

I have lived in Grand Marais since September. I love it here, even in the deepest cold of winter. What a beautiful place to live. It was a joy to sing about the Savior's birth this last Christmas with Borealis. Thanks to all of you who helped me feel welcome.

Since I have four articles to write for the News Herald, I decided to write about Christian Apologetics. That isn't apologizing for Christianity (apologetics is the technical term for mounting a defense), but rather defending what the bible teaches about who Jesus Christ is, and what he has done for us.

Christianity is a historical religion. It is based on the claims of ancient people about the person of Jesus Christ. A man who lived in history. He was active in the world. He made claims about himself. These are recorded in the Bible in the first four books of the New Testament. The historicity of Christianity stands firmly on the historicity of Jesus. We can determine the truth about Jesus by historical and scientific investigation.

So, let's start at the beginning. The question is: How do we determine the truth claims of historical sources? By historical and scientific investigation. The nature of the documents is irrelevant. Religious documents are no different than any other. Historical and scientific investigation is the only valid way to determine the claims. The historian uses logic, collects facts, and sets out theorems, and accepts the explanations which best account for the facts discovered.

Historians use three basic tests to determine the accuracy of ancient texts; The Bibliographic test, the Internal Test, and the External Test. The Bibliographic test follows the trail of how we got a particular text. How close to the original events was the text written? What are the oldest copies of the text? And how early are they?

The fact is that the Gospels (the biblical books, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) pass these tests far better than any other ancient text. Everything we know about ancient Rome and Greece, is based on far less textual evidence than we have in the Gospels. Just a few examples will suffice. Homer's Iliad, a text from ancient Greece, was written about 800BC. The oldest manuscripts we have are from 400BC. That's a gap of 400 years. We have a total of about 1,800 fragments and copies of the Iliad. The Annals of Tacitus, a history of Ancient Rome comes from 100AD. For the first half we have documents from 850AD and the second 1050AD. That's a gap of 750 to 900 years. We have approximately 31 documents. (note these are 2014 figures and some new discoveries may have changed these numbers. See <https://www.josh.org/wp-content/uploads/Bibliographical-Test-Update-08.13.14.pdf>). And the list goes on. In fact, all we know of ancient Rome and Greece comes from less than 2,500 copies of the ancient documents. With a time gap between the writing and the documents from 200 to 1,500 years.

In contrast, the Greek New Testament documents were written between 50-100AD. The time gap between that and the copies that exists is a mere 50 years (or less), and there are 5,800 copies, in Greek. Counting early translations, the number swells to 18,500. But, what about differences in the copies? Is the text we have even close to the original? The answer is, yes. While there are many variants, most of them are minor grammatical, or syntactical. Not a single difference can be found on a theological issue. The textual evidence for the Christian claims is better than that of any ancient text. One could say that if you discount the textual grounds of the New Testament texts, you must first discount the entire body of Greco-Roman historical and literary texts. I encourage you to follow the trail of this historical evidence yourself.

As for me, I am a Christian. I believe in Jesus Christ, who was a real person and did real things in history. As St. Paul said in his trial before Herod Agrippa, “For the king knows about these things, and to him I speak boldly. For I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this has not been done in a corner.” (Acts 26:26, ESV) He pleads his case based on things the king can verify. He claims, as do I: For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.” (1 Corinthians 15:3–6, ESV)

Please feel free to contact me with comments or questions. Pastor@WattsWhat.net