

## THE LAYMAN AND HIS BIBLE

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Note to the reader: Different readers will come to this series of articles with different backgrounds. If your particular experience has been of one sort, you will recognize at once many matters discussed by the writer. But if you have never heard or read many of the things said against the Bible, you might be inclined to feel that we were looking for objections to answer. Not at all! The very opposite is the true state of affairs. The world is flooded with such objections as we will discuss. Such ideas, questioning the historical trustworthiness of the Bible, prevail very widely in Protestantism. It is usually—but quite wrongly—assumed that the deciding voice in questions about the Bible should be the judgment of specialists and scholars. Most people will accept unhesitatingly a statement about the Bible if they are told that 95% of the world's leading authorities support it. The word of the specialist is accepted as final by most men. The main point of this series of articles is to deny that the scholar has the right to be final judge, and to assert, putting it positively, that the layman—not the clergyman, or scholar, or theological professor—the layman, let it be repeated, is the rightful and final judge of the questions at issue in controversies over the Bible's historical trustworthiness. What, then, is the position of the specialist and scholar? Is it therefore nothing because it is not everything? By no means! The famous reply of Robert South is always in point. When reminded by a Puritan that God did not need human learning, he replied: "Still less has He need of human ignorance." With this sentiment we may stand in fullest agreement. The issue is not in the least between ignorance and knowledge. The question is very different. It is this: whether the layman has a right to settle certain questions, or whether he must bow to the authority of scholars. The function of the specialist is not cramped in any way by a refusal to accept his verdicts. The function of the specialist is only made ministerial and advisory. The specialist becomes the servant and the advisor of the layman, who makes the final decision.

This way of looking at things will seem strange to you, dear Reader, at first. But if you will be patient with me, I hope to make it seem quite reasonable and just. A common example will help to make clear what has just been stated. When a man is accused of a crime, who decides whether he is guilty of the crime as charged, or not guilty? Does the judge decide? Not at all! A jury of twelve men, the man's own peers, settles the question. The judge is quite a specialist, but he does not decide the case. Perhaps he could settle it better than the jurymen, but the rules for fair trial do not allow him to settle the defendant's fate. He presides in court as an umpire; he explains the rules of a fair trial to the jury. One slightest attempt, or anything that even looks like such on his part, to influence the jury can be made the basis for a claim of mistrial. Is this in any way derogatory to the judge's reputation for fairness and competence and learning? Does it take away from him his right to form his own opinion? Not at all! It only means that all his integrity and learning are devoted not to settling the case, but to securing a fair presentation of both sides so that a jury (who legally considered are laymen) can make an intelligent decision. Is this a guarantee against error? Certainly not! It is only a rule designed to give fair play to any person charged with a crime. The rule is this: that if the prosecutor cannot convince twelve of the defendant's equals beyond a reasonable doubt that the accused did commit the crime with which he is charged, then no man can punish him for that crime. Are mistakes made? Plenty of them! But, right or wrong, the jury settles the defendant's fate. This system is not infallible, but it is the fairest to the accused that the world has devised. He is not guilty until convincingly proved guilty to a dozen of his equals after they have heard in full both sides of the case. And not only is the part played by the professional judge severely restricted to the work of umpiring, explaining, and clarifying the rules of the trial, but you will perhaps have noted that the rules of a fair trial put every "specialist" who testifies into the same strictly subordinate, ministerial, and advisory capacity. For example, in the recent famous Hiss-Chambers perjury trial, several experts were allowed to testify.

Two psychologists and a typewriter expert all testified before the jury. What did the judge direct the jury to do? He said, "Expert opinion is purely advisory and you may reject it entirely if in your judgment the reasons given for it are not convincing or sound. The determination rests with you—not with the expert." (Judge Goddard in charge to jury.) Now the work of the typewriter expert is an extremely exact science. Yet this expert's opinion was subordinated as strictly as that of the psychologists. His opinion was no evidence as to matters of fact. It was strictly advisory. The jury was completely to disregard his opinion, even obligated to do so, if they felt any question about the foundation of it or about his method of arriving at it. From this example the reasons for our earlier statement should be transparently clear. The testimony as to facts about the life, works, and words of Jesus, as well as the attestation of other facts in the Bible, are just as much testimony as the assertions of Hiss or Chambers. And what have we then asserted? Is it any more than this: that when question is raised as to the validity and credentials of a Biblical book and its assertions, it should be accorded the same fair hearing and trial accorded to a common thief, spy, or murderer, indeed to every kind of moral leper? In the case of all such, the rule of fairness is that a jury of twelve of the man's fellowmen must be convinced by direct testimony, establishing definite acts as having been actually committed. For example, this would seem to be a fair thing to require from those who hold the accepted critical views on our four Gospels, which are in vogue at the present time. We will later discuss such views of the Gospels. For the present our only concern is to point out that fair treatment of those Gospels would require us not to reject their credentials for authenticity and trustworthy witness to real events except only on the basis of the most direct and solid sort of evidence against them, but never on the basis of mere expert opinion in place of real evidence as to the matters of fact involved. But suppose someone attempts to show us that there are definite breaches of consistency or of truth in the stories about Jesus which the different Gospels contain. If such inconsistencies can be shown, do they establish fraud? Perhaps yes! Perhaps no! It all depends on their character. Again we have reached a point where a word of explanation is necessary in order to secure fair

