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The Virgin Birth of Christ

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THE VIRGIN BIRTH OF CHRIST

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When Satan, by means of a subtle challenging of the veracity of God's Word, brought about the Fall of our first parents in the Garden of Eden, he planted the germ of our present day "Modernism". For from that day on the Devil has ever had disciples in the field ready to question the inspired Word and to substitute for It their own subjective ideas. To-day they are more numerous than ever, and are growing bolder as their number increases. They deal with the Bible in much the same manner as did Jehoiakim, king of Judah, some 2500 years ago. Because the prophecy of Jeremiah annoyed him and was at variance with his dreams of the future Judah, this king made short work of the offensive scroll of the prophet. For we are told, "it came to pass, that when Jehudi had read three or four leaves, he(the king) cut it with the penknife, and cast it into the fire that was on the hearth, until all the roll was consumed in the fire that was on the hearth". Of course "Modernists" no longer resort to such crude methods of doing away with Scriptures. Nevertheless, figuratively speaking, they too are "knifing" the Word of God, cutting away a passage here and a passage there which does not suit their "critical" minds, and mutilating the Bible to such an extent, they they might just as well be consistent, and like Jehoiakim, exterminate the Book in its entirety. Doctrines, they say, are vestiges of an ignorant, superstitious age. The "modernmind", "modern Christianity", must free itself from the shackles of ancient and medieval dogma. Thus one Christian belief after another has been subjected to the knife of "science" and of "modern criticism". As Beckwith puts it, "Of the historic doctrines of the Church not one but has undergone redefinition".(1). Hence it is only to be expected that a doctrine like that of the miraculous birth of Christ should be one of the first to require "restatement" in order to become acceptable to "the scientific temper" and the "intelligence" of to-day -

(1) "Idea Of God" p. 5.

which is a euphemistic way of saying, the Virgin Birth must be discarded altogether. But this need not surprise us in the least, for to unbelief in all its forms the supernatural birth of Christ has ever been a "rock of offence". The only new and strange thing about it is, while the attacks formerly came from non-Christians and anti-Christians, to-day men within the Church, who still profess to be faithful to the standards of churches which have as their basis a very positive and Biblical confession of faith, are "saying of the Virgin Birth practically what Ingersoll, Haeckel, Paine, Voltaire, Celsus, and Cerinthus said".(1) The result of this more or less sceptical behavior on the part of many so-called Christians toward a fundamental fact is positively appalling. "For some, it means utter disregard of the whole Christian system of doctrine and its moral ideals; for others, it means a most painful state of unrest and perplexity; for others, it means the equivocal situation of those who use evangelical vocabulary with unevangelical thoughts. For all, it means dreadful loss, spiritual decadence, the going down toward darkness."(2)

In view of such horrifying conditions within the Christian Church, especially with respect to the blasphemous attitude of some of its "ministers" and "scholars", it would seem to us both important and timely to reaffirm the much maligned doctrine of the Birth of our Lord and to review the impregnable grounds upon which this fundamental article is based.

It shall be our object to trace the history of the controversy over this doctrine from its very beginnings to the present time; to state briefly and to refute the arguments of the opposition; and finally to search out the the true Biblical version of the Lord's birth, of which we are confident that it will also be the view upheld by the Lutheran Church from its very inception.

(1) Macartney, "Twelve Great Questions About Christ", p.11-12.
(2) Guiton W.H. "Princeton Theo. Review", Vol.XXV. July, 1927. Page 390.

I

THE HISTORY OF THE CONTROVERSY

As a subject of controversy the Virgin Birth has few peers in the history of the Christian Church. As early as the second century we find the opponents centuring their attacks upon it. Briggs states, "It was indeed the burning question from the close of the first to the middle of the third century".(1)

The earliest known impugner of the Virgin Birth was Cerinthus,"whom a credible tradition makes a contemporary of St.John".(2) He taught that Jesus was the offspring of Mary and Joseph, tainted with sin like his fellowmen, though more righteous than others. This earthly Jesus was joined by the heavenly Christ at his baptism when the "spiritual aeon" descended upon him in the form of a dove and gave him powers to work miracles and to reveal the unknown Father among men. These two continued together in the human body of Jesus until just before the Passion, at which time the "spiritual" Christ left him again, and remained a true spirit, so that only the man Jesus suffered and died.(3) Tradition has it that John felt a keen aversion for this heretic and on one occasion even left the bath at Ephesus when he noticed Cerinthus entering it.(4) This may be nothing more than a legend, but we have Polycarp's testimony for it (John's own disciple), that the bitterest personal antagonism existed between the two.(5)

The Ebionites, a narrow, legal, anti-Pauline section of the Jewish Church, followed soon after with a purely human origin of Christ. They insisted on the observance of the Law, branded Paul an apostate, and declared Jesus to be the son of Joseph and Mary, a mere man, whom God elected to the Messiah-ship because of his extraordinary piety. This sect fabricated a Gospel of

(1) Briggs C.A.,"Amer. Journal Of Theo." Vol.12. 1908. Page 197.
(2) Gore, "Dissertations" - "Dict. of Chr. Biog., art. Cerinthus. (P,49)
(3) Klotsche, "An Outline Of The Hist. Of Doct.", p. 15-19.
(5) Iren.iii,4. Gore, Dissertations, pp. 49-51.
(4) Orr, "The V.B. Of Christ", p.110.

its own, a mutilated form of the Gospel of Matthew, from which the chapters teaching the Virgin Birth were omitted. It was known as the"Gospel Of The Ebionites" and is described to us as not "entire and perfectly complete, but falsified and mutilated".(1) At the beginning of the second century we find a sect arising within this sect, marked by rigorous Essenic asceticism and Gnostic speculation, and known as the "Elkesaites", because they accepted as a revelation "the Book of Elkesai". To them Christ was an angel born of human parents.(2)

Another form of opposition to early Christianity in general and to the Virgin Birth in particular was Gnosticism. "This was an essentially heathenish movement with a Hellenistic philosophical tendency within the pale of Christianity." (3) While some of the Gnostics accepted the Virgin Birth after a fashion, others could find no room for this doctrine in their monstrous speculations. They either denied the true humanity of Christ and pictured him as a heavenly aeon who assumed a body formed of psychical substance,and was therefore a human appearance only (Docetae), or they followed Cerinthus' lead believing Jesus to be a mere man, withwhom, for a time, the aeon Christ united himself.(4) Among these Gnostic rejectors Orr also lists the following: "the Carpocrations, a most licentious sect, and some of the Ophites, who revelled in a crude mythology." (5)

At this point we must also make mention of Marcion, who had very much in common with the Gnostics. Due to his peculiar belief that Jesus was the son of the "good" New Testament God, who appeared upon earth in a purely visionary body, and descended directly from heaven to Capernaum, this heretic of the second century could not, in consistency with his teachings, allow Jesus to be born at all. He was consequently forced to reject the idea of a miraculous birth from the very start,and in the interest of his theory dropped the first two chapters of the Gospel of St.Luke. Almost

(1) Orr, "The V.B. Of Christ", pp. 44-45.
(2) Klotsche, "An Out. Of The Hist. Of Doct.", p.16.
(3) " " " " " " " " " , p.15.
(4) " " " " " " " " " , p.20
(5) Orr, "The V.B. Of Christ", p. 140.

every Apologist from Justin onward takes notice of this heretic.(1)

Even among the early translators of Holy Scriptures we find a few who rejected the idea of a miraculous birth of Jesus Christ. A quotation from Eusebius will suffice to acquaint us with them: "Hear also what he(Irenaeus) has written respecting the translation of the Holy Scriptures by the seventy. 'God became man, and the Lord himself saved us, giving us the sign of the Virgin. But not as some say that now presume to interpret the Scripture: 'Behold, a young woman shall conceive and bear a son', as Theodotion of Ephesus and Aquila of Pontus have translated both of them Jewish proselytes. Whom the Ebionites following, assert that Jesus was begotten of Joseph'."(2) The ancient historian also classes the translator and commentator Symmachus as a scholar infected with Ebionite doctrine.

About the middle of the second century a new element was introduced into the controversy. While the Ebionites and Gnostics at no time expressly purposed to degrade or dishonor Christ, but were merely intent upon making room for the Head of the new Christian faith in their own religion or philosophy, the newcomer in the field tried to do away with Christ altogether. We have in mind Celsus, the heathen philosopher, the Epicurean and bitter enemy of everything Christian. "He opens his polemic against the Christians by referring to the taunts which the early Jews flung at them, and the first reproach of which he makes capital is that Jesus whom they worship was not born of a Virgin but was the son of a nameless father".(3) Here we have the Voltaire of a later age - a coarse, blasphemous fellow, representing Christ as an offspring of an illicit union between Mary and a soldier named Panthera, in short calling our Lord a bastard.(4) Not satisfied with making mirth of the Virgin Birth, Celsus also attempted to explain its origin by comparing it with the Greek fables "about Danae, and Melanippe, and Auge, and Antiope".(5) In his attacks he drew freely from the Gospels and

(1) Klotsche, "An Outline Of The Hist. Of Doct.", pp.23-24.
(2) Eusebius, "Hist. Eccl.", Bk.5, ch.8, p.176.
(3) Crain O.E. "Credibility Of The V.B.", p.5.
(4) Origin, "Ag. Celsus" 1,32 - Orr, p.146.
(5) " " " 1,37 - Orr p. 169.

tried to discount the Nativity narratives by urging the genealogies contradict one another.(1) Origin vehemently opposed this arch-enemy of early Christianity refuting his arguments in his well-known volume "Against Celsus", in which he goes so far as to call Celsus a "buffoon".(2)

However, these slanders, coming from Jew and pagan, together with the speculations of the Gnostic and Ebionitic sects, only served to whetten the tongues and pens of the <u>early defenders</u> of the miraculous birth. In their disputes with these heretics we see how tenaciously the Fathers held to this doctrine. No sooner did a contemner of our Lord's birth arise to disseminate his heresy, than one or more defenders took up the battle of the pen in its support.

One of the earliest Christian writers to stress and defend the Virgin Birth of Christ was <u>Ignatius</u>, Bishop of Antioch a few years after the writing of the fourth Gospel. About 110A.D., while passing through Asia on the way to his martyrdom, he bears witness of the Christian belief of his time and calls "the virginity of Mary one of the "three mysteries of loud proclamation which were wrought in the silence of God".(3) He is very pronounced in his warnings against "Docetism" and opposes all Judaizing heresies.

After Ignatius we come to the Apologist <u>Aristides</u> (c.125), a Greek Christian, a Syriac translation of whose Apology was recently discovered by Dr.Rendel Harris in a cloister on Mt.Sinai. In this valuable find, we are assured that the early Christians confessed Christ to be the Son of God, come down from heaven for the salvation of man, and that "from a Hebrew Virgin he took and clad Himself with flesh".(4)

A more important witness of the first Christian centuries was <u>Justin Martyr</u>. In his "Apologies" (c.150), and "Dialogues With Trypho" he summarizes the Church's belief of his age and gives the Virgin Birth a very conspicuous place in his discussions.(5) About 133 A.D. he travelled from

(1) Orr, "The V.B. Of Christ", p.74 - "Against Celsus", ii.32.
(2) Orr, "The V.B. Of Christ", p.170 -"Against Celsus", i ,37.
(3) Gore,"The V.B. Of Our Lord", p.46 - "Ign. Eph. 19.
(4) Lehre Und Wehre, Vol.68, p.133.
(5) Orr, "The V.B. Of Christ", p.145 - I Apol., 21,31,33,46,54,63, etc.

Palestine to Ephesus and thence to Rome, came in contact with Christians everywhere, and in his summary of their beliefs declared that the Virgin Birth was the universal belief to be accepted by everyone calling himself a Christian. He defends this doctrine against the pagan calumnies, and from the objections of the Jews.(1)

Towards the end of this century the voice of Irenaeus rings out loud and clear for this doctrine of the birth of the Lord from a Virgin. (c.190). He stands in history as the connecting link between the sub-Apostolic age and the succeeding era of the Christian Church, for his tradition comes to us on the authority of Polycarp, John's disciple, as pointed out above. His testimony has therefore value both for the range which it covers and for the source out of which it springs. In his great work "Against Heresies", he especially refutes the false "Gnosis", attacks the Ebionites, and gives the redemption through the incarnate Christ the central place in his system. Hear his testimony: " The Church, though scattered over the whole world to the ends of the earth, yet having received from the Apostles and their disciples the faith in ..... the one Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was incarnate for our salvation ..... and the birth of the Virgin Mary." Whereupon he proceeds to specify as agreeing in this faith the churches of Germany, Spain, Gaul, the East, Egypt, Libya, and Italy.(2)

A little later Tertullian gives the Virgin Birth the same prominent place in his creed. We quote from his "Veiling Of Virgins" written about 210 A.D.: " The Rule of Faith is altogether one, sole, immovable, and irreformable - namely, to believe in One God Almighty, the Maker of the world, and His Son, Jesus Christ, born of the Virgin Mary,"etc.(3) "Christ came", as Tertullian says, "to consecrate a new order of birth".(4) Thus Tertullian also brings the Virgin Birth to the foreground and defends this

(1) Gore, "Dissertations", p.45. - "Dial.", 85.
(2) " " " , p.43-44. - "Ag. Her.", i.10. 1 and 2.
(3) Orr, "The V.B. Of Christ", p.145.
(4) " " " " " , p.147-148. - "Flesh Of Christ",9.

doctrine against the heresies prevalent at his time.

