

MATTHEW, MARK, LUKE, JOHN
Were They Fooled? —Did They Lie?
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You say that if the Gospels were true no one could help being a Christian. Do I understand that to be your meaning?

Yes, for I hold that the things recorded in the Gospels, if true, would leave no room for doubting the Divinity of Jesus Christ.

What is your reason for not believing that the Gospels are true?

For the simple reason that if the Gospels were true, everybody would be glad to acknowledge them as true, for everybody would be glad to have God's word for what .he should believe and do.

From what you say, I think we should consider a few fundamental matters before we come to the direct and definite proof of the truth of the Gospels. You state that because there are many who do not believe in the Gospels it is an argument against the truth of the Gospels. Numbers, however, do not make an argument for the truth of anything. Consider the vast number of people, even learned people, who, until recently, believed in spontaneous generation. Now, however, since Pasteur's experiments proved the contrary, no one believes in spontaneous generation. You say that no one would hesitate to accept a religion that was Divine, and that consequently no one would reject the Gospels which proclaim a Divine religion if the Gospels were true. What you say seems plausible, but a little consideration will show that it is fallacious. It is true that no one who is logical and consistent would hesitate to believe in a religion that he knows to be divine. But, unfortunately, everybody is not logical or consistent. People are influenced by various things which interfere with logic and consistency. For instance, everybody wants to have good health, yet although they know it to be a fact that certain drugs and certain immoral habits destroy health and cause dreadful diseases, that does not prevent them from using these drugs or indulging in these immoral practices. The whole world is strewn with human wrecks, the victims of various nervous disorders resulting from habits and practices which are known to be destructive of health. Knowing is not doing. So, acknowledging that the Gospels are true would not necessarily imply that such acknowledgment would result in living by the Gospel religion. The fact, therefore, that everybody does not practise the religion of Christ is no argument against the truth of the Gospels.

But in such a serious matter as religion, would you not think that people would live in accordance with their belief?

To that, let me say that a person's health is a serious matter, and if many people, nevertheless, fail to live in accordance with what they know to be the laws of health, we should not be surprised that they do not live in accordance with the true religion. Health concerns our present life; and violation of its precepts brings penalties here and now, yet many ignore its laws. Religion concerns our eternal welfare. Violation of its precepts or the ignoring of its authority are not always penalized in this life. That does not mean, however, that religion can be ignored or defied with impunity.

But what has all this to do with the truth of the Gospels?

It has a great deal to do with it. There is such a thing as wishful thinking, which causes people to believe readily what appeals to their inclinations and pleasure, and to disbelieve whatever restrains, or limits their desires or gratifications. If people could believe the Gospels without the obligation of living by the Gospels, it is safe to say that very few would have doubts about the truth of the Gospels. For it is

acknowledged by all classes of people that the Gospels are the most sublime moral teaching of all time. They proclaim the most consoling and beneficial truths ever heard on this earth. But they also declare that the teaching therein is that of God Himself. This teaching obliges man to regulate his life by the will, of God. But man likes to do his own will rather than that of another, so rather than submit his will, he tries to find reasons against the truth of the Gospels.

In acting thus he may not be conscious that he is influenced by the desire to be a law unto himself, but in reality, he gives undue importance to everything that he thinks will justify his rejection of the Gospels. If people would eliminate self-seeking from their consideration of the Gospels they would find little or no objection to accepting them as the Divine teaching which they really are.

Is that not rather severe on the learned men who have spent much time and study on the Gospels, yet refuse to believe them true?

It is a strong statement to make, but, nevertheless, conforms to what most learned scholars have admitted, who spent the greater part of their lives in the endeavour to discredit the Gospels. These men who are considered to be the highest authority on early Christian literature, after a thorough study of everything pertaining to the Gospels, finally admitted that no one with pretence to scholarship could deny their genuineness or authenticity.

Why, then, did they not become Christians?

For the very reason I assigned above, self-seeking, or what is commonly called wishful thinking. These men, not being able to find a flaw in the genuineness or authenticity of the Gospels, instead of accepting them as the Word of God, devised a method of interpreting them which would enable them, as they thought, to avoid accepting them as the Word of God.

May I ask how they managed to accept the Gospels as genuine and authentic yet deny their Divine character which seems to stand out on every page?