treatment of a witness. Strict truth in main facts is normally accompanied by disagreement among witnesses on collateral circumstances. Too close agreement on minute details is normally regarded as the very opposite of a sign of truth. It makes us suspicious. Usually it means that there has been collusion among witnesses, that they have agreed on a made-up story and are sticking to it. On the other hand, when witnesses are questioned separately disagreements can and do arise which are of such a serious and fundamental character as to show that one party or another is surely lying or mistaken. Both cannot be telling the real truth. Now the whole question in regard to the Bible is: are any disagreements to be found of such a character as to impeach its right to be believed till proved guilty. If there are, let them be specified. Let them be named so that the layman on the jury may be able to form a judgment. With regard to such "inconsistencies" my own experience (if I may speak for myself) is, that most of the alleged inconsistencies supposedly to be found in the Bible are not really inconsistencies at all. A very few others appear to me to be real inconsistencies at present. Of these, none warrants any condemnation of any Biblical document or writer as untrustworthy! Moreover, further examination and new insight may well reduce most of them to perfect consistency with whatever they now seem to clash. A further obligation of a layman in judging these matters is to insure a fair trial for the Bible by a constant watchfulness in any discussion as to where the burden of proof lies. This is a very easy matter to find out. Is the speaker or writer assuming the Bible is false until proved true; or does he assume it is true until proved false? This, let it be repeated, is a very simple matter to watch. Assume the Bible is false, it is practically impossible to prove anything in it is true! But, assume it is true till proved false and the difficulty is reversed. It then becomes almost impossible to prove that anything in it is false or inconsistent. The only question is: what is a fair trial? A man is accused of murder. What is fair in that case? The Gospels are accused by some scholars of not even purporting to give accurate narrations of the facts about Jesus' words and deeds. What is a fair trial for the Gospels? It would seem to me (and I would hope, to everyone)

that what is fairness to a murderer on trial should at least be accorded to those who are accused of not being apostles or their followers. What has just been said is of the utmost importance. I confess freely, for example, that I once accepted without reservation the "results" of "higher criticism" of the New Testament and the Old. What changed my mind? Simply the fact that it was pointed out to me that all unconsciously I had assumed the Bible was false until proved true. The method of trial had been that of a witch-trial under Roman law. I then went over the ground again with the method of trial by jury under English law as the rule for fair trial, that is, assuming my defendant was innocent until proved guilty. The result was to reverse my former opinions. And this is, I think, a matter which laymen can handle very well. Let them be very blunt. Let them ask: "Where is the Bible proved false? Where is the bill of indictments!" For if this is the only fair way to hang a murderer, why is it not the only fair way to impeach one who speaks in the name of an apostle or in the name of a prophet? One other matter, very important to notice in a fair trial, is this: one must go straight to the main issue, cutting through the jungle of words. Judge Goddard told the Hiss jurors that the testimonies and opinions were hopelessly contradictory. They could never be reconciled. They, the jurors, had only one question to decide. Was Hiss telling the truth, or was he lying? Then the judge came to a distinction so important that the jurors asked to have it explained again. They must be convinced, he told them, beyond a probable doubt, but not beyond a possible doubt, in order to vote for a verdict of guilty. Notice that difference between a probable doubt and a possible doubt. That applies to laymen judging the Gospels, for example, or any other part of the Bible. Is he who speaks to you in the name of Matthew or of John telling the truth or is he lying? Does the evidence convince you, not beyond a possible doubt, but beyond a probable doubt, that he is speaking truth or falsehood? In matters of historical fact, mathematical certainty is never possible. Therefore, it is ridiculous to ask men to be sure of anything beyond a possible doubt. But men can be certain enough of things in order to invest their money in them, yes, even to risk their lives for them. They can be sure beyond a probable doubt. To ask

for more than this in regard to the Bible is to ask for a mathematical kind of certainty which is strictly impossible here, or anywhere else, in regard to matters of fact. Therefore, the layman has only to keep composed. Always, a cool head! Then, he must cut straight through the jungle of words and arguments to the main issue. And the main issue, for example, will always turn out to be a question such as this: Have I an amount of doubt amounting to a probable doubt of the truth of the ascriptions of authorship, say of the first Gospel to Matthew, or of the fourth to John?

Now, let us suppose a layman formed a resolution to look into such questions about the Bible. Would the subject be too technical for him to handle without a knowledge of the original languages? I do not think so. Without Hebrew and Greek plenty of laymen could get at the "jugular vein" of many a book or argument. The hardest task would be to wade through the "gobbledygook," the usual high-flown technical language which is found in every field of special study. And although this task of reducing things to plain language might be hard, it would be most rewarding, for it would cut to the ground a vast number of question-begging expressions which cloud issues at many points.

