and passion, to discover all the truths even of natural religion, an all-merciful Father has disclosed these to us with a certainty that removes all vacillation and doubt. The disclosure of supernatural truths is a further beautiful and touching manifestation of the Creator's love for His children, made in His image and likeness.

### **Christ—The Bearer of Revelation**

Who was the bearer of this revelation to mankind? It was His own divine Son, Jesus Christ. Partial revelations had been delivered to the patriarchs and prophets to prepare the way for the full and universal revelation which God was to give us through His Son. Many prophecies had been made concerning the coming of Christ so that He would bear the credentials of His messiahship. His mission was to redeem mankind and to banish the darkness from the souls of men; He was the Light of the world, the Light that was to illumine the mysteries of life and death and show men the unfailing path to Heaven.

The revelation which Christ delivered to the world is supported not by a single miracle or prophecy, but by a multitude whose cumulative force cannot fail to carry conviction to the honest mind. That revelation is reinforced by the great web of Messianic prophecies. It is certified by the manifold miracles of Christ during His early mission and by the climactic miracle of His resurrection from the dead. It is supported by the marvelous spread of Christianity throughout the world, constituting a miracle of the moral order. It is further authenticated by the miraculous nature and vitality of the Christian Church

which has triumphed over the determined efforts of mighty empires to destroy her.

Thus the Vatican Council teaches: "In order that the obedience of our faith might be agreeable to reason, God has willed that to the internal aids of the Holy Spirit, there should be joined external proofs of His revelation, namely, divine works, especially miracles and prophecy, which inasmuch as they manifestly display the omnipotence and the omniscience of God are most certain signs of a divine revelation and are suited to the understanding of all."

How may a revelation be known? By certain marks which show forth its divine origin. These are as follows: (1) The message must not be unworthy of its alleged Author. It must not be ambiguous or trivial. It must be noble, elevating, agreeable to reason, satisfying to human aspirations, and beneficial to society. (2) It must be confirmed by miracles or prophecies. That the good tidings which Christ brought to the world bear the first mark is evident to all who have read the Christian gospel. That His message is authenticated abundantly by prophecies and miracles, we shall now proceed to show.

### **The Proof from Prophecies**

A prophecy may be defined as the definite prediction of events which depend for their occurrence on the exercise of free will, whether it be the free will of God or of rational creatures, and which are of such a character as to be beyond the possibility of guess work or of human prevision.<sup>1</sup> It is only God who knows beforehand what a free agent will do. That is why a prophecy, if fulfilled, is as conclusive a mark of divine authority as a miracle. The latter is an expression of God's omnipotence, the former of His omniscience: both are seals, affixed by the hand of God Himself authenticating the work as His.

The web of prophecies running through the Old and New Testaments is so extensive as to preclude escape from the con-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Archbishop Sheehan's *Apologetics*, Gill & Son, Ltd., Dublin, 1939, p. 70



viction that this is a seal of the divine authority behind the revelation. The prophecies are numerous, abound in detail and circumstance, and are literally fulfilled. Thus the date of the Redeemer's coming was foretold,<sup>2</sup> as was the fact that He was to be *born of a virgin*,<sup>3</sup> of the tribe of the *family of David*,<sup>4</sup> at Bethlehem,<sup>5</sup> and that kings would come offering gifts.<sup>6</sup>

Our wonderment is further increased when we discover that: the name of the Saviour was foretold; His passion and death were described; He was to be sold for thirty pieces of silver; His hands and feet were to be pierced; His garments were to be distributed and His outer garment assigned by lot; He was to rise from the dead and found a kingdom that would not be destroyed. All these detailed facts and a multitude of others were foretold in the Old Testament from 400 to 800 years before they occurred.

In the New Testament we find prophecies not less striking. Thus Christ foretold the manner and time of His death, His resurrection, His ascension. He foretold that Judas would betray Him, that Peter would deny Him thrice before the cock would crow twice, that His disciples would forsake Him, that the Holy Ghost would descend upon the apostles. After peering into the future to see the events that were to transpire after His death, Christ foretold the destruction of Jerusalem, the razing of the Temple, the dispersion of the Jews, the growth of His Church, and the preaching of the Gospel to all nations. Thus vividly do these prophecies attest the supernatural and divine character of the revelation of Christ.

### Proof from Miracles

A miracle may be defined as an occurrence outside the course of nature, perceptible to the senses, and explicable only as the direct act of God Himself. We might more accurately term the miracles of which we are here speaking *evidential* to

<sup>2</sup> Daniel ix. 24

<sup>3</sup> Isaias vii. 14

<sup>4</sup> Jeremias xxiii. 5

<sup>5</sup> Michaes v. 2

<sup>6</sup> Psal. 1 xii. 9



distinguish them from miracles not apparent to the senses. Thus the change of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ is not perceptible to the senses. It is known only by faith and cannot, therefore, be used as an evidence of God's intervention. A miracle in the strict sense of the term constitutes clear proof of the divine origin of the doctrine in support of which it is wrought. It is a credential, certifying to the truthfulness of the doctrine as well as to its divine authority.

No one who admits the existence of a personal God can question the possibility of miracles. The Creator who fixed the course of nature can change, suspend or supersede it as He deems wise. A human legislator can modify or suspend his law. Who will deny the Author of the laws of nature the same power? Indeed, if He could not modify the work of His own hands, how could He be said to be omnipotent? The question, then, in regard to miracles is not whether God *could* work a miracle, but whether in any given case a miracle has occurred or not. In other words, the question of miracles boils down to a matter of evidence.

There is no denying, however, that there has been created in the minds of many people a prejudice against the possibility of miracles and a consequent distaste for their use as evidence in the establishment of the divine character of the Christian revelation. This is traceable to the oft-repeated assertions of scientists that the laws of nature are fixed and immutable and admit of no exceptions: they have created the widespread impression that science frowns upon the *possibility* of miracles. To be in step with the scientists, people generally have felt that they too must regard the possibility of miracles as disproved by the advance of modern science.

Let us now examine the line of reasoning of the scientists that would outlaw the possibility of miracles. Briefly it would run: Physical science declares that nature acts not capriciously but uniformly in accordance with definite laws. But the doctrine of miracles denies this. Therefore the believer in miracles must reject the outstanding generalization of modern science.

We reply by pointing out that we do not differ with scientists in regard to the law-abiding character of nature's opera-

tions. Indeed, we are at one with them in holding to the general law of nature that the same physical cause in the same circumstances will produce the same effect. We maintain, however, that when God intervenes, the circumstances are no longer the same, because a *new* force has been introduced. Even man can introduce a force which will alter the course of nature's operation.

Thus a baseball player who catches a fly ball prevents the law of gravity from pulling it to the earth. Does he destroy the law of gravity? Not at all. He simply exercises a force sufficient to counteract the pull of gravity. When an airplane leaves the ground, is the law of gravity annulled and the uniformity of nature's operations impaired? Not at all. A contrary force sufficient to overcome the pull of gravity is introduced. When I swim in a stream, am I destroying the law of gravity? No, I am simply applying a force sufficient to counteract it and thus keep afloat.

Similarly in the case of miracles, we do not imply that the laws of nature are destroyed or rendered inoperative: we simply affirm that a greater force has been introduced, a force sufficient to bring about a different resultant. Far from nullifying the laws of nature, properly understood, miracles may be said to attest their validity; for surely it is a law of nature, and one of the most basic of all her laws that, when two opposing forces are brought into operation, the greater will always prevail over the lesser. As God is stronger than any force, it follows that His force will always prevail. To deny God the power to apply a force necessary to attain a desired end is to deny the existence of God as a personal, free agent.

### **Laws of Nature**

Let us penetrate a little more deeply into the meaning of the laws of nature, a term which scientists use with such frequency. When we investigate what scientists mean when they speak of the laws of nature, we find that they mean so many uniform modes of action, invariably observed by natural causes in the production of their proper effects. Thus they say it is a law of nature that bodies attract one another, that fire burns,

that the human body, once dead, never revives. According to scientists, then, the laws of nature are nothing else than the whole collection of similar uniform acts grouped under a general proposition.

