

The MOST Theological Collection:

Critical Basis for Apologetics

Introduction

There are some special slants to the attacks on the possibility of proving that the Church has a teaching commission.

1) One of them, which is in a way old and yet new is the claim that since Jesus died about 30 AD, and the first Gospel, Mark, was written about 40 years later, there is the implication that few facts could be had about Him. Further, Matthew and Luke wrote much later, between 80 and 90 or even 100 A.D.

2) "There is no such a thing as an uninterpreted report: subjectivity gets into everything. So we cannot trust the Gospels."

3) There were many other miracle workers, especially Apollonius of Tyana. Thus an ad from Prometheus books for *Gospel Fictions*, by Randall Helms, says: "In the first century...there appeared...a remarkable religious leader who taught the worship of one true God and declared that religion meant not the sacrifice of beasts but the practice of charity and piety and the shunning of hatred and enmity. He was said to have worked miracles of goodness, casting out demons, healing the sick, raising the dead. His exemplary life led some of his followers to claim he was a son of God, though he called himself the son of a man. Accused of sedition against Rome, he was arrested. After his death, his disciples claimed he had risen from the dead. His name was Apollonius of Tyana, he died about 98 A.D."

I - Preliminary Phase

1. *We begin with the Gospels:* But we do not look upon them as sacred or inspired - that remains to be shown. We look on them merely as ancient documents. We put them through the usual sort of checks that are used on ancient documents in general.

2. *Textual Transmission:* Has the text come down substantially the same as the original? Yes, the oldest manuscripts are much closer in time to the originals than those of pagan works, e.g., Julius Caesar. The differences, as seen in a critical text, are mostly of no importance, and surely of none for the points we will need.

3. *What Pattern of Writing (genre) did the writers aim to produce?* Greeks, Romans and Hebrews all tried to write down facts plus interpretations. The Gospels clearly intend to follow in the ancient tradition of the Hebrews, so as to give the facts about Jesus, plus interpretations.

4. *Can we tell what is fact and what is interpretation?*

a) We distinguish simple from complex facts. Complex facts are entwined with an ancient culture which might be hard or impossible to reconstruct. (Really, not hard to reconstruct in the case of the Jews).

b) We distinguish within the area of simple facts some things that are simply picked up by eyes and ears so that there is no room for serious distortion. It is often said: "There is no such thing as an uninterpreted report". This is true in many cases, but not in all. For example, if someone sees a leper stand before Jesus asking to be healed, and Jesus said: "I will it. Be cleansed", there is no room for any substantial alteration by subjectivity, and only pure fakery would make it up out of nothing. Even the enemies of Jesus in ancient times did not deny He worked cures and did exorcisms: they attributed them to satan or to magic. Nor were his miracles really like those of some pagans, e.g., Apollonius of Tyana, if one reads the life of Apollonius by Philostratus (for example, he once wrote a threatening letter to a demon - instead of commanding it to go out. Apollonius never worked a miracle with a tie to the claim, about which we will speak below.) On other parallels, cf. L.J. McGinley, "Hellenic Analogies and the Typical Healing Narrative: in *Theol. Studies* 4 (1943) 385-419.

Further the miracles of Jesus are in continuity with modern miracles checked to the hilt by modern science at Lourdes, the host of Lanciano, the Guadalupe picture. At Lourdes, many cures are done when the Blessed Sacrament passes, e.g., Madame Biré who in 1908 regained sight instantly, though she had atrophy of the papilla. She could see even with the withered nerve, as checked by a team of Doctors at once after the cure. (No other denomination believes in an *abiding presence of Jesus in the Eucharist*.)

Historicists say each person and event is so close to unique that we have little in common with the past - this would undermine all history. But it is not true that everything is so unique: many sciences: medicine, psychology, sociology, etc., give us broad generalizations on people, even if some exceptions. And if we stick to the simple facts as described above, no problem with the six points we will need, as we will see below.

