

Evidence for Christ



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In this series

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It was a spring day in Rome. My wife and I stood in the great circular piazza in front of St Peter's. Underneath the piazza is the site of the circus where, in AD 64, Christian men, women and children were thrown to the lions and mauled to death, because they believed in Christ and would not deny him. We felt our feet to be on holy ground because of them. Their readiness to face martyrdom cannot be adequately explained without Christ.

Some people would have us accept that Christianity was founded on the deluded ideas of an unusual man who met defeat on the cross rather than bringing in his hoped-for earthly kingdom. Asking us to swallow that such a foundation could have produced the impact of Christianity on the world is like asking us to swallow a camel. The immediate impact of the Christian faith and its worldwide growth cannot be adequately explained without Christ – Christ as Son of God and Risen Lord.

The first Apostles were men dramatically changed. Their boldness and courage contrasted sharply with their humble origins. They tell us that it was because they had been with Christ and had met him risen from the dead. That they had power and impact is undeniable. Even if we wanted to be cynical about their claims, we could not be so cynical as to try and explain them and their testimony without Christ.

The New Testament, with its gospels, letters and its book of Acts, has come under thorough scrutiny and examination for more than a hundred years. We have the various modes of criticism and assessment, but in the end there is one factor that runs through every piece of study and that is that you cannot adequately explain the New Testament without Christ.

Christianity is Christ

Christ is the centre, the key, the Lord of the faith in the New Testament and in the Church. We would go as far as to say 'Christianity is Christ'. Take

Christ away and the whole structure falls apart, for he is the foundation stone – the head of the corner. When Christ is in central place, the shape of the building may vary but it stands secure and meaningful. For those who think of Christ as Lord and God, the prospect of providing evidence for him is almost distasteful – like putting God under a microscope as if we are the arbiter of whether he exists or not. Yet Christians welcome genuine examination of the evidence and hence we welcome the opportunity to provide it. But a warning ought to be given. Human beings are fond of thinking they are the measure of all things. When we do face up to the evidence for Christ we may find the situation reversed. We cannot contain Christ under our microscopes, nor control him with our theories – for he bursts the bonds and we find ourselves measured by him rather than our measuring him.

Christ is firmly included in Roman history. For instance, Tacitus, in his *Annals*, written around the turn of the first century, AD, explained how the burning of Rome in AD 64 had been attributed by Nero to the Christians and he then went on to say why they were called Christians: ‘They got their name from Christ, who was executed by sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilate in the reign of Tiberius’. Tacitus had no sympathy for Christians so we need not dismiss his writing as biased. He was a reliable and reputable Roman historian. He may have exaggerated a little in speaking of the Christians as an ‘immense multitude’ but we still have strong evidence from him of the early years of Christianity.

In the ruins of Pompeii, destroyed by the volcanic eruption in AD 79, are acrostics with *Pater Noster* (our Father) enclosed in the alpha and omega signs for Christ, showing us the convictions of Christians in that first century, and its meaning, based on the letters in the Greek; *ICHTHUS*, spells out Jesus, Christ, God, Son, Saviour. The early church breathed and thought Christ in human, divine, cosmic and eternal terms. This does not prove he existed and without film of the first century one cannot have the sort of proof some want, but it does put the onus on those who deny Christ’s existence to explain the vigorous believing church flourishing even as far away from Jerusalem as Rome, in a period of years less than that since the end of the Second World War for ourselves. The life, vitality and faith of the early Christians are almost impossible to explain without Christ.

Understanding of Christ

The New Testament has to be our main ground for evidence. It is the major source of our understanding of Christ. The earliest documents are the Letters, although the oral tradition which formed the basis of the Gospels must have been earlier. In the Letters we have the breath of a Christianity emerging in a hostile environment yet grappling with application of the faith within that environment. Most scholars would give an early date to Paul's letters to the Corinthians. In chapter 15 of his first letter he speaks in terms of a faith already well established and of creedal forms long accepted. 'What I received I passed on' he says and then speaks of Christ and of what Christ did – 'died... was raised... appeared... '. In several of his letters well-established forms of Creed occur (as in the letter to the Philippians) and we can be certain of established belief in Christ as Lord and Saviour at a very early date indeed.