Indeed, I can imagine many a layman with an engineer's or accountant's or lawyer's mind having a great deal of satisfaction as he pinned down the current coin of scholarly discussion in order to try to extract some definite meaning from it. I would encourage a layman to do a little browsing in these subjects. He should not feel he has no right to do so. Neither should he feel that the clergy are always sufficiently trained to answer his questions for him. As a matter of fact, most of the clergy would be quite ready to concede that they had only the slightest brush with critical scholarship: for instance, a single term's course in Old Testament Introduction; the same in New Testament Introduction. This, the majority of ministers will tell you, formed the driest part of their seminary training. And very few will be found who have made a serious study of the subject. Most of them live by an impression they assume to be correct, taking it for granted that the authorities they trusted gave

them the truth. If I am not greatly mistaken, the average minister will be glad to confess that he has turned from this unedifying sort of study in order to use his time finding a constructive message to give to his people. I should judge that laymen, studying these questions, would find very few ministers who will make a claim to possess any expert knowledge on these subjects. Indeed, an interested layman might greatly stimulate a minister to a reawakened interest in these subjects and so help lead him to see that he need have no fear to believe and to preach the whole faith once delivered to the saints. Actually, the constitution of our Church lays a special responsibility on the Elders to study and to exert a helpful and instructive influence on the clergy. This confidence in the laymen is, I feel, not only well-placed, it is a peculiar glory of our system. And why should the layman bother with these questions? One reason! The higher criticism has dissolved almost the whole Bible. This is largely kept under cover. I will try to bring much of it into the open in the articles which are to follow this one.

## II. CAN WE BELIEVE THE GOSPELS?

The conclusions of the so-called "higher criticism" in regard to the books of the New Testament leave only a few letters of Paul as genuine and authentic and historically reliable sources. In regard to the Gospels, those negative conclusions are very widely received. But, if such conclusions are accepted, the most devastating consequences follow unavoidably. These consequences are often silently ignored, or speciously glossed over. Every reader will have sensed from the preceding article that the writer does not think there is anything to be afraid of in these widely accepted conclusions despite their popularity, because they do not hold up under examination. Remembering, then, that they may turn out to be merely an illusion, let us look at them quite fearlessly. From the very first day that the first three Gospels were written and handed over to others to be read, until the time of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, no one, so far as we know, either in the churches or out of them questioned that the first Gospel was written by Matthew, one of the twelve apostles, the second by Mark, Peter's interpreter, who gave the accounts about Jesus as Peter gave them and the third by a companion of St. Paul, Luke the beloved physician. This has to be remembered in order to keep things in perspective: for seventeen hundred years the authenticity and genuineness of these books went unquestioned. On the basis, further, of a belief that Matthew, Mark, Peter and Luke had given us our records, the contents of these books were treated as historically reliable. Then what happened? Some professors in Germany began to draw a conclusion from the fact that certain accounts of the same events were very similar in all three Gospels. What did this fact mean? This, they said, could only mean that one of these Gospels must have been copied by the writers of the other two, so close were these accounts in their wordings. This conclusion was called the "hypothesis of use" (Benutzungs-hypothese in the German). This line of argument has swept most scholars off their feet. With the fall of the "experts" have fallen also the "amateurs." We will take the

measure of this hypothesis later, in a proper place. Only, in passing, friend reader, take note of it. It is accepted almost everywhere and all conclusions of scholars concerning the Gospels are built on it. I, personally, do not think this hypothesis has any validity. If, however, I did believe that the Use-hypothesis in regard to the first three Gospels was correct, then it would follow at once that I would have to believe that the value of two of the three Gospels as independent witnesses to the life, words, and deeds of Jesus, would be destroyed. Why? Because the writers of two of those Gospels copied from the third. The two copiers then were not independent witnesses at all. The faith rested then for 1700 years on three pillars. Accept the Use-hypothesis, all is changed. Only one is left. Which one is left? For the past 90 years, Mark has been widely regarded as the one which was copied by the writers of Matthew and Luke. This one pillar that is left is the Gospel which contains no story of the supernatural conception of Jesus—no virgin birth. This one pillar that is left, further, is the Gospel in which the last twelve verses are missing in the two oldest and most highly regarded Greek manuscripts. What does this mean? It means that Mark, as commonly considered, records no resurrection appearance and no ascension of Jesus to heaven, because scholarly opinion regards the two manuscripts from which the last verses are missing as superior to all the others which have them. (This question, by the way, about the ending of Mark is one of the most complicated and confused that the writer has ever encountered.) This leaves the one pillar of the original three which is without a virgin birth of Christ, and also, if we should ever accept the rather common view, without a resurrection appearance. This is where we are left, if we accept the conclusions that are generally held with a very imperfect realization of their devastating consequences. The worst, however, dear reader, is yet to come! From the foregoing, you might perhaps have thought that the substance of the body of Mark's Gospel would be left. Not so. In two books that have never been translated into English, two German scholars named Wrede and Schmidt cut Mark to pieces. They separated story by story what they considered to be the work of the "editor" from the materials the editor used. This would