Yet if we subject that concept to careful analysis we find that these uniform acts are not laws, strictly speaking, but the *effects* produced by laws; for a law is a *principle* of action, not the act itself. The fact that in America we drive on the right-hand side of the road is not a law. It is the result of a law which exists independently of whether an individual observes the law or violates it. So it is in nature. The fact that fire burns is not a law: it is the result of a law from which combustion proceeds as a uniform occurrence. Hence the laws of nature can only be the will of the divine Lawmaker as expressed in natural causes.

As these natural causes are devoid of freedom, as B. J. Otten points out, "the will of the lawgiver can find expression in them only by means of predetermined forces; so that the laws of nature are objectively nothing else than the forces with which God has endowed His creatures, and by reason of which they must, when left to themselves, always act the same way if placed under the same circumstances."<sup>7</sup> Hence it is evident that the uniformity of the so-called laws of nature has its ultimate reason only in the will of God. When scientists penetrate beyond the superficial view of the laws of nature as mere uniform modes of action to the ultimate principle underlying all such laws, they will perceive that it is none other than the will of the divine Legislator who has brought the universe into being and framed all its laws. Thus may the laws of nature be said to be the objectified thought of God.

### Hume's Objection

We should refer here to the objection of Hume which caused a considerable stir back in the eighteenth century. "A miracle," he says, "is a violation of the laws of nature; and as a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws,

<sup>7</sup> *The Reason Why*, B. Herder Book Co., St. Louis, 1921, p. 152

the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined.”<sup>8</sup> The explanation which we have just given shows that a miracle need not, and indeed should not, be viewed as a violation of the laws of nature. It involves simply the introduction of new force sufficient to change the resultant.

Hume’s objection is vitiated by another fallacy, namely, the assumption that mankind has no experience of miracles. This is not only a begging of the point to be proved but is also a flying in the face of the testimony of both scientists and layman alike. The only relevant testimony concerning the occurrence or the non-occurrence of a miracle is that of eye witnesses. Let us take the incident of Christ’s walking upon the sea of Galilee. Hume argues that millions of people will testify that they have never seen anyone walking upon water. Granted. But that testimony is totally irrelevant and would be thrown out by any court of evidence.

We are not arguing that people generally walk upon water or that any appreciable number have ever done so. We are contending simply that Christ on one specific occasion did so. Now the only testimony that is relevant to that incident is the testimony of those who were present and who witnessed such an occurrence. The testimony of those who lived centuries later and who never witnessed such an occurrence is completely beside the point. When carefully analyzed, Hume’s objection is thus seen to be vitiated by a twofold fallacy. It is little more than a piece of artful pettifogery.

### Facing the Facts

In recent years something of the old prejudice against miracles has begun to wane. Many scientists are now willing to look into the cases of alleged miracles with open minds and allow the facts to write their own verdict. This change of attitude is due in no small part to the eminent medical scientist,

<sup>8</sup> *Hume’s Works*, ed. 1770, Vol. iii, p. 178. Cardinal Newman gives a complete refutation of this objection in his *Grammar of Assent*, pp. 306, 307

Dr. Alexis Carrel. In his widely read *Man—The Unknown*, Dr. Carrel called attention to the impressive and carefully documented evidence of miracles at Lourdes. He pointed out that the scientific attitude is not to wave that evidence aside and formulate a judgment which amounts only to a pre-judgment—the root meaning of prejudice. The scientific attitude is to investigate the evidence, examine the actual facts, and arrive at a judgment on the basis of the verified data.

More and more is his wise counsel being followed. The scoffing of the cynics and the doubting of the incredulous are vanishing before the impressive evidence so carefully documented in the *Annals of Lourdes* by medical authorities of every shade of religious faith and of no faith at all. In that work are recorded the sworn testimony of physicians who examine a patient before he invokes the intercession of Our Lady of Lourdes, and the sworn testimony of the same physicians after the patient is instantly cured. Their testimony is corroborated by clinical data, X-ray photographs taken before and after, and by all the elaborate checks and controls devised by scientists,

The cures cover the widest assortment of human ills, including tuberculosis, organic lesions, paralysis, blindness, running sores, and cancer; some of the miracles involve an instantaneous lengthening of bone structure—as shown by actual X-ray pictures. Before recording a cure as miraculous, physicians and surgeons are enlisted in the endeavor to find any natural explanation: only when every natural factor has been ruled out is the case adjudged to involve the expression of supernatural power. It has been the frank facing of this evidence that has caused an ever-increasing number of scientists to abandon their attitude of incredulity and to admit not merely the possibility but the fact of miracles. Many came to scoff, but remained to pray.

We have beheld the great assemblage of crutches, wheel chairs, plaster-of-paris casts, and other evidences of invalidism which patients, miraculously cured, have left at Lourdes as mute symbols of their gratitude. It is difficult to gaze upon this tell-tale evidence and to read the sworn testimony of



physicians—Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, and non-believers—certifying in the *Annals of Lourdes* to the complete and instantaneous cure of maladies deemed incurable, and understood how any normal mind can question the fact of miracles.

The best cure for skepticism on this subject is not argument, not theory, but a generous dose of the actual facts. For against a fact all argument collapses. "The man of theory," observes Carlyle, "twangs his full bent bow; nature's fact ought to fall stricken, but does not; his logic-arrow glances from it as from a scaly dragon and the obstinate fact keeps walking its way. How singular!"

While the evidence at Lourdes is most impressive and its bureau for the scientific investigation of miraculous cures is perhaps the best organized, the searcher for evidence of this nature need not travel to Europe. He can find here on our own continent, at the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico, at the Oratory of St. Joseph at Montreal, and at the Shrine of St. Anne at Beaupré, Canada, irrefragable and convincing evidence of miracles in our own day.

### **Christ Appeals to Miracles**

After this exposition of the possibility, the nature, and the fact of miracles, we return now to point out the demonstrative force of miracles in establishing the divine character of the Christian revelation. Christ Himself appealed time after time to His miracles as blinding evidence of His divine mission and of His divine message. "The *works* themselves which I do," He said, "give testimony of me, that the Father hath sent me."<sup>9</sup> Note the manner in which He appealed to His restoration of Lazarus to life as convincing evidence of His divine mission.

Lazarus, a man of great virtue, fell sick and died. He was a close friend of Christ, as were also his two sisters, Martha and Mary. During his illness, his sisters had sent for Christ. But he remained away purposely, as the Evangelist St. John tells us, to deepen the faith of His followers by a striking miracle. When He finally arrived in Bethania, Lazarus had

<sup>9</sup> John v. 36

been dead four days and was already interred: nevertheless Christ assured the sisters that their brother would rise again. Going to the grave, Christ ordered them to open the tomb; they objected on the ground that the body was already undergoing putrefaction. At Christ's insistence, however, they opened the grave and exposed the body to the assembled multitude.

Then "Jesus lifting His eyes, said: 'Father, I give Thee thanks that Thou hast heard me. And I know that Thou hearest me always; but because of the people who stand about have I said it, that they may believe that Thou hast sent me.' When He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice: 'Lazarus, come forth.' And presently he that had been dead came forth, bound feet and hands with winding bands; and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus said to them: 'Loose him, and let him go.' Many therefore of the Jews who were come to Mary and Martha, and had seen the things that Jesus did, believed in Him." <sup>10</sup>

What is to be noted particularly in this case is the explicit statement of Christ as to why He was about to perform this miracle: "Father . . . because of the people who stand about have I said it, that they may believe that Thou hast sent me." Here Christ appeals to the miracle as the unmistakable credential of His oft-asserted, divine mission. It was God's seal upon the divine revelation which He had brought them.

Other miracles He had already wrought. He had fed five thousand persons with five loaves of bread.<sup>11</sup> By a mere word He had healed a person who had for thirty-eight years been sick with an incurable disease.<sup>12</sup> He had given sight to the man that was born blind.<sup>13</sup> He had walked on the surface of the storm-tossed sea.<sup>14</sup> These miracles had produced their effect upon His disciples and upon the people and now He wished to deepen that effect by a still greater miracle, the rais-

<sup>10</sup> John xi. 41-45

<sup>11</sup> Mat. xiv. 17

<sup>12</sup> John v. 7.

<sup>13</sup> Mark x. 52

<sup>14</sup> Mat. xiv. 26



ing of Lazarus from the dead. Thus it was by the constant appeal to miracles that Christ drove home to the people the important truth of His divine mission and the divine character of the revelation which He was giving to them.

