

HOW DO I KNOW THAT CHRISTIANITY IS GENUINE?

Introduction

In this paper an attempt will be made to give an answer to the question, "How do I know that Christianity is genuine?"

In general, the answer will be, "Christianity must be recognized to be genuine because it is factual."

The rational task of the apologist for Christianity is just the natural task of the advocate and exponent of any great generalization of science, to vindicate it, on the basis of evidence, as the most reasonable hypothesis to explain undoubted facts . . . Christian apologetics is the explication of the fact that the Christian religion explains the world, man, and human history more comprehensively and more satisfactorily than any other explanation which can be devised. (L.M. Sweet, The Verification of Christianity. p. 17, quoted by Bernard Ramm in Protestant Christian Evidences. p. 35.)

Christianity is intimately related to history and facts. It is our contention that neither of these can be explained adequately outside of the Scriptural perspective. However, it is important to recognize that we are not to start with facts and work back to God. This method, utilized in the ordinary arguments for God, may verify only a cause greater than the observable effects.

One must begin this question of verification with the recognition that all thinking is presuppositional. All facts are held within a certain perspective and interpreted according to certain presuppositions. It is important for the Christian to realize the necessity of starting with the fundamental presupposition of God and His revelation.

In this paper we will attempt to do three things and by this indicate the genuineness of Christianity.

1. To show that Christianity, as any other world-view, is based upon some definite presuppositions. In contrast to other world-views, these presuppositions are based upon, or grow out of, the concept of Biblical supernaturalism.
2. To show that there are factual evidences of Christianity which verify its supernatural character.
3. To show that to reject these Christian presuppositions, one leaves himself without the possibility of a coherent world-view and without the possibility of explaining Christian evidences.

By the use of the term "coherent" we not only mean coherence of fact with fact, i.e., inner consistency, but coherence with the Biblical presuppositions

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Christianity has been accused of being based upon that which cannot be verified. Therefore the accusation of subjectivism has often been raised against her. It is helpful to point out, in this connection, that all world-views start with presuppositions and that these are no more demonstrable in science than they are in Christianity.

This means that we can inform the sceptic that we believe Christianity must submit (in this area) to the same test of validity that we demand of science. Science, as Christianity, is based upon certain non-demonstrable presuppositions. Certain foundational truths must be assumed which can never be subjected to ordinary scientific proof. These presuppositions are assumed because it enables science to develop a coherent world-view. Without these assumptions, science would not be able to adequately explain the universe or facts. Therefore, the only test to which these presuppositions may be subjected is the test of the resultant coherency of the world-view. On this basis Christianity is no more subjective than science.

I. Christianity, as well as every other World-View, is Based upon Presuppositions.

A. What this does not mean.

This does not mean that (1) Christianity and other world-views are based upon the same presuppositions, nor (2) that the presuppositions of Christianity are formulated and accepted in the same manner as in other world-views.

Observations —

1. Christianity rests upon a foundation that is fundamentally different from other religious and world-views while remaining presuppositional. The presuppositions of Christianity are not formulated on the basis of sense-experience, nor on the basis of human rationality, but are a product of divine revelation.

The importance of this concept has been pointed out by A. A Hodge, as to the basic difference between Christianity and Atheism in the book, Popular Lectures on Theological Themes, Lecture IV; and J. Gresham Machen, as to the basic difference between Christianity and Liberalism, in the book by that title, note particularly, chapters 2-6.

2. Generally there are only two types of presuppositions: the naturalistic and the supernaturalistic. Christianity is based upon the latter while other religions and world-views are based upon pseudo-supernaturalistic or naturalistic presuppositions. The naturalistic perspective believes the universe to be self-originated and self-explanatory. The supernaturalistic perspective is committed to the view that the universe has been created by God and can only be explained adequately from the viewpoint of divine revelation.

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3. These supernaturalistic presuppositions upon which Christianity is grounded are not accepted by us because they are the most rational or because they enable one to formulate a coherent world-view. We accept them, i.e., divine revelation, as final authority because of the work of the Spirit of God.

With Calvin, we admit two principles, one external, the other internal. The external and objective principle is the fact assured to and perceived by the soul that God reveals Himself and speaks in the Scriptures. The internal principle, interior to the subject, is the persuasion of the Holy Spirit which raises this knowledge to the height of a certainty of divine faith, a certainty distinct from sensorial and rational evidence, and entirely supernatural. (A. Lecerf, *An Introduction to Reformed Dogmatics*, p. 370. See also John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Vol. I, Chapter VIII, Paragraph 13 and Bernard Ramm, *The Pattern of Religious Authority* and *The Witness of the Spirit*.)