There is no doubt in Paul's mind that what happened to him on the road to Damascus, when he was blinded with light and heard a voice, was a meeting with Christ – a spiritual experience that he unhesitatingly links to the historic Jesus Christ. He met with those who had lived with Christ for three years and what he learnt from them only served to confirm what he had experienced. This link between experience of Christ in our lives spiritually and the historic Jesus Christ is important both in relation to the writing of the gospels and to the experience of Christians in the present day. Paul's grasp of this link grows in his understanding and spiritual experience. He says 'We preach Christ crucified... we preach Jesus Christ as Lord'. He speaks of growing to the measure and stature of the fullness of Christ, of being more like Christ, of knowing more of Christ and the power of Christ's resurrection. Paul did not separate the Christ of history from the Christ of faith or from the Christ of Eternal Lordship. The three aspects fed one another as a cohesive whole in Paul's experience. To have said to Paul that the facts of whether Christ existed on earth or not did not matter as long as he experienced Christ in his life would have been met with a forthright rebuke. Such suggestions of separation are the inventions of scholars and not the convictions of Paul.

In 1 Corinthians 15:1-5 Paul is concerned primarily with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He adds the phrases 'he was buried' and 'he appeared' to underline the historicity of these events. He roots his teaching historically, presses the significance doctrinally and then applies it all to the living personal experience of Christ in the Christian.

Lord and Saviour

It is certainly fair to say that the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles do not have a lot about the life of Jesus but are more concerned with declaring his death for our sins and his resurrection from the dead, and what this means in the life of human beings. This is the force of the preaching as given to us in Acts chapter 2. Yet the presentation of Christ as Lord and Saviour must inevitably have created a desire to know of his ministry and life. The Gospels may have been later in date as far as writing is concerned, but much of what the Gospels contain must have been circulating early on in the Church. Indeed, in the Acts and Epistles sayings of Jesus are quoted, clearly assuming that the readers would already know them as, for instance, the words of Institution at the Last Supper, mentioned in 1 Corinthians 11.

The four Gospels are our main source of information about Jesus Christ. Their authors or 'composers' expect to be taken seriously. Luke is the author of a two-part account with his Gospel and the Book of Acts. He claims at the start of the gospel to have 'carefully investigated everything from the beginning'. Certainly everything we know about the early disciples indicates to us a great integrity in their actions and lifestyles and it is not unreasonable to expect that what they wrote down would have been with that same integrity. This does not guarantee accuracy but it does mean that we should come at what they wrote with more expectancy of truth than doubt. Luke indicates to us that he was far from being the first to set pen to paper. He says that 'many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us' (Luke 1 verse 1). The critical studies of the gospels strongly indicate a priority to Mark's gospel as a source from which Matthew and Luke drew. There was also probably a collection of sayings, known by scholars as 'Q' and possibly several other sources. Luke indicates

access to ‘many’ such writings and, with his careful checking of information, was able to write with assurance that what he recorded was a gathering of eye-witness testimony recorded in those scripts (Luke 1:2). The early church tested its accepted writings by whether they had Apostolic authority and Luke indicates that what he has gathered for his gospel has the first-hand witness approval of those who were ‘servants of the word’.

The Gospels

We are soon aware that material is marshalled somewhat differently in the gospels. Luke tells us that he is attempting to record an ‘orderly account’ and in doing so is anxious to support what has been taught by word of mouth to such people as his Gospel’s recipient, Theophilus. It is not just a history but a presentation of historical events and sayings to teach about Jesus. Each gospel has an underlying purpose in the way in which material is presented and this brings us variations in the order of events in a number of places. Had the gospels been inventions no such variations would have been permitted. When we find Mark (in his first chapter) gathering a number of events together as a typical day in the life of Jesus we do not regard him as dishonest. The events happened, as far as Mark is concerned, and probably happened similarly on very many occasions in the years of Christ’s ministry. Mark gives us the impression and feel of the pace of one day by his presentation. In doing so he conveys to us a more vivid sketch of Christ’s ministry than by telling us, for instance, that a man was healed on Thursday afternoon at 3pm, that Christ took time to explain about parables at 9am on the following Monday and so on. The identikit picture is not misleading but illuminating.