ordinarily have been regarded as a prank, except for the fact that a group of scholars known as "Form Critics" accepted this work as valid and planted an interpretation of the Gospels built on it in nearly every theological seminary in the Protestant world. This has been done in the short space of the last thirty years. Here is a key point for the layman to remember. The most popular and prevalent interpretation of the first three Gospels today is based entirely, openly, yes, avowedly, on the conclusion that Mark is without historical value for gaining an historical account of our Lord's public activity. Here is where Form Criticism comes in. "The sources are bankrupt," says Form Criticism; "let me help you try to pin down the sources behind the sources." I have been told many times (and in rather a high-handed way, too) that I did not understand Form Criticism. Doubtless every layman will sometime or other be told the same. But this is ridiculous. The idea is very simple, though it is very often missed. Form Criticism has a very appealing and constructive side. It offers an explanation of the origin of the materials in the first three Gospels based on the needs of the early Church for preaching, teaching, story-telling, etc. We may well let this appealing side of the theory influence our thinking. But we must not forget that Form Criticism is explaining the origin of the materials in our Gospels on the assumption that they are in large part legend and myth. And of what is left, nothing is considered certainly valid historical information. This assumption carries the whole point of the theory which is so popular today. It must never be left out of account as if it were unimportant. Assuming that all the miracles of Jesus never happened, how did the stories of them arise? That is the question Form Criticism tries to answer. Assuming that Jesus never thought of Himself as Christ or as Lord, how did this idea come into the early Church and into its Gospels? Only let the books of Bultmann and Dibelius be read with a view to determining how much they think is really historical in the Gospels, and a reader will see at once that only a few pitiful scraps are left. Many laymen will be able to do this. Open the book. Lay your hand on the jugular vein of the argument. Hold it by the throat until it tells you what is historical and what is not. I would encourage any layman to

have a try at this. He will not need to know any Greek in order to do what is proposed.

How far this school of thought goes towards eliminating completely the historical foundations of Christianity in the Gospel records may be realized from the following words of Bultmann: By means of this critical analysis an oldest layer is determined, though it can be marked off with only relative exactness. Naturally we have no assurance that the exact words of this oldest layer were really spoken by Jesus. By the tradition, Jesus is named as bearer of this message: according to overwhelming probability he really was. Should it prove otherwise, that does not change in any way what is said in the record.

One must be very clear on what the above words say. In plain language it is this: the thing which really counts is the words in the oldest layer of tradition. If we cannot be sure they are accurately recorded and accurately transmitted to us, that is just too bad. If Jesus never spoke them, that does not matter. Probably He did. But if not, so what? I have not dealt fully with this subject at all. I have not even attempted to describe its logic. I have stuck strictly to business in hand, aiming only to state clearly for a reader the real pinch of so-called scientific, literary study of the Gospels on the old faith. That real pinch is this: the historical foundation in the Gospel writings for a knowledge of what Jesus was and did and said is almost totally demolished. Is there any answer to this? I believe so, and in another article to follow it will be presented. At present let me invite you to a consideration of the position the Church of today is in because a large part of it accepts the devastating conclusions of such modern scholarship. If you accept the kind of conclusions described above, then you must carry on without the Gospels as an historical basis for your faith. You must muddle through with a patchwork Christianity pieced together from the remnants left you by the New Testament scholar or scholars you happen to trust. This is what much that is called new-orthodoxy (though not all) actually does. It

says, the resurrection is true as doctrine that is, as teaching it is true: it is a true idea), but not as historically witnessed fact. It says, again, that Jesus was the Son of God incarnate, God made man: the incarnation faith is true. It seems to me, though in this I may be wrong, that in order to be fair to the new orthodoxy, this element of their faith, which they salvage, must be recognized as solid—as far as it goes. God was in Christ, who was a real historical figure, the Son of God made man from the hour of His conception. (I think they believe this even when in the same breath they deny the virgin birth!) The value of this solid core of revelation is, however, it seems to me, almost totally canceled. For when we ask about Jesus, what He said, did, thought, the lack of historically trustworthy witness causes them to say that we cannot be sure of anything except that He was born and died on the cross. These men insist upon the reality of revelation. It is real, historical! But the contents of it, of which we can have historical assurance, they reduce practically to nothing. Sometimes we will read in such books the highest praise of Jesus. The real question, you will see however, is not glowing praise of Jesus, but: What do we know about Jesus to praise? One book I remember reading praised Jesus, in the words of a Gospel, saying: "He spake as never man spake." Good! But the same book tells us that we cannot be sure of even a single word that Jesus spoke. Now no one wishes to appear to be stuffy, but the question comes to mind: How can any one claim that Jesus spoke as never man spoke, if we are not sure of anything He ever said? The insistence on a real, historical revelation, a real, historical incarnation, is very good. For this we may praise the neo-orthodox school. But why lock the barn after the horse is stolen? Or does it make sense to insist to the death that God was revealed to man in Christ, when we also admit that Jesus, who was that Christ, is one whose personality, words, actions, can never be recovered? He is and must remain an unknown quantity. Behold, the man, Christ Jesus, God and man—an unknown quantity in every detail of His speech, and acts, and personality!