Their method was to assert, without proof, however, that the supernatural was impossible, and that consequently everything supernatural in the Gospels should be interpreted as imaginary.

You mean that they regarded the miracles of Christ, even His Resurrection, as fiction of some sort?

Fiction may not be altogether the proper word for *it*, but it really comes to that.

And why were they not justified in their conclusion?

For the simple reason that Christianity was not founded on imagination. The first Christians did not sacrifice comfort, possessions, liberty and life for fiction. As Saint Augustine says: "The establishment of Christianity without the Resurrection would be a greater miracle than the the Resurrection itself." The millions of Jews, Greeks and Romans, who worshipped the Crucified as God, and for doing so endured the most dreadful torments of martyrdom, were not so foolish as to suffer and die for a fiction. Those Jews and pagans loved liberty and life as much as ourselves, and they were just as critical as the most wise and learned amongst us, yet they bowed down in Divine worship of a Crucified Jew.

Why is it that all this does not convince Rationalists and others such?

Why is it that the legion of human wrecks caused by vicious practices has not convinced of their danger people who are addicted to such practices? Man wants to do his own will, and in doing so sees a thousand and one reasons to justify his procedure. It was for this reason that Jesus, in the Lord's Prayer,

taught us to say to our Heavenly Father: "Thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven." Man is inclined to say: "My will be done," not: "Thy will be done," and as a consequence, seeks in every way to find a justification for what he does.

By this do you mean to infer that those who do not believe in the Gospels are, therefore, unrighteous?

By no means. There are various considerations which may influence a person to deny the truth of the Gospels, yet without fault on his part. I am simply trying to show you that, despite the fact that the Gospels are the truest record in the world, there are some people who do not believe in them.

What are the considerations you refer to which, as you say, explain why some persons, without fault on their part, do not believe the Gospels to be true?

There are several reasons to explain the attitude of such persons. Perhaps the most common explanation is the environment of these persons. Suppose, for instance, they live among people who are indifferent to religion or who scoff at religion or who are hostile to religion. In such an atmosphere they imbibe the sentiments of their surroundings and, perhaps, never think of investigating the matter for themselves.

Another explanation is to be found in the vicious attacks made against Christianity by writers who have a reputation for literary excellence but who know little or nothing about philosophy, history or religion, yet dogmatise on these matters, thus leading many astray. One of the worst features of our times is that a person, distinguished in some line, is considered an authority on any and every subject in other entirely different lines. Because a man is a famous surgeon it does not follow that he is an authority on architecture. Yet, many people to-day base their religious views on the statements of writers who are no more competent to speak on religion than is a cobbler to conduct a symphony orchestra.

I suppose you are now referring to those novelists, historians and scientists who, because of their fame, are regarded as authorities on everything in the universe?

Yes. But the worst of it is that, because the views of these persons flatter human pride and often give free rein to human passions, they are eagerly accepted by multitudes who are looking for reasons to justify themselves in being a law to themselves.

But how do you explain the opposition to the Gospels by those learned men who acknowledge that the Gospels are genuine and authentic?

To reply to that, let me first state what is meant by a document being genuine and authentic. A document is genuine if it is just the same as it originally was, that is, if it has not been altered in any way. It is authentic if written at the time and by the persons to whom it is attributed. When Rationalists started to destroy Christianity their first move was to discredit the Gospels, for they knew that the Church of Christ stands or falls with the Gospels. Not that the Church depended on the Gospels for her origin, for she was widely established before the Gospels were written. But since the Church has proclaimed that the Gospels are true, she would cease to be a Divine institution if the Gospels were not true.

You mean, I take it, that if the Church put her seal on the Gospels, and they were not what she declared them to be, she would by that fact show that she was not Divine, because a Divine Church could not proclaim what was false?

Precisely. And so certain opponents of Christianity determined to undermine the Church by discrediting the Gospels. Their first attack was to assert that the Gospels were not genuine, namely, that they were altered in the course of time in order to favour the claims of the Church. As a result of this

endeavour, after a most thorough examination of the various historical and antiquarian sources they were finally forced to admit that the Gospels to-day are exactly what they were at the time they were first given to the world. They next asserted that the Gospels were not authentic, that is, that they were not written at the time and by the persons to whom they were ascribed. They contended that the Gospels were written long after the Apostolic Age and by persons other than the Evangelists.