From all this it is evident then that miracles and prophecies are a seal, placed by God's own fingers upon the revelation brought to the world by Jesus Christ, certifying to its supernatural and divine character. In that communication from on high there are contained the imperishable truths which will guide all who believe and live them to the harbor of eternal life. In bequeathing that revelation to man there is mirrored the solicitude and the love of God who lights our way through the valley of life to the mountain peaks of eternity. Like a good shepherd, He hungers for the safety of all His sheep, and sends His only-begotten Son to shepherd us on the way lest any be lost. That deposit of divinely revealed truth is our cloud by day and our pillar of fire by night, and no one who follows it will perish in the darkness.

# CAN WE BELIEVE THE GOSPELS?

## Light from Historical Research

*But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel has been preached unto you.—I Peter i. 25.*

The Christian revelation comes to us through two channels, tradition and the New Testament. By tradition is not meant the haphazard handing down of a doctrine from father to son, from generation to generation. It means the word of God that was not committed to inspired writings, but was preserved in writings of historical value, in the preaching and practice of the Apostles, in the sacramental and liturgical life of the Church. The writings of the Fathers of the Church, reflecting the teachings and practices of the Apostles and disciples, are rich sources of tradition. They are, of course, supplementary to Holy Scripture.

The New Testament may be viewed from two aspects: (1) as a collection of ordinary historical documents; (2) as a group of divinely inspired books, having God as their principal Author. By inspiration is meant an influence breathed forth by God on the soul of the writer so that he expresses what God wishes him to express. It does not imply a divine communication of knowledge to the writer; it is not perceptible to the senses; it does not modify the style or manner of expression of the writer; it moves him to write certain truths which he already knows and safeguards him from error in his writing. The fact that certain writings are inspired was made known by the early Christian Church, divinely appointed to teach all the nations of the world.

We shall make no further reference to inspiration in this discussion: we shall treat the four Gospels from a human point of view and undertake to prove from reason that they are trustworthy, historical documents. That is all that is necessary to

establish the truth that they present in a reliable manner the revelation of Christ. While the Acts of the Apostles and Epistles throw additional light upon the contents of divine revelation, the Gospels present the good tidings in sufficient detail for our purposes. We shall accordingly focus our attention upon them, contenting ourselves with the general observation that the historic validity of the other books of the New Testament can be established by similar lines of reasoning and of evidence.

A work must be accepted as historical in the sense that it is a trustworthy record of past events if it meets these three conditions:

1. It must be genuine in the sense that it is the work of the author whose name it bears.

2. Its author must be reliable in the sense that he is well informed and truthful.

3. It must be intact in the sense that the text is substantially as it left the author's hand.

All these conditions, as we shall show, are fulfilled in the Gospels, the four fundamental books of the New Testament.

### How Written

Before presenting the evidence of the genuineness of the Gospels, we shall say a word about how the Gospels were written and copied. The entire New Testament was written in Greek with the single exception of the original of St. Matthew's Gospel. This was first composed in Aramaic, a language similar to Hebrew then current in Palestine, and the tongue which Christ Himself used. The Gospels, like the other books of the New Testament, were without punctuation and lacked the division into chapters and verses which we find in our modern printed Bibles. The original documents were written on papyrus, which served as "paper" at that time; the pages were gummed together into a long roll which was wound on two cylinders. Some idea of the bulkiness of their written material may be gained from the fact that the *Acts of the Apostles* numbering fifty pages in a modern Bible formed a roll about thirty feet long.

## The Synoptic Gospels

The first three Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, are written along similar lines and cover to a considerable extent the same general ground: they present more particularly the ministry of Christ in Galilee. The similarity or parallelism obtaining among the first three has caused them to be called the Synoptic Gospels. *Synopsis* is a Greek term for looking at and comparing two or more things together. The literary relationship of these Gospels to one another is a highly complicated technical question which has given rise to an enormous literature.

Numerous theories have been developed to explain the degree of dependence on one another, on a common oral tradition, and on other sources, but much uncertainty still clouds the picture. In general, critics, both conservative and radical, hold that the Synoptic Gospels were written somewhat earlier than the fourth Gospel, that of St. John. While in general agreement with the first three, the latter stresses for the most part the acts and utterances of Christ, which are omitted in the Synoptics, and treats mainly of His ministry in Judea.

If we consider the subject matter in the Synoptic Gospels as containing one hundred sections, the following percentages will show the amount of matter common and proper to each: <sup>1</sup>

	Proper	Common
Mark	7%	93%
Matthew	42%	58%
Luke	59%	41%
John	92%	8%

The percentages show that Mark has but little material, just about one-tenth, that is not contained in Matthew and Luke. The additional material in the first and third Gospels consists largely of the utterances of Jesus. In the fourth Gospel there are few passages which coincide with the narrative of the other three. In fact, aside from the account of the Passion, there are but three facts which St. John narrates in common with the other Evangelists—the feeding of the five

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Voste, J., *De Synopticonum*, 9

thousand, the storm on the Sea of Galilee, and the anointing of the Lord's feet by Mary. While the Synoptics depict the life of Christ chiefly in Galilee, St. John follows Him into Judea, and relates how Christ journeyed to Jerusalem for the prescribed feasts. The only satisfactory explanation for this is that St. John, writing last of all, toward the close of the first century, was familiar with the other Gospels, and purposely abstained from writing anew what was recorded in them.

### **The Genuineness of the Gospels**

*External Evidence.* That the Gospels are genuine is proven by external and internal evidence. The external evidence consists of the testimony of Christian and non-Christian writers of the first two centuries, showing that the Gospels were widely known, diligently studied and treated with the utmost reverence throughout the Christian world. Within one century following the death of the Apostles, the Gospels were in practical use in all the churches; wherever Christians assembled for the celebration of the Holy Mysteries, selections from the Gospels were read; they constituted the basis for the instructions and sermons preached to the worshippers.

Is it believable that the Apostles or their successors, who gave their lives to testify to the truth of all the teachings of the Gospels, would have permitted a series of forged documents to be palmed off as the inspired word of God? Is it credible that Jewish converts, so jealous of the authority of their own Old Testament, would have accepted without question such forgeries? Is it likely that the Gentiles, so many of whom were philosophers, scholars, and men of culture, would have accepted a Gospel which inculcated penance and self-denial in place of sensual gratification without previously assuring themselves of the genuineness of such a Gospel?

Is it possible that pagan philosophers and heretics, seeking to refute the Gospel teachings, would have neglected the simplest and easiest way of all, namely, that of showing that the Gospels themselves were forgeries? Are we to believe that the faithful, at a time when being a Christian involved the danger

of being martyred for one's belief, would all have been ready and willing to lay down their lives for the foisting of an impious fraud upon their children? To raise these questions is to answer them. Either the Gospels are genuine, authentic records of the life and teachings of Jesus or all Christianity is reduced to a series of ridiculous absurdities—a conclusion which does violence alike to nineteen hundred years of human history and to the dictates of human reason.

The existence and use of the Gospels in the earliest days of the Church is proven beyond a shadow of doubt by the *Didache*, the *Epistle of Barnabas*, *Ignatius*, *Clement of Rome*, *Polycarp*, the *Shepherd of Hermas*, *Papias of Hierapolis*, *Aristides*, the *Diatessaron of Tatian*, *Justin*, *Irenaeus*, the *Muratorian Fragment*, as well as by the writings of the heretics *Basilides*, *Valentine*, *Heracleon* and *Marcion*.

The custom of reading the Gospels at Divine Service is explicitly mentioned by *St. Justin Martyr* about the middle of the second century. In 441 the First Council of Orange ordered the Gospel to be read after the Epistle and before the Offertory for the benefit of the catechumens who had to leave before the Eucharistic service began. In the early Church the book of the Gospels was carried in procession to the altar before Mass; the liturgical rite of incensing the Gospel book is very ancient, the incense signifying the "good odor of Christ." For many centuries the faithful made the Sign of the Cross at the end as well as at the beginning of the Gospel; formerly all the clergy present were accustomed to kiss the book of the Gospels, while now only the celebrant does so, saying: "By the words of the Gospel may our sins be blotted out."