We could mention more Christian writers of the first centuries who not only taught the Virgin Birth but protected it against the onslaughts of its enemies. There is Clement of Alexandria who writes, "that the Son of God ..... took flesh and was conceived in the womb of a Virgin".(1); there is Hippolytus who describes Christ as "the first-born of God who came down from heaven to the blessed Mary and was made a first-born son in her womb." (2); and then we have Origin who lived about the middle of the third century and is best known for the already quoted writing, "Against Heresies". "Who has not heard of Jesus' Virgin Birth", he cries out while arguing with the heathen Celsus.(3)

This then, in short, is the history of the controversy during the first three centuries. With the exception of the afore mentioned Ebionites and Gnostics, who, as Orr points out were themselves split on the question, so that only a small group of the former, and only a few uninfluential sects of the latter, really denied the Virgin Birth - the Christians the world over held fast to the miraculous conception of their Lord. By the middle of the third century the belief was truly universal. But at this time the more subtle Christological controversies engaged the attention of the Fathers and the Virgin Birth was pushed to the background.

Naturally the attack from the quarter of the Jews and pagans continued as before. It was probably in the eleventh century when a Jewish work appeared, entitled "Tol'doth Jeschu""which was nothing more than a matured discussion of the contentions and calumnies of Celsus.(4)However it scarcely occasioned a ripple in the Church, and we may safely say that from the third century onward up to Luther's time the faith in the Virgin Birth remained secure and established. The believers simply accepted the doctrine as laid down in the Gospels and the writings of the Fathers.

(1)Gore, "Dissertations", p.47. - Clement, "Strom",VI. 15. 127.
(2)Briggs C.A., "Amer. Jour. Of Theo.", Vol.12, 1908. Page 205.
(3)Orr, "The V.B. Of Christ", p.149 - "Ag. Celsus", i,7.
(4) " " " " " " , p.146.

It is to be expected that the great Reformer Luther, with his determined insistence upon the Word of God as the only norm of faith, should also run amuck of opposition on this point. The Anabaptists were ever a thorn in his flesh. His writings are full of refutations of their doctrines, and among other things he attacks their views on the Incarnation and the Virgin Birth. (1) To take a single instance out of many let us quote from his exposition of Luke 1,31: "Noch sind etliche gewest (wie auch zu unserer Zeit die Muensterische Wiedertaeuferrotte) die da sagen; es sei nicht geschrieben, dass Christus sei ein natuerlicher Sohn der Jungfrau aus ihrem Blut und Fleisch".(2) How else could they teach, when, like Marcion, they cherished the peculiar view that Jesus brought a body along with him from heaven. Some, as for example, Hans Denk, Ludwig Haetzer, Jakob Kautz, and Michael Servetus, held Antitrinitarian views.(3)

Another "Schwaermer" of Luther's age was Kaspar Schwenkfeld, whose philosophical tendencies led him into all sorts of strange speculations. He set out from the hypothesis that Christ was a mere man, but explained his preeminence by asserting a certain progression of the humanity of Christ through its union with the divine nature, so that it gradually became deified (Vergottung) without losing its identity.(4) In order to remain logical he was forced to grant Jesus a purely human birth. He once sent Luther a booklet containing his doctrines accompanying it with a letter in which he requested the Reformer to read his book and let him know what he thought of it. Doctor Martin did so in his usual gruff manner: "Darnach gedenkt er (Schwenkfeld), Christus ist eine Creatur, derhalben so soll ich Christum als einen Menschen nicht anbeten." - "So will mir der Narr zween Christus machen; einen der am Kreuz haengt, und einen anderen, der gen Himmel gefahren ist, und zur rechten Hand Gottes, seines himmelischen Vaters, sitzt!"(5)

A contemporary of Schwenkfeld was Faustus Socinus, the founder of the liberal Socinians and father of our present day Unitarians. Since this

(1) Luther's Works (St Louis Edition) II,1417; VII, 985; etc.
(2) Luther's Works (St Louis Edition) VIII, 366.
(3) International Ency. (sub Anabaptists).
(4) International Ency. (sub Schwenkfeld).
(5) Luther's Works (St Louis Edition) XX, 1662-63

body disregarded everything that was contrary to reason or "moral progress", they also insisted on a modification of the orthodox doctrine concerning the Person of Christ. To them Christ was a truly mortal being, but a man of unusual endowments, imbued with immeasurable wisdom, and exalted by God. All men are sons of God, however Christ was the favorite and most beloved son. Zoeckler tells us that they professed Christ "conceived of a Virgin, perfectly holy, and with power to reign over all things".(1) They represented him as having been conceived in Mary by a supernatural interposition of the Holy Ghost, in consequence of which he was a man free from original sin and its evil inclinations, but nevertheless a man. Reason told them there could be no union between the divine and the human, and Jesus must therefore not be regarded as the God-man, but as a creature of God. And since they denied the Deity of Christ their theory of a Virgin Birth was a corruption of the true Biblical version, for according to Scripture a sinless man is unthinkable. This sect was opposed by Protestantism and persecuted by Romanism.

There followed a lull in the storm. However at the close of the eighteenth century Deism and Rationalism once more insisted on a natural explanation of Jesus' birth. In his criticism of all religion, in so far as it claims a supernatural origin, the French philosopher, Voltaire, also directs his vitriolic pen against the Virgin Birth of Christ.(2) Paulus, another representative of extreme rationalism, "gave a 'natural' explanation of the event, supposing Mary to be the victim of a deception practiced upon her by her kinswoman Elizabeth.(3) The freethinker Thomas Paine, a bitter enemy of Christianity made an assault upon this doctrine in his "Age Of Reason". De Wette followed with a system of theology which declared all doctrines to be poetic symbols of religious ideas, and included the stories of the Virgin Birth.(4) To Renan Jesus was a gentle Galilean, a vain

(1) Schaff-Herzog Encycl. (sub Socinians).
(2) Orr, "The V.B. Of Christ", p.5. - "Examen de Milord Bolingbroke, ch.X.
(3) Orr, p.5 - Strauss's "Life Of Christ", I,p.18 (E.T.)
(4) Schaff-Herzog Encycl. (sub Wette de).

and sensual darling of women, an ambitious dreamer, yet filled with ambition and undisguised deceit. He opens his book on the "Life Of Christ" with the bold assertion: "Jesus was born at Nazareth, a small town of Galilee ..... His father and His mother , Joseph and Mary, were people in humble circumstances.(1). A little earlier Strauss's volume "Leben Jesu" had created quite a sensation. In this work he advanced the so-called "mythical theory" of the Gospel narratives of the life of Christ and left little unsaid in his attack on the Virgin Birth stories(2)

In enumerating the rationalistic writers and impugners of the doctrine under discussion we have passed over a rationalist within the Christian Church, namely Friedrich Schleiermacher. He stirred up the troubled waters to a still greater pitch with his philosophic interpretation of everything Biblical. Jesus was the son of Joseph, but distinguished himself among men because in Him "was the highest consciousness of God". While he granted a miracle in the constitution of the Person of Jesus, yet he maintained the miracle was not physical but psychical. "The sole factor in the redemptive work of Christ was his Person, and therefore the supernatural birth, resurrection, etc., were of little moment.(3)

In 1892 Pastor Schrempf of Wuerttemberg brought on a furor of discussion on this question when he refused to assent to the Apostles Creed , and especially objected to the article "born of the Virgin Mary". Scholars from all over the world were involved in the controversy that followed. Professor Harnack immediately sprang to the defense of the young man and "gave rise to an enormous controversial literature".(4)

Since then hardly a year has passed during which no attack has been launched upon this important doctrine. In the wake of newer tendencies has come the so-called "historical-critical" school which makes of the Bible a mere piece of human literature to be read as Shakespeare is read and openly repudiates everything that is supernatural in the history of Jesus.

(1) Schaff-Herzog Encycl., (sub Renan).
(2) Orr, "The V.B. Of Christ", p.5.
(3) Schaff-Herzog Encycl. (sub Schleiermacher).
(4) Orr, "The V.B. Of Christ", p.6.

Exponents of this school are loud in their declarations against the miraculous Birth. Orr lists the following as representatives of this class: "Lobstein, Pfeiderer, Schmiedel, Harnack, Soltan, Usener, O.Holtzmann, Bousset, Percy Gardner, F.C.Conybeare, Prof. Foster of Chicago, N.Schmidt of Cornell, and others of like standpoint."(1) These men regard it as a mark of their intellectual maturity that they reject the Virgin Birth. Foster, of Chicago, for example, goes so far as to say that any intelligent man who believes the Biblical narratives concerning miraculous events to be facts - "can hardly know what intellectual honesty means!"(2) Soltan, in his "Geburtsgeschichte Jesu", maintains that the belief in the Virgin Birth is a sin against the Holy Ghost.(3) R.J.Campbell holds the same view as Soltan and calls this doctrine a barrier between Jesus and the human race.(4) We could cite many more of these modern critics of the Bible and everything miraculous, but we shall meet them again when we take up the arguments of the opponents of the Virgin Birth. Suffice it to say, they have a large following among the clergy of the Protestant churches to-day. The liberal Unitarians with their Antitrinitarian teachings naturally fall in line. Among the Baptists, the Methodists, the Presbyterians, the Episcopalians, and among other prominant denominations there are representatives of this damnable heresy. They repeat over and over again that the Virgin Birth is "unacceptable to theology, to science, to history, and to sound human reason".(5) In books, in pamphlets, in newspapers, over the radio, from platform and from pulpit the Satanic doctrines of "modern theology" are being broadcast throughout the world. The result is that many Christians are led to believe that the case for the Virgin Birth must indeed be a weak one, and since it is maintained that this doctrine is unessential to Christian faith, not a few assume an attitude of indifference to it. Fosdick says: "Side by side

(2) Orr, "The V.B. Of Christ",p.13 - "The Finality Of The Christ. Rel.p.132.
(1) Orr, "The V.B. Of Christ", p.19.
(3) Orr, "The V.B. Of Christ", p.13.
(4) The New Theology, pp.97-98.
(5) Schulze G.A. "Theo. Month.",Vol.VII, 1927, p.194.

with the orthodox Christians in the evangelical churches is a group of equally loyal and reverent people who would say that the Virgin Birth is not to be accepted as an historical fact. They would say those early disciples phrased it in terms of biological miracle that our minds cannot use". (1) However we believe that Dr.Fosdick is speaking for a very small minority of Christians and that by far the vast majority of Protestant laymen are still bold enough to confess,"I believe in Jesus Christ, born of the Virgin Mary". And lest we be left under the false impression that the weight of evidence and of scholarship is preponderatingly on the side of the impugners, let us list a few of the outstanding men who stand on positive ground. Orr mentions: "Bishop Lightfoot and the late Bishop Westcott, Sir Wm.Ramsay, Dr.Sanday of Oxford, Dr.Swete of Cambridge, Principle Fairbairn of Mansfield, Oxford, Bishop Gore, Canon Ottley, Dr.Knowling, Canon Hensen, Adeney, Garvie, Rartlet, Denny, Theo Zahn, B.Weiss, Seeberg, Cremer, Schaff, Briggs, and many more".(2)

This in short is the history of the controversy from the first to the twentieth century. The doctrine itself has outlived all wrangling. "The Word of God abideth forever". As stated above, aside from a few Ebionites and Gnostics, the article of the Virgin Birth formed an essential part of the general faith of the early Church. Wherever the unadulterated Gospels of Matthew and Luke were accepted the nativity chapters were also accepted. It was contained in the first "Rules of Faith", the baptismal creeds which are traced back to Apostolic times. Students have shown beyond the shadow of a doubt that the earliest form of the Apostles Creed, the Roman Creed, is not only based on these baptismal creeds, but is a development of them. (3) In this Roman creed"the doctrine of the Virgin Birth received its first authoritively formulated statement, not later than 100 - 150 A.D."(4) We have sifted the testimony of the early Church Fathers and found a

(1) Wm.Jennings Bryan, "Sunday School Times" - "The V.B." Jan. 1924.
(2) Orr, "The V.B. Of Christ" - p.10-11
(3) Orr, "The V.B. Of Christ", p.141-142.
(4) Schaff-Herzog Encycl. (sub The Virgin Birth).

remarkable consensus of opinion on this point. The East and the West declared for the Virgin Birth. It was included in the official statement of the Synod of Antioch, 269 A.D.(1) "When the Creed of Nicea was enlarged and presented to the Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.) as the faith of the Fathers of the previous council of Constantinople, the Virgin Birth appears as an essential part of the historic Nicene faith in that form of the Creed which for nearly fifteen centuries has been the Creed of the entire Christian Church. No one thought of questioning it during these centuries, whether at the division of the East and the West, or of Protestantism from Rome, except a few Anabaptists and Socinians, until recent times."(2) Even to-day the Virgin Birth of Christ is an esteemed article of faith of the orthodox church bodies throughout the world, and we may repeat what Justin said hundreds of years ago,"it is the universal belief to be accepted by everyone calling himself a CHRISTIAN".

(1) C.A.Briggs, "Amer.Journ.Of Theo." - Vol.12, 1908.- P.197.
(2) " " " " " " " " " - P.198.