After the most searching investigation, however, they were forced to admit that the Gospels were written at the time and by the authors that the Church claimed.

Well, I should think that ended the matter. Why did not those men admit they were wrong and declare that Christianity was the Divine institution it claimed to be?

Thereby hangs a tale. Wishful thinking again. You see when they failed in their main assault on the Gospels they had recourse to subtle, devious attacks which would, they felt sure, accomplish the purpose of destroying the Church.

In desperation they finally asserted that the Gospels did not mean what they said, but must be interpreted rationally, that is, in accordance with the rationalistic theory that the supernatural was impossible. Hence, the miracles and the claims of Christ in the Gospels were to be interpreted as the enthusiastic expressions of hero worshippers.

Well, what have you to say to that? It certainly sounds plausible.

Very plausible. But it does not explain why the Apostles and Evangelists and the early Christians believed in the Resurrection as a fact, and sealed their belief by their blood. Certainly, the Jews who were the first converts to Christianity were as critical and intelligent as the twentieth century sceptics. These early converts to Christianity were on the spot. They could examine for themselves the facts recorded in the Gospels, and as a result of their investigation they broke life-long ties of worship to which they were deeply attached, and embraced a religion which demanded of them the greatest sacrifices human beings could make. Christianity, moreover, offered no worldly incentives or inducements to its adherents, but depended altogether on the supernatural evidence which it presented for its claims. Such being the case, it would be a miracle greater than any recorded in the Gospels, if the Jews became Christians without the most substantial evidence for the truth of the supernatural things recorded in the Gospels.

That certainly puts matters in a very commonsense light. I never before realized the tremendous seriousness of the change from Judaism to Christianity. And, as you say, the Jews were not a people to take such a step except on the strongest evidence to justify it.

Rationalists overlook the fact that supernatural religion absolutely required supernatural evidence to confirm its claims. The Gospels abound in supernatural evidence, and that is why Rationalists are obliged to deny the possibility of the supernatural or else accept Christianity for what it claims to be, namely, a Divine religion.

But why is it, after all, that Rationalists who certainly above the ordinary grade of intelligence, fail to be convinced by arguments which to common sense are so compelling?

It is the old, old reason, namely, not being open to conviction. If a person has a very strong motive for not accepting evidence he becomes blind to the clearest evidence.

On the other hand, if he has strong motives for accepting evidence, he will swallow the most absurd fabrications without hesitation. We see examples of this every day. Observe how readily some people join the most nonsensical religious sects or political movements simply because these organisations give them what pleases them. A strong argument for Christianity is that, although it imposes great restraints on man's impulses, and offers no concessions to human frailty, it, nevertheless, became the dominant religion of civilisation. You can't talk away that proof of the supernatural character of Christ's religion.

Men do not naturally embrace a creed that restricts and restrains them. When, therefore, we behold millions of the world's best men and women embrace the religion of the Crucified we know that it is because Christ was not only crucified but that He also had His glorious Resurrection. The Resurrection is a greater miracle than any other recorded in the Gospels. Let Rationalists explain the establishment of Christianity without the Resurrection and then we shall listen to their theories about the Gospel miracles.

Is the denial of the supernatural the only argument that Rationalists oppose to the truth of the Gospels?

No, but it is their fundamental reason for their stand against the Gospels. They also assert that the Gospels with their miracles were written in order to enable the Apostles to obtain ascendancy over the people and thus establish themselves in authority.

What would you say to that?

The Church was firmly established before the Gospels were written. It was the firmly and widely established Church that gave us the Gospels. The Gospels did not originate the Church but were only a documentary record of her Divine Founder's life and doctrine, which was authorised by the Church, after it was widely established.

How long after the Resurrection were the Gospels written?

The Gospels were written in the first century, within the lifetime of those who were witnesses of the facts therein recorded. The Jews did not deny the Gospel facts, although it would have been the most effective means of discrediting Christianity. No fact of the Gospel was ever called in question by those who lived at the time of its occurrence.

I have heard it said by some who disbelieve the Gospels that their reason for doing so is that the Evangelists contradict one another. What about that statement?

