

Christianity: origins and contemporary expressions | A1 Sample answer

Outline the key points of religious evidence for the existence of Jesus of Nazareth from the writings of Josephus and two Evangelists.

There is a lot of evidence to prove that Jesus of Nazareth was a real person. He is as much a historical figure as Joan of Arc or King Henry VII. The proof available for his existence is twofold i.e. Faith based and non-faith based documents. Faith based documents or religious evidence includes the Gospels and other religious writings. These are usually subject to bias, they are in favour of Jesus' existence and there is no room for doubt in their writings about this.

Josephus

Josephus wrote the book *History of the Jews 98AD*. He is the first of our religious sources for Jesus of Nazareth. He is a non-Christian source, yet still religious as he was a Jewish historian. He wrote of Jesus of Nazareth 60 years after Jesus' death. He was doing research into the history of Judea and noted that there were disturbances there during Pontius Pilate's reign as governor. He wrote that a man from Nazareth was crucified under Pilate's orders. This evidence corresponds to our own previous knowledge of Jesus. Josephus admired Jesus which was odd for historians of that time. Josephus believed that Jesus was the Messiah which they were all waiting for. He wrote 20 volumes on the History of the Jews and that is how we have knowledge of his existence.

The Evangelists

Matthew

Matthew was one of Jesus' twelve apostles. He was a former tax collector. He experienced metanoia upon meeting Jesus and changed his name from Levi to Matthew. His Gospel was written in 85 AD for a Jewish/Christian audience. Matthew believed that Jesus was the new Moses and fulfilled the promises of the Old Testament for being the Messiah. Matthew focused on Jesus' incidents and sayings. The most famous quote from Matthew is Matthew 28:19 "*Therefore go and make disciples of all nations..*" Matthew must've asked many eyewitnesses to obtain such an accurate quote.

Both Matthew and Luke's gospels are very similar. They both used Mark's Gospel to obtain information. This is why they are known as the synoptic Gospels. Quotes which are common to all three gospels make scholars believe that they shared a document which provided this information. This mysterious document has been named the Q document. Q represents the German word "quelle" meaning source.

Luke

Luke is rumoured to have written Acts of the Apostles as well as the Gospel of Luke. He supposedly was friends with Saint Paul. He was the only gentile gospel writer. His gospel was written 85-90 AD. His gospel focuses on Jesus' compassion and love for sinners and outcasts e.g. Samaritans, poor people, Tax collectors and prostitutes. The parables of the prodigal son and the Good Samaritan are prime examples of Jesus' compassion and can only be found in Luke's Gospel. Luke's gospel also mentioned a lot more of the role of women in Jesus' ministry. Luke's gospel is my own personal favourite as his way of writing the parables is very effective at passing on Jesus' message.

Though these sources are religious, hence bias, they are still authoritative. They agree that Jesus of Nazareth did exist, which most historians believe. Most historians, however, doubt the true nature of who Jesus was. We can see that the men who wrote these documents believed Jesus was the messiah. Whether we believe that too, is up to us.