4. Now it is clear why the presuppositions of Christianity are so different from the pseudo-supernaturalistic or naturalistic presuppositions of man-made religions and philosophies. In these views, a god or gods are introduced to make the system workable or to give some source of human values or ethics. The presuppositions of Christianity are not the result of human thinking but of divine revelation. Because of this factor the very word "presupposition" or "postulate" may be criticized as has been correctly done by H. R. Mackintosh.

Now it cannot be too emphatically said that Christian doctrines are not postulates in this sense — not at least the doctrines which form a genuine part of Christianity. They are not postulates, because they have been generated in the mind and heart of man by the self-revelation of God. His self-disclosure, His awakening and arresting Word, has been the producing cause of these convictions; it is because God has shown us that in character He is such and such that we are sure of this or that. (*The Christian Apprehension of God*, p. 57.)

B. What this means.

An understanding of the presuppositional nature of Christianity will not only enable the Christian to understand why Christian doctrine is authoritative, but will also give him an apologetic approach whereby he may deal with the skeptic.

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Observations - -

1. World-views such as modern science are presuppositional. The nature of these presuppositions are quite different from those in Christianity because they are the theoretical results of human reflection. By way of illustration consider the presupposition of causation. This presupposition has been assumed because it enables science to formulate a coherent world-view. Causation, however, as clearly shown by David Hume, is beyond empirical verification. It is non-demonstrable. Science cannot give a coherent explanation without this and other non-demonstrable presuppositions. She can only show that they are necessary, i.e., validated because they help science to construct a meaningful world.

"We cannot prove, for example, that all events have a cause. We postulate this, in the interest of scientific knowledge."

(W. E. Hocking, Types of Philosophy, 3rd ed., p. 99)

2. The Christian may thus turn the attack of subjectivism back upon the skeptic. The latter also works with presuppositions, even though he may not espouse the scientific viewpoint, which are beyond direct verification.
3. The Christian may now take two further steps with the skeptic.
 - a. He may show that when one accepts the Christian presuppositions one is able to explain the universe, man, and life in a meaningful manner.
 - b. He may also show that there are evidences of supernaturalism which can only be adequately explained on the basis of the presuppositions of Christianity. For one to reject these presuppositions and to adopt a naturalistic perspective of life then one is left without the source of a coherent explanation.
4. Here we are reminded that the Christian is sure that there is no conflict between divine revelation and the universe. God is the Author of both. He is confident that only on the basis of divine revelation may a coherent world and life view be produced.

C. The presuppositions of Christianity.

1. The existence of God as the Ontological Trinity, Infinite, Sovereign, Personal Being.
2. The creation and purposeful control of all finite being by God.
3. The creation of man in God's image and his historical, total fall.
4. The historicity of general and special revelation, the latter being inspired and propositional.
5. The historicity and adequacy of the atonement by the incarnate Son of God.
6. The reality of Personal Salvation.

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II. If the Presuppositions of Christianity Are True, Then We Would Expect To Find Evidence of Such in the Universe.

A. There is evidence of the genuineness of Christianity in the human sense of obligation.

Here we wish to point out that all men have a consciousness of being under obligation. As Christians we say that this reflects the reality of the moral law of God. A man's knowledge of obligation and his manifestation of this may differ from one man to another due to time, place, and background. However, it is evident that the human race manifests a consciousness of being "under law."

This sense of obligation which confronts and motivates every individual has been recognized by most philosophers. It is remarkable that the best non-Christian philosophers are those who have made the most of this concept.

It was Plato, who, representing the best of Greek Philosophy, described man as possessing a consciousness of a universal, decisive standard which existed apart from himself and to which he was subjected. For Plato, man was such and realized his potentiality only to the degree that he responded to this moral law.

It was Immanuel Kant who described man in a similar way. Every man is portrayed by Kant as possessing a consciousness of an "I ought." This can be explained, he said, by the fact that there is a law-Giver Who says, "Thou Shalt." Kant was not trying to verify Christianity in his work but was attempting to describe man as he found him.

The Apostle Paul plainly taught that all members of the human race have a sense of obligation. It would seem from Chapters 1 and 2 of Romans that there are at least three things he states about this: (1) That all men are the recipients of revelation. This leaves them without excuse, Romans 1:19,20; (2) That the human conscience testifies to the reality of this revelation by way of obligation, Romans 2:14, 15; (3) That man, because he is fallen, rejects or suppresses this revelation and sense of oughtness, Romans 1:18.

This evidence of human oughtness is exactly what we would expect to find in man if the presuppositions of Christianity are true.

