On the Truth of the Gospel by Way of Reasoning from Proofs

Yahya ibn Adi (AD 893–974)

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On the Truth of the Gospel by Way of Reasoning from Proofs — by Ya yā ibn Adī ibn amīd ibn Zakriyā, may God almighty have mercy on him
[Translated by Sam Noble]

Among the evident proofs is that the pure Gospel is accepted by many peoples whose countries are far from each other and who have different religions and diverse ambitions. It is not possible for ones such as them to collude nor is it thinkable that they would agree with one another. If this is the case, then all things that are accepted are accepted either because of the reasons that something false is accepted or because of the reasons that the truth is accepted. The reasons for accepting something that is false are fear of being killed and degradation and poverty, the imposition of oppressive burdens, the constraints of the law, separation from relatives, proximity to pleasures and the rebelliousness of desires, the desire for strength and power and easy circumstances and the acquisition of wealth, the desire for ease and calm and security and peace, laxity in the law, familial bonds, the allowing of total indulgence in pleasures, the permission to indulge in lusts, and the trickiness of those preaching and the foolishness of those who are preached to. The Gospel contains the opposites of all these things and the renouncement of them all. It commands the bearing of degradation, the renouncing of seeking power, the love of poverty, patience with oppressive burdens, and the leaving aside of laxity in the law in favor of exactitude in it. It commands courage in bearing suffering, the laying aside of indulgence in pleasures, and the laying aside of worry in the face of dangers.

It is manifestly clear that those who preach the Gospel, that is, those who preach Christianity, were not trickier and cleverer than those to whom they preached. Most of those who preached were illiterate fishermen and craftsmen. They were not endowed with special knowledge or overwhelmingly strong understanding. As for those to whom they preached, these included the Romans and the Greeks, the masters of subtle wisdom and the foremost in lofty knowledge. They possessed sharp intellects and penetrating insights. They could not be fooled by a trick or defeated by deception. No error is hidden from them and they

are not blind to erroneous expressions. Thus it is clearly unimaginable that the Gospel was accepted for one of those reasons by which falsehood is accepted.

It remains then that it was accepted for those reasons by which the truth is accepted, either wholly or in part, and this compels belief in what it contains. These commands and prophecies that the Gospel contains not only require that one not hasten to accept them, but even demand to be found burdensome, and to be mocked and fled from and avoided, to not be accepted at all and to not be loved in principle. For this reason, if it is accepted by peoples whose numbers are countless, then this is the most convincing proof and the most impartial testament that belief in it is a miracle and the surest sign. The reasons that remain by which, in whole or in part, the truth must be accepted are: that what is reported is tangible to the senses and manifestly present, that it is primary in the intellect, that it is made clear through apodictic proof like the existence of the corners of an isosceles triangle, or it is believed because it is commonly and widely known and because peoples who could not conspire to agree on a falsehood bear witness to it. A reason for its acceptance other than these reasons is that acceptance and credence in it is only because those who preach it demonstrate it through signs and miracles of which man's inability to perform bears witness that they are not possible without the help of the Creator, blessed be His name. Only those who are good and pure are able to perform them, those who are excellent and trustworthy, who only speak the pure truth untainted by falsehood, only that which is wholly beneficial unmixed with harm.

If this is the case, and if what is contained in the Gospel was not ascertained by the all peoples who accept it through the senses or through its being materially present, nor is it one of the first principles in the intellect, nor is it ascertainable by apodictic proofs from the natures of things, and not something that is widely and commonly known, the truth of which is undisputed, then it necessarily follows that it was accepted and believed on account of the miraculous signs that those who preached it used to demonstrate it. It is not at all possible to believe that those who were preached to believed those preaching if what they preached was completely devoid of the reasons by which the truth is accepted, which we have enumerated. It follows that those who accepted it, accepted it because they witnessed the miracles that the preachers worked, which are impossible for humans. This confirms what we wanted to prove about the truth of what the pure Gospel contains, which is that the peoples who were called to believe it only did so because of signs and miracles that God worked by the hands of those who preached it. Thanks be to God always!

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