### III—Can We Believe the Gospels?

Well, Mr. Layman, you may judge of all this for yourself. Read the books of these men. You will find generalizations about love, about obedience to God, about the dangers of legalism. But to assert outright that Jesus, the Lord, said so and so—that is impossible for them. Why? Because, if they are true to their profession that they accept the results of so-called scientific criticism of the Gospels, they are not permitted to say that Jesus said this, or that, or such and such a thing. Rather, they must always say, "If the tradition is correct," or "If we may assume that this part of the Gospel is trustworthy," or "If the primitive Christian community in Palestine, or the pre-Pauline Hellenistic community has not modified this saying out of all recognition, or has not invented it and placed it in the mouth of Jesus as if He had really said it," then, we may perhaps say that Jesus said the words in question. This, even when it is not expressly said, is their real meaning. The fog is really pretty thick here, through which the Sun of Righteousness tries to send forth His light and His truth to His waiting people, is it not? The above has been briefly sketched so that a layman can have a clue as to what to watch for when he reads much of the theological literature of the present day. Many people are still scolding about "liberalism" of the old Harnack-Fosdick kind. Their efforts are wasted. That brand of liberalism is dead and gone. It is a mistake to spend energy knocking down such a straw man, while failing to realize that a new threat has arisen. It is a new form of Christianity which asserts that the doctrines are true, which uses all the language of the old orthodoxy, but which denies that the four Gospels can furnish us with historical facts about Jesus on which full reliance can be placed. Compared with the old liberalism, the new orthodoxy is extremely subtle. The old liberalism hardly fooled anyone. The new orthodoxy can fool almost everyone. For about ten years it fooled me completely until the suggestion was made to me to look for the historical basis of this "improved" form of the faith. And behold, it was not in the Gospels of the New Testament. According to Paul, "If

Christ hath not been raised, then is our preaching vain, your faith also is vain." According to this new orthodoxy, "Even if God did not raise Christ from the dead in the way the New Testament states, the doctrine of the resurrection is still true, and our preaching is not vain." You see the difference. Frankly, I agree with Paul. With facts to warrant it, I believe the Gospel of the Son of God. Without facts to justify it, anyone would be a fool to believe that Gospel. So Paul said. I agree. Now of course theologians of the new orthodoxy do not go the whole length of dropping every vestige of historical basis in the Gospel records. This, however, is chiefly due to a failure to be consistent with their profession that they accept the results most critical scholars offer them. Critics are continually scolding them because they fail to be consistent and let everything go. Of course, the critics are right; you cannot have your cake and eat it too. Also, the theologians are right. They see clearly that it would put them completely out of business if they did what the critics scold them for not doing! The layman must observe this very closely or else he will misunderstand the new orthodoxy that talks so much like the true faith. It begins, generally, by accepting the currently fashionable, form-critical, demolition of the Gospels as historically reliable records. That leaves it with a spiritual vacuum. Then it becomes their task to fill the vacuum. With what? With selected remnants of the old faith. Are the remnants the same as in the old faith? No. Not really. They are but a shadow of their former selves. They are old minus the facts in the Gospel records that were the foundation of the old. A good way to test the new orthodoxy is to examine some writer point by point. In doing this aim to learn, at each step, whether a writer manages to keep the substance, or whether he retains only the shadow. All appear to keep a very great deal, because they use the terms which the ages, have used to express the meaning of the Gospel. They appear to keep much, but do they really do so? That is the question. They seem to try to keep a real, historical incarnation. They also seem to keep a real, historical, once-for-all atonement in the cross. Thus far the new orthodoxy is Christian and deserves to be called Christianity. Holders of this view have a right to consider themselves Christian believers, in the sense that

they retain two basic elements of Christianity. We are obligated to deal with them as brothers—in love. But we must not for a moment think they are right in claiming that they have discovered the true Christian religion, the wheat separated from the chaff. Neither should we think that we must choose, as some of them seem to think we must, between what they offer us and no Christianity at all. Meanwhile, until we go on to consider the real state of matters in the next article in this series, we only want the layman to be very clear as to where the tracks are switching. This much is certain. If you accept the Schmidt-Bultmann-Dibelius analysis of the Gospels, then you must attempt the very kind of rescue-mission which the neo-orthodoxy attempts, saving a piece of an ear or a tail here and there from the lion's mouth. If, on the other hand, for good cause, you reject this analysis of the Gospels, you are left with a substantial body of historically reliable facts on which Christianity rests still—as it has always rested—unshakable. Does the layman have the ability—and therefore the inalienable right based on that ability—to reject the view at present most popular and widespread in learned circles as a non-sequitur? I think he does. And in the next article I will explain in detail how an alert layman can avoid marching in this theological parade, if he will get down to bedrock, define the issues clearly, and form an independent judgment of his own.