5. *Did the writers have access to the facts?* Usual estimates even by leftist scholars are these: Mark written a bit before 70 AD. Matthew and Luke 80-90 A.D (Really likely to be much earlier. Chief arguments for 80-90 date: a) Luke speaks of an army going to surround Jerusalem in a siege, of 70 A.D. But that was just normal in ancient sieges. b) Matthew especially shows no trace of the debates Paul had over freedom from the law, while Matthew has Jesus saying He came to fulfill it. - But Paul insists on keeping law too, in 1 Cor 6.9-10 and Gal 5.16-25 [Paul says we are free from law only to counter Judaizers, he means keeping law does not earn salvation, Christ is sufficient.] John around 100 AD. At these periods, here are sources:

a) *First Epistle of Clement to Corinth:* Dated about 95 AD. Writer says Peter and Paul were of his own generation. This is obvious, Peter and Paul died around 66, Clement became Pope in either 88 or 92 AD. Much information about Christianity contained in this.

b) *Quadratus:* Earliest Greek apologist, who wrote about 123 AD. He says that in his day, some were still alive who had been cured by Jesus or raised from the dead by Him. This need not be as late as 123 of course, but it would surely cover the period 80-90 when many think Matthew and Luke wrote.

c) *St. Polycarp,* born 70 AD, died a martyr in 156. St. Irenaeus who heard Polycarp when young says Polycarp reported much he had heard from the Apostle John, who lived at Ephesus, not far from Smyrna where Polycarp was Bishop. Polycarp wrote a letter to Philippi, which we have, with much information on Christianity. Probable date is 110 AD. He sent with the letter Epistles of St. Ignatius of Antioch, also with much on Christianity - see next item:

d) *St. Ignatius of Antioch:* Was sent to Rome to be eaten by the beasts, around 107-110. On the way sent 7 letters to various churches. We have them. Much data on basic Christianity in them. Ignatius was Bishop of Antioch, where Peter first settled after leaving Jerusalem. There Christians were first called Christians. Paul had used Antioch as a base of operations to which he often returned. So much data was to be had there.

e) Papias Bishop of Hierapolis c. 130 and also the Antimarcionite Prologues, late 2nd century, and Irenaeus, same period, all report that Mark wrote from the preaching of Peter, the prime eyewitness. Even Martin Hengel of the university of Tübingen, long a center of far-left opinions, believes this report.

f) Jesus died around 30 or 33 A.D. A person then in his/her teens would be about 65 by the year 80 A.D. the period when some think Matthew and Luke wrote. They say Mark wrote a bit before 70. So there would be persons around who had heard Jesus at that time.

6. *The Gospel writers believed their eternity depended on the truth about Jesus.* So many of them died for that as did thousands of other Christians.

Objection: Muslim terrorists also die for their faith. Reply: To die for one's faith proves only *sincerity*. One also needs *facts*. *We have just shown the Gospel writers could get the facts.* Muslims do not even try to give a reasoned demonstration such as we are giving - nor does any other religious body try it.

II -The Six Points

As we go through these points, please notice that each one easily fits the requirement of being free of entanglement with an ancient culture, and also is such that the senses can readily pick the things up with no distortion unless it would be deliberate - which is ruled out by the concern of the writers for their own eternity.

1. *There was a man named Jesus.* This is obvious from all over the Gospels, and even from secular history. Tacitus, the famous pagan historian in his *Annals* 15.44 reports Christ was executed by Pontius Pilate during the reign of Tiberius.

2. *He claimed He was sent from God as a sort of messenger.* Again this is obvious from His whole preaching, in which He often demanded faith as a condition for a cure: Mk 2:1-12; 5:21-43; Mt 8:5-13; and 9:27-29. NJBC on p.1371 asserts: "Consistently, Jesus is presented as refusing to work miracles to show off his power) Mat 4:5-7; Lk 23: 6-12; Mark 8:11-13. Mt 12:38-42; Mark 15: 31-32. "We reply: In Mt 4:5-7 He refused to do as the devil asked in the temptations; in Lk 23-6-12 He refuses to gratify the curiosity of Herod; in Mk 8:11-13 the Pharisees asked a sign to tempt Him they had already seen so many. In Mk 15:31-32 the high priests ask Him to come down from the cross. Are the claims stupid or deliberately fraudulent?"