II

A SUMMARY OF THE MAIN POINTS BROUGHT UP BY THE OPPOSITION - REFUTATION

Rebuttal of arguments advanced against the fundamental teachings of Scripture is of little importance to the Christian in so far as he is a Christian. For him the Bible is the inspired and infallible Word of God. If the Sacred Page clearly states a fact which transcends his reason, as for instance, that Christ was "conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary", the Christian will accept the statement, subjecting his reason to the Word. And yet, apologetics, in so far as it removes objections of the enemy, has its value even for the Christian. In meeting the opponent on his own ground, combating reason with reason, apologetics may at times render valuable service. In the following lines we shall therefore present the objections most frequently raised against the Virgin Birth of Christ and endeavor to refute them, not because we feel we can in any way strengthen or fortify the Biblical accounts, but rather in order to reveal how feeble and subjective are the "systems" of men. It would be impossible to cover all of them in a short thesis, however it shall be our aim to at least touch upon the more important, discussing them under various more general heads.

The present struggle over the Virgin Birth is but one phase of the age-old battle of reason versus the Word of God. It will therfore not be necessary to delve into ancient history in order to gain a composite picture of what the opposition has to offer . In the main the chief difference between the arguments advanced to-day and those adduced by the contemners of centuries past is to be found in the language and terminology used rather than in the content. For this reason we feel we are justified to more or less limit ourselves to the objections raised in the present time.

At bottom of it all is a marked tendency to rationalism which is sweeping through the Christian Church to-day, and which either ignores or tries to explain away the miraculous elements of Scripture.

The Miracle - Impossible.

In the first place there is a radical group which maintains that this supernatural element in the Virgin Birth is proof of its impossibility. The doctrine presupposes a miracle and for that very reason it must be rejected. Thus Matthew Arnold comes forward with the bold statement: "I do not believe in the Virgin Birth because it involves a miracle, and miracles do not happen. I have no place for them in my intellectual scheme".(1) We will remember that Foster, of Chicago University, doubts the "intellectual honesty" of any intelligent man who still affirms his faith in the miraculous narratives as found in the Bible.(2) The Deists, the pantheists, the evolutionists, in fact all extreme rationalists, must be classed under this head, for they cannot logically find room for the Virgin Birth in their systems of religion.

Such dogmatic reasoning hardly deserves a reply. It is unscientific to say the least. We have very definite proof for the Virgin Birth, as we shall show, and it is and remains an historical fact until disproven by other and more conclusive facts. Mere philosophy, bald statements, speculative assertions, prove nothing. The question is not, Are miracles possible? The question is, Did they occur? We do not ask whether the Virgin Birth could take place; we ask, DID it take place? Of a man like Arnold, Orr says: "I do not profess to argue with that man. When he descends from his 'a priori' altitude to discuss the evidence, I will hear him, but not before. It is evident this canon already rules aut a great deal of objection of a sort to the narratives of the Virgin Birth".(3)

(1) Orr, "The V.B. Of Christ", p.12 - Matt. Arnold, "Lit. a. Dog."Preface.
(2) See above, page 12.
(3) Orr, "The V.B. Of Christ", p.13.

The Miracle - No Miracle.

There is a much more acceptable and more "scientific" method of ridding oneself of this objectionable doctrine. There are those who maintain the Virgin Birth can be accepted without believing that it was a miracle. "The Author of a recent little book on 'Science An Aid To Faith' concludes a scholarly and scientific discussion by saying: 'Modern science affirms nothing that discredits the doctrine of the Virgin Birth. To assert that there is anything in biology or in any other modern science that discredits the Virgin Birth, considered a physiological event, is to display lack of knowledge of the latest advances in science.'"(1) In this same volume attention is drawn to the fact that parthenogenesis, generation from a virgin, is a common phenomenon. Are not bees occasionally known to propagate without sexual union, and eggs "caused to develop artificially by certain physical and chemical means"? The famous scientist, Romanes is called in to declare that even while he was an agnostic and before he came to the Christian faith, "There was no physiological law which would prevent belief in the Virgin Birth".(2) Thus one scientist after another is brought before the bar as a witness for the plausibility of the Virgin Birth.

But we ask, what has this to do with Christ? The Gospel narratives are clear and distinct in ascribing the miracle of the Birth from a Virgin to the Holy Ghost, not to phenomena brought to light by science. A natural explanation will not suffice, and is as antagonistic to the true doctrine as absolute rejection.

The Miracle - Adulterated.

A third group of scholars takes a sort of a neutral position, standing between the traditional Christian and the modern view. This body grants that there was something miraculous connected with the Birth - it does not

(1) Straton R. "The V.B., Fact Or Fiction". A debate. p.12.
(2) Same as (1), p.12-14.

however, concede a physical miracle, but only a miracle of a spiritual, psychic nature. One will immediately recognize this as the "theory" of Schleiermacher whose teachings were touched upon above.(1) He has had numerous imitators; among others, Keim, Beyschlag, and the Ritschlians, Kaftan, Loofs, Haering, etc.(2)

We need not go to any lengthy rebuttal of anything so impossible as Schleiermacher's "psychical miracle". It is not only contrary to Scripture but also to reason. The Bible calls Christ "that Holy thing", terms Him "the Son of God", and tells us that "in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily".(3) In other words, the Bible ascribes perfect holiness to our Lord, while Schleiermacher would only accord Him acquired sanctification. The Bible calls Him God, this theologian makes Him out to be a mere sanctified and perfect man. And considering it from the standpoint of pure reason, we are constrained to ask with Orr: " Can we, in the establishing of such a new creative beginning, - in the origination of One who, while holding of humanity, is yet outside the chain of its heredities and liabilities, - think of a spiritual miracle which has not also its physical side? I contend that we cannot..... The best proof of all for the inadequacy of this half-way position is that, historically, it has never been able to maintain itself."(4) Schleiermacher's "ideal man", the product of a "psychical miracle", certainly is anti-Scriptural, unreasonable, and inadequate, for by granting the sinlessness or Christ, the author himself digs a grave for his own "theory".

The Miracle - Unhistorical.

We now come to a whole array of objections which have been popularized by the so-called "higher critical" school. Higher critics have found a very simple way of ridding themselves of this inconvenient doctrine of the Virgin Birth. While they are not as dogmatic as their extreme naturalistic

(1) Op. above, p.11.
(2) Orr, "The V.B. Of Christ", p.197.
(3) Lk. 1,35: Col. 2,9.
(4) Orr, "The V.B. Of Christ", p.206.

brethren, they are nevertheless infected with the leaven of naturalism and cannot find room for for a supernatural origin of Christ in their "intellectual scheme". Putting it bluntly, the higher critics also take offense at the miraculous elements of Scripture. When these particular features cannot be evaded, it is the policy of this group to explain away the historicity of all supernatural assertions, either by invalidating the text, or by attacking the "internal character" of the narratives concerned. Exponents of this school attack the problem of the Virgin Birth from every conceivable angle, and while their witness may at times disagree and even contradict, all reach the basic conclusion - THE VIRGIN BIRTH IS NOT AN HISTORICAL FACT.

An inquiry into the historical reality of the Virgin Birth naturally begins with the documents that contain the birth narratives. Here the critical school feels it is on firm ground. "The Gospels, we are told, are late; we do not know for certain who are their authors; they are at least far removed from the events which they relate. What credit, therefore, can be attached to them?"(1) Of what historical value are they to a man of the twentieth century?

In the first place there has been a noticeable trend among the scholars and critics in recent years to return to the traditional early dates of all of the books of the New Testament. Harnack, for example, places Matthew as early as 70-75 A.D., and Luke about 78-93 A.D. (2) B.Weiss thinks they were written even earlier.(3) Allen, in his Gospel of Matthew accepts 65-75 A.D. as the probably date of the first Gospel.(4) Even so critical a writer as Holzmann holds 68 A.D. to be about the correct date for Matthew.(5) Theo. Zahn, one of the greatest authorities on the New Testament of the present age, believes in an original Aramaic Matthew, and accepts 61-66 A.D. as its likely date of origin.(6) In the face of such evidence we are led

(1) Orr, "The V.B. Of Christ", p.37.
(2) " " " " , p.38.
(4) Intern. Crit. Comm. - Matthew - LXXXV
(5) Meyer's Commentary - Mt., p.16. Lk., p.244. Volumes I and Ia. Seventh and sixth Edition respectively.
(5) Orr, "The V.B. of Christ", p.61. (6) Same as (5).

to the logical conclusion - the Gospels containing the Birth narratives are to be placed within the limits of the Apostolic age.

A few words concerning the editors should suffice. The Lukan authorship has never been seriously doubted. It has on the contrary been defended by such writers as Keim, Beyschlag, Meyer, Godet, and most English scholars.(1) Harnack and Ramsay have also thrown their powerful advocacy into the scale, and the authorship of Luke is thereby more firmly established to-day than ever before.(2)

With Matthew the case is a little more difficult. Many scholars believe that the Greek Matthew was based on an older Aramaic document, "because all ancient writers tell us that Matthew was composed in the Hebrew, i.e., the Aramaic".(3) The conclusion drawn by the higher critics is that the Greek Matthew is not the original, but a later work based on the Hebrew Matthew and the earlier Mark, neither of which have the birth narratives. Ergo, the introductory chapters of our present Gospel are a product or an addition of the Greek Evangelist, the whole Gospel is placed under suspicion, and the book loses its historical worth.

It is not our intention to delve deep into the problem of the "Logia" and of the "Aramaic Matthew" at this point, for such a discussion would lead us far afield. We can only show that there are very able scholars who put no stock in the "Two-Source" theory of Matthew, and others who are of the opinion that the Apostles"connection with the First Gospel was very much more direct than the prevailing theory assumes".(4) Zahn holds the latter view, and Westcott says: " All early writers agree that Matthew wrote in Hebrew ..... At the same time all equally agree in accepting the Gospel of Matthew without noticing the existence of a doubt as to its authenticity".(5) We add a statement from Orr: " However,

(1) Orr, "The V.B. Of Christ", p.58.
(2) " " " " " , p.58 and 69.
(3) " " " " " , p.59.
(4) " " " " " , p.61.
(5) Westcott, "Introduction To Gospels",pp. 223-4.

the testimony of the early Church is unanimous as to the identity of our existing Greek Gospel with the Gospel that Matthew wrote. The early Fathers knew no other Gospel of Matthew, and they attributed it unhesitatingly to the Apostle.(1) If an Aramaic original ever existed, it must, as Meyer says, "apart from the language, have been in content and form, in whole and in part, substantially the same as our Greek Matthew".(2) In the light of all the evidence for Matthean authorship we cannot permit the objections of the critics to stand as valid.

In summing up, we might say, the early date of the two Gospels under consideration has been definitely established, and the authorship of Luke and Matthew must be conceeded.

But it is further objected that the writers themselves are not trustworthy; that they were naturally biased, incredibly stupid, and products of a superstitious, ignorant age. Intent on glorifying and deifying their Master, these men spun yarns about the miraculous origin of Christ. Reville, as Godet puts it, thinks that "Matthew is more foolish than false; Luke more false than foolish".(3) Fosdick believes in a sort of evolution or "development of the miracle-stories", and intimates that Matthew and Luke merely heightened and exaggerated the earlier traditions.(4)

This is another example of the arbitrary manner in which men, who believe the Virgin Birth ought not to have happened and therefore did not happen, do away with this inconvenient doctrine. Leaving aside all ideas of inspiration, we have no reason for not accepting these writers (Lk. and Mt.) as honest, sincere, serious-minded men. The one was a business man, the other an historian of no mean ability, yes, one of the most reliable historians of all times.(5) He begins his Gospel by stating that he has carefully sifted all the evidence of "eyewitnesses, and ministers of the Word".(Lk.1,1-4), and is now able to relate these things with certainty.

(1) Orr, "The V.B. Of Christ", p.62
(2) Meyer, "Comm. On Mt.", I, p.11 and 44.
(3) Orr, "The V.B. Of Christ", p.66.
(4) Fosdick, "The Modern Use Of The Bible", p.144-8.
(5) Orr, "The V.B. Of Christ", pp. 58 and 69 - Harnack and Ramsay.

We may say with Orr: "I postulate the honesty of the writers".(1) Godet confesses, "If I am asked, with what scientific or religious assumptions I have approached this study of the third Gospel, I reply, with these two only: that the authors of the Gospels were men of good sense and good faith". Macartney comments: "How much these contemners of the Virgin Birth must have wished that for their purposes of denial or discounting it had been the great historian Luke who was silent on the subject, instead of the fragmentary Mark or the philosophical John".(2) To Macartney's way of thinking Luke was undoubtedly one of the most scientific and dependable witnesses of his age.