### **III—THE GOSPEL RECORDS AND THE LAYMAN**

**or**

#### **How the Layman May Form His Own Judgment About These Records**

First of all, in order to form a basis of judgment on the subject of the Gospels, the Layman should know what sort of criticisms are being raised against the Gospel records. Therefore, we may outline charges leveled, from many sides, against the first three Gospels. To begin with, the writer of Matthew, it is alleged, could not have been the disciple of that name. He must have been another (an unknown) person, who put forth his Gospel in the name of Jesus' apostle Matthew. This writer, it is said, was himself not an apostle at all. He copied out of Mark's Gospel nearly all his stories about Jesus' action. He also used a source called "Q, a collection of Jesus' sayings, as some think, which is now lost. Again, Mark's Gospel may have been written by John Mark, it is true. But if so, we must remember, they say, how he composed it. He collected a great many stories which he found circulated in the form of an "oral tradition." No one knows who first composed any of them. We do not know to what extent any of them may be trusted. Besides this, Mark had a special theory about Jesus, and in editing the stories he found, he arranged them, and cut them, and adapted them, to fit his own preconceived theory. Hence, his Gospel cannot be relied upon to give us real facts about the Lord's life. And again, what do they say about Luke's Gospel? Perhaps it is his. Rather, probably it is his. But he, like the unknown writer of our first Gospel, copied from Mark. He also drew a lot of material from "Q." His claim to have traced everything from the beginning and to have got his information from "eyewitnesses and servants of the Word" should not be taken seriously. It is only the common, polite way in literature, to make such a statement as an introduction to your book. Every ancient writer would have said something like this in writing history. Nobody

would have meant anything by it. But suppose we admit that Mark and Luke wrote two of our Gospels. Even so, it is charged, that would really mean nothing. Why not, you ask? Because, it is answered, by the time they took up pen to write, what Jesus had really said and done had been forever lost. The earliest Jewish Christians first misrepresented what Jesus said and did. For example, He never really made claim to be the Christ. It was the Jewish Christians, who held that He was Christ who put the claim in His mouth and misled all who accepted their account of what Jesus had said. Then the Gentile influences and Gnosticism in the heathen Christian churches further confused the facts. Actually, it is charged, Jesus never claimed to be "Lord." But the Gentile Christians, who received Him and worshipped Him as Lord, put the claim to be Lord into His mouth. Mark and Luke, then, in writing after the facts had been embroidered in these and other such ways, gave us Gospels which have almost nothing of historical value when trusted for direct information as to Jesus' activities. These are a few of the charges. Now, how shall we sift them? What kind of trial shall we have? Are the long-dead writers of our Gospels to be treated as if they were guilty of these charges until proved innocent? Or, will we regard them as innocent until proved guilty? The layman must first make up his mind what kind of trial he wishes to give the accused. This choice is of the highest importance. Please notice that if you assumed they are guilty until proved innocent, then no matter what they say themselves, or what anyone can say on their behalf, it will not avail. Why not? Because, assuming they are guilty as charged, you can interpret every appearance of innocence and sign of truthfulness as deliberately and skillfully introduced, in order to try to make men believe the forgery is not a forgery. There may be a little truth you cannot deny. There may be much that looks like truth which you can deny. How? By saying it is cleverly invented imitation of truth to throw a reader off the track and beguile him into receiving trustfully a fictitious account under a false name. But the main point we would like to make clear is this: the greater the appearance of innocence, truthfulness, faithfulness, etc., is, the more easily you can discount it and explain it away. You can always say that it

does not indicate truthfulness in s writer, but it rather shows his extraordinary skill in deceiving, in covering a falsehood with the face of truth. And, if you assume a defendant is guilty until proved innocent, you are putting him in a position in which neither he nor anyone else can say or do anything that will be of much value to prove his innocence.

A story bears pondering in this connection. Once there was a woman on trial, accused of bewitching a certain person. She was able to bring forward witnesses who established beyond doubt that she had been in another place, miles away, at the very time she was accused of bewitching her victim elsewhere. Did the alibi help to prove her innocence? No. The judge ruled that the alibi proved beyond all doubt that she was guilty of the crime of being a witch, because only one who was a witch could be in two places at the same time. This illustrates why we have said that the kind of trial is all-important. Give the Bible a witch-trial, it cannot be shown to be trustworthy. Everything in it will become doubtful at once. The method, you will see, is vicious. It becomes even more so when it is most scholarly. The lay man should let no smoke-screen of either genuine or sham learning hide from his eyes the kind of trial the Bible is getting. The result is the very opposite if you treat a defendant as innocent until proved guilty. In such a case, you would not feel warranted in distrusting anything a man might say, until you had first proved him false in a number of points. And only if in those points where he was proved incorrect it was reasonably sure he was deliberately falsifying, would you distrust all he said. This is a position, and this is a kind of trial, which is very advantageous to the defenders of the trustworthiness and authenticity of Biblical writings. It throws great burdens on all who deny the truth of the writings in the Word of God. However, this is not the reason we urge the layman to take this standpoint. We assert that this is the only kind of trial that is fair or just. We further assert that it alone offers a standpoint from which an open mind can be maintained to the claims of the Biblical writings. We may set it down as inevitable that mistakes will be made, whatever

