

Church could get along without the Acts, valuable as that book is by its fresh account of the early activity of the Apostles, their martyrdom, and the hopeful confidence with which they preached the Gospel until it was carried to Rome itself. It would continue to maintain itself and efficiently propagate its message, if the Epistles of Paul were destroyed, valuable as they are for the statement and proof of Christian doctrine. But without the Gospel records, the Church could not well maintain its present faith and activities. They are the main building, to which, without disparagement, the other apostolic writings may be regarded as occupying, say, the position of oriel windows and observatory. For the person of Christ and for the events of His life, for His discourses and miracles, we depend upon their narratives. These are the pillars and ground of a living faith. Origen, speaking of the Gospel of John, calls the Gospels the crown of the sacred writings, as John is the crown of the Gospels. It is not without significance that in a discovery such as has just been made on Mt. Sinai, the Lewis Codex, the portion of the Scripture preserved should be Matthew, Mark, John, and Luke (according to its order).

The Gospels accredit themselves chiefly and finally by their contents; all the external evidences together shrink in weight before this one. The reason Coleridge gives in the "Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit" for the superhuman origin of the Scripture, "that they found him out at greater depths of his being than any other writings," applies in the highest degree to the evidence of the Gospels. Their message must win the assent of the reader by its own intrinsic value. The exact names of the authors is a matter of importance. The date of their composition, at a period when eye-witnesses of the events of Christ's life were still living, is of very great importance. But that which is of preeminent importance is that the contents of these documents, like a light carried in the darkness, accredit themselves by their own unmistakable excellency, and as superior to the phosphorescent lights which may glisten here and there among the philosophies and literatures of the world. Here, in a profound sense, the entrance of God's Word giveth light to the soul. There is a self-evidencing power in the sunlight to the eye. Charts of astronomy are put aside after the stars themselves have arisen. The eye knows of itself that what it sees are the stars. The Gospels make an immediate appeal to the soul of man. They shine independent of everything else. Other arguments for the truth of Christianity, such as its victories in the world, are subsidiary to this primary evidence. The Gospel narrative itself, with its portraiture of Christ, makes the first and decisive appeal to faith. It responds to the cry of the soul searching after divine truth and longing for the throb of the heart of the Father in heaven. After we have studied the other proofs and have toiled through morasses and thickets of doubt, we return to the simple stories and the unadorned parables of the Gospel, and find in them a