

FAITH OF OUR FATHERS

[A WEEKLY INSTRUCTION FOR YOUNG AND OLD.]

Third Article: Facts and Proofs.

57. The existence of the Christian religion and its wonderful history is a fact obvious to the whole world. Springing from the Jewish religion, like a flower from its stem, this religion took its rise in Judea in the reign of the Emperor Tiberius. It quickly spread over the whole pagan world, established its centre in Rome, overthrew idolatry, and changed the face of the earth by creating a new society, a new civilisation, which was that of Christianity.

After upwards of 18 centuries, in spite of numberless persecutions and trials, we see this wonderful religion still existing, ever the same, ever youthful, ever vigorous, ever fruitful.

This is the first uncontested and incontestable fact. The second follows: This same Christian religion is divine: that is, established by God as the true religion, by which humanity must honor its Creator.

The second fact is as incontestable as the first, but it is not unassailable. Unbelievers and the impious contest it relentlessly: therefore we must prove it by some signs which cannot be gainsayed. These signs, or proofs, are very numerous: but we will reduce them to three:

(1) Proof drawn from the preëminence of Christianity over all other religions.

(2) Proof drawn from the prophecies.

(3) Proof drawn from miracles.

I.—Proof drawn from the Preëminence of Christianity.

58. When we contemplate all the different religions which exist on the earth, it becomes evident that they may be reduced to four heads: Paganism with its offshoots, rationalism, and incredulity; Mahometanism, Judaism, and Christianity. Two amongst these religions hear a divine character, and rise above the others, namely, the Judaic and the Christian religions: but the latter, proceeding originally from the Mosaic synagogue, has become elevated far above its origin, and has so eclipsed it by its splendor, that for 18 centuries it has shone alone to the eyes of the universe like a luminous city built on the summit of a mountain.

It indeed suffices to compare the Christian faith and worship with (1) the superannuated ceremonies of Judaism as it now exists, (2) the manifest errors and the abominations of Mohametanism and Paganism, to recognise at once the preëminence of the religion of Jesus Christ.

Christianity alone is worthy both of God and man. It alone embraces the whole of humanity, and, as a distinguished writer has remarked, with truth, it overrides all time and all ages. It starts from eternity to return thither: it springs from God only to seek Him again, and to repose in Him eternally. Everything in it is truth and holiness. Those who study it and scrutinise its dogmas find therein a marvellous and ever-increasing harmony, beauty, grandeur, and evidence of truthfulness. In fine, all the world may recognise that the purity of its morals, the sublimity of its mysteries, the dignity of its priesthood, the majesty of its worship and of its ceremonies, elevate it so high that, in the eyes of reason, if there exist a true religion on earth, it can only be that of Christianity.

This conclusion is drawn from the following argument: The Christian religion is evidently superior to all others. Now such a religion could not be false: hence the Christian religion could not be other than true.

We will explain the minor of this syllogism, and show that, by reason of the divine perfection, a religion which is superior to all others could not be false.

If such were the case, man would be the victim of error, and he would be so by the fault of God Himself must have delivered this reasonable creature to the invincible spirit of falsehood, which it is absurd to suppose. Here is the proof: In matters of religion man, by his reasoning nature—that is to say, by God

Himself, who is the Author of this nature—is obliged to embrace the truth, or, in case of doubt, to accept the most probable doctrine; because, in a matter of such supreme moment, reason demands imperiously that he should take that which is most sure, or at least most probable. The Christian religion, being superior to all the others, is therefore the most probable. Hence man is obliged by God, and even by his own reason, to embrace the Christian religion. From this it is clear that this religion could not be false: for in case of such an hypothesis man would be accepting a false religion by God's own order, which is impossible, seeing that He who is by essence truth and holiness could not lead mankind into error and falsehood.

II.—Proof drawn from the Prophecies.

59. The Christian religion is sanctioned by the prophecies. It is marked therefore with the seal of truth. Let us prove the antecedent of this enthymeme:

Christ Jesus and the religion which He founded were announced by prophecies from the very cradle of humanity—that is to say, more than 4000 years before their appearance. On the day when the sin of our first parents delivered the human race over to the slavery of the devil, God promised a Redeemer who would crush the head of the infernal serpent—in other words, who would break the bonds of sin and the devil. God successively announced later that this Redeemer or Messiah would be born of the seed of Abraham and Jacob, called also Israel, the father of the Twelve Tribes; then that He would be born of the tribe of Juda, of the royal blood of David, of a Virgin who should give Him birth at Bethlehem, when Judea should be subject to the sway of a stranger, which would happen about five centuries after the reign of Cyrus, King of Persia. All these and many other predictions are found in the books of Genesis, Kings, Psalms, Isaiah, and Daniel.

It may be said in general that the whole of the Old Testament is one great prophecy, which has Christianity for its object. The future law of Christ and His kingdom, meaning His Church, appear therein as the new religion by which Judaism was to be superseded, and as the perfect and universal religion by which God would be honored by all His people.

We may add that Christ Himself predicted His Crucifixion, His Resurrection on the third day, His Ascension into heaven, and the Descent of the Holy Ghost upon His Apostles: also that these latter would establish over all the earth His spiritual kingdom, by which He meant His Church, founded on the primacy of St. Peter: and that the gates of hell, the wickedness of man, and all the powers of darkness would rise up, but could not prevail against it; but, on the contrary, that Jerusalem would be ruined, and her temple razed to the ground. These predictions are all to be found in the Gospels.

The events corresponded to the prophecies: we know from history that they have been verified to the letter, and we ourselves still in part witness their accomplishment.

The Christian religion is, then, stamped with the divine seal of the prophecies: it is, then, the holy and divine religion to which all men must submit.

I desire, O Lord, to live here always conformed to your Passion, and to find pain and suffering my repose and delight.—St. Catherine of Siena.

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