### **The Gospel of Matthew**

Let us now look at the external evidence of the authenticity of each of the Gospels. We shall begin with the first Gospel, that of *St. Matthew*. The classic text covering the authorship of the first Gospel as well as of the other three is from *St. Irenaeus*. Born in the first half of the second century in Asia Minor. Irenaeus was a widely traveled man, familiar with the territory from Asia Minor to France; his writings reveal an



inquiring type of mind and historical sense; he died about 202. He writes as follows: "Matthew published his Gospel among the Hebrews in their own language, while Peter and Paul were preaching and founding the Church in Rome. After their departure [death?] Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, also transmitted to us in writing those things which Peter had preached; and Luke, the attendant of Paul, recorded in a book the Gospel which Paul had declared. Afterwards John, the disciple of the Lord, who also reclined on his bosom, published his Gospel, while staying at Ephesus in Asia." <sup>2</sup>

Papias, Bishop of Hierapolis in Phrygia, a friend of Polycarp and the last disciple of St. John, testifies: "Matthew wrote the Oracles (Logia) of the Lord in the Hebrew language; but everyone interpreted them as best as he could." <sup>3</sup> By the term *Logia* (Oracles) Papias does not mean a mere collection of the utterances of the Saviour, but a work which is substantially identical with the Gospel of Matthew. The expressions, "Logia of the Lord" and "words and works of the Lord," are employed synonymously by Papias, as is evident from his remark about St. Luke. It was in this sense that St. Irenaeus understood him, as is clear from the quotation of his already presented.

Similar is the testimony of Origen, who died 232: "Matthew published the Gospel for the faithful from Judaism in the tongue of the Hebrews." <sup>4</sup> Eusebius records for all posterity the testimony of the Fathers and writers of the early Church concerning the authorship of the first Gospel in the following words: "Matthew, who had at first preached to the Hebrews, when he was about to go to other peoples, committed his Gospel to writing in his native tongue, and thus compensated those whom he was obliged to leave for the loss of his presence." <sup>5</sup>

St. Jerome, the great Biblical scholar of the early Church,

<sup>2</sup> Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* v.8, 2-4

<sup>3</sup> Eusebius, *op. cit.*, III, 39, 16: "Ματθαίος . . . Ἐβραϊδὶ διαλέκτῳ τὰ λόγια συνετάξατο."

<sup>4</sup> Eusebius, *op. cit.*, VI, 25, 4

<sup>5</sup> Eusebius, *op. cit.*, III, 24, 6: "Ματθαίος ἐν τοῖς Ἐβραίοις τῆ ἰδία διαλέκτῳ καὶ γραφὴν ἐξήνεγκεν."



likewise bears witness to this truth.<sup>6</sup> The Aramaic Gospel of Matthew was certainly written before the destruction of Jerusalem. While it is impossible to fix the precise date, the most probable one is A.D. 42—50, the writing being done in Palestine.

### **The Gospel of Mark**

Mark, the author of the second Gospel, is disclosed to us in the Scriptures as the cousin of Barnabas and the companion and disciple of Peter. Writing to the Colossians, Paul sends greetings from "Aristarchus, my fellow-prisoner, and from Mark, the cousin german of Barnabas, touching whom you have received commandments; if he come unto you, receive him; and Jesus, that is called Justus: who are of the circumcision: these only are my helpers in the kingdom of God, who have been a comfort to me."<sup>7</sup>

After the release of St. Paul, probably in 63, St. Peter claimed the services of Mark. It was to the home of Mark that St. Peter went after his own miraculous deliverance from prison. In his First Epistle he sends greetings from Rome in the name of his "son Mark."<sup>8</sup> Upon being imprisoned a second time in Rome, St. Paul desired to have the faithful companion of his first captivity with him again. "Take Mark," he writes to Timothy, "and bring him with thee (to Rome), for he is profitable to me for the ministry."<sup>9</sup> The early Fathers of the Church commonly refer to Mark as the disciple and interpreter of St. Peter.

The historical evidence of St. Mark's authorship of the second Gospel is overwhelming. The earliest witness is Papias, Bishop of Hierapolis and disciple of St. John. When Papias made inquiries of St. John about Mark, the aged Apostle replied: "Mark, Peter's interpreter, wrote down what the Lord had said or done—so far as he remembered it—accurately, but not in order. For he had neither heard the Lord nor followed Him, but later, as I said, he was a follower of Peter, who gave

<sup>6</sup> De Vir., Ill., iii

<sup>7</sup> Col. iv. 10-11

<sup>8</sup> 1 Pet. v. 13

<sup>9</sup> 2 Tim. iv. 11

such instructions as circumstances required, and not an orderly account of the Lord's words. Hence Mark was not at fault in writing some things simply as he remembered them. For his one care was to omit nothing that he had heard, and to speak truthfully thereon." <sup>10</sup>

This explicit testimony is further confirmed by St. Irenaeus, a disciple of St. Polycarp of Smyrna and later Bishop of Lyons, whom we have already quoted on this point. An interesting light is thrown on the origin of St. Mark's Gospel by Clement of Alexandria, head of the famous Catechetical School of that city toward the close of the second century. "When Peter had preached the word in Rome," he says, "many there besought Mark, who had followed him of old and remembered his words, to write down what he had said; accordingly Mark composed the Gospel, and gave it to those who had made the request of him, and Peter, knowing of it, neither hindered nor encouraged him." <sup>11</sup>

In his *Prologue to Matthew*, St. Jerome states that "Mark, the interpreter of Peter and the first bishop of Alexandria, who did not indeed see the Lord, narrated of the things which he had heard his master preach. . . . Asked to Rome by the brethren he wrote a short gospel." <sup>12</sup> In these words of St. Jerome there is mirrored the unanimous voice of the Fathers and writers of the early Church and of a tradition which goes back to the Apostolic period. Harnack places the composition of the Gospel in the period A.D. 65—70.

### The Gospel of Luke

The author of the third Gospel and of the *Acts of the Apostles* was a companion and disciple of St. Paul. Writing during his second imprisonment to Timothy, St. Paul says: "Luke alone is with me." Ancient tradition unanimously

<sup>10</sup> Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.*, iii, 39, 14

<sup>11</sup> Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.*, vi, 14

<sup>12</sup> "*Secundus Marcus, interpres apostoli Petri et alexandrinae ecclesiae primus episcopus, . . . ea quae magistrum audierat praedicantem iuxta fidem magis gestorum narravit quam ordinem . . . Rogatus Romae a fratribus breve scripsit evangelium.*"

ascribes this Gospel to the "beloved physician, Luke." St. Irenaeus thus bears witness: "Luke, the follower of Paul wrote down the latter's Gospel—preaching in a book."<sup>13</sup>

In the seventeenth century Ludovico Muratori discovered in the Ambrosian Library in Milan a canon or list of books of the New Testament. While its author is unknown, scholars are agreed that it goes back to about 170. The notes attached to each of the books are of the highest importance. Concerning the third Gospel, the canon, known as the Muratorian Canon, affirms: "Luke, the physician, composed a Gospel in the name of Paul and in accordance with his teaching." The authorship is further confirmed by Tertullian (*Adv. Marc.*, IV, 5) Origen, (*Hom. I, in Luc*). Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.*, I, 21), and by Jerome (*De Vir.* III, VII). Thus Origen mentions the Gospel of Luke among the four "which alone," says he, "are admitted without dispute by the universal Church."

The Gospel itself confirms in a striking manner the witness of tradition. Throughout this Gospel we see the hand of a disciple of St. Paul in style, in vocabulary—eighty-four words are found in Luke and Paul only—in sentence structure and especially in the conception of Christ's mission on earth. In the Epistles of Paul and in the Gospel of his disciple, the kingdom of God is world-wide. Jews and Gentiles, publicans and sinners, rich and poor, bond and free, are all called. "God will have all men to be saved, and to come to a knowledge of the truth,"<sup>14</sup> epitomizes the message of both Luke and Paul.

### **Internal Evidence of Genuineness of Synoptics**

Let us now glance at the internal evidence of the genuineness of the Synoptics. A careful study of the texts shows that the writers were Jews, and were contemporaries, or in close touch with contemporaries, of the events described. The texts contain nothing contrary to the laws, usages, institution, tastes, and customs of the time in which they were composed. They mirror the religious and social conditions then prevailing in Palestine with accuracy and precise detail.