The test of true testimony in a court of law is difference in incidental details, but agreement on essentials. Twenty persons witnessing an event will give twenty different accounts of various details but the same account of main facts. Variation of description is not contradiction, since each observer pays attention to what most impresses him. In all the Gospels there is no contradiction on essentials, nor is there error in non-substantials.

Another objection I have heard against the Gospels is that the Evangelists were interested parties who profited by the glorification which they conferred on Christ, and therefore are not reliable historians.

To that assertion the answer is that the Evangelists gained nothing but, on the other hand, incurred great suffering and loss by publishing the Gospel facts. They were imprisoned, exiled and finally endured mortal agony for witnessing to the facts they recorded.

What would you say to the statement that the people living at the time the Gospels were written were credulous and superstitious, and that the Evangelists took advantage of their state of mind to impose the Gospels on them?

To this false accusation is opposed the well known fact that at the time of Christ the Jews, Greeks and Romans were the most critical and sceptical people in the history of mankind. Yet it was the sceptical Jews, Greeks and Romans who accepted the Gospels, and lived and died professing the truths which they

contained.

Why is it that, if the Gospels are true, the Jews as a people did not become Christians?

The Jews were looking for a Messiah who would be a great worldly monarch, who would make them the dominant people of the world. When Christ declared that His Kingdom was not of this world and refused to be an earthly king, they turned against Him. Although they openly admitted the Resurrection, it did not convert but rather perverted them, and they sought to destroy the evidence of the Resurrection by bribing the Roman military guard. All the first Christians, however, were Jews, and so many were becoming converts that the Jewish authorities instituted the first persecutions against the Christians. The Jewish leaders realised that if Christ prevailed they would lose their power, position and emoluments.

But the Jewish leaders were not fools. If the Gospel facts were true, why would these leaders stultify themselves, by rejecting Christ?

The Jews themselves never denied the Gospel facts. In the very city where Christ was crucified He was worshipped as God by those who had witnessed His death on the Cross. It was the Resurrection that converted them. But the leaders, carried away by passion and pride, refused to believe, despite the most convincing evidence. In their blind hatred of Christ they went so far as to endeavour to suppress evidence, which is not only a serious violation of justice, but also proof of bad faith on the part of those who have recourse to it. A person may be convinced without being converted.

Does it not seem strange, or rather unbelievable, that the Jewish leaders would close their eyes to the evidence for Christ's claims, if it was so convincing as you state?

Nothing is strange or unbelievable when people are dominated by pride and self-interest. We see the same tactics of the Jewish leaders employed today by the opponents of Christianity, who after the most deep and critical investigation of the Gospels, are compelled to admit their genuineness and authenticity, yet refuse to believe their message because it does not give them what they want.

Nevertheless, despite all you say, I can't understand how people of intelligence can ignore evidence simply because it does not confirm their point of view.

Self-interest, passion, pride often blind those who otherwise would see clearly. For that reason Jesus said of the Jewish leaders: "They are blind and leaders of the blind." (Saint Matthew xv, 14). I shall now state briefly the reasons why anyone who is not blinded by prejudice *must* admit that the Gospels are the truest books in the world.

- (1) The Evangelists were either eyewitnesses or companions of eyewitnesses of what they relate.
- (2) They had no motive for deceiving; they gained nothing, but, on the contrary, suffered imprisonment and death for preaching what they recorded in the Gospels.
- (3) They could not have deceived if they had wished, for multitudes who lived with Christ were living when the Gospels were written.
- (4) No people on earth at that period were more sceptical than the Jews.
- (5) The Jews never denied the Gospel facts but tried to suppress them or explain them away.
- (6) It was because so many Jews were becoming Christians that the leaders inaugurated the first Christian persecution.
- (7) The conversion of so many Jews to Christianity would have been impossible unless the Gospel facts were true.
- (8) The Evangelists could not have invented such a sublime character as Christ; nor could any human author have conceived of such a majestic and unique personage.
- (9) No merely human pen could have given us the Gospels unless the things recorded were actual

occurrences.

If the above data were presented to a jury of unprejudiced men they could hardly bring in any verdict except that the Gospels were what they have always been held to be by Christians, from the first century to the present day, namely, Divinely true.

May I ask you why you stated that no merely human author could have invented Christ?