Our sense of the integrity of the gospel writers is heightened by seeing that they often include sayings or actions by the Apostles that tarnish their reputation and would have been edited out if the gospels had been some fabricated promotion-material for Christianity and its leading exponents. Thus we have the honest recording of the time when Simon Peter declares that Jesus is Christ, the Son of the Living God, but that incident of great significance, supporting Peter as an Apostle of spiritual insight, is at once

followed by Peter's protest when Christ speaks of suffering, cross and resurrection. The gospels tell us that this outburst of Peter against Christ's suffering was dealt with by Christ sharply, in chiding Peter for thinking in human terms rather than divine terms, and then with the searing rebuke 'Get behind me, Satan'. With Peter as main leader in the early church such blind statements and stupid actions would hardly have advanced his reputation. The Gospels record the incident. They also record the time when James and John, manipulated by a scheming mother, tried to corner the best seats in heaven for themselves. It takes one's breath away to read when they said, for it smudges their reputation. Yet it is there, written in the gospels. This reinforces the conviction that we have integrity in the gospel narratives as they show us what happened and show us the Apostles 'warts and all'. We might also note the way in which Peter denied his Lord three times, or the falling asleep of the disciples in Gethsemane, or the recording of unpopular sayings, as further illustrations of this argument.

Papias speaks of the 'Logia' composed in Hebrew by Matthew. Most scholars believe that this is a major source behind Matthew's gospel rather than being the gospel itself and is probably part of the list of written accounts referred to by Luke. In the same way there is strong tradition of John's connection with the Gospel in his name. Some accept John's authorship and others would at least go as far as believing that John's notes, memoirs or records lie strongly behind the Gospel. Certainly, even if John's Gospel was the last to be written, it shows an accurate inclusion of detail that reinforces its integrity of source or sources. JDG Dunn says it 'is valuable as a historical source' and refers to thirteen geographical notes not mentioned in the Synoptics. Some of these, like the five porticoes of the Pool of Bethesda or the Gabbatha – the Pavement by Pilate's house – used to be regarded as 'embroidery' to the Gospel until excavations earlier this century discovered both – even the five-portico detail being shown as accurate. JDG Dunn argues that the accuracy of geographical detail means that John's Gospel must be firmly rooted in good historical tradition that is, in the testimony or account of eye-witnesses.

Altogether there are strong tides of support for taking the Gospels seriously as the main evidence for Christ. Of course, we are entirely unable to

prove historically events that took place two thousand years ago. We have no video recording. We cannot, in that sense, prove that twelve baskets full of fragments were gathered after the feeding of the five thousand with a few loaves and fishes; we cannot prove that Lazarus rose from the dead; we cannot prove that the sweat of Jesus was as drops of blood as he prayed in Gethsemane. However, we can know the impact of Christians upon the world of their day and must surely agree that such an impact would have been very unlikely without the obvious integrity of their witness to what they had seen, heard and experienced. If we are wanting to press the valid point that witnesses can sometimes be mistaken we cannot seriously press the point that the whole of Christianity was based on a fraud, or that what inspired early Christians even to martyrdom and what converted the Roman emperor in due course was a faith that lacked integrity. It is this apostolic integrity which leads many to take the gospel writers seriously. It encourages others at least to give the gospel accounts a high degree of probability.

The teaching of Jesus

Let us now look at the contents of the gospels more closely. We start with the sayings of Jesus. What would it have been like to have lived and travelled with Jesus Christ almost every day for three years? My ministry as a Bishop is partly itinerant within my Diocese and beyond it. I am out most evenings to a confirmation or some other service. Several times a week I have to carve out the hours to produce new material for preaching and so it is almost inevitable that with confirmations I use several addresses very many times, as the preparation is done and the congregation is normally different on each occasion. My wife travels with me to most services and this means that she hears the same material very frequently. I sometimes say that if I was unwell she could step up and carry on from where my words stopped! But actually every occasion is different. The main thrust of the material is perhaps the same but the circumstances vary so much that the very rapport of the confirmation candidates with me, or the lack of that rapport, makes me draw more sharply or fully on some aspects, or to add a special illustration or to pick something up in the local situation that can underline what I am saying.

If, at the end of my life, several people decided to set down the main content of sermons they had heard me preach or the illustrations they had heard me use, there would be a broad agreement and a host of variations – most of them genuine. Memories might be jogged or corrected by someone else's written account but there would be freshness of personal reminiscence.