<sup>13</sup> Eusebius, op. cit., v, 8, 3

<sup>14</sup> 1 Tim. ii. 4

The writers were Jews. The Gospel of St. Matthew was originally written in Aramaic, the language of the country where our Lord lived. The other three were written in the colloquial Greek of the period, but show marked traces of Hebrew idiom. Scholars are agreed that this popular form of the Greek language was used as a literary medium by Jews during the first century of the Christian era, but not subsequently. Furthermore the authors display no acquaintance with Greek philosophy or literature, but intimate familiarity with the religion and customs of the Jewish people.

That the authors were eye-witnesses of the events which they describe, or were in close touch with them, is evident from the vividness of the accounts and from the wealth of detail. Moreover their countless references to topography and to the political, social, and religious conditions of Palestine at the time of Christ, are flawless. Such an intimate close-up of those conditions, peculiarly complicated and transient, could not have been given by a stranger to Palestine or by a later writer.

For example, the government of Palestine at that time was administered by a curious medley of elements. There were Roman officials and native officials, while at the same time, the Sanhedrin, the great religious council of Jewish judges, still insisted on carrying out its functions, though this spelled almost incessant friction with the civil authorities. Roman money was used in commerce, taxes were paid in Greek money, while dues to the Temple were paid in Jewish money. This complicated pattern of Jewish, Grecian, and Roman elements is vividly portrayed in all its detail in the Gospels, thus stamping the authors as contemporaries of the events described.

“In the first three gospels,” observes Weinel, “so much local colouring attaches to the figure of Christ, and His native language, Aramaic, is everywhere so easily traced, that it would have been absolutely impossible for an Italian Greek of the second century to invent such a personality. Jesus is at home in Galilee and in real life, not at the Emperor’s court, not in Rome during the second century, and not in the brain of some Hellenistic poet. His native place is near the sea, where the fishermen let down their nets and on the mountains, where the

lilies blossom and the wind rustles through the corn in the evening, and the little birds in the thickets sing the praise of their Creator; there Jesus was at home, there He really lived.”<sup>15</sup>

### The Gospel of John

Let us turn now from the Synoptics to the fourth Gospel which differs so markedly in style and in content from the first three.

It has been called the “universal Gospel” because of its profound appeal to all humanity. It brings peace and comfort to the peasants in their humble cottages while at the same time it grips the minds of the greatest philosophers and theologians with its sublime conceptions. “I meditate on the Scriptures,” declared the poet Wordsworth, “especially the Gospel of St. John, and my creed rises up of itself with the ease of an exhilaration, yet a fabric of adamant.”

On the one hand, it stresses the relation of the individual to the Saviour and to God. On the other, it stresses institutional religion, with the establishment of a Church apart from the world, with emphasis on its unity, a training of the disciples to carry on their Master’s work of forgiveness and of shepherding His sheep with spiritual birth and nourishment provided by the sacrament. “The book is fighting,” observes von Hügel, “more consciously than the Synoptics for that inalienable idea of all deepest religion—unity even external and corporate among all believers.”<sup>16</sup>

In short, the fourth Gospel is a singular combination of simplicity of style and thought with penetrating philosophic insight and mystical depth. At times the author achieves heights of sublimity of thought and expression which would do justice to the greatest of speculative philosophers. The discourses of our Lord are all presented in a solemn, sustained and majestic style which is in sharp contrast to the simple,

<sup>15</sup> Weinel, *Jesus in the Nineteenth Century*, 1903

<sup>16</sup> “The Gospel According to St. John,” in *A New Commentary on Holy Scripture*, edited by Bishop Charles Gore, Macmillan Co., N. Y., 1928, p. 240



vivid manner of speech which the Synoptics picture Him as using with the plain people of Galilee.

Every thoughtful reader of the fourth Gospel finds three questions arising in his mind: (1) Why is this Gospel so different from the first three? (2) Is a Gospel of such philosophic depth and majesty of diction the work of the "beloved Disciple" or of a philosopher of a later generation? (3) Are the discourses of Jesus recorded as they were delivered by Him or do they mirror chiefly the author's own reflections upon the original words of Jesus? These are the questions which constitute the Johannine problem. Thousands of books have been written about it and numerous speculative theories have been brought forth. In the nineteenth century the pendulum swung to far-fetched extremes, with fancy substituted for fact. Under the stress of continued scientific research, the pendulum has now swung back to reinforce virtually all along the line the verdict of ancient Christian tradition. Dispassionate scholarly research enables us to provide satisfactory answers, we think, to the three preceding questions.

### **Keys to Understanding Differences**

The purpose, which the author of the fourth Gospel had in mind, is explicitly stated in the concluding verses of the twentieth chapter: "Many other signs also did Jesus in the sight of the disciples, that are not written in this book; but these are written, that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that, believing, ye may have life in his name." Since the author was familiar with the first three Gospels, he would naturally wish to record such "signs" as bore directly on the divine Sonship of Christ and to reproduce only such miracles and discourses as were not already presented by the Synoptics. This is the key to the understanding of the selection and organization of his material—all designed for the achievement of his distinctive end. For this reason he reproduces the miracles of the multiplication of the loaves and the walking upon the sea, since they form the introduction to the supremely important discourse on the Holy Eucharist which was omitted by other Evangelists.

So much for the difference in his subject matter. Now in regard to the difference of style in which the Saviour's discourses are presented. The Synoptics present Christ's ministry in Galilee. Here the simple, unlettered country folk required a simple, vivid discourse, abounding with concrete illustrations and parables. In Jerusalem, where the author of the fourth Gospel so frequently depicts Jesus, it was different. Here our Lord was constantly engaged in controversy with the theologically trained Scribes and Pharisees and doctors of the law. In this difference of audience is found the key to the understanding of the change of style, diction and content in His discourses.

Moreover it must be remembered that the author, faithful to his avowed purpose, chooses for the most part only such portions of our Lord's discourses as bear directly upon His divinity. Presenting this teaching to a Jerusalem audience, abounding with Scribes and Pharisees, would fittingly call for a sustained solemnity of language. The fourth Gospel, with its greater profundities of thought and its greater majesty of language, may be viewed as carrying the simple instructions of the Synoptics to a higher and more advanced stage. Christ's net must catch not only the simple peasants of Galilee but the proud Scribes and Pharisees of Jerusalem as well.

While the difference in the audiences to whom Christ speaks in the Synoptics and in the fourth Gospel explains to a certain extent the difference in form, language and style, it is to be admitted with all candor that the respective author's own style enters into and colors all that he writes. No one contends that the Master's discourses are reproduced in their entirety, word for word, in modern stenographic form. The brevity of the recorded sermons indicates that the leading ideas of much longer speeches are presented in greatly condensed form.

The literary canons of the time allowed much greater freedom in reporting a discourse than obtains today. "At that time," observes Cardinal Newman, "the third person was not so commonly used in history as now. When a reporter gives one of Gladstone's speeches, if he uses the first person, I understand not only the matter, but the style, the words to be Glad-



stone's; when the third, I consider the style, etc., to be the reporter's own. But in ancient times this distinction was not made. Thucydides uses the dramatic method, yet Spartan and Athenian speak in Thucydidean Greek. And so every clause of Our Lord's speeches in St. John may be St. John's Greek, yet every clause may contain the matter which Our Lord spoke in Aramaic. Again, St. John might and did select or condense (as being inspired for that purpose) the matter of Our Lord's discourses, as that with Nicodemus, and thereby the wording might be St. John's, though the matter might still be Our Lord's." <sup>17</sup>

### External Evidence of Authorship

The most ancient tradition of the Church ascribes the fourth Gospel to St. John the Apostle. Most impressive is the testimony of Irenaeus, a disciple of Polycarp, who was a disciple of St. John himself. "Then, (i.e., after the other three Gospels) John, the disciple of the Lord, who also leaned on His breast, himself published also a Gospel, while he was at Ephesus in Asia." <sup>18</sup> The testimony of Irenaeus is confirmed by Theophilus, Bishop of Antioch (168 A.D.), who quotes the fourth Gospel as "inspired Scripture" and ascribes it to John. <sup>19</sup>

Of unusual significance is the testimony of the learned Clement of Alexandria, who, writing at the end of the second century, tells us that "John, perceiving that the other Evangelists had set forth the human side of the Person of Jesus, at the instance of His disciples composed a spiritual Gospel." <sup>20</sup> He styles it spiritual (*πνευματικόν*) because of its insistence on the divine Sonship of Jesus. Similar is the testimony of Ignatius in numerous places, of Justin, <sup>21</sup> and of the ancient Muratorian Canon.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted by W. S. Reilly, *The Gospel According to St. John*, p.

xxxvi

<sup>18</sup> Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* v, 8, 2-4

<sup>19</sup> *Apology to Autolytus*, ii, 22

<sup>20</sup> Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* vi, 14, 7

<sup>21</sup> *I. Apol.* lxi, *Dial* lxxxviii

Back of these specific witnesses is a tradition dating from the second century and stretching from Antioch and Ephesus in the Eastern Mediterranean area over Carthage and Alexandria in Africa to Rome and Lyons in Europe that affirms the fourth Gospel to be the work of John the Apostle. All the early manuscripts and versions ascribe it to him. Among the witnesses to his authorship are men close to him personally or in time, while others are closely associated with the section of Asia Minor where the Gospel was written. It is the unanimous verdict of scholars that the Gospel was written *after* the destruction of Jerusalem, probably toward the close of the first century. Irenaeus reports that it was written at Ephesus.