The Christian can say to the skeptic that even as the concept of causation is verified by its ability to explain the world, so the presuppositions of Christianity are verified by their ability to explain this sense of obligation.

C. S. Lewis has popularized this concept and has been so successful in utilizing its apologetic value that he has been called the Apostle to the Skeptic.

B. There is evidence of the genuineness of Christianity in the reality of a law structure in the universe.

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Because the presuppositions of Christianity teach the creation and providential control of the universe by God, this recognition of a law-structure is what we would expect.

- C. There is evidence of the genuineness of Christianity in the condition of man.

Man is disgustingly religious, selfish, guilt-laden, and often irrational. And yet he is capable of tremendous religious, social, rational, and aesthetic feats. This reminds us of Pascal's comment on "man's greatness and wretchedness."

Because the presuppositions of Christianity show that man was created in the image of God and is now fallen, one is thereby enabled to explain man's present condition.

III. If the Presuppositions of Christianity are True, then We Would Expect to Find Evidence of Supernaturalism in the World.

- A. Here one should consider the factuality of direct supernatural evidence in the following areas.

1. The origin and characteristics of Israel's religion.
2. Prophecy.
3. Miracles.
4. The person and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
5. The existence and spread of the early Church.
6. The experiential implications of regeneration.
7. Early Christian literature and creeds.
8. Archaeology.
9. The existence of the Bible and early versions.

- B. By way of illustration, note the necessity of holding to the presuppositions of Christianity in order to explain the historicity of the Scriptures.

1. It is helpful to show the skeptic that we may demand of the Scriptures the same test that we would demand of any other book which purports to be truthful. Perhaps such tests, as evidences of truthfulness, would be historical and archeological verification, the testimony of disinterested witnesses, and the affirmation of contemporary literature.
2. Here we wish to point out the testimony of early Church literature to the historical nature of the New Testament and to New Testament Christianity. The sample of material given below is presented to show four things .
 - a. That the New Testament existed when it implies that it did.
 - b. That the events and persons in the New Testament are factual.
 - c. That the New Testament existed then in the same basic content in which we possess it today.

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- d. That the nature of Christianity, as seen in this literature, is of a supernatural character, i.e., the men who lived in those early days were committed to supernaturalism.
- 3. The testimony of some early Church leaders to the New Testament and to New Testament Christianity.
 - a. A few of the most commonly known leaders.

Apostolic	Ante -Nicene
Clement of Rome (30-100) Ignatius (30-107 or 116) Polycarp (69-155)	Justin Martyr (100-165) Irenaeus (about 120-192) Clement of Alexandria (150-216) Hippolytus (d.235) Origen (185-254) Tertullian (150-220) Eusebius. (270-340)

- b. Quotations from the New Testament by seven leaders in the early Church.

	Gospels	Acts	General Epistles	Pauline Epistles	Revelations	Total
Justin Martyr	268	10	6	43	3	330
Irenaeus	1,038	194	23	499	65	1,819
Clement of Alex.	1,017	44	207	1,127	11	2,406
Origen	9,231	349	399	7,778	165	17,922
Tertullian	3,822	502	120	2,609	205	7,258
Hippolytus	734	42	27	387	188	1,378
Eusebius	3,259	211	88	2,592	27	5,176
Total	19,368	1,352	870	14,035	664	36,289

(H.S. Miller, General Biblical Introduction, P. 259)

When we recognize that these men accepted the New Testament as final authority, quoted it as such against heretics, used it in support of their denunciation of the immorality and idolatry of their day, and looked upon it as the basis of the Christian faith, we gain an understanding of the wide acceptance of the New Testament as factual in the history of this early period.

- 3. The testimony of some of the early Church leaders as to the nature of Christianity.
 - a. Clement of Rome and his Epistle to the Corinthians.
 - 1). Background.

Clement is said to have been the pastor of the Church at Rome from 92-100 A.D. The dates of his birth and death are usually

given as 30-100. He was a man of great learning, ability, and influence. His Epistle was written either in 95 or 96 A.D. It is a brief statement of Christian doctrine as a practical exhortation to unity. It is now in the British Museum as part of two fourth-century Greek manuscripts.

2). Text.

. . . . from him also (was descended) our Lord Jesus Christ according to the flesh... And we, too, being called by His will in Christ Jesus, are not justified by ourselves, nor by our own wisdom, or understanding, or godliness, or works which we have wrought in holiness of heart; but by that faith through which, from the beginning. Almighty God has justified all men; to whom be glory for ever and ever, Amen,

(Chapter 32)

The Apostles have preached the Gospel to us from the Lord Jesus Christ; Jesus Christ (has done so) from God. Christ therefore was sent forth by God, and the apostles by Christ. Both these appointments, then, were made in an orderly way, according to the Will of God. Having therefore received their orders, and being fully assured by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, and established in the word of God, with full assurance of the Holy Ghost, they went forth proclaiming that the kingdom of God was at hand ...