Unable to hold their own in the attack upon the authenticity of the Gospels and upon the character of the writers, the higher critics focus their guns upon those sections of the Gospels that contain the Nativity narratives. They point out that there are but two witnesses to the origin of our Lord - Matthew and Luke - and even these confine their testimony to a few introductory chapters that are not above suspicion. We are asked to believe that these chapters were not part of the original Gospels in which they are found, but are fanciful preludes invented and attached by later writers. Thompson, who is continually being quoted by modern students, thinks it remarkable, "That there is nothing in Luke, apart from chapters 1-2, which could by any possibility suggest the idea of a Virgin Birth. If, by accident, these two chapters had been lost, it would never have occured to any one that they were missing". He maintains the same thing of the first chapters of Matthew and further on shows why these chapters should be dropped.(3) Wellhausen, in his "The Gospel of Matthew, Translated and Explained", and in "The Gospel of Luke, Translated and Explained", does not even think it necessary to add a word of explanation when he simply drops these chapters from his commentary.(4) According to B.Weiss,

(1) Orr, "The V.B. Of Christ", p.63.
(2) Macartney, "Twelve Great Questions About Christ", p.17.
(3) Thompson, "Miracles In The New Testament", pp. 142 and 150.
(4) Orr, "The Virgin Birth Of Christ", p.48.

the genuiness of these chapters was also attacked or doubted by earlier scholars - Williams, Stroth, Hess, Ammon, and J.Jones.(1) If the theory of these men can be established the doctrine of the supernatural conception is branded as an historical fraud, and the testimony of the Birth narratives impeached.

But what are the facts? Surely, Wellhausen's system of simply omitting these chapters without even commenting upon his strange action, cannot be considered scientific. He would not dare to treat a work of Shakespeare or any other piece of literature in like manner. Who then gives him the right to arbitrarily cut out certain portions of Scripture which do not suit his fancy. We maintain the Nativity chapters are genuine parts of the primary Gospels, and to ignore them is to ignore the whole New Testament, for they are as firmly established as any chapters in the Bible. When we appeal to the manuscripts or to the Versions, what do we find? "There is not a single unmutilated MSS. of the New Testament which does not contain the Birth narratives. The same is true of the ancient Versions of the New Testament, or the translation from the Greek into the popular tongues of the different countries. Every MSS. and every Vesion bears witness that the Birth narratives are genuine sections of the two Gospels in which they are found."(2) Alfred Plummer lists the primary uncials in which they are present, and calls attention to the unanimous testimony of the Versions - the Latin, Egyptian, Syriac, Armenian, Ethiopic, and Gothic.(3) Weiss says,"There never were forms of Matthew or Luke without the Infancy narratives".(4) Even the liberal Thompson admits," We have no external evidence for following the hint of iii,1, and regarding all that precedes as a prologue, added at a later date, or by a different author, and not a constituent part of the Gospel".(5) This he states concerning the Gospel of Luke, and his remarks on Matthew are

(1) Meyer's Comm., - Matthew, p.44. B.Weiss.
(2) Macartney, "Twelve Great Questions", p.18.
(3) Plummer, "Intern. Crit. Comm." - Luke, p. LXXII.
(4) Orr, "The V.B. OF Christ", p.32.
(5) Thompson, "Miracles in the N.T." ,p.143.

even more positive. Why he does not accept the clear case his own confessions make for the Virgin Birth is more than we can understand. For us the evidence of the MSS. and Versions establishes the genuineness of these chapters beyond the shadow of a doubt.

Confronted by the overwhelming evidence of the MSS. and Versions, the opponents next try to discredit the Nativity by attacking the integrity of the text and eliminating certain verses which assert the Virgin Birth. They say, drop a few verses from the introductory chapters and the whole doctrine of the Virgin Birth of Jesus disappears. Matthew is usually left untouched, "for there can be no doubt about the meaning of chapter 1-2, which teaches the Virgin Birth quite explicitly throughout".(1) Some have, however, attempted to minimize the importance of his testimony, as for instance Potter - "We come next to Matthew and there we have one verse, chapter 1,18, which states the Virgin Birth. It is the only verse which states it in Matthew, and I might as well say here that it is the one verse in the whole Bible which states it directly and clearly".(2) Luke, on the other hand, has suffered mutilation at the hands of quite a number of recent scholars. "Beyschlag, Harnack, and others, say that by omitting Luke 1,34-5, the claim to the Virgin Birth of Jesus will vanish from Luke".(3) Hear what Thompson has to suggest: "It may be confidently said that, if two verses, 34 and 35 (Of Luke), were removed from the text, there would be no suggestion left of anything but a human birth."(4) In the following paragraphs he proves that even verse 35 is "not incompatible with human birth", and that only verse 34 remains as a "crux".,,More than that, we need but drop four words, "ἐπεὶ ἄνδρα οὐ γινώσκω " - and presto, there is no suggestion of the Virgin Birth in the Gospel. Thompson's solution is, "these words are interpolations of a later writer who wished to make the miracle clear ..... for we have no reason, unfortunately, to suppose

(1) Thompson, "Miracles in the N.T.", p.154.
(2) Potter C.F., "The V.B. Fact Or Fiction?", p.59.
(3) Orain O.E., "The Credibility of the V.B.", p.42.
(4) Thompson, "Miracles in the N.T.", p.147.

that even the best texts which we possess are free from interpolations".(1) We have quoted from Thompson at length because he is considered quite an authority amongmodern critics, and gives us a shining example of how these men deal with the New Testament text.

However, the evidence for these verses is as strong as the evidence for the genuineness of the whole chapters. In a recent article', Gresham Machen, has powerfully and scholarly demonstrated the integrity of the Lukan narrative. He concludes his rather lengthy discourse, " Our conclusion then is that the entire narrative in Luke 1-2 finds both its climax and its centre in the Virgin Birth of Christ. A superficial reading may lead to a contrary conclusion; but when one enters sympathetically into the inner spirit of the narrative one sees that the Virgin Birth is everywhere presupposed. The account of the lesser wonder in the case of the forerunner, the delicate and significant way in which Mary is put forward instead of Joseph, the lofty key in which the whole narrative is pitched - all this is incomprehensible without the supreme miracle of the of the supernatural conception in the Virgin's womb. THE INTERPOLATION HYPOTHESIS, therefore, not merely FAILS OF PROOF, but (so fully as can reasonably be expected in literary criticism) IS POSITIVELY DISPROVEN".(2) "Gunkel dismisses all these interpolation theories as baseless. Dr.Chase says of them in a recent paper: ' I cannot think there is a shadow of justification for regarding Lk1 1,34-5 ... as an addition to the original document, inserted either by St.Luke himself, or by some unknown interpolator, and for thus eliminating the idea of the Virgin Birth from the genuine Gospel ... The arguments brought forward against them are wholly subjective; and I hope that it is not arrogant to say that these arguments appear to me both far-fetched and mechanical'."(3) This is the opinion of able scholars on the integrity of the Lukan narratives, without even

(1) Thompson, "Miracles in the N.T.", p.149.
(2) Machen J.G., "Princton Theo. Rev.", Vol.XXV, Oct., 1927. P.586.
(3) Orr, "The V.B. Of Christ", p.56.

making mention of the impregnable account of Matthew, "which cannot be operated on in this fashion".(1) What need have we for further witness?

That the critics are aware of the many loop-holes in their "interpolation theory" is evident from the fact that they try to bolster it up with a whole catalogue of additional arguments and objections. Since they are unable to satisfactorly rid themselves of the supernatural Birth records by means of textual criticism, they turn to certain "internal marks" which are supposed to prove that these narratives are later additions. Thompson says that "doubt is thrown upon the narrative of Matthew, because of its use of prophecy, and its lateness and artificiality of tone".(2) Keim argues the connection between the first two chapters and the third is very loose.(3) In Luke, chapter 1,5 - 2,52 is said to be foreign to the text and to Luke's style in general.(4) Hilgendorf asserts that in the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 1,1, "the Gospel of Luke is described as a treatise concerning all that Jesus began to do and to teach until He was taken up. In this 'πάντων τε καὶ διδάσκειν', the narrative of Luke 1,5-2,52 cannot be included; therefore those first two chapters were no part of the 'former treatise'."(5)

Once more we must say, there is nothing to favor these objections, save the disinclination of the opponents to believe the Virgin Birth. The stylistic evidence in both Gospels is so strong that only a biased mind will not see it. Matthew is mainly concerned to bring his message to his kinsmen and naturally draws upon Jewish sources to drive home his arguments. He does so throughout the Gospel, and this very fact forces us to believe that he is not only the author of chapters 1-2, but also of chapters 3-28. This Apostle has a fondness for introducing his prophecies with the phrase, "that it might be fulfilled", and he uses this uniformly throughout his

(1) Orr, "The V.B. Of Christ", p.37.
(2) Thompson, "Miracles In The N.T.", p.159.
(3) Orr, "The V.B. Of Christ", p.30.
(4) Machen, "The Princeton Theo. Rev.", Vol.IV.,1906. January. P.44.
(5) " " " " " " - " " P.46.

Gospel, employing it five times in the introductory chapters. "The peculiar-Greek words and phrases so common to the Nativity chapters, are also common to the remainder of the Gospel."(1) The same holds true of Luke. Plummer asserts,"The peculiarities and characteristics of Luke's style and diction run through our Gospel from end to end. In the first chapters they are perhaps more frequent than elsewhere".(2) Harnack, who himself does not accept the Virgin Birth, is honest enough to admit, "the Infancy chapters show unmistakeable signs of Lukan authorship".(3) We adduce one more witness - a word from Machen: "Indeed, the cumulative evidence advanced for the linguistic affinity of the birth narrative with the other Lukan writings must, I think, be pronounced very convincing - far too convincing to allow us to stop short with the hypothesis of a common redactor merely".(4) These internal evidences plainly deny that there was a double authorship in either of the Gospels. Keeping this fact before our mind we shall have little difficulty with the remaining arguments that are brought forward on the ground of "internal evidence".

It is next urged that both Matthew and luke contradict their own story of the Virgin Birth, not only in the Nativity chapters, but also in the remainder of their Gospels. How then can we close our eyes to these glaring inconsistencies and accept the narratives as historically sound? The two verses of Luke, for example, that have given the critics so much trouble, namely Luke 1,34-35, are said to be without corroboration from the rest of the Infancy narrative, and even contradicted by it, since the whole of the first two chapters except these two verses proceed from the supposition that Jesus was the son of Joseph and traces his Davidic descent through him. They point to such phrases as "house of David"; the repeated occurance of such words as "γονεῖς", applied to Joseph and Mary, and "πατήρ" applied

(1)Crain, "The Cred. of the V.B.", p.41.
(2) Intern. Crit. Comm. "The Gospel of Luke", p. LXIX.
(3) Orr, "The V.B. of Christ", p.32. - "Lukas Der Arzt", p.73.
(4) Machen, "Princeton Theo. Rev.", Vol.IV. January, 1906, p.48.

to Joseph; the significance of the "in the days of THEIR purification"; the failure of Mary to understand, or her astonishment at the sayings of her son and those of Simeon and Anna.(1) Matthew is attacked in the same manner, and is accused of ascribing natural paternity to Jesus in his genealogy as well as in the rest of his Gospel. Thus both evangelists speak of Jesus in terms that are absolutely inconsistent with the specific verses that carry the Birth story. In dealing with the chapters from Luke, Thompson lists most of the objections we have mentioned above and finally draws the conclusion: "The surer we are that these chapters are meant to be a narrative of a miraculous birth, the stranger it becomes that they should have been written in such a way as to throw doubt upon their own essential meaning". Of Matthew he maintains, "He has no objection to speaking of Him as the son of a human father..... and deliberately inserts the idea of Joseph's paternity".(2)

As stated above, these objections arise from a desire to strengthen the interpolation theory, but they bear little weight in view of the fact that the authorship of the Gospels is so well established. If Matthew and Luke wrote the first and the third Gospel respectively, if every chapter and every verse can be established as genuine parts of these writings(3), then surely also the objections to the "internal" inconsistencies must fall. The very men who placed the "generations" in their Gospels, spoke of Jesus' father and of his parents, described Mary's reactions under various circumstances, etc., are the men who tell us of the miraculous Birth of Christ, and yet are conscious of no contradiction between those narratives, which say Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary, and others which trace his descent through Joseph. What else can we conclude, but that there is no contradiction? More than that, both Evangelists are very careful in

(1) Davidic descent - Both genealogies - with Mt.1,20 and Lk.1,27.32.69,etc. "Parents", Lk.2,27.33.41.43,etc. "Father", Lk.2,48,etc. "Purification", Lk.2,22. "Astonishment of Mary", Lk.2,33.48.
(2) Thompson, "Miracles in N.T.", Lk.,p.150 - Mt.,p.150. (Mt.1,25)
(3) Cp. above pp.26-27.

their genealogies, not to say that Jesus was the son of Joseph. Matthew begins, "Abraham begat Isaac", and goes on repeating the formula down to "Jacob begat Joseph"; then instead of proceeding in the natural manner, he makes use of a remarkable periphrasis, saying, "and Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ". This agrees perfectly with the Virgin Birth. Luke, on the other hand begins with Jesus and traces his lineage back to God through Adam. His statement concerning the descent of Jesus is very significant - not for natural paternity, but for the Virgin Birth: "And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age, being AS WAS SUPPOSED the son of Joseph." We find nothing but substantiation of the miraculous Birth in the "tables" of the Evangelists. Most positive scholars maintain that these lists express the legal and not the physical descent of Jesus, and this seems very plausible.(1) When the writers therefore refer to Jesus as the son of Joseph and Mary, or to Joseph as His "father", they have a perfect right to do so. The terms used "do not necessarily imply anything more than that there was really an adoptive relation between Joseph and Jesus, and that Jesus before the world was regarded as an actual son".(2) Matthew and Luke were merely reflecting the popular opinion of the day. "The emphasis on Joseph's Davidic descent rather than that of Mary (Lk.2,4), proves nothing, for it was the man only who would be considered as determining the place of enrollment." As to Mary's peculiar actions, they do not surprise us in the least. We have an analogy in the behavior of the disciples, who never did understand their Lord until after his Resurrection although he had taught them with great patience throughout his ministry, and revealed Himself to them on many occasions.