### **Internal Evidence of Authorship**

The internal evidence strongly supports the external. The minute details reported by the writer and his complete familiarity with Jewish customs and the conditions then prevailing in Palestine stamp him as an eye-witness and a Jew of Palestine. The intimate details within the Apostolic College, especially the description of the Last Supper show that the writer must have been one of the Apostles. While the author writes in Greek, the mode of thought is that of a Palestinian Jew—as John the Apostle was and in some instances the construction is Aramaic.

The writer, moreover, manifests an intimate familiarity with Palestine. Thus he speaks of Cana as Cana in Galilee (ii. 1; iv. 46) to distinguish it from another village of the same name in near-by Syria. He shows a first-hand acquaintance with the villages around the lake of Genesareth, the size of the lake, the mountain that borders it on the northeast (vi. 3, 15). He is aware that Ennon near Salim was a place which afforded plenty of water for John the Baptist to use in baptizing (iii. 23). This very place was rediscovered in 1892.

These and many other details which the writer mentions in casual, offhand manner show he is speaking as an eyewitness of the events which he describes. "As one reads the Gospel and the accompanying Epistle," observes Professor Charles Harris,

“the conviction becomes irresistible that the author in all sincerity lays the greatest stress upon his having been an eye-witness of what he records; and this implies that he was one of the innermost circle of disciples, and therefore an Apostle, and also John the son of Zebedee.”<sup>22</sup>

The frequent reference to an anonymous disciple or “the disciple whom Jesus loved,” “who rested on His breast,” leads to the inference that the author of the Gospel is this disciple. The correctness of that inference is explicitly confirmed by the author in the second to the last verse in his Gospel, wherein he states: “This is that disciple who giveth testimony of these things, and hath written these things; and we know that his testimony is true.” Then frankly admitting that his narrative gives only a partial account of the life of Christ, the author ends his Gospel: “But there are also many other things which Jesus did; which, if they were written everyone, the world itself, I think, would not be able to contain the books that should be written.”

The external and internal evidence, harmonizing so perfectly, constitute solid historical ground for the conclusion that the fourth Gospel is the work of St. John the Apostle. Such is the unbroken tradition of the Church from the earliest days down to the present time. That traditional belief has been powerfully reinforced and substantiated by the findings of modern Biblical research.

In closing this discussion of the authenticity of the Gospels, we present the impressive testimony of three Scriptural scholars. The first is Dr. J. P. Arendzen, who writes: “The Gospels rank among the best attested works of the Graeco-Roman world. They are better attested than the works of Pindar, or Xenophon, or Horace; of Pliny, Polybius, or Suetonius; of Terence or Plautus, Sophocles or Euripides, or of a score of others, the genuineness and authenticity of whose writings are cheerfully accepted by every classical scholar in the world. For instance: Is there a Greek historian more unquestionably received, more absolutely believed, more respected as an utterly

<sup>22</sup> *A New Commentary on Holy Scripture*, edited by Bishop Charles Gore, Macmillan Co., N. Y., p. 76

reliable source of information than Thucydides? Yet, the first allusion to Thucydides as author of his works occurs some two hundred and twenty years after his death, in the pages of another historian called Polybius!"<sup>23</sup>

Similar is the conclusion reached by Renan: "In fine, I admit as authentic the four canonical Gospels. All, according to my view, go back to the first century."<sup>24</sup> Of special significance is the conclusion reached after a lifetime of research by Adolph Harnack of Berlin, whose outstanding scholarship is acknowledged by all: "All competent men must finally admit that the chronological order, according to which tradition has arranged the old monuments and records of Christianity, is quite accurate in its main lines, and consequently compels the historian to reject as false all hypotheses that have been devised in opposition to that order."<sup>25</sup>

In this connection it is well to point out that, while we have presented the historical evidence, overwhelming in its massive cogency, of the authenticity of the four Gospels, this would not strictly be required to establish their historic validity as channels of the Christian revelation. All that the latter would actually demand would be that the writers, whoever they were, were accepted by their contemporaries as competent and trustworthy reporters of the teachings of Christ and of the Apostolic Church. No student of the Scriptures, no matter how liberal or radical in his views, will hesitate in acknowledging the competency and the trustworthiness of the authors of the four Gospels. Their acceptance at so early a date by all the colonies of the infant Church is eloquent and convincing testimony that the writers were recognized as competent and trustworthy authorities on the life and teachings of Christ. As a matter of fact, however, we are able, as has been shown, to do more—to establish the authors of the Gospels to be none other than the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

<sup>23</sup> *The Gospels—Fact, Myth, or Legend?* Sands, London, 1923, p. 27

<sup>24</sup> Devivier-Sasia, *Christian Apologetics*, J. F. Watner, Inc., N. Y., 1924, Vol. I, p. 345

<sup>25</sup> Devivier-Sasia, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 340

## Well Informed and Truthful

Having demonstrated the authenticity of the Gospels, we come now to a consideration of the second condition necessary for the trustworthiness of a record of past events, namely, that the writer be reliable in the sense that he is well informed and truthful. It is obvious that since two of the Evangelists, Matthew and John, were Apostles, they were admirably situated to present eye-witness testimony concerning the life and teachings of their Master. The other two, Mark and Luke, were companions and disciples of the Apostles.

Over a long period Mark was the disciple and secretary of Peter, putting down in writing the teachings of his master. He was likewise in close touch with Paul at various intervals. He was with both Peter and Paul in Rome before their death. He was converted at Jerusalem in the first decade of the Church and was the cousin and companion of Barnabas. Mark's mother was a prominent member of the infant Church in Jerusalem. In her home Peter found refuge after he was released from prison in the year 42-43 A.D. Traveling with Peter, Paul, and later with Barnabas alone, Mark was in intimate personal touch with the Christian colonies in Jerusalem, Palestine, Rome and Asia Minor.

Luke was the companion and disciple of Paul. The latter was converted not later than 35 A.D. and made five visits to Jerusalem where he conferred with Peter and James. Intimately associated with Barnabas, Paul was in the closest personal touch with many of the earliest Christian communities, upon whom he left, by his preaching and writing, a lasting mark. In addition to his association with Paul, Luke also had contact with Mark at Rome. About the year 57, he dwelt in Jerusalem with Mnason, a disciple of our Lord, and had association there with the Apostle James. For a time he lodged in Caesarea with Philip, one of the seven who were chosen deacons in 33 A.D. It is significant that Luke mentions explicitly in the beginning of his Gospel that he was in touch with those "who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word" and that he "diligently attained to all things from the beginning."



It is evident, then, that the authors of the four Gospels were either eyewitnesses themselves or were in close and prolonged association with eyewitnesses. They wrote for a generation, hundreds and thousands of whom had seen and heard Christ in the flesh, and who would have quickly pounced upon any inaccuracy in the narrative. The Gospels are not therefore the crystallization of late traditions: they are the records of events which they either witnessed or learned from witnesses. Is there any ancient work of secular history which rests so solidly upon the concordant testimony of so many competent eyewitnesses and contemporaries as do the Gospels? History knows of none. No one disputes that Caesar was the author of the Commentaries on the Gallic Wars. Yet what is the evidence for it? Merely two scant references about a hundred years later in the writings of Plutarch and Suetonius.