(Chapter 42. The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. I, pp. 13,16)

b. Ignatius and his letters To the Ephesians . Magnesians, Trallians, Romans, Philadelphians, Smyeans, and To Polycarp.

1) Background.

Ignatius was the pastor of the church in Antioch. His dates are generally given as 30-107. During a period of persecution he was condemned to die for his faith in Christ. While being taken to Rome for execution he wrote the letters referred to above. Ignatius was thrown to the wild beasts in the reign of Trajan the Emperor.

2) Text. (To the Ephesians)

The cross of Christ is indeed a stumbling-block to those that do not believe, but to the believing it is salvation and life eternal. "Where is the wise man? where the disputer?" Where is the boasting of those who are called mighty? For the Son of God, Who was begotten before time began, and established all things according to the will of the Father, He was conceived in the

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womb of Mary, according to the appointment of God, of the seed of David, and by the Holy Ghost. For says (the Scripture), "Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and He shall be called Immanuel." He Was born and was baptized by John , that He might ratify the institution committed to that prophet. (Chapter 18)

Stand fast, brethren, in the faith of Jesus Christ, and in His love, in His passion, and in His resurrection. Do ye all come together in common, and individually, through grace, in one faith of God the Father, and of Jesus Christ His only-begotten Son, and "the first-born of every creature," but of the seed of David according to the flesh, being under the guidance of the Comforter, in obedience to the bishop and the presbytery with an undivided mind, breaking one and the same bread, which is the medicine of immortality, and the antidote which prevents us from dying, but a cleansing remedy driving away evil, (which causes) that we should live in God through Jesus Christ. (Chapter 20) (The Ante- Nicene Fathers, Vol. I, pp. 56,57)

c. Polycarp and his Epistle to the Philippians.

1) Background.

Polycarp was born near 70 A. D. and died as a martyr in Rome in 155. He was the pastor of the church in Smyrna. He had been personally acquainted with the Apostle John and had talked with many who had known the Lord Jesus Christ.

2) Text.

I have greatly rejoiced with you in our Lord Jesus Christ, because ye have followed the example of true love (as displayed by God), and have accompanied, as became you, those who were bound in chains, the fitting ornaments of saints, and which are indeed the diadems of the true elect of God and our Lord; and because the strong root of your faith, spoken of in days long gone by, endureth even until now, and bringeth forth fruit to our Lord Jesus Christ, who for our sins suffered even unto death, (but) "whom God raised from the dead, having loosed the bands of the grave." (To the Philippians, Ch. I; The Ante-Nicene Fathers. Vol. I, p. 33)

... then, the proconsul urging him, and saying, "Swear, and I will set thee at liberty, Reproach Christ." Polycarp declared, "Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He never did me any injury; how then can I blaspheme my King and my Savior? " (The Martyrdom of Polycarp, Ch. 9; The Ante-Nicene Fathers. Vol. I, p. 41)

d. Justin the Martyr, his First Apology. Second Apology, and The Dialogue with Trypho.

1) Background.

Justin was born about 100 A. D. and died as a martyr in 165. He was one of the earliest and best known of the Apologists for Christianity. It would seem that he was born into a wealthy family. After an extensive education he became recognized as a philosopher. In about 130 he was converted to Christianity through the personal work of an aged Christian. (Dialogue with Trypho, Chapters 1-8. The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. I, p. 194-198) Justin was condemned for his faith in Christ and was beheaded, with six other Christians in Rome.

2) Text.

Our teacher of these things is Jesus Christ, who also was born for this purpose, and was crucified under Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judaea, in the times of Tiberius Ceasar; and that we reasonably worship Him, having learned that He is the Son of the true God Himself, and holding Him in the second place, and the prophetic spirit in the third, we will prove. (The First Apology, Chapter 13)

In these books, then, of the prophets we found Jesus our Christ foretold as coming, born of a virgin, growing up to man's estate, and healing every disease and every sickness, and raising the dead, and being hated, and unrecognized, and crucified, and dying, and rising again, and ascending into heaven, and being, and being called, the Son of God. (The First Apology, Chapter 31)

And, on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things. But Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ our Savior on the same day arose from the dead ... (The First Apology, Chapter 67)

(The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. I, pp. 166,167,173,186)

e. Aristides and his Apology.

1) Background.