The invention of a character like that of Christ, and of discourses such as those recorded of Him, would be beyond the power of the combined genius of Homer, Dante and Shakespeare. Yet the Evangelists were very ordinary men, chiefly of the peasant type, and absolutely incapable of the sublime descriptions and discourses of the Gospels unless they were merely setting down facts as seen and heard.

What is meant by saying that the Evangelists merely narrated facts as seen and heard?

That is a very significant question and I am glad you asked it. The Gospels are the only biography in the world in which there is practically no comment by the author. The Evangelists simply narrate what Jesus says and does, with scarcely a word of their own interpretation. They draw no inferences from His stupendous miracles, show no amazement at the acclaim of the multitude nor at the denunciation of His adversaries. They record His glorifications and His humiliations without any, even the slightest, expression of amazement or the least attempt to emphasize or detract from what occurs. In no other biography do we find such disinterested recordings of events as in the Gospels. As a result of this disinterestedness the Gospels give us a living likeness rather than a portrait of Jesus. In a portrait the artist either embellishes the subject before him, or attempts to interpret his characteristics. The Gospels, however, are like a photograph which reflects only what is before the lens. That is why the Gospels give us such an unsurpassable picture of Jesus. No other biography leaves such an intimate impression on the reader. Although none of the Evangelists describe the person of Jesus, we form a very definite idea of Him simply by what He says and does. In point of fact, no biography gives us such a clear conception of its subject as the Gospels give us of Christ, without describing a single feature of His person, whether it be His voice, appearance or any other characteristic.

What is your inference from that feature of the Gospels?

It seems quite clear that it is evidence of the reliability the Gospels. Due to the fact that the Evangelists were, for the most part, ordinary men, it was naturally impossible for them to give us a work surpassing the genius of the most eminent writers known to mankind. This is one of the points that go to show it is what it is claimed to be, a supernatural religion.

Just what is meant by a supernatural religion?

A supernatural religion is one whose origin and doctrine is from a supernatural source, that is, from a source higher than is natural to human beings. Jesus Christ, Who is God in the true sense, is the Founder of Christianity, and His doctrine, which is known as Revelation, is consequently Divinely true. The Gospels announce the religion revealed by the Eternal Son of God. They tell us certain things about God and ourselves we should never be able to know by our natural or human powers. Because this knowledge is revealed to us by the Son of God, it is called Revelation. This Revelation contains doctrines which are above human reason to originate or to understand. It is accepted on the sole word of God Who can neither deceive nor be deceived. For that reason our religion is called our Holy Faith. Christ established His Church to perpetuate His ministry and teaching. It was the Church, divinely guided by the Holy Ghost, that preserved for us the Gospels and the Sacred Scriptures. It was not until the middle of the fourth century that the Bible, as we know it, was given to the world. Up to that time there were many and various writings which claimed to be Holy Scriptures. It was the Church, Divinely authorised, that

determined and solemnly proclaimed the writings which were truly the Word of God. And it was the Church of Christ that preserved them intact, and transmitted them down through the centuries.

How were the Gospels preserved and transmitted down to the present day?

You must know that no book now in existence dates from the time of Christ. Every book originating at that time perished centuries ago. It is only a copy of the original, or a copy of a copy that now exists. The oldest book in the world today is a Bible whose origin dates from about A.D. 350. If it were not for the Church, in whose monasteries ancient manuscripts were copied and preserved there would not be in the world today even one book from classical antiquity. Until the invention of printing in the sixteenth century, all books were made by penmanship. This made books to be very costly. The Bible, for instance, required several years to copy, as each word had to be carefully written on a substance called parchment, which was the skin of sheep, polished and made very thin. In the monasteries of the Middle Ages was a room called the Scriptorium, in which there were sometimes as many as a hundred desks, at each one of which a monk wrote down what was dictated by a lector, who read from the book what was being reproduced. At the end of each page that was copied, an inspector, after carefully comparing the copy with the book, certified that it was a true version. This mark had to be on every page before it was inserted into a book called a codex. In this way a hundred copies of a book were made as one reader dictated the contents of the volume which was to be renewed. Even with this method of transmission books were few and hard to obtain.

But how are we certain that the Gospels as a result of this frequent renewal and transmission are now the very same as the original?