kind of trial the Bible gets. Assuming the defendant is guilty till proved innocent, most mistakes will be to his disadvantage. On the opposite method, assuming he is innocent till proved guilty, most mistakes will work to the advantage of the person or thing on trial, and everything that is inconclusive must be construed in his favor. We are thankful for this advantage. However, we do not desire it if we have no right to it. Yet, if it is inherent in a truly fair procedure, then we are rather obligated not to be stupid, but to acknowledge this advantageous position we have. At the same time, we must not disgrace ourselves, as may easily be done, by taking unfair advantage of the position given to us. Operating under the rule we have outlined as to what makes a fair trial, a layman will be quite astonished to find how quickly the largest part of so-called criticism will fall to the ground. What parades as a great, fearless search for truth, whatever the cost, etc., etc., will turn out to be just an unregulated and licentious surrender to pure insinuations in most instances. We say, "in most instances," for it is certainly right and lawful to have doubts, even about books of the Bible. We certainly have a right to doubt the validity of numerous books in the Roman Catholic Old Testament. The same applies to much early Christian literature outside the New Testament, and to many alleged miracles certified to be true by the Pope. Indeed, no single thing would be more helpful to Bible-believing Christians than to learn that many doubts are right and healthy, and stepping-stones to faith. The line may not be easy or possible to draw, but there are legitimate doubts as well as vicious doubts. Legitimate doubts cannot be squelched. They must be answered satisfactorily. Only so can men continue to be convinced age after age that our faith does not consist in "cunningly devised fables." But the assertions made against the Gospels can be put to the test by a layman. Let him ask: Is this a fair trial? We predict confidently that as the rising sun dissolves the mists of morning, that test will dissolve the largest part of so-called criticism's "assured results." Let us try it out a little. As to the first three Gospels, we have outlined some charges against them, we have discussed the method of a fair trial. Let us now ask: What is the

evidence? This is easy enough for anyone to handle. The evidence is of two kinds. The first kind of evidence consists of the statements about the Gospels that have come down to us from ancient writers in the Church. These are called external testimonies because they are from outside the New Testament itself. We can collect all the statements we can find about who wrote the Gospels and when they were written. We can gather together what Papias said, what the "Elder" told Papias, what Clement of Alexandria said, what Pantaenus was said to have done, what Origen, Irenaeus, Eusebius, Cyril of Jerusalem, Epiphanius, Jerome, etc., etc., wrote about such matters. There are also in the different manuscripts of the Gospels titles and colophons (bits of information added at the end of a book). These add up to a great many pages when copied out. The fashion has been to spurn these as if they were not even worth mentioning, as if they did not even exist. There are also Gospel "prologues." Certain of these are widely regarded as at least as early as the days of Marcion (A. D. 138-150). Collecting these one will find some amount of apparent disagreement, and also a predominant vein of unanimity on main points. There will be a mass of direct statements—some anonymous, but others from the intellectual leaders of the early Church in every quarter of the civilized world. There is not a single discordant note as to the authorship of the first three Gospels. These statements establish beyond any question that the three Gospel writers were received as three independent witnesses to a series of events which were everywhere understood to have really happened substantially as narrated in their accounts. The Church received them as such, that is, churches everywhere in the world received them without any central authority or any compulsion to make them do so. If there is any evidence of the external kind that the first three Gospels were not so received, no one has brought it to light. Since the year 1775, fully 17 long centuries after the books were written, opinions based on the second kind of evidence, that is, internal evidence, have arisen, alleging that the first three Gospels were not written by independent witnesses. One of the Gospels, it is said, must have been copied by the writers of the other two. Who? Because the very same words are so often found used in all