3. *He did enough to prove, this by miracles done with a connection between the claim and the cure.* For example, He forgave the sins of the paralytic in Mark 2, and when His enemies called it blasphemy He said: "Which is easier, to say your sins are forgiven or to say, take your bed and walk". He did the one to prove He did the other. God who is truth, cannot provide the power for a miracle if it is used to prove a lie.

4. *In the crowds He had a smaller group to whom He spoke more.* This is merely what we would expect. The Apostles were that group.

5. *He told them to continue His work, His teaching.* We would really expect this too.

6. *He promised God would protect that teaching:* "He who hears you hears me, He who rejects you rejects Him who sent me." Again, given that He is a messenger sent by God on a mission, we would think it likely He would provide such protection. Not strange then if He says He will do it. (He did say this, Lk 10.16, to the 72 at first, but He continued in time, clarifying His intent, by telling only Peter: "Whatever you shall bind on earth, shall be bound also in Heaven." In Mt 18:18 He said to, seemingly, the Apostles. That it was for them only becomes clear from Mt. 28:16-29. This is confirmed by Acts 1:15-26 where a replacement for one of the Twelve is chosen, Matthias, and by Acts 5:12-13 (no one else dared join self to the Apostles) and by the early Church: Clement I claims authority over Corinth etc. This gradual clarification on a trajectory was to be expected as a part of His gradual self-revelation.

Some try to devalue the promise, "He who hears you, hears me," saying He was just identifying with them, as He said He will do with the poor at the judgment. We reply: We notice the point of identification. He identifies with the poor as poor, but with the Apostles He identifies with them as teachers. Cf. Mt 18.17: "If he will not hear the Church, let him be to you as a heathen and a publican."

So we see before us a group, actually a church, commissioned to teach by a messenger sent from God, promised God's protection on the teaching. Then it is not only intellectually permissible, but inescapable to believe what the group, church teaches. It can then do many things, can look back on the documents and say they are inspired - the only way to do this. Protestants have failed in all tries to prove which books are inspired, (e.g., Luther said if a book preaches justification by faith strongly it is inspired. But he did not prove that is the standard, and he could write such a book and so could I, and it would not be inspired). They can say the messenger is divine, etc. This group can then tell us, with divine protection, that there is a Pope, and say what authority he has.

So we have a bypass around the worries of the critics, questioning so many things. With just these 6 very simple things we have assurance.

Even the Eastern Church admitted the powers of the Pope as shown by the letter of Clement to Corinth, the statements of Eastern Councils of Ephesus, Chalcedon, and Constantinople.

Final Capsule

The Gospels were written by persons who had access to the facts, and whose sincerity is evident from their concern for their own eternity. The facts they learned and passed on were simple in that they were not entwined with an ancient culture, and were things readily picked up directly by eyes and ears in such a way that there was not room for bias to affect the report, e.g., if a leper stands before Jesus asking to be healed, and Jesus says: I will it. Be healed.

The Gospels show that a group was commissioned to teach by a messenger sent from God, and promised divine protection: He who hears you, hears me.

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Catholic Apologetics Today: Answers to Modern Critics:

"Chapter 3: Wonders Never Cease"

"It is impossible to use electric light and wireless ... and at the same time to believe in the New Testament world of spirits and miracles."⁵ The writer is one we have met before, R. Bultmann, founder of New Testament Form Criticism. Modern man is so sophisticated and smart, according to Bultmann, that he can no longer accept miracles.

He explains, "A miracle-i.e. an act of God-is not visible or ascertainable like worldly events."⁶ In fact, "The conception of miracles as ascertainable processes ... makes belief in miracles (or rather *superstition*) susceptible to the *justifiable* criticisms of science."⁷ Yet, on the other hand, he insists, "When worldly happenings are viewed as a closed series... there is certainly no room for any act of God. But this is just the paradox of faith: it understands an ascertainable event in its context in nature and history as the act of God ... This is the only genuine faith in miracles."⁸

If the reader finds the above somewhat confusing, he is probably grasping Bultmann correctly. What Bultmann really says is that modern man is too smart to accept miracles. If *science* cannot explain something, it would be *superstition* to call it a miracle. But something science *can* explain can be a miracle.