The opponents of the Virgin Birth bring up many more arguments similar

(1) Maclean A.J. "Hastings, "Dict. of the Bible", sub "Genealogies" - He lists, Westcott, Barnard, Allen, and Burkitt.
(2) Machen, "Princeton Theo. Rev.", Vol.IV, January, 1906. P.32.
(3) Same as (2)

to the ones we have just treated, but we believe we have answered some of most popular of them, and are convinced that our main argument, namely, that two intelligent and sincere writers have given us the narratives under consideration without being aware of any contradiction whatsoever, covers practically every objection with regard to the inconsistency of the individual writer.

There is still another main objection which we must meet at this point. The charge is preferred that the Gospels of Matthew and Luke mutally disagree with each other. We admit it is difficult to harmonize the Synoptics on any event in the life of Jesus. In the Nativity chapters we have an example of where two witnesses record one and the same event in their own original way, and no one would expect them to agree perfectly in every detail. If they did, the critics who make most of their inconsistencies would probably be the first to accuse them of mutual conspiracy in recording the supernatural conception.

The"apparent discrepancies" between the two "tables" do not concern us at present. That would be matter for a separate discussion. We are satisfied to have shown the genealogies in no way deny or invalidate the Birth narratives. However,the historical events incidentally mentioned by both Evangelists are said to be contradictory. Some find a contradiction with respect to the place of residence of Mary and Joseph. Soltau permits himself to say: "We learn from Matthew that Bethlehem was the real native place of Joseph and Mary".(1) But Soltau has no foundation for his assertion, for Matthew says nothing in his first chapter as to where the events he narrates took place. In the second chapter he mentions Bethlehem for the first time, merely as the birth-place of Jesus. When he tells of the return from Egypt and the settling down at Nazareth, he naturally refers to this place for the first time. Where is the contradiction? Thompson

(1) Orr, "The V.B. Of Christ", p.34. - "Op. cit., p.30 (E.T.).

also makes Bethlehem the home of Joseph and Mary on basis of the account in Matthew - "Matthew then, is quite at variance with Luke as to the home of Joseph and Mary, and as to the circumstances under which the birth took place. The flight into Egypt is quite incompatible with St.Luke's chronology,,,,... On a number of points we have to choose between them (Mt.and Lk.), or to reject them both."(1) Enough of this - these men are simply following the favorite method of the critics, dealing with the narratives in such a way as to discredit their trustworthiness by pitting one against the other, and declaring them to be divergent and contradictory. Let us briefly survey the facts in the case. We cannot here go into the problem of the Synoptics, but any unbiased reader of the Birth stories must reach the right conclusion, that Matthew and Luke make up one complete narrative, independent of each other, it is true, yet converging in the one all important fact - a Virgin conceives and bears a son as a result of a miraculous working of the Holy Ghost. Orr lists twelve major points in which the accounts perfectly harmonize.(2) He adds, "Careful inspection shows that, even in the respects in which they are divergent, so far from being discrepant, they are really, in a singular way, COMPLEMENTARY; that where a careless glance suggests contrariety, there is really deep and beautiful harmony".(3) The key to the accounts lies in the fact that Matthew tells the story from the standpoint of Joseph, while Luke delicately gives us Mary's side of the unprecedented event. For this reason Sanday terms Luke's book, "the woman's Gospel".(4) We appeal to one of the latest of critical writers, Oscar Holzmann,"who, in his recently published 'Life Of Jesus', tells us: 'A contradiction between these narratives of Matthew and Luke does not exist; even in regard to the places of residence there is no need for assuming one'".(5) The sane conclusion is - The two independent

(1) Thompson, "Miracles in the N.T.", pp.152 and 159.
(2) Orr, "The V.B. Of Christ", pp.36-37.
(3) Same as (2).
(4) Orr, "The V.B. Of Christ", p.75.
(5) " " " " "
, p.34. - "Leben Jesu", p.65.

narratives, one from Matthew, the other from Luke, so far from being contradictory, in reality corroborate and supplement each other.

Summing up what we have learned so far, we find that we have two early and genuine Gospels, whose integrity is above reproach, written by intelligent men whose honesty must be postulated, and whose accounts beautifully harmonize and supplement each other. These Gospels, in their introductory chapters, teach that Jesus of Nazareth was born at Bethlehem of the Virgin Mary, and conceived by the Holy Ghost.

Over and against these unimpeachable narratives the enemies of the Virgin Birth now attempt to bring in the reminder of the New Testament as witness for the negative. The argument from the <u>silence of the whole New Testament</u> is probably the most popular of all the objections raised against the supernatural origin of our Lord. It is maintained, that outside of the introductory chapters of Matthew and Luke, the New Testament does not once even allude to the Virgin Birth. Mark, John, Paul, The Acts, the non-Pauline Epistles, Revelation, all are brought in one after the other to prove that this doctrine was not a part of the Apostolic preaching. Fosdick says: "The two men who contributed most to the Church's thought of the divine meaning of Christ were Paul and John, who never even distantly allude to the Virgin Birth".(1) Campbell maintains, the Virgin Birth of Jesus was unknown to the primitive church since Paul gives us no hint of it, Mark is silent on the whole childhood of Jesus, and John simply ignores the Birth.(2) This is such a common argument of the opposition that it will hardly be necessary to adduce further negative witnesses. The enemies of the Virgin Birth are pretty well agreed, if one ignores the first two chapters of Matthew and Luke, the New Testament contains no hint of anything supernatural attending the mode of Christ's entry into the world. Therefore, it is held, the authority of these isolated narratives is

(1) Theol. Month., Vol.VII., June,1927. P.161.- "The New Know. a, t. Chr. Faith" - a sermon.
(2) Orr, "The V.B. Of Christ", p.8. - "The New Theology", pp.97-8.

broken down, for it is inconceivable that these other writers should have remained silent if they knew of it. The Virgin Birth narratives are unhistorical.

On the surface of it this indictment of the Virgin Birth appears very formidable, however, on closer inspection the argument is not nearly so convincing. The argument from silence is ever a dangerous one. "E silentio non valet consequentia". If manipulated in the right way a person should be able to prove most anything he is in favor of, and disprove anything his own subjective reasoning does not accept. Robert Dick Wilson gives us an example of what such arbitrary criticism would lead to if applied to modern literature. If we subjected Scribner's history of the United States to this system, we might be led to believe that the Presbyterian Church did not exist in the twentieth century, etc.(1) Let us apply it to a few outstanding truths which are accepted as historically sound by every sane Bible student. Mark and John, for instance, tell us nothing of the youth of Jesus. Are we therefore obliged to follow Marcion and believe Jesus dropped from heaven, that he had no youth? Again, John does not give us an account of the Lord's Supper. Must we infer that John did not believe Jesus instituted this Sacrament? We admit from the very start that there is no direct statement of the Virgin Birth outside of Matthew and Luke in the entire New Testament, but does mere silence on the part of one invalidate the clear testimony of the other? We think not. We would much rather believe that the Holy Spirit, in his unfathomable wisdom, gave us but two narratives as sufficient for our faith. Various Scriptures have been written to serve various purposes (II Tim. 3,16), and what might not appear in one writing would in no way cast reflection upon the truth or worth of what is found in another. "With this method of "rigor and vigor" it is possible to subvert all Scripture to any and all personal prejudice" and

(1) "Is Higher Criticism Scholarly?", pp,33-36.

dogmatism.(1)

But let us examine the alleged silence of the Gospel and Epistle writers, taking Mark and John as representative of the first group, and Paul as typical of the second.

Much is made of the silence of Mark, because it is supposed to be the oldest Gospel we have, and as is maintained, shows obvious ignorance of the Virgin Birth. The answer seems simple to us. "It is purile to demand of a record which professes to begin with the ministry of the Baptist, that it shall mention an event which preceded the Baptist's birth."(2) The origin of Jesus is plainly beyond the scope of a narrative which sets out to tell "the events of Christ's ministry within the limits of the common Apostolic testimony, which, as we know, began with the baptism of John, in Christ's thirtieth year, and ended with the ascension".(3) It may be noted in passing that "it was the singular contention ofthe older Tuebingen critics - of Baur, Hilgenfeld, and others of the school, but also of a scholar like Bleek - Mark DID know of the Virgin Birth".(4)

Let Mark speak for himself. The prelude to his Gospel reads, " The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God". Why "Son of God", if Mark believed Jesus to be the son of Joseph? Moreover it might be said, Mark was even more consistent in his statements concerning Jesus than the author of our first Gospel. In Matthew the people of Nazareth are represented as saying, "Is not this the carpenter's son?"(5), while Mark is very careful to omit the allusion to Joseph, and writes, "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary?"(6) Why does he not say the son of Joseph, which certainly would have been the more natural way of expressing himself. Whether this incident may be allowed to make Mark favor the Virgin origin of Jesus or not, the fact remains he gives us good reasons for believeing he does.

(1) Crain, "The Credibility of the V.B.", p.7.
(2) Orr, "The V.B. Of Christ", p.107 - Note - Dr.Swete, "Apostles' Creed". / P.48.
(3) See above (2).
(4) Orr, "The V.B. Of Christ", p.106.
(5) Matthew 13,55. (6) Mark 6,4.

We next turn to John. Here the same remark has to be made to begin with, that John's "silence" is due more to lack of occasion for the mention of the fact than his ignorance of it, for John like Mark begins his Gospel with the ministry of Jesus. The last of the Evangelists surely knew of the Virgin Birth as described by his predecessors. At the same time we must remember that the mother of Jesus had been placed under John's guardianship by the Lord himself, and that she must have lived with him until her death.(1) If the narratives of Matthew and Luke were false, why did John not rise up in righteous indignation, defend his "mother" from such "slander", and renounce, repudiate, and correct these blasphemous myths? As a matter of fact he does no such thing. What remains but to believe that he accepted and endorsed these narratives? Zahn puts it thus: "Johannes hat nicht nur indirekt seine Bekanntschaft mit der jungfraeulichen Geburt Jesu an den Tag gelegt und jeden Widerspruch dagegen unterlassen, sondern er hat sich mit volltoenendem Zeugnis dazu bekannt. Ist der vierte Evangelist der Juenger, welcher nach dem Testament des sterbenden Jesus Maria in sein Haus aufgenommen hat, so ist ein staerkeres Zeugnis als das seinige nicht zu denken; denn was Menschen von der Geburt Jesu wissen koennen, dass hat die Mutter gewusst, die den Herrn geboren hat."(2)

We have already indicated the bitter personal enmity that existed between Cerinthus, the first impugner of the Virgin Birth, and John who would not even remain in the same bath with this heretic. May we then suppose that John and Cerinthus were at one on the very point in which the latter came into the sharpest conflict with the belief of his day? Zahn concludes: " Hat Kerinth sie(the V.B.) bestritten, so hat Johannes sie gekannt, und man duerfte vermuthen, das er sich zu derselben bekannt habe".(3) If anything, John's silence would mean that he was heartily in favor of this

(1) John 19, 26-27.
(2) "Altes und Neues", - Art. ueber "Ein Weihnachtsbekenntnis", p.68.
(3) " " " " " " , p.66.

doctrine concerning his Lord's origin. But is he silent? We say, no! Look at the first chapter of his Gospel, and read therein, "the pre-existent "Logos was made flesh", who is "the only begotten of the Father", "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world". This is what the critics call "the silence of St. John". In discussing various verses of this first chapter of John, Robertson finds "his language in perfect harmony with the Virgin Birth. One will have difficulty in giving full force of the language of verse 4 without the idea of the Virgin Birth..... The idea of the peculiar origin of Jesus pervades the Gospel of John from beginning to end. It makes it practically certain that, when he wrote the words, "the Logos became flesh", he was referring to the Virgin Birth of Jesus, who then, as the Son of God, came into our human nature as the Son of man".(1)

We will remember that one of the objections to the Virgin Birth is this, that in the after history, Mary shows no consciousness of the divine greatness of her son. However, at the marriage in Cana, John pictures Mary regarding her son as endowed with supernatural powers, expects a miracle of him. Orr has sized up the situation in one sentence: "It is the irony of this mode of criticism that the only Gospel which shows clearly this consciousness on the part of Mary should be one challenged for ignorance of the Virgin Birth." (2)

From the <u>silence of Paul</u> nothing detrimental can be drawn, since the one central theme of this Apostle's preaching and teaching was the death and resurrection of Jesus. "He very seldomly alluded to or recalled the incidents of Christ's life - incidents which must have been perfectly familiar to him."(3) Paul journeyed from one Christian community to another, traveled with Luke for years, and was a fearless defender of the truth. If the Virgin Birth was a heresy, creeping into the Church during the ministry of

(1) Theo. Month., p.373. - Biblical Rev., October, 1925, pp. 575-8.
(2) Orr, "The V.B. Of Christ", p.112.
(3) " " " " , p.114.