The authors of the Gospels not only knew the facts but they reported them truthfully as well. They could have had no motive to engage in a conspiracy to foist a monstrous falsehood upon mankind. Men do not endure hardship, suffer persecution, and risk death for the spreading of a lie that brings them nothing but hardship in this world and eternal damnation in the next. Their holy lives and their miracles testify to their divine ambassadorship and to their truthfulness in recording the deeds and utterances of their divine Master. That the writers of the Gospels were sincere and truthful is denied by no Scriptural scholar, radical, liberal or conservative.

That the Evangelists wrote accurately and truthfully can be verified moreover by reference to contemporary historical documents. The findings of modern historical, archeological, and ethnological research have enabled us to reconstruct with amazing accuracy and vividness the life, customs, laws and culture of the peoples among whom Christ lived and taught. That period represented the flood time of the great Greco-Roman civilization. A mass of historical and literary writings of that period have come down to us and have been studied with meticulous care and accuracy. So vivid is the light which modern scientific research has thrown upon the life and customs

of Palestine at the time of our Lord that we probably know more about its minute details than we do of the life and culture of our own American colonies prior to the Revolution.

The findings of research corroborate all along the line the records of events mentioned in the Gospels. It is true that very slight discrepancies appear at some times in the Gospel narratives. But these can be harmonized by careful study. If the Evangelists had been impostors, however, conspiring to deceive mankind, they would have avoided even the appearance of such divergences.

Then there is the character of Christ. That character is so original, so noble, so lovable, so tragic, so surpassingly beautiful, that viewed merely as an artistic creation, it was beyond the inventive capacity of men such as the Evangelists. That character ran, moreover, against the grain of their preconceived image of the Messiah. The Jews of their day—and the Evangelists were Jews—thought of the Messiah as coming to restore the kingdom of David: they pictured that kingdom, not as a spiritual kingdom, but as a temporal one. How different is the Christ of the Gospels from the Messiah of their expectation. Sticking to the facts of His life, the Evangelists are compelled to portray a character radically different in many respects from that which they had cherished in their Messianic expectations. They portray a Christ who teaches meekness, humility, the love even of one's enemies, and who leads a life of poverty and humiliation culminating in the ignominious death upon Calvary's Cross.

This truth has been strikingly put by J. J. Rousseau. "Consider," he says, "the gentleness of Jesus, the purity of His morals, the persuasiveness of His teaching. How lofty His principles! What wisdom in His words! How opportune, frank and direct His answers! How can the Gospel history be an invention? My friend, forgeries are not of this kind, and the acts of Socrates, which no one doubts, are not so well attested as the acts of Christ. Besides, this only increases the difficulty. Far more inconceivable is it that several men should have combined to fabricate this book than that there should have been one living original whom they described. No Jewish



author could have fabricated the tone or moral teaching of the Evangelists. So powerful, overwhelming, and inimitable is the impress of truth stamped upon the gospel, that its inventor would be a greater marvel than its hero.”<sup>26</sup>

It is the character of Christ, as portrayed in the Gospels, that stamps them in the judgment of Harnack with a seal of indisputable authenticity. Listen to his testimony, both eloquent and profound: “Jesus Christ had been their life-experience, and in Him they had found the Messiah. They were convinced that God had made Him Wisdom and Righteousness, Sanctification and Redemption. No hope but found its security in Him, no exalted thought but found in Him a living reality. Hence they brought to Him all they possessed. He was all that the human mind could conceive as most High. Within two generations of His death all has been said of Him whatsoever men are capable of predicating of any one. Yea, even more, they actually experienced Him and knew Him as the Everlasting One, as the Lord of the World and as the energizing principle of the life of their own souls. . . . Only now after Christ had come, were they certain of the Resurrection and of Eternal Life, and thus the sorrows of this world disappeared as a cloud is dissolved by the sun, and the remainder of their earthly life was light as day. This set of facts ushers the story of the Gospel into this world, and is at the same time the highest thing and the most unique in kind which meets us in the history of Christian doctrine. This great fact is as it were its seal, and makes this history different from the history of any other of the world’s religions.”<sup>26a</sup>

### The Integrity of the Gospels

We come now to consider the integrity of the Gospels, in the sense that they have come down to us substantially intact. We begin by pointing out the deep attachment of the early Christians to the Gospel texts. They were read aloud in the churches, sung in the liturgies, committed to memory, and treasured in their hearts; holding fast to the four Gospels, the

<sup>26</sup> *Emile*, book 4.

<sup>26a</sup> Arendzen, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

infant Church rejected all others. Gospels ascribed to St. Peter, St. James, and St. Thomas were in circulation in the sub-apostolic age, but were suppressed as spurious.

With jealous care, the early Christians guarded their spiritual patrimony. Any attempt to introduce a substantial change in the text on the part of Christian, Jew, heretic, or pagan would have provoked instant and violent protests; even trifling changes aroused opposition and brought rebukes. Thus Sozomenes tells us that Bishop Spiridion openly rebuked a fellow-bishop who, in quoting a text, substituted another word having the same meaning as the original, but which appeared more elegant.

It was with difficulty that Pope Damasus prevailed upon St. Jerome to revise the Latin version of the Bible, because of the latter's fear that he would be regarded by the people as a corrupter of the text, should they find some alterations.<sup>27</sup> That St. Jerome's fear was not unfounded was evidenced by a letter which St. Augustine wrote to him. "A bishop of our province," wrote the saint, "having begun to read your translation of the Bible in his church, came to a passage of the prophet Jonas, which you have translated differently from what was known to the memory and ears of every one, and sung during many generations. Thereupon a great tumult arose among the people, caused principally by the Greeks, who called out that the text was falsified. . . . The bishop, not to remain without a flock, after this great danger, was obliged to correct the passage as if it were a fault."<sup>28</sup> What verbal change aroused this protest? St. Jerome had used the word "ivy" for "gourd." The incident illustrates the jealous tenacity with which the early Christians clung to the exact text of the Scriptures.

We do not wish to imply from the foregoing, however, that in the many intervening centuries in which the Gospels have been copied thousands of times and translated into all known languages, that different readings called *variants*, have not appeared. What has happened to all ancient manuscripts, which have been copied hundreds of times, has likewise hap-

<sup>27</sup> Praefat. ad Evang. ad Dam.

<sup>28</sup> Epist. 71, ad Hieron.

pened to the Scriptures. Different readings of the works of Horace have furnished material for three large volumes. No book has been copied, translated, annotated, so frequently as the book of the Gospels; it was inevitable that slight divergencies in the thousands of copies would appear in the course of the centuries. Were we to expect God to work a continuous series of miracles to preserve the Gospels from a certain liability to changes in the phraseology of the text, when such changes do not alter the substantial meaning or message of the sacred books? By no means. Man has the power to detect and correct his own mistakes: textual criticism by carefully studying the variants of the texts can generally eliminate the defective reading and thus restore the primitive text. In other words, the substantial tenor of the sacred text has not been altered and the good tidings of divine revelation have come down to us in all their essential fullness, even though doubt or obscurity may cloud here or there a part of the phraseology or passage in the text.

Let us look a little more closely into the abundant material by means of which Scriptural scholars arrive at the primitive text of the Gospel manuscripts and demonstrate their integrity. The first and most striking aspect of all the Gospel manuscripts, which have come down to us, is their substantial uniformity. There are nearly thirteen hundred manuscripts in Greek alone, besides many in other languages. Among the earliest and most important are the Vatican manuscript at Rome and the Sinaitic at Leningrad, both of the fourth century; the Alexandrian at London and the Codex *Ephraemi rescriptus* at Paris, of the fifth century; and the Codex Bezae at Cambridge, England, of the fifth or sixth century. As the Gospels were probably written on papyrus which is perishable, the originals must have worn out from frequent use in the early Church. The use of copies in the absence of the originals is true likewise in regard to the great classics of ancient times. Thus the earliest manuscript of Vergil, in the Vatican Library, dates from the fourth century A.D., while the earliest copy of Homer's *Iliad*, in the Ambrosian Library at Milan, dates back only to the fifth century.

The extant manuscripts of the Gospels agree as to text and carry us back to the fourth century. This is about three centuries after the originals were written. How are we to bridge that gap? We can do so by going to the translations of the Gospels in other languages, the Syriac and the Latin versions dating back to the second century. Upon examining these, we find all in substantial agreement.