three Gospels to describe the same events. This fact, it is said, destroys the very possibility that what the early Church tells us about the first three Gospels can be true. The resemblance is too close. Every one, all whose words have come down to us, must have been mistaken in what they have told us about the basic nature of the first three Gospels. They could not have been written by apostles or apostolic men getting information directly from eye-witnesses and hearers of the Lord Jesus. Please notice. Everything is argued from the fact of close resemblance in the wording of the Greek text when one of these Gospels is compared with either of the other two. This argument can be quite imposing, erroneous as it is in my opinion. One safeguard against it would be to remember that the uncontradicted words of all the witnesses say the opposite. At best the argument is an hypothesis, it is speculation, opinion. It is not evidence or testimony as to matter of fact. Now speculation based on the internal features of our Gospels may be called internal evidence. But it is not at all evidence of the same clear straightforward kind as the external testimonies. It is nearly always a speculation based upon a special interpretation of something in the book or books in question. This much we all know. If we were on a jury in a court trial, and if a lawyer made up a plausible hypothetical case against a defendant, so that we gave a verdict of guilty, then the judge could set aside our verdict completely, if in his opinion all the direct evidence pointed the other way. No amount of indirect (circumstantial) evidence can convict a man of crime in court, apart from its use in conjunction with direct evidence. It is right here that the widely accepted Use-Hypothesis (that is its name!) is fatally weak in the eyes of a judicious observer. It sounds good. But in order to accept it you have to believe that all the direct evidence must be set aside as a mistake. Mind you, this was all a colossal blunder. And yet this "mistake" was believed everywhere and by everyone, so far as we can learn, from one end of the world to the other. Now, inasmuch as this is the very point where we are asked to surrender three Gospels, hitherto three independent witnesses, and to receive in exchange only one tradition under three forms, it is best for the layman to have his eyes wide open before he agrees to take this

step with certain preachers and theological professors. What is this Use-Hypothesis (German, Benutzungshypothese)? This is the key to all that follows after. All negative criticism, destructive of faith in the historical reliability of the Gospels, is built on this. All falls, if this falls. Why does all fall, if this falls? Because this is the only attempt that has been made to deny the triple attestation of the facts of the life of Jesus. This is the primary attempt to deny the truth of the external evidence. The external evidence stands if this attempt to over-rule it fails. Of this the layman is perfectly qualified to judge. Matthew, Mark, and Luke are still three independent witnesses, if we cannot succeed in showing that two copied from the third. In the latter case, if we can show it to be true, they are only to be counted as one witness, since two of them copied from the third and are not additional independent witnesses for what they all three tell us. If we assume that one of the three Gospels was copied, or practically copied in large sections, by the writers of the other two, this is called direct literary dependence. A man who is writing a Gospel in Greek, with another Gospel in Greek open in front of him which he uses as a source for his Gospel, we are told, is what we must actually have had in the case of two of the first three Gospels, because the Greek wording is so close in places. Now in this writer's opinion this assumption is not at all necessary, and it is a sign of unusual carelessness to allow one's self to be driven into such an awkward position. It is my opinion, further, that the similarities and differences to be found in the first three Gospels are far more easily accounted for on the assumption that what the early Church tells us is really the truth. We are told that Matthew wrote first in Aramaic and that every one translated this into Greek as best he could. Now if Peter had possessed a copy in Aramaic, or even in Greek, while preaching in Rome, he had a perfect right to expand and vary its story, adding anything he knew to be true. We are also told that hearers of Peter asked Peter's translator (Mark) to write out the stories the way Peter told them. The greater fullness and liveliness of Peter's preaching accounts better than anything else, for the demand we are told people made on Mark to write the actual words of Peter, as well as for the difference between stories of the same events as we find them

in Matthew and in Mark. The misleading impression of freshness and originality in Mark does not at all mean that Mark wrote first and Matthew's writer copied. It only means that Peter's preaching produced a certain desirable impression. That impression could perfectly well be made after Matthew was written as before it. More could be said along these lines, but we must not leave the main point. And that main point is that many reputable scholars have insisted that the similarities and differences between the first three Gospels must not be explained in any such way as just suggested. They reject every other possibility, and insist on a Greek-on-Greek literary dependence as the pillar and foundation of any acceptable solution of the problem. On that basis, that alone, they have tried to explain the relation of the first three Gospels to one another. The Use- Hypothesis of Greek-on-Greek literary dependence is the only way, they say, that is open to us. All this is most doubtful, of course, but we only attempt to make clear a viewpoint very widely held. You will notice at once an undeniable fact. The choice of the assumption creates the conflict with the statements made by the leaders and others in the early Church. The hypothesis which is brought in to explain the facts, at once comes into conflict with all the direct evidence. It may be added, further, that the hypothesis also creates the synoptic problem as scholars have to deal with it. Their problem is this: which of the three Gospels was used by the other two. Which two copied? Which was original? Drop the Use-Hypothesis, and there remains a problem or puzzle as to how the first three Gospels are related, but a large number of answers are possible. Keep the Use-Hypothesis, and only three answers are possible, and only one sort of connection is thinkable, namely, direct copying and borrowing. It would be quite careless not to remember always that the problem of the first three Gospels, as most scholars face it, is unreal (imaginary), if the Use-hypothesis is by any chance mistaken. There is a confident feeling among so-called experts that it could not possibly be wrong. But as laymen you will be perfectly justified in holding an honest doubt, if you have any good reason to do so. Moreover, if you are only beginning to be interested in a study of the

Gospels, it is a good general position to hold that any hypothesis can turn out to be wrong.