Paul, then he must have known of it, and we should expect to find him vehemently withstanding and denouncing the "myth". Yet this staunch defender of the Christian faith, neither directly refers to nor condemns this doctrine. We cannot help but infer, the Virgin Birth was perfectly in agreement with Paul's Christology. His whole life's history - the bitter enemy of Christianity converted into the greatest missionary for Christ of all times, willing to go into death for his Master - is to our mind, inexplicable unless Paul regarded Jesus as true God. Now over and against his regard for Jesus, think of his abhorrence for sin, his vivid discussions on the lust of the flesh and the utter depravity of man. How then shall we understand him buffeted about, persecuted, and suffering death with a joyous pride, ever and anon proclaiming that one message, " This Jesus is the Christ", if he believed Jesus to have been conceived in sin like as other men? The human parentage of Christ militates against, the Virgin Birth harmonizes perfectly with Paul's Christology.

Who can read his epistles without being impressed by the plea for faith in the God-man, Jesus Christ, of "the seed of David", yet "Son of God"?(1) To him Christ was at all times one of us, yet not OF us, flesh of our flesh, and nevertheless God.(2) He speaks of Him as "emptying Himself, taking on the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men", and yet "being in the form of God".(3) Christ was "the second man from heaven"(4), who voluntarily took upon Himself our nature(5), coming to us as the "Son of God", "born of a woman, born under the law".(6) Here Zahn inquires: " Warum spricht Paulus von dem Weibe als die Mutter, die ihn geboren hat, anstatt von dem Manne, der doch viel strenger schon durch das Gebot der Beschneidung an das Gesetz gebunden ist? Die Antwort kann nur lauten: 'Weil Paulus ebensowenig

(1) Rom. 1,3-4.
(2) Rom. 8,3.
(3) Phil. 2,6-7.
(4) I Cor. 15,47.
(5) II Cor. 8,9: Phil. 2,5-8.
(6) Gal. 4,4.

wie irgend ein Christ unter den Volks- und Zeitgenossen Jesu von einem Manne weiss, der Jesum gezeugt habe".(1)

We hope to have shown that Paul is not a witness who can be relied upon to disprove the Virgin Birth, and that his silence is silence only in the biased minds of those scholars who <u>will</u> not believe the miracle. In this manner we could go on to explain away the silence of every book of the New Testament. However, the above illustrations will suffice to show that the argument from silence, when applied to the writings of the New Testament with respect to the Virgin Birth, is untenable, leads to all sorts of monstrous speculation, and above all, IS CONTRARY TO FACT.

In our rather detailed discussion of the argument from silence we have already met another objection of the critics, namely, that the whole <u>New Testament</u> (outside of Mt. and Lk. Gh. 1-2) <u>contradicts</u> the Virgin Birth. We believe to have proved, the New Testament implies, teaches, and perfectly harmonizes with supernatural origin. And when the opponents once more bring up the argument from "Davidic sonship", and point to the expressions which are supposed to make Jesus the son of Joseph, we merely refer them to Matthew and Luke who do the same thing without any thought of contradition.(2)

The Virgin Birth stands as an HISTORICAL FACT, plainly taught in two Biblical writings, accepted by the earliest Christians, defended throughout the ages, and treasured by all true believers to-day, inspite of all objections and calumnies continually being heaped upon it.

THE MIRACLE - UNESSENTIAL.

Thus far we have dealt with objections that openly repudiated a Virgin Birth, and attempted to refute the same by direct criticism. We now come

(1) Altes und Neues - 1928, p.68.
(2) Compare above, pp.28-29.

to a more subtle, more insidious line of argument, and for that reason more dangerous and threatening. There is a group of scholars within the Church who accept most of the evangelical doctrines of the Christian faith, but who are not ready to believe in the Virgin Birth. Many of these men manifest a deep interest in the Christian faith, and zealously assert their loyalty to the "practical" demands of the Christian religion. They often hold high positions in various church bodies and wield a powerful influence in the religious lives of thousands of people. We hear them speaking of Christ in glowing terms, holding Him up as the "Ideal Man" whose example ought to be followed by all men, and using "evangelical terms with unevangelical thoughts", finally make Him out to be a man. We can therefore readily understand why these same men contend that, whether the claim to a miracle in the Birth of Jesus is real or fancied, it makes no essential difference in the Person of Christ, and is entirely immaterial to the believer. It adds nothing of doctrinal worth to the creed of the Church, and it were well to purge our beliefs of such incredible articles in order that they might better appeal to the "modern mind". Faith is in no way dependent upon, or conditioned by belief in the Virgin Birth, no not even Christ's sinlessness depends upon it. The Virgin Birth may therfore be safely dropped from our creeds without fear of losing anything of importance or disturbing our faith in Christ. Thompson, in one of his concluding sentences of his chapter dealing with this doctrine, says: " The view - that He came into life miraculously - adds nothing to the wonder of his coming, or to the value of His life among men".(1) Here are a few words from Mr. R.J.Campbell's newly published book on The New Theology. "The credibility and significance of Christianity are in no way affected by the doctrine of the Virgin Birth.....Like many others, I used to take the

(1) Miracles in the N.T., p160.

the position that acceptance or non-acceptance of this doctrine was immaterial because Christianity was quite independent of it; but later reflection has convinced me that in point of fact it operates as a hindrance to spiritual religion and a real living faith in Jesus".(1) Campbell certainly goes farther than Fosdick who only claims that he is "far from thinking that he has given up anything vital in the New Testament's attitude toward Jesus".(2) Kaftan stamps the Virgin Birth as a doctrine "having no religious value".(3)

Even with regard to essentiality we cannot allow the opponents objection to stand. Difference of opinion on the Virgin Birth in NOT immaterial, it IS VITAL. It goes to the very root of the question of deity, and that is the very essence of Christ's power. We may drop all further refutation at this stage, for the question of the importance of this doctrine will be taken up once more in the last part of our thesis. Nevertheless, we cannot resist the temptation to put one pointed question to the critics before passing on to the next thought: If the Virgin Birth is unessential, immaterial, and of such little importance, how are we to explain the ernormous amount of controversial literature on just this subject which is flooding the market to-day? "For people do not usually waste their energies in efforts to overthrow a fact which they deem of little importance"(4)

The Miracle - A Myth.

The great problem for those who deny the historicity of the Birth stories is to show how the idea of the Virgin Birth could have arisen in such a way and at such a time as to find lodgement in the Nativity narratives. The Infancy accounts are established as integral parts of two early and genuine Gospels.(5) They are not interpolations, neither do they contradict themselves, nor do they militate against the teachings of the rest of the New Testament.(6) The rather

(1) Orr, "The V.B. Of Christ", p.3. - The New Theology p.104.
(2) Theo. Month., Vol.VII, 1927. P.195. - The New Knowl. a. t. Chr. Faith. / P.10
(3) Pieper, Dogm., III, 366.
(4) Orr, "The V.B. Of Christ", p.183.
(5) See above, pp.19-24. (6) See above pp.24-38.

difficult problem of the critics is to show how the Virgin Birth, unless it were a fact, ever could have found place in these Gospels. They must not only show how the idea of the Virgin Birth might have developed during the first century, but must further show how this idea was ever taken up by just those narratives in which we find it.

Basic for all theories, and their name is legion, is the idea that Jesus made a profound impression upon his disciples and the people of his day by the "uniqueness" of his personality, and that these disciples then tried to explain his preeminence by ascribing to Him a supernatural origin. We state the most popular theories, roughly classifying them under the general heads, the "Jewish Influence Theories" and the "Heathen Influence Theories".

The Jewish Influence Theory. Since the narratives of the Virgin Birth are Jewish in character, it is most natural to suppose that the basis of the idea is to be found on Jewish-Christian soil. Within the limits of Judaism itself, two starting points have been suggested for the development of the idea of the Virgin Birth. In the first place, men like Harnack believe they have found a complete explanation in Isaiah 7,14. The Old Testament heroes, as for instance Jacob and Isaac, were regarded as begotten of the Spirit (Gal.4,29), and an analogy is to be found in the New Testament John.(1) And since Jesus was considered greater than any of these "spiritual children", it was only a step farther to exclude the human factor entirely, by making the Holy Ghost not an important , but the sole factor in Christ's conception. The prophecy of Isaiah would suit such a belief very nicely, hence it was brought in to give impetus to the whole idea. Harnack not only makes this passage "a necessary element in the development , but apparently the only determining cause for the peculiar form which the "myth" assumed.(2) Lobstein is able to trace a very definite

(1) Machen, "Princeton Theo. Rev.", Vol.IV. January, 1906. P.66.
(2) " " " " " " " " P.67.

course of development. The character of Jesus, his mighty works, and profound sayings made such an impression on his followers, that unintelligent as they were, they imagined Him to be the promised Messiah. Later they began to reflect upon His uniqueness and decided it must be due to a miraculous origin. "Thus arose the Pauline doctrine of the preexistence, and finally,..... the more highly developed Logos Christology of the fourth Gospel. To the theocratic sonship was added the metaphysical sonship."(1) At the same time a more popular development had been going on, assisted by the "spiritual childern" stories and the prophecy of Isaiah 7,14, which found the solution of the unique personality of Christ in the fact that He was not begotten like other men, but directly by God. Thus the idea developed, from the theocratic, to the metaphysical, to the physical sonship.

Pfeiderer introduced a new thought when he maintained, "the ideas which lie at the basis of the birth narratives came specifically from the theology of Paul, and only the details from the Old Testament.(2) As Orr puts it, "He actually thought he saw in these words of Paul about Jesus 'being born of the seed of David according to the flesh', and 'declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection of the dead', the origin of Luke's narrative of the Virgin Birth."(3)

Leaving the purely Jewish and Christian basis, some seek to derive the idea of the Virgin Birth "from that mixture of Greek philosophy and Old Testament religion which we find best exemplified in the writings of Philo."(4) Conybeare and Voelter, exponents of this theory, speak of "redactors" who were influenced by Hellenism, and by the heathen notions of "children of God". Of them Orr says; "It is unnecessary to delay on theories of a mixed kind..... He will be a skilful person who can discern any trace of Philonic influence in the narratives of either Matthew or Luke".(5)

(1) Machen, "Princeton Theo. Rev.", Vol.IV.,1906, (Jan.) p.67.
(2) " " " " " " " p.69.
(3) "The V.B. Of Christ",p.119. - "Unchristentum, pp.420-1.
(4) Machen, "Princeton Theo. Rev.", Vol.IV. Jan. 1906, p.70.
(5) "The V.B. Of Christ", p.163.

The insufficiency of these Jewish and "mixed" theories is strikingly attested by the fact that so many recent critics feel obliged to seek the idea of the Virgin Birth outside of Judaism - in the heathen world.

The Heathen Influence Theories. Let us briefly outline a few of the main theories to which critics have taken recourse inorder to prove the Virgin Birth is a heathen idea. Usener claims that Matthew and Luke were not satisfied with the narrative of the great event at the baptism, for it postponed Christ's consecration or "adoption" too long, and that rather He "must have been God's chosen instrument from His birth".(1) Hence the story of the Nativity, and "here we unquestionably enter the circle of pagan ideas", "for the idea is quite foreign to Judaism".(2) The "star", the "Magi", etc., are from the "warp and woof" of heathenism.

Soltau finds three main features of heathenism in the Nativity records. They are: The generation of Jesus through the Holy Spirit; the angels song of praise; and the journey of the Magi.(3) "The angels song of praise is an adaptation of rejoicings at the birth of Augustus, who was hailed as the savior of the whole human race. He too, points to the star and the Magi as based on heathen mythology."(4) In fact all three of the above mentioned heathen notions "referred to what had been handed down and proclaimed in honor of the Roman Emperor, especially of Augustus, to the true Saviour of the world."(5)

Holtzmann proceeds more cautiously. He allows the germ of the whole idea of a Virgin Birth to originate in Judaism, but continues, the idea could never have ripened into its present form on Jewish ground. "In the heathen world it found an atmosphere friendly to the highest degree, for there we find many "children of God" - Hermes, Aesculapius, Dionysius, Hercules, etc., as well as Pythagoras, Plato, Alexander, Augustus. These

(1) Machen, "Princeton Theo. Rev.", Vol.IV,, Jan. 1906, p.75.
(2) Orr, "The V.B. Of Christ", p.163. - Encycl. Bib., sub "Nativity".
(3) and (4) Machen, "Princeton Theo. Rev.", Vol.IV, Jan.,1906, p.76
(5) Machen, same article as (3) and (4), page 77.

heathen representations 'of the coming of the great from above needed only to strip off their coarsely sensous forms in order to be transferred to the world-conquering Son of God from the East."(1)

There is one more group of scholars whose theory must be made mention of before we take up the refutation of the "myth stories". It is the view held by Cheyne, Gunkel, Farnell, and others.(2) Cheyne sees "a basis for the idea of the Virgin Birth in the mythology of other Eastern peoples, and knows that the Old Testament has, as a matter of fact, been in various ways influenced by those mythologies".(3) By means of Babylonian, Egyptian, and Persian parallels, he can show that"the prelude to the first Gospel is a Christian transformation of a primitive story, derived ultimately, in all probability, from Babylonian mythology".(4)

We have briefly stated the case of some of the outstanding exponents of the Jewish, the Pagan, and the Babylonian "Influence Theories", without any attempt at refutation. To have gone into detail even in combating only the main "Influence Theories" would have called forth a rather tedious and lengthy discussion; we might say an unnecessary discussion, for these scholars have carried on an internecine warfare, which has so vitiated all attempts at explaining the mythical origin of the Virgin Birth, that little remains for us to refute. We adduce a few example of this war of extermination among the critics themselves.