Jesus must have used some stories, illustrations and parables dozens and dozens of times as an itinerant preacher. He would see the sower and use the sower as an illustration. The next day, perhaps without a sower in view, he might re-use the same illustration and improve on it. In three years he might use it a hundred times if it was effective in getting his teaching across. One film of Jesus' life that I saw some years ago depicted the Sermon on the Mount in one incredible sequence. I say 'incredible' for that is what it was. Jesus sat on a hillside and in the course of five minutes or so delivered the main bulk of what we call the 'Sermon on the Mount' in staccato sentences like a rapid-repeater gun. It was ridiculous. That Jesus did much of his early teaching on the hillside above Capernaum seems very likely. That this was over several weeks of months seems very likely. That what is contained in those chapters of Matthew's Gospel as the Sermon on the Mount was all taught there and then seems immensely unlikely. What is gathered must surely be distillation of teaching often repeated and renewed in different forms across Christ's ministry.

Some of the teaching given may have been in the style of a Rabbi to disciples, with specific learning and repetition. One feels this particularly over the Beatitudes, which seem a composite series of well-memorized teachings and sayings. In our own day we do not learn by rote or memory as much as fifty years ago when the school I first went to made us learn our maths tables by heart and made us learn the spelling of words with a weekly test in public. The effect upon spelling was dramatic compared with the vagueness over spelling in many otherwise excellent pupils today. In Christ's time the method of teaching was immensely dependent upon repetition and memory. That this means unreliability is questionable. Some of those who accurately retained oral tradition in the Orthodox churches only found error occurring when it was written down and copied! The power and accuracy of oral tradition should not be underrated by our sophisticated literary

and computer-age minds. This does not mean that oral tradition cannot err. Of course it can, but it is not so unreliable as some would think and we must take it with considerable seriousness.

It would be beyond belief that Jesus Christ, if he was indeed the Son of God come into the world, would not take the greatest possible care to ensure that his disciples grasped the truth that he was revealing and teaching as far as they could and in such a way that they could pass it on to others. Mark indicates to us that it was only when the disciples had realized and confessed who Jesus was that Jesus began to teach them about the suffering and the cross.

The watershed of Mark's gospel is undoubtedly the confession at Caesarea Philippi. That the truths which took the disciples deeper in their understanding were conveyed mostly in the final weeks of Christ's life also seems to come across in the other Synoptic Gospels and especially in the Gospel of John. That it all 'made sense' in a vivid way after the resurrection and by the coming of the Holy Spirit is also indicated to us – with the statement that the Spirit had been given to remind the Apostles of what Jesus had taught was gradually opened up to the Apostles and it seems certain that this must have been a deliberate strategy and purpose of the part of Christ. Some scholars build a strong case on the aspect of rabbinic accuracy in looking at Jesus' teaching as it is given to us in the gospels. One scholar, who was critical of this approach, admitted that those presenting the case had 'forcibly compelled the recognition of the structural parallelism between much in primitive Christianity and Pharisaic Judaism. This means, in our judgement, that they have made it far more historically probable and reasonably credible, over against the scepticism of much form criticism, that in the Gospels we are within hearing of the authentic voice and within sight of the authentic activity of Jesus of Nazareth'.

Some critics

Form criticism has developed on the theory that most of the contents of the gospel are the reflections of the first century church and the 'form' aspect means identifying what might have caused such stories to have been

invented or such sayings to be thought up. Form criticism, once it has set its ground rules, whoops along like a dog with a scent to follow. But many believe the scent itself is wrong and thus the explorations and conclusions are way off course. The assumption that most of the gospels' content was invented by the early church is anything but watertight. For instance, it would demand that some of the major issues of concern and dispute in the early church, which we learn about from the Acts and the Epistles, would have some appropriate sayings invented for the mouth of Jesus to issue in the gospel 'accounts'. Yet this is far from so.

One of the main controversies in the early church was the issue of circumcision – of the religious practices of Jews and the applications to Gentiles. Acts 15 records the deliberations at the Council of Jerusalem which was called largely to sort out this dispute. So why, if the basic case of the form critics is right, is it not spoken about frequently and clearly by Jesus in the Gospels? Many of us would reply that it is because Jesus did not speak about it and so the gospel writers do not include anything. Again, one of the issues that ran like a storm through the church at Corinth and elsewhere was that of speaking in tongues. Why did Jesus not speak about this matter if it was to be so important in the church's life? If we respond that the church invented the Pentecost story instead, we may reply by pointing out that 'tongues' in 1 Corinthians is a very different phenomenon from that in Acts, where hearing is the miracle. Invention would not have allowed that.