Moreover we can further check the text of the Gospel manuscripts through actual quotations therefrom in the writings of the Fathers of the infant Church. So numerous are these quotations that if all the manuscripts and translations of the Gospels were lost, it would be possible to reconstruct virtually all the text of the Gospels from the vast multitude of quotations in the early Patristic literature. The writings of Origen, Clement of Alexandria, Irenaeus, Tertullian and Cyrian, who were active in the second half of the second century and in the first half of the third, constitute a mine of direct quotations. For instance, in the writings of Irenaeus, we find besides the names of the four Evangelists, 234 texts quoted from Matthew, 13 from Mark, 125 from Luke, and 94 from John. In addition, his writings present an analysis of the Gospel of Luke which corresponds exactly with the third Gospel as it has come down to us. In the writings of Tertullian, who was active in Proconsular Africa, we encounter not less than 925 texts taken from the Gospels.

The discourses and writings of Justin, Papias, and Marcion, active around the middle of the second century, abound in quotations. We find additional quotations in still earlier Christian literature, such as the Second Epistle of Clement, the Epistle of Barnabas, the so-called Gospel of Peter, the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, the Pastor of Hermes, and the writings of SS. Polycarp, Ignatius, and Clement, which date back from the middle of the second century into the fourth quarter of the first.

The manuscripts, translations, and quotations from the writers and Fathers of the early Church are in textual agreement and constitute such an impressive bulk of converging and cumulative evidence as to bring conviction to all. Scholars of

different schools of thought, radical, liberal, and conservative, find themselves in agreement, except in regard to a rare phrase, or sentence, or passage, which material would constitute only about one to two per cent of the entire text. Indeed, in regard to the whole New Testament, Alfred Durand states that "no serious doubts exist except concerning about one-sixtieth of the contents of the New Testament. Perhaps even the number of passages of which the authenticity has not yet had a sufficient critical demonstration does not exceed twelve, at least as regards substantial alterations." <sup>29</sup>

We may conclude this discussion of the integrity of the Gospels with the observation of the great Scriptural scholar, Cardinal Wiseman: "Though every available source of information has been resorted to: though all the interpretations and explanations of scriptural texts given by the Fathers of the first ten centuries, as well as the versions of nearly all languages, the Arabian, the Syrian, the Coptic, the Armenian, the Ethiopian, have been consulted, with the purpose of ascertaining the true meaning of those texts; though the manuscript copies of all countries and of all times, from the sixteenth century up to the third, have been diligently scrutinized by a multitude of learned scholars, anxious to seize on their hidden treasures; though many critics, after having exhausted the riches of Western lore, traveled to distant countries in search of new testimonies; though they fathomed, as it is said of Scholz and Sebastiani, the depths of Mount Athos and the libraries of the desert of Egypt and Syria, yet, notwithstanding all these scrupulous researches of past records, they have not been able to discover one single version or copy, duly authenticated, that might throw even the shadow of a doubt on any passage, that, before all these minute investigations, was held as certain and decisive in favor of this or that part of sacred doctrine." <sup>30</sup> Hence we are forced to conclude that the historical value of the Gospels cannot be questioned by anyone familiar with the evidence.

<sup>29</sup> *Catholic Encyclopedia*, "New Testament," p. 534

<sup>30</sup> *Oriental Studies*, Lecture 10. Quoted by Devivier-Sasia, op. cit., pp. 344-345

Viewed simply as historical documents, the Gospels present in a trustworthy and reliable manner the revelation of Jesus Christ to mankind. They should be read and meditated upon daily by all who wish to grow in spiritual insight and in holiness of life. They should be revered and loved as constituting not only the heart of the greatest book in the world but also a most important part of the spiritual patrimony of mankind.



## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

### I

1. How does God's goodness shine forth in revelation?
2. What is meant by a natural revelation? By a supernatural revelation?
3. How may revelation be supernatural in manner but not in substance? Illustrate.
4. Why is supernatural revelation possible? Illustrate.
5. Who is the bearer of supernatural revelation to mankind?
6. What were the credentials of Christ's Messiahship?
7. Christ's revelation is supported by what?
8. What does the Vatican Council declare?
9. How may a revelation be known?
10. How would you define a prophecy?

## II

1. Is a prophecy as conclusive a mark of divine authority as a miracle? Why?
2. Mention some of the prophecies of the Old Testament concerning Christ.
3. State the prophecies mentioned in the New Testament concerning Christ.
4. How would you define a miracle? Illustrate.
5. Why are miracles possible to God?
6. Why does the question of miracles boil down to a matter of evidence?
7. Outline the reasoning advanced by some scientists to outlaw the possibility of miracles.
8. State the fallacy in such reasoning and give illustrations.
9. Does a miracle destroy a law of nature? Why?
10. What do scientists usually mean when they speak of the laws of nature?

## III

1. Criticize that concept of the scientists.

2. The uniformity of the laws of nature has its ultimate reason where?
3. How may the laws of nature be said to be the objectified thought of God?
4. State Hume's objection to miracles.
5. Indicate the fallacy in his argument. Illustrate your answer.
6. What did Dr. Carrel declare to be the scientific attitude toward the question of miracles?
7. What evidence is offered in the *Annals of Lourdes*?
8. Did Christ appeal to miracles? How?
9. Why was Lazarus restored to life?
10. Mention some of the other miracles of Christ.
11. How do miracles and prophecies prove the supernatural and divine character of revelation?

## Gospels—Part II

### I

1. The Christian revelation comes through what two channels?
2. What is meant by tradition?

3. The New Testament may be viewed from what two aspects?
4. What is meant by inspiration?
5. To be accepted as historical and trustworthy a work must meet what three conditions?
6. Describe the manner in which the Gospels were written.
7. What is meant by the synoptic Gospels?
8. Give the percentages showing the amount of matter (1) common and (2) proper to each Gospel.
9. What is the external evidence that the Gospels are genuine?
10. Prove the use of the Gospels in the earliest days of the Church.
11. Cite the external evidence of the authenticity of St. Matthew's Gospel.
12. Who were the associates of the Evangelist Mark?

## II

1. Cite the historical evidence of St. Mark's authorship of the second Gospel.
2. The Evangelist Luke was the disciple of whom?

3. What is the Muratorian Canon and explain its significance.
4. What is the internal evidence of the genuineness of the Synoptics?
5. In what language was the Gospel of St. Matthew originally written? The other three Gospels?
6. Prove that the authors of the Gospels were eye-witnesses of the evidence described or were in close touch with such happenings.
7. Why has the Gospel of John been termed "the universal Gospel"?
8. The fourth Gospel combines what?
9. What three questions are raised by St. John's Gospel?
10. What was the chief purpose of John in writing his Gospel?
11. Why is his style so different from the other three Evangelists?
12. Did the literary canons of the time allow greater freedom in reporting than those of today? Illustrate.

### III

1. What is the external evidence of authorship of the fourth Gospel?

2. What is the internal evidence of such authorship?
3. What light is thrown upon the identity of the author in the concluding verses of the fourth Gospel?
4. What is the testimony of Dr. J. P. Arendzen on this point?
5. What is the testimony of Harnack and its significance?
6. What would be sufficient to establish the historic validity of Gospels as channels of Christian Revelation?
7. How were Matthew and John well situated as eye-witnesses? Why were Mark and Luke likewise well qualified to give testimony?
8. Prove that the authors of the Gospels spoke truthfully.
9. What is the significance of the slight discrepancies found in the Gospel narratives?
10. Describe the character of Christ.
11. What does Rousseau say about Christ?
12. Give the substance of Harnack's testimony and explain its significance.



1. What is meant by the integrity of the Gospels?
2. What evidence can you cite to establish the integrity of the Gospels?
3. State the incident which Augustine related to St. Jerome.
4. What are "variants" and are they found among the Gospel manuscripts?
5. How do Scriptural scholars arrive at the primitive text of the Gospel manuscripts?
6. The extant manuscripts of the Gospels carry us back to what century?
7. How do we bridge the gap of three centuries?
8. What constitutes converging and cumulative evidence of the integrity of the Gospels?
9. Give the substance of Cardinal Wiseman's testimony.
10. Viewed simply as historical documents the Gospels present a trustworthy revelation of what?
11. Why should the Gospels be read frequently and revered greatly?





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