Harnack says: "The belief that Jesus was born of a Virgin sprang from Is.7,14. It is in point of method, not permissible to stray so far (as in the Gentile theories) when we have near at hand such a complete explanation as Is.7,14."(5)

Now hear the other side. Soltau: "This at any rate is clear: the belief in the Virgin Birth of Jesus could not have originated in Palestine; any-

(1) Machen, "Princeton Theo. Rev.", Vol.IV. Jan.,1906, p.73.
(2) Orr, "The Vir. B. of Christ", p.176.
(3) Machen, "Princeton Theo. Rev.", Vol.IV. Jan.,1906, p.79.
(4) Same as (3)
(5) Orr, "The V.B. Of Christ", p.153. - "Hist. Of Dog.", p.100.

how, it could never have taken its rise in Jewish circles.... The Virgin Birth,in particular, was certainly not first inferred from the words of the prophet Isaiah in 7,14."(1) Cheyne corroborates Soltau's assertion when he says: " It has been overlooked that the mistranslation of 'ha-almah' in the LXX is so far from accounting for the belief in the Virgin Birth of Christ that it requires to be explained itself."(2) In the same strain writes Gunkel: "It has long been seen that the representation (in Luke) is quite foreign to pure Judaism: the Judaism which comes from the Old Testament ..... knows of no miraculous begetting through a divine factor".(3)

"But now the advocates of the Gentile origin have the heavy guns of Harnack and his friends turned upon them: 'The conjecture of Usener, that the idea of the birth from a Virgin is a heathen myth which was received by the Christians, contradicts the entire earliest development of Christian tradition, which is free from heathen myths,"(4) Harnack reminds us "of the fact that the oldest Christianity strictly refrained from everything polytheistic and heathen", and on that account declares that "The unreasonable method of collecting from the mythology of all peoples parallels for original Church traditions, whether historical reports or legends, is valueless." In another connection Harnack is even more explicit: "The Greek or Oriental mythology I should leave entirely out of count; for there is no occasion to suppose that the Gentile congregations in the time up to the middle of the second century adopted, in despite of their fixed principle, popular mythical representations."(5)

There you have the witness of the critics, representatives of the two general mythical theories. We are reminded of the witness before Caiaphas at the trial of Jesus: "Neither did their witness agree together". Be-

(1) Orr, "The V.B. Of Christ", p.153 - "Geburtsgeschichte", pp.23-25.
(2) " " " " " -, p.153 - "Bible Problems", p.193.
(3) " " " " " , p.164 - "Op. cit., p.66.
(4) " " " " " , p.154 - "Hist. of Dog.", I,p.100.
(5) Machen, "Princeton Theo. Rev.", Vol.IV. Jan.,1906. P.74.

sides, we have the newest of these theories of the mythical origin of the idea of the Virgin Birth, which, as Orr humorously puts it, "like its predecessors, lacks but one thing - BOTTOM. It gives the death-stroke to all theories that have gone before."(1) The Reverend Schulze has summed up the entire situation in one statement: "The rival theories are hopelessly at variance with each other. The Jewish theory cuts the throat of the Gentile theory; the Heathen theory disposes of the Jewish theory; the Babylonian theory gives the death-blow to the Jewish and the Pagan theories and goes down to destruction with them".(2)

In their strife with each other the critics have practically sounded the death-knell of their own theories. It is our intention to pronounce final judgement upon them by pointing out some flagrant discrepancies which lie on the very surface.

The Jewish Influence Theory goes down on two counts:

1) The Time Element.
   a) If <u>early</u>, the main difficulty is the impossibility of explaining the rise of such a myth within the space of 25-30 years. The Apostles, Mary herself, her friends and relatives were then still alive. If a myth, it is also a stain upon Mary's and Jesus' honor. Where do we find opposition to the "myth" on the part of those men who would rather die than deny or malign their Lord? Another thing: It is a leading point with the critics that Paul and the other Apostles knew nothing of it. Impossible!

   b) If <u>between</u> the <u>primitive</u> outlook <u>and</u> the fully developed thought of <u>John</u> (Lobstein (3)), or between Paul and John, "we are back to a date of origin for this story earlier than the Epistles of Paul, i.e., within 20 years from the Crucifixion".(4) Once more we must say, how explain the alleged ignorance of the Apostles?

   c) If <u>concurrently with Paul</u>, and Lobstein says it is possible(5), the difficulties thicken. We thought Paul contradicted the Virgin Birth, or knew nothing of it. Keim and Lobstein assume that the idea of the supernatural birth, and Paul's pre-existence doctrine, are conceptions which exclude each other.(6) Even then we are still barely 30 years from the origin of the Church. How could a myth so fully formed and complex be received in that brief space of time?

(1) Orr, "The V.B. Of Christ", p.176.
(2) Schulze, Theo. Month., Vol.VII., 1927. P.204.
(3) Orr, "The V.B. Of Christ", p.158.
(4) Same as (3)
(5) Orr, "The V.B. Of Christ", p.159.
(6) " " " " " ,, p.160.

d) If late, what shall we do with the Gospel accounts that have been established as early?

2) The Jewish Element.

a) We have no reason to believe that Is.7,14 was ever applied to the Messiah by the Jews. Edersheim gives a list of all the passages, some 456, but Is.7,14 is not among them.

b) The Hebrew word "Almah" in its strict sense denotes a young marriageable woman. And while we believe it does signify "virgin" in the Isaiah passage and in other O.T. writings, the Jews at least had no reason to believe their Messiah would be Virgin born.

c) The Virgin Birth is foreign to the Jewish idea of marriage. Parhood was honored and children considered a heritage from the Lord. The Jews expected a royal Messiah, not the son of a lowly Virgin.

d) The monotheistic idea of God which separated the Jewish God from the world as heathen conceptions of God did not, certainly cannot be brought into harmony with the origin of a the idea of Virgin Birth on Jewish ground.

e) Luke shows no trace of connection with Messianic prophecy

f) It may be mentioned as remarkable - if the origin of the myth was Jewish - that it was just from Jewish-Christians (the Ebionites) that the conspicuous denial of the Virgin Birth in the early Church proceeded.

g) If a myth - then a slander. Mary and Jesus - objects of ridicule. From Matthew and Luke? Impossible!

The difficulties of the Jewish mythical theories are so apparent , the theories so insufficient, that most modern critics have already cast them overboard. However the Heathen Influence Theories are no better. They too succumb in the face of insurmountable difficulties.

1) There is not a single true parallel between the Gospel stories and heathen myths.(1) In the heathen world we find narratives of gods, who are no more than great men, visiting women in carnal intercourse, but not a single Virgin Birth. In every myth we can trace the male factor, a god assuming the form of a serpent, a satyr, an elephant, or even entering the body of the husband of the woman who is said to have begotten "a child of God". The theories are too confused, and too numerous, to refute. Orr spends about eight pages to prove there is no analogy between the Bible stories and heathen myths.(2)

2) There is no proof for the influence of heathenism upon Christianity at the time when the Virgin Birth is supposed to have originated. The fact is, the Jews, especially the Christians were filled with a feeling of intense repugnance for anything heathen.(3) We know from history that they would rather die than join in heathen idolatry.

(1) Orr, "The V.B. Of Christ", p.167.
(2) " " " " " , pp. 165-173.

3) When the time element is introduced, "the whole theory falls like a house of cards".(1)

The latest theory is also baseless. Orr virtually tears it to pieces when he says: "Who ever heard of, or saw, or came on any trace of this purely imaginary 'pre-Christian' sKatch, based on Babylonian or other myths, which is first thought as 'plausible', then is converted into a certainty, and reasoned from a fact! Jewish or Christian literature furnishes not a scrap of evidence for its existence. It is, what these writers would have the Virgin Birth to be, purely a fiction - a creation of the brain. The upshot, therefore, i.e., that this new theory, having destroyed all the rest, itself shares in their downfall, and leaves the field clear for the only remaining hypothesis, which is the simplest and most satisfactory of any - THAT THE THING ACTUALLY HAPPENED."(2) For the heathen myths, far from involving a suspicion of the Virgin Birth, even illustrate a truth which argues for the miracle. In the heathen idea that a divine man presupposes a miraculous origin is reflected the universal and natural belief of man, we might say, the instinct, which connects super-human greatness with divine origin. All of which "leads us to suspect that, if there is a real incarnation, it will be accompanied by a miraculous sign".(3)

It is time to sum up our result. We set out from the premise that miracles are possible, hence the Virgin Birth cannot be simply brushed aside by pure dogmatic assertions. Parthenogenesis explains nothing and is anti-Biblical. The "ideal" Christ of Schleiermacher is insufficient, an impossible creature. We next examined the New Testament narratives of the Birth of Jesus and showed that they have very early attestation, and themselves give clear evidence that they are not pure inventions. We proved the Gospels genuine, found the narratives integrally sound, the writers honest beyond reproach, and showed that the supposed contradictions with the rest of the New Testament, and within the limits of the narratives themselves, have not been

(1) Orr, "The Virgin Birth Of Christ", p.175.
(2) " " " " " " , p.179.
(3) " " " " " " , p.166.

firmly established. The alleged silence of the New Testament proved a boomerang. We then examined the alternative hypothesis that the narratives are to be explained in other ways than as based on facts, reviewed the various theories, ran amuck of contradictions, wars within the camp of the enemy, and showed that all theories, the Jewish, the Heathen, the Babylonian, run up against insurmountable difficulties.

So we have found that there are grave objections both to the "historical" and to the mythical explanations of our narratives. What decision ought we make? To this question we believe there is but one answer - the answer we shall give in last part of our thesis.

III

THE LUTHERAN POSITION

We have aired the intricate arguments of the opposition, have found them extremely rational, subjective, and dogmatic; sometimes straining the imagination, at other times contradictory, but always revealing the futility of the attempts of finite minds to gage and to limit the Infinite. We have dealt with gross speculations, with human vagaries, with biased assertions, and with subtle, insidious advances. All in all, our impression has been, they "became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. PROFESSING THEMSELVES TO BE WISE, THEY BECAME FOOLS!"

By way of contrast, let us now turn to the plain and simple Word of God. A real thrill is in store for us. To delve into an enormous array of controversial literature, to spend hours trying to follow the involved theories and profound arguments spun out for and against the Virgin Birth of Christ - then to turn to the short, concise, and lucid accounts of the Inspired Word, is to come out of the realm of darkness into the bright and glorious sunlight. Relegating all polemics to the background, let us then make an honest endeavor to approach the Sacred Page with open mind, and in humble submission, allowing God Himself to talk to us through His Word.

But, someone may object, we are getting away from the subject; we have set out to present the Lutheran view, and are now giving the Scriptural side of it. Rightly so, for we believe the two to be identical. The Lutheran Church has often been called the Bible Church and is very proud of this name. She has built up her doctrine upon the firm foundation of the Word of God. She accepts the testimony of the Prophets as well as that of the Evangelists, and does not trace her origin, as is often thought, back to the sixteenth, but to the first century, to the Apostolic Church. It is therefore only natural, that in attempting to state the Lutheran position with regard to the Virgin Birth, we should begin with the question, "WHAT DOES THE BIBLE

SAY ABOUT IT?".

"Vetus Testamentum in Novo patet, Novum Testamentum in Vetere latet". That is an old axiom which has its application also to the Virgin Birth even in the present age. "The Old Testament," someone has said, "is Jesus foretold". We may then rightly expect to find some light shed upon the Birth of our Lord also in the Old Testament. We are not to be disappointed. The very first Messianic prophecy, the "Protevangel", Genesis 3,15, sheds a faint ray of light upon the origin of our Saviour. This passage presents a contrast, a struggle, between "the seed of the woman" and the "seed of the serpent". The whole context compells us to look upon these terms as individualizing, for we are told, "it (the seed of the woman) shall bruise (crush) thy(the serpent's) head, and thou shalt bruise his heel". Two persons are denoted, Christ and the Devil. Hence Eve correctly interpreted the promise, although her calculations as to time were incorrect.(1) The passage is obviously Messianic. What could be more natural than to connect the "seed of the woman" with the "son of the Virgin"? There is to be perpetual enmity between the two "seeds", a continuous struggle, from which the "seed of the woman" is to emerge victorious. From these details we must at least conclude the promised "victor" will have an origin unlike that of other men. All men are sinners, flesh of sinful flesh, but here the order is to be broken.(2) This "seed of the woman", shall crush the head of the serpent, yea, overcome Satan. To do this he must Himself be sinless, he must be God, for otherwise he himself would be in the power of Satan. And if he is without sin, he cannot be born according to the ordinary course of nature - he can be conceived of the Holy Ghost and born of the woman, the Virgin. Not a word of a father - a strange thing when we consider the ordinary manner of stating descent, prevalent even in our day,

(1)Gen. 4,1.
(2)Gen. 5,3: Ps.51: etc.

and especially so among the ancient Jews, who always derived the birthright through the male parent.(1) The idea of maternity is emphasized in our passage, and since we are here dealing with the very beginning of Messianic prophecy, which runs through the whole Old Testament and culminates in the New Testament Christ, we cannot help but infer with Luther and most of the positive Bible students - Genesis 3,15 suggests the Virgin Birth.(2)

If the above passage stood out from the rest of the prophecies and proclaimed the Birth from a Virgin in its low, muffled tone, we should have reason to question the correctness of our interpretation of the same. However, the prophets have left us other and clearer witnesses, and the most explicit of these is the prophecy of Isaiah 7,14.