It is impossible to be more perverse. Really, Bultmann is showing the kind of faith we rejected in our opening chapter, a faith based on nothing at all, a faith as solid as a cloud.

But we, on the other hand, insist on being rational. When we begin our study of the Gospels, we will find accounts of miracles, so it is good right now to ask: Can we believe in miracles?

The answer is: No. For we do not have to *believe* in miracles-rather, we see and accept as a miracle something that has no other conceivable explanation but the hand of God.

Did such things ever happen? The easiest way to find the answer is to ask: Do they still happen? Let us proceed, therefore, and see.

Madame Biré, a French woman, became blind in February 1908. Medical examination showed blindness was due to atrophy of the papilla; in other words, the optic nerve was withered at the point where it enters the eye. Obviously, there was organic reason for her blindness. No one can see with a withered optic nerve. She was taken to Lourdes, the great shrine at which it is reported the Blessed Virgin appeared in 1858. On August 5, 1908, Madame Biré received Holy Communion at the Grotto of Lourdes. At 10:15 a.m., the priest who was carrying the Blessed Sacrament in procession passed beside her. Madame Biré at once saw the statue of the Blessed Virgin.

She was taken at once to the permanent Medical Bureau at Lourdes where doctors are always available. In fact, any doctor, even an atheist, is permitted to go there and examine cases to his heart's content. (One of these, Dr. Alexis Carrel, came to scoff, but left a convert.⁹) Dr. Lainey, an oculist, examined her. What he found was even more astonishing than a miraculous cure: She could read even the smallest letters of a newspaper, but *the optic nerve was still withered!* A month later another eye examination by three specialists found that the nerve had been restored.¹⁰ No possible suggestion nor any natural means can make a dead, withered optic nerve functional!¹¹

In passing, we note that a case such as this is not only a miracle, it also proves the presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, for it was when the Host passed her that she was cured instantly. It also proves the claims of the Church with regard to the Eucharist, that It is the real Presence of Christ-His Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity.

We often hear claims of cures by faith healers and similar persons. There is no careful checking on these; but some fakes have been detected. The supposed cures are generally of maladies open to the power of suggestion. The mind can do some remarkable things. But no one would dare to claim suggestion could restore a withered nerve.

Some have proposed that Jesus in His earthly life worked miracles by suggestion, or even, that He had found some marvelous natural means not known to others. The claims are false. First, He said He did things by the power of God. If it were merely by natural means, He would have been a liar and a fake. But His whole life, His lofty moral tone and His teaching contradict that. And this cure of Madame Biré-worked by His presence in the Blessed Sacrament-could not have been accomplished by natural means of any kind. For no natural process can make a nerve operative while still withered. Our next cases, too, are far beyond any natural process, as we shall see.

Around 700 A.D., in the church of St. Legonziano in Lanciano, Italy, a priest was celebrating Mass. He began to doubt the Presence of Jesus in the Host and chalice. Then it happened. Most of the Host changed to flesh (the center kept the appearance of bread), and the Liquid in the chalice became five clots of blood. The treasure was guarded over the centuries by monks.

Finally, in November 1970, the authorities of the Church gave permission for a study. A team of biological and medical scientists gathered. They took small samples of the flesh and the blood and put them through a full battery of tests. They found that the flesh really was human flesh, a part of the heart, and the clots were human blood. The proteins in the blood were the normal ratio contained in fresh blood. Other features of the chemistry were normal. The type of the blood in the clots was the same as the blood in the flesh. Yet, no trace of any preservative or embalming agent was found. Obviously, flesh and blood would ordinarily begin to decay in a day or two-yet after so many centuries, and right up to today, they have not decayed.¹²

So now we ask Bultmann: What natural law can change bread and wine into human flesh and blood and keep them without decay, without preservatives, for centuries, so that every scientific test can verify they really are human flesh and blood?