Little is known of Aristides. He was a Christian philosopher in Athens and addressed a defense for Christianity to the Emperor Antonius, This apology is dated about 140 A.D.

2) Text.

Now the Christians trace their origin from the Lord Jesus Christ. And He is acknowledged by the Holy Spirit to be the Son of the most High God, Who came down from heaven for the salvation of men. And being born of a pure virgin, unbegotten and immaculate, He assumed flesh and revealed Himself among men that He might recall them to Himself from their wandering after many gods. And having accomplished His wonderful dispensation, by a voluntary choice He tasted death on the cross, fulfilling an august dispensation. And after three days He came to life again and ascended into heaven. And if you would read, O King, you may judge the glory of His presence from the holy gospel writings, as it is called among yourselves.

(The Apology of Aristides, Chapter 15. The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. X, p. 276)

5. The testimony to Christianity as found in the interchange of letters between Emperor Trajan and Governor Pliny.

a. Background.

Pliny was asked by the Emperor Trajan, in about 111 A.D., to accept the governorship of Bithynia, in northern Asia Minor. The interchange of letters between these two, concerning the conditions in Bithynia, is important for the study of early Christianity.

b. Text.

1). Pliny to Emperor Trajan (98-117)

In the examination of Christians I have never taken part; therefore I do not know what crime is usually punished or investigated or to what extent . . . Meanwhile I have taken this course with those who were accused before me as Christians: I have asked them whether they were Christians. Those who confessed, I asked a second and a third time, threatening punishment. Those who persisted I ordered led away to execution. . . On this account I believed it the more necessary to find out from two maid-servants, who were called deaconesses, and that by torture, what was the truth. I therefore

adjourned the examination and hastened to consult you, The matter seemed to me to be worth deliberation, especially on account of the number of those in danger. For many of every age, every rank, and even of both sexes, are brought into danger; and will be in the future. The contagion of that superstition has penetrated not only the cities but also the villages and country places; and yet it seems possible to stop it and set it right. At any rate, it is certain enough that the temples, deserted until recently, begin to be frequented, that the ceremonies of religion, long disused, are restored, and that fodder for the victims come to market, whereas buyers of it were until now very few.

2). From Emperor Trajan to Pliny.

... You have followed, my dear Secundus, the proper course of procedure in examining the cases of those who were accused to you as Christians... They are not to be sought out. If they are accused and convicted, they are to be punished. . . Papers, however, which are presented anonymously ought not to be admitted in any accusation.

(Anne Fremantle (ed.), A Treasury of Early Christianity, p. 253-255)

Observation: How can one account for this testimony of early Christian literature if one rejects the presuppositions of Christianity? The days from which this testimony has been drawn would be the very period when fraud, myth, and legend would have been rejected if there were such involved in the origin of Christianity. Christianity stands verified as to its historicity and factuality by the presence of early Christian literature.

Conclusion

- A. We have attempted to show that the presuppositions of Christianity are verified by their coherent explanation of history and facts. When one starts with God and His revelation, history and facts become meaningful.
- B. One may reject these presuppositions but then one is faced with the necessity of explaining the world and particularly Christian evidences on the basis of non-Christian presuppositions.
- C. It is my contention that if one rejects divine revelation or the Christian presuppositions then one is unable to construct as comprehensive and coherent a world and life view as one could with them. The sceptic may thus be shown that Christianity stands verified by facts — when these facts are interpreted by Biblical presuppositions.

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Suggested Reading

C. S. Lewis, Mere Christianity; Miracles; The Problem of Pain; Pilgrim's Regress.

B. Ramm, Protestant Christian Evidences: The Pattern of Religious Authority.

C. Van Til, The Defense of the Faith: Christian Theistic Evidences.

J. I. Packer, Fundamentalism and the Word of God.

Edward J. Camell, An Introduction to Christian Apologetics.

F. F. Bruce, The Reliability of the New Testament Documents.

Bruce Shelly, By What Authority?

Paul E Little, Know Why You Believe,

I. V. C. F. Publications

Paul E . Little , How To Give Away Your Faith.

Arthur F. Holmes, Christianity and Philosophy.

George Eldon Ladd, Tesus Christ and History.

Clyde S. Kilby, Christianity and Asthetics.

A, R. Short, Archaeology Gives Evidence.

Kenneth A. Kitchen, Ancient Orient and Old Testament.

B. M. MacKay, ed. , Christianity in a Mechanistic Universe.

C. Kidner, Christianity and the Arts.

D. M. Blaiklock, The Century of the New Testament.

J. Denny, The Death of Christ.

J. R. W. Stott, Basic Christianity.

J. R. W. Stott, Becoming A Christian.

Victor M. Matthews