The form critics' case leaks at the seams when subjected to this sort of questioning. This is not to deny that there is help and illumination in some of that which form criticism emphasizes; not do we deny that the early church meditated much on what had been said and taught by Christ and that this is reflected in the Gospels. We are well aware that John's Gospel has a depth of meditation far greater than that of the Synoptics. But we do not accept the sweeping permeation of doubt from much form criticism. It assumes an empty Jesus Christ who could not teach his disciples and did not think teaching to be important. As Vincent Taylor put it: 'If the form critics are right the disciples must have been translated to heaven immediately after the resurrection'.

It seems more valid to believe that in the Gospels we have the witness of men who knew Christ, who lived with him and followed him and who have strong testimony of what he said and did. We feel the impact of when they first heard what was said and as it was repeated and taught. We note that the Gospels never praise Jesus as invented writings would. As CFD Moule says of Jesus' attitude to women: 'It is difficult enough for anyone, even a consummate master of imaginative writing, to create a picture of a deeply pure, good person moving about in an impure environment without making him a prig or a prude or a plaster saint. How comes it that through all the Gospel traditions without exception, there comes a remarkably firmly-drawn portrait of an attractive young man moving freely about among women of all sorts including the decidedly disagreeable, without a trace of sentimentality, unnaturalness or prudery, and yet at every point, maintaining a simple integrity of character'. It is this consistency of the picture of Jesus that strengthens belief in the honesty of the Gospel testimony and record.

We sense the note of authority running through the teaching. However much rabbinic-method was used by Jesus to teach, there was a world of a difference between Christ and Rabbis. They repeated and re-presented what came from the past. Christ was original, fresh, penetrating and searching. As Bousset said: 'The Rabbis stammered but Christ spoke'. Beverley Nichols, quoting some of the gripping sayings of Jesus, wrote. 'Whoever said them was gigantic. And whoever said them was living... there was nothing trite or commonplace about his words and nothing colourless about his deeds'. This line of approach makes a lot of sense to me. The idea that in John's Gospel we do not have what Jesus said or did is challenged by the amazing depth of the Gospel itself. Whoever wrote that gospel was not a committee (which designs a horse and produces a camel) but a person greater and deeper than anyone whose words I have read anywhere. There is a ring of truth and an eternal dimension that I find compelling.

The amazing vitality and relevance; the penetrating insights of the words of Jesus; the comforting and discomfiting impact; the warming of heart and soul – all this is for me a daily experience of meditating on the new Testament that has continued over more than thirty years. No other book in the world could be like this. The writers and sources of the gospels recede in

importance before the over-all impact that the Gospels witness to someone far greater than their authors.

The resurrection

What about the narrative parts of the gospels? We have already noted that events and sayings may be marshalled or gathered together by the gospel writers. They are not writing a history book but a gospel – a conveying of the good news that had burst upon the world in Jesus Christ. John tells us (John 20.31) that his Gospel is written so that people may believe Jesus is the Christ and might have life in his name. The gospel writers' ways of presenting what Christ said and did will bear differences as between any editors and assemblers of material (we see this in the differences of reporting the same events by the ITN News and the BBC News on television). This does not mean that they were not acting with integrity. Major agreement on the course of events is supremely in the accounts of the Passion – though even there we find minor differences. The accounts of the resurrection bear anything but the mark of invention. Much play is often made about the differing accounts from the witnesses of the risen Christ. That has always been to me a mark of the honesty in recording how the events happened or appeared to those witnesses. An overall editor would have removed such discrepancies but instead we have the vibrancy of people meeting an overwhelming truth in a mind-blowing experience of the risen Lord.

No one is required by Christianity to come at the gospel narratives uncritically, but they certainly should be treated seriously. IH Marshall says in his thorough examination of the evidence for the historic Jesus: 'Instead of the tradition resembling a cloud of shifting composition and uncertain size, it is better to think of it as a reasonably solid mass with fuzzy edges'. Those who rend the Gospel tradition apart and who, usually at the same time, do not accept even the resurrection of Jesus, are leaving a shredded New Testament on the floor with just a small amount of agreed possibility on the table. In so doing they must themselves then face a fundamental question. Their minimal and emaciated Jesus, this pale but courageous man, seems hardly worth following – certainly not worth martyrdom. Can such a figure account for

Christianity – for the faith that turned the world upside down? Can such a figure account for the fact that the early church regarded Jesus not just as a man but as the long-expected Messiah, the Christ, the Son of God and the Lord of all? Some would drive a wedge between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith but the acts and the Epistles know no such distinction. The early church clearly understood Jesus to be man and God, Lord and Saviour. They worshipped him. They dared for him. They followed him. And against all opposition the church grew. It seems incredible that such would result from the pathetic remnant of a man left by those who would desiccate the New Testament; rather it is credible that such would result from the person portrayed in the New Testament in his humility, authority, power and grace – the Christ.