Here is one more case. On December 9, 1531, an Aztec Indian, Juan Diego, claimed he had seen the Virgin Mary in the countryside near Mexico City. He told his Bishop, who was quite properly skeptical. The Bishop told him that if it happened again to ask the Blessed Virgin for a sign. On December 12 she came again, and Juan did ask for a sign. She told him to pick some roses growing nearby, which ordinarily would not be found there in December. He put them into his cloak and went to see the Bishop. But the Bishop did not look at the flowers; he kept staring at the cloak. Juan had not noticed, but the cloak now held a large full color image of the apparition Juan had seen.

On November 14, 1921 a powerful bomb hidden in a vase of flowers was placed before the image. The bomb exploded and did extensive damage, heavily twisting a large metal crucifix (which I myself have seen), but it did not harm the image or the glass in front of it!

In 1929, Alfonso Marcue Gonzales was studying the image, and to his surprise he saw a picture inside of the eyes. In 1956, two ophthalmologists, Dr. Javier Toroello-Bueno and Dr. Rafael Torija-Lavoignet confirmed that there is indeed an image in the eyes. This image follows the pattern of the Purkinje-Sanson Law: there should be a threefold reflection in a normal eye, two right side up, one upside down. More recently, Dr. Jose Aste-Tonsmann, using computer-enhanced images, found that at least four figures can be

seen, one seeming to be an Indian peasant with hands lifted in prayer. Dr. Aste believes it is Juan Diego. The image shows also a bearded Spaniard.

Further, extensive studies made by infrared and ultraviolet photography and by microchemical analysis of fibers and pigments prove that some trimmings have been added to the picture by human hands, but that the basic picture is totally inexplicable by science; e.g., no brush marks, no sizing on the cloth, no cracking of pigments, etc. The cloth itself should have decayed in 25 to 30 years from the time of the apparition.¹³

As we said, we could quite rationally claim that these events, which we do not *believe* but rather *see* for ourselves, not only prove the existence of a God, but prove the truth of the Catholic Church, which alone proclaims the Real Presence in the Eucharist and the dignity of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

However, without in any way denying that these marvels do prove these things, we are going to put them aside, and show still another way of establishing the solid ground for faith.

END NOTES

5 Note in Context:

KM 5.

6 Note in Context:

KM 197.

7 Note in Context:

KM 199, italics added.

8 Note in Context:

Ibid.

9 Note in Context:

Alexis Carrel, *Man the Unknown*, N.Y., 1935 and *The Voyage to Lourdes*, N.Y., 1950.

10 Note in Context:

Cf. P. Flood, ed., *New Problems in Medical Ethics*, Newman, Westminster, 1953, pp. 187-88.

11 Note in Context:

Cf. Ruth Cranston, *The Miracle of Lourdes*, McGraw-Hill, N.Y. 1955, and Dr. F. de Grandmaison de Bruno, *Twenty Cures at Lourdes Medically Discussed*, tr. H. Bevenotand & L. Izard, Herder, St. Louis, 1912; and L. Elliott, "A Pilgrimage to Lourdes," in *Reader's Digest*, April, 1982, pp. 65-69.

12 Note in Context:

Cf. Bruno Sammaciccia, *The Eucharistic Miracle of Lanciano, Italy*, tr. A. E. Burakowski, F. J. Kuba, Stella Maris Books, Ft. Worth, Tex.

13 Note in Context:

Cf. *A Handbook on Guadalupe*, Marytown Press, Kenosha, Wis. 1974; *The Dark Virgin* (a documentary anthology) ed. C. Demarest and C. Taylor, Cole Taylor Inc., Freeport, Maine and N.Y., 1956; Simone Watson, *Cult of Our Lady of Guadalupe, a Historical Study*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville and Hildebrando Garya, *Madonna of the Americas*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, 1954. For the latest studies, see Jody B. Smith, *The Image of Guadalupe*, Doubleday, N.Y., 1983.

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