That is where the solicitude of the Church showed itself before a copy of the Gospels was published it had to have the certification of the ecclesiastical authorities that it was a true version of the genuine Gospels. This certification is now known as the imprimatur and if you open your Bible you will find it on the front page. When the Rationalists began their endeavour to discredit Christianity by discrediting the Gospels, their first procedure was to attack the genuineness of the Gospels. They moved Heaven and earth in order to find some addition or modification in the Gospels of today which differed from the most ancient manuscripts. They consulted the oldest Scriptures of the various languages, dug up monuments of ancient Greece, Syria and Rome, but always it was found that the Gospels as found in these ancient documents agreed *with* the texts of the present Gospels.

The hostile activity and scholarship of the Rationalists only served to make clearer than ever that the Gospels are now just what they were in the time of the Apostles.

I gather from this and from what you have said previously that the fundamental objection of Rationalists to the Gospels concerns Revelation, because Revelation is beyond human reason to originate or to comprehend. Am I right in so concluding?

Yes. It is true that Revelation is beyond human reason to originate or comprehend. We accept Revelation on the sole word of the One Who revealed it, namely, Jesus Christ the Son of God. It is not, however, unreasonable to believe that what God reveals is absolutely true. We may employ our reason to ascertain if Christ is truly what He claimed to be, but once that is settled it is the highest use of reason to believe that He Who gave us our reason will not ask us to act unreasonably. Saint Augustine said that he would not believe that Christianity was a Divine religion if it taught only what could originate in the human mind. The truths of the Gospel are such that they never could have been conceived by the human intellect. Every- other religion teaches only what human reason can evolve, which is sufficient proof that they are only human religions. Christianity alone teaches truths too sublime to be the creation of the human mind. Revelation proclaims the Fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man, the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Eucharist, the Resurrection of the body, universal judgment, and a future eternal life,

which will be happy or miserable according to each one's conduct during this brief period of probation called life.

It is because Revelation concerns life's conduct, and holds up high standards of morality that it is opposed by some persons. Others oppose it because of intellectual pride, which refuses to submit one's judgment to the sole word of another. It is true that Faith requires the sacrifice of our judgment, but the sacrifice is made on the altar of God's Word, which cannot fail. People submit their judgement every day to expert opinion, whether it be with regard to law, medicine, surgery or any other department of scientific knowledge. God certainly qualifies as an expert on all things, human and Divine.

You have certainly enlightened me concerning Revelation. As a matter of fact I have observed that people are perpetually acting on the confidence they have in the judgment of others. People who consult a surgeon about an operation submit to his judgment in a matter of life and death. It's all a question, it seems to me, of the trustworthiness and knowledge of the one whose word we accept.

Yes, and Christ was fully aware of that, for before He began to proclaim His Revelation He gave proof that He was speaking with Divine authority.

Revelation means declaring something otherwise hidden. A man reveals his thoughts by speech. A telescope reveals the glory and magnitude of the firmament, which otherwise would be unknown to man. Night reveals the starry heavens which but for the darkness of night would be invisible. Jesus Christ, the Eternal Son of God, revealed to mankind things about God, ourselves and the hereafter, which we should not otherwise know. By human reason we may know that man's soul is immortal, but not that it is destined for eternal membership in the Divine family. The Gospel contains the Revelation of Jesus Christ which is the basis of His supernatural religion.

All those who for one reason or other refuse to accept a supernatural religion are opponents of the Gospels.

Jesus Christ is the light of the world. The Catholic Church is the institution He founded to enlighten, guide and aid mankind to eternal welfare, and the Gospels are the documentary evidence of His Divine mission.

To conclude and sum up: The Gospels were written by those who lived at the time the facts were recorded took place; they were addressed primarily to people living in or near the time of the facts narrated; the writers were eyewitnesses of what they described; they had no motive for deceiving; what they describe and record could not have been invented by any human being unless the things narrated were actual occurrences; the people at the time were the most critical known to mankind; the era in which they were written was the classical period of the world's history; and finally, the research of scientific scholarship has confirmed what Christianity has held from its infancy, namely, that the Gospels are a completely reliable account of Christ's life and teaching.

*Nihil Obstat
RECCAREDUS FLEMING,
Censor Theol. Deput.*

*Imprimi Potest
✠ IOANNES CAROLUS,
Archiep. Dublinen.,
Hiberniae Primas.*

Dublino, die 16 Mai, anno 1945.