The more we read the Gospels the more the impression burns into us that here is portrayed a person (and what an attractive person!) – not a collection of sayings, ideas and stories alone but over, through and in all, an individual who spoke and thought and acted. As CH Dodd has put it: ‘When all allowance has been made... it remains that the first three gospels offer a body of sayings on the whole so consistent, so coherent and withal so distinctive in manner, style and content, that no reasonable critic should doubt, whatever reservations he may have about individual sayings, that we find reflected here the thought of a single, unique teacher’.

Jesus Christ is the cohesive factor in the gospels and this very cohesion is one of the most compelling evidences for Christ. If the Gospels had all been written by the same person we might feel that there was a possibility of this person being ‘drawn’ by word-sketching. But we have four styles of Gospel – even if the synoptic share similar sources. In this variety of Gospel the overriding impact is not of four possible Christs but of one Person graciously spanning the four, breathing through the four and supreme over the four. The whole fits together not in some malformed conglomeration but in the unique person of Jesus Christ.

Experience of Christ

In the end it is our experience of Christ through coming openly to the New Testament that will be the crowning evidence of all. There is ample ground for us at least to take the New Testament seriously and to come at it like someone testing a theory in science. I have many times commended genuine enquirers to read John's Gospel with an open mind and to pray, sincerely, 'Lord, if you exist, open yourself to me as I read this gospel'. A considerable number of people have come to know Christ in this way – often by chapter 7! If we really do have here the testimony to the living Lord then we may expect him to meet with those who seek him genuinely with all their heart and mind. The New Testament shows us Christ; we reach out to him as eternal Lord and Saviour with faith; we find him meeting us in our experiences; this drives us back to the New Testament to know more of him; he increasingly illuminates the word to us and so we come to know not just more of him but to know him more. So it continues more and more.

Indeed, it does not even require an attitude of expectancy to bring home to the reader of the New Testament its dynamic power and unique revelation. JB Phillips, who translated the Epistles in such an arresting way (*Letters to Young Churches*) gives his testimony of a translator in his book *Ring of Truth*. He did not believe in 'verbal inspiration' and so did not come to the New Testament with preconceived expectancies. But he found that 'once one gets to grips with the stuff of the New Testament, its vitality is astonishing... the centuries seemed to melt away and here I was confronted by eternal truths which my soul, however reluctantly, felt bound to accept. The further I went on with my work of translation the more this conviction of spiritual truth grew within me'. He spoke of the impact of 'inspiration' which he had never experienced even to the remotest degree in any other work. His testimony is powerful and honest and is shared by tens of thousands of others who have come at the New Testament carefully and thoughtfully and found it alive – supremely alive with the person of Christ. E V Rieu undertook the translation of the Gospels for Penguin Books in 1952. He did so as a Classics scholar. His thorough foreword shows us the impact on him and he ends it thus: 'these documents... bear the seal of the

Son of Man and God, they are the Magna Charta of the human spirit. Were we to devote to their comprehension a little of the selfless enthusiasm that is now expended on the riddle of our physical surroundings, we should cease to say that Christianity is coming to an end – we might even feel that it had only just begun’.

The subtle effect of extremely liberal scholarship has meant that most people at the ordinary level do not take the New Testament seriously. In the television University quiz-challenges, questions on the New Testament often receive the reply: ‘Pass’. It is increasingly true as GK Chesterton said, that it is not so much that Christianity has been tried and found wanting, it has not been tried. There is a pathetic lack of serious study, knowledge or understanding of the New Testament in most people. Yet to the millions who have faced up to the New Testament and have from that come to know Christ Jesus as Lord in their living experience, the evidence for Christ is overwhelming and the Christ of that evidence overwhelms us. I am but one of those who would testify to this as reality and who would urge others to come to Christ.

Like Thomas, doubts were overcome by faith and experience and, kneeling, we now say ‘My Lord and my God’. The one before whom we kneel is the Jesus of history, the Risen and Reigning Lord, the one at whose name every knee will bow, the Cosmic Creator and Sustainer, the Light of the world, the Messiah, the Word, the Saviour, the Christ.

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