Every Messianic prophecy is in a certain sense the product of the age in which it was proclaimed. The prophets were generally men of power and influence in the Israelitic kingdoms, counselors of the kings and their people, spokesmen of God. When the "chosen race" accepted their word, God looked down upon his people with favor, granted peace and prosperity, and victory over outnumbering hordes; when, on the other hand, Israel rejected His messengers, God let the hand of His wrath descend upon this people, and its fortunes took a turn for the worse. But even when Israel sank to the depths of misery and everything looked dark, the Lord was ever mindful of a faithful "remnant", holding out to them a ray of hope for a better age through promises of a coming "Deliverer". These promises were the Messianic prophecies, and thus history and prophecy were often indissolubly bound up in each other, and progress in one involved progress in the other.

Isaiah 7,14 offers a striking example of the close connection between historic event and prophetic word. In order to gain a clear idea of its

(1) Hastings "Dict. Of The Bible", sub "Genealogies" - A.J.Maclean.
(2) St. Louis Ed. - 13b, 2676.

import, and to correctly interpret this passage, it is necessary first to establish the historical setting. Let us recall the circumstances under which the prophecy was given. We go back in spirit to about the year 740 B.C. Ahaz, a most degenerate, wicked, and idolatrous king, sat upon the throne of Judah. He was being threatened by a coalition of the kings of Ephraim and Syria, which had for its object to depose Ahaz, and to set up a man of their own choosing in his stead. So far the invasion had been crowned with success, and only Jerusalem remained to be taken. The foe already stood at the door, while Ahaz and his people trembled with fear. In this desperate position, what could be more natural than that the king should look to outside help for succor, to Assyria for example? But he was still debating the matter in his mind, when Isaiah was sent to him by God to assure him, the conspiracy would not succeed. Ahaz makes no reply; the message seems to impress him but little. Then a sign is offered him, either "in the depth, or in the height above", as a confirmation of the Lord's word. But the king's heart is hardened, and in mock humility he declines the sign. The indignation of the prophet is aroused: "Hear ye now, o house of David; is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also?" Before he had said "thy God", now it is "my God". Ahaz and his people had rejected the proffered aid, and ignored the offer of a sign; "Therefore, the Lord Himself shall give you a sign!". From what had transpired, we are justified in expecting that the sign the Lord would give would be no ordinary one. What was the sign? We quote the Authorized Version: "BEHOLD, A VIRGIN SHALL CONCEIVE, AND BEAR A SON, AND SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL".

Let us examine the text in the original and try to establish the intended sense of each individual term, presenting the positive view without going to any great length in refuting the negative critics. The introductory words are very significant. "לָכֵן" is a causal adverb, used here in an adversative sense, "yet therefore, nevertheless".(1) The

(1) Gesenius, Heb. and Eng. p.474b.

Prophet would say, although you impiously refuse the offered sign, yet therefore (nevertheless) the Lord Himself will give you a sign. " הָרָה " - the present is used, "because both the pregnancy of the mother, and the birth of the son are present to the Prophet".(1) "The Lord Himself" - He will give it of His own accord, without any cooperation, in spite of the king's refusal. The position of the pronoun is significant and gives express emphasis to the subject,(2) When "הוּא" is placed after the predicate and subject it has the force of "he himself".(3) We will do well to bear this in mind, for it will be of benefit later on to rightly understand the prophecy proper. " לָכֶם " refers to Judah, the house of David(v.13), the king and his subjects. "אוֹת" is a sign of something future, a portent, an omen. "So of prophetic sign or token of the truth of a prophecy, viz., when God or a Prophet as His interpreter foretells some minor event, the fulfillment of which serves as a sign or proof of the furure fulfilment of the whole prophecy."(4) But Hengstenberg maintains, that this has its reason not in the idea of " אוֹת ", but solely in the circumstance that, ordinarily, the future cannot serve as a sign of assurance. In Messianic prophecy it would almost seem imperative to look to the future also for the sign, and not to the present. Furthermore, Biblical usage allows us to understand "אוֹת" as referring to a future event, as in Ex.3,12.(5) Here, we hope to make it clear, "אוֹת" can only refer to a great sign which is still in the distant future. The whole intrduction prepares for something extraordinary. The stress laid on the fact that God Himself would give a sign, a portent, the strength of the " לָכֶם ", the word " אוֹת " itself, all presage a great remarkable event.

This idea is heightened by the opening word of the prophecy proper.

(1) Hengstenberg, "Christology" , p.43. Vol.II.
(2) Gesenius Grammar, paragraph 135a, Note.
(3) Gesenius Grammar, " " 135c.
(4) Gesenius Heb. Eng. Lexicon, sub " ".
(5) Hengstenberg, "Christology", Vol. II. P.43.

"הִנֵּה" - "Behold", open your eyes, give heed, something of great import is about to happen. This term "indicates the energy with which the Prophet anticipates the future; in his spirit it becomes the immediate present."(1) Keil says, "immer ist "הִנֵּה" mit folgendem Partizip (hier Part. adj.) vergegenwaertigend, die Gegenwart ist aber entweder eine wirkliche, wie Gen.16,11, oder eine ideale, wie hier anzunehmen ist, denn abgesehen von 47,7 fuehrt "הִנֵּה" bei Jesaias immer Zukuenftiges ein".(2) We are therefore the more firmly convinced that the sign is not a present omen of some great event in the far future, but that the "אוֹת" itself will take place in the future. Now we come to the sign itself, "הָעַלְמָה" shall conceive". In its strict etymological sense, this word simply signifies a "young woman of marriageable age". Its true meaning in this particular passage we shall determine below. The verb," הָרָה", means to "conceive, become pregnant", and must be taken as referring to the future, because of its connection with the demonstrative "הִנֵּה".(Cp. above). The same holds true for the succeeding verbs, " יֹלֶדֶת" and " וְקָרְאָה". The former term is the common word for "bearing, bringing forth", and the latter expresses the notion of "calling, naming". Whether "וְקָרָאת" is third feminine, or second feminine is debateable, but the fundamental passage in Genesis 16,11, is, according to Hengstenberg, decisive for considering it as second person.(3) Mothers often gave names to the children(4), and thus this mother calls her son, "Immanuel", that it, "God with us". The name is a designation of his character and nature. He is God Himself, present here on earth, with man — the God-man.(5)

To summarize, the Prophet promises a great, wonderful sign. "Behold",

(1) Hengstenberg, "Christology", Vol.II, p.44.
(2) Keil and Delitzsch, "Comm. On Isaiah", p.142.
(3) Hengstenberg, "Christology", Vol.II. p.44.
(4) " " " " " " ".
(5) Isaiah 9,5: 10,21.

he cries out, "here is a young maiden, pregnant, and about to give birth to a son, whom she shall give the significant name, 'God with us'". The vision of the Prophet carries him far beyond present events, the future and present appear to him as one, the element of time is absent, and he beholds as present something that in reality would not occur for centuries to come. What then is the true import of his prophecy? It is evident, by this time, that the meaning of the whole passage rests upon our interpretation of the subject of the sentence, the word "הָעַלְמָה". Here we are forced to look for the remarkable sign, since it were nonsense to see,in the fact that the prophet designates a son and not a daughter, the key to the passage. We would not be doing justice to the whole passage. Luther, in his trenchant way remarks: "das ist aber schimpflich und kindish",(1)

Some Hebrew authorities tell us, "almah" does not strictly mean a virgin, as the A.V. translates it, but simply a young woman of marriageable age; and that there is another term - bethulah - which expresses absolute virginity. It is worth noticing, however, that in Joel 1,8 the bride lamenting over her husband is called a "bethulah". Drechsler says: " Die zwei Ausdruecke sind Synonymen, sie bezeichnen ein und dasselbe Ding, nur eben unter verschoidenen Gesichtspunkten. Das Wort 'bethulah' bezeignet die Jungfrau als virgo illibata, das Wort 'almah' dagegen als virgo nubilis. Damit stimmt der Sprachgebrauch, damit die alte Tradition auf das Genauste ueberein".(2) Gesenius practically says the same thing: "'Almah' neque enim illibatae virginitatis notio, quam Hebraei propria voce 'bethulah' exprimunt, in hoc vocabulo in est, neque conditionis innuptae, sed pubertatis et aetatis nubilis, id quod tum etymo et linguae Hebraeae usu evincitur, tum linguarum cognatarum veterumque interpretum auctoritate".(3) We may agree with Gesenius as to the etymology of the word expressing

(1) St. Louis Ed., Vol.XX, 1801.
(2) Drechsler , Isaiah Comm., p286.
(3) Gesenius, "Thesaurus Linguae Heb. et Chald. Veteris Test.", p.1037.

"pubertatis et aetatis nubilis", but we cannot accept his statement, that it never expresses an unmarried state. We maintain that, even if the term does not necessarily bear this meaning of "virgin", it may, and indeed, usually does bear it. "עַלְמָה" is the feminine form of "עֶלֶם", a young man, a youth of marriageable age. It is derived from the root "עָלַם", which includes the idea of "fatness, fulness". Gray says it has the connotation of "being lustful".(1) Hengstenberg, derives it from this same root, but says it signifies, "to grow up, to become marriageable".(2) At any rate, etymologically speaking, "almah" implies youthful vigor and sexual ripeness, without indicating whether the person so called is still virgin or not. But now let us examine the word in its usage, for usage surely ought to prevail over the etymology of a word in order to determine its meaning. "Almah" is used seven times in the Old Testament, not counting "alamoth" in the superscription of Psalm 46 and in I.Chron.15,20.(3) Orr says: "In all the six places in which, besides this passage, the word occurs in the Old Testament, it may be contended that this (virgin) is its meaning".(4) Luther once sent forth the challenge:"If Jew or Christian can prove to me that in any passage of Scripture 'almah' means 'a married woman', I will give him 100 florins, although God alone knows where I may find them".(5) And Stoeckhardt dryly adds; "If Luther were living today, he could still retain his 100 florins".(6) "Even the opponents have given up all but one passage, namely Proverbs 30,19."(7) The writer is speaking of four things that are incomprehensible to him (v.18); "the way of an eagle in the air, the way of a serpent upon the rock, the way of a ship in the midst ofthe sea, and the way of a man with a virgin (almah)". The way of a man with his wife should occasion no wonderment, but that a

(1) Int. Crit. Comm. - Isaiah, p.126.
(2) "Christology", Vol.II, p.44.
(3) Ramsay, "The V.B.", p.30.
(4) Orr, "The V.B. Of Christ", p133.
(5) Cp. (4).
(6) Comm. Ueber Den Prop. Isaias - p.84.
(7) Hengstenberg, "Christology", p.45.

virgin should stoop to carnal intercourse, while she is still unwed, that seems incomprehensible to the writer. In verse 29 an adulterous woman (wife) is described and contrasted with the virgin of the preceding verse.(1) Thus the whole Old Testament stands as a witness, that "almah" means a virgin and nothing else.

When we go to the versions we find the same unanimous evidence for this meaning of the term. We are familiar with Luther's translation, the rendering of the A.V., and that of the R.V. The Vulgate uses the Latin word best suited to express virginity, "virgo". The LXX renders it with "neanis" in four of the seven passages, and in two, including our passage, it also translates "virgin" (parthenos). Robert Dick Wilson made a very thorough and scholarly study of this same word a few years past. He tells us that all the Greek versions have "parthenos", and that the Coptic, Armenian, Ethiopic, Harklesian, Syriac, and Arabic render Is.7,14 and Mt.1,23 by "the best word for virgin which they possess". He continues to point out that in all kindred languages there is not a trace of evidence to show that 'almah' ever meant 'young married woman'. We quote from his conclusion: "'Almah', so far as known, never meant 'young married woman'; and secondly since the presumption in common law and usage was and is, that every 'almah' is virgin and virtuous, until she is proven not to be, we have a right to assume that Rebecca and the 'almah' of Is. 7,14 and all other 'almahs' were virgin, until and unless it shall be proven that they were not".(2) It is apparent, related languages and the Versions demand the translation "virgin".

The New Testament leaves no room for doubt. Matthew explicitly states the Birth of our Lord from the Virgin Mary, and then adds, that "all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying," and then follows our passage.(3)

(1) Stoeckhardt, "Jesaia", p.84.
(2) Princeton Theo. Review, April, 1926.
(3) Matthew 1,22-23.

In view of this strong chain of evidence we are compelled to believe that when Isaiah wrote the word "almah" he had in mind a virgin and not a young married woman. The context demands something great, some miraculous event; the text itself presents the supernatural; the languages and versions confirm the miracle; and the New Testament establishes it as an historical fact.

Here then is a sign which agrees with the scope of the whole prophecy - a virgin, without the interposition of a male, conceives and bears a son. We might have said "the Virgin", for in the Hebrew and Greek the article is used. We realize the Hebrew article often has no more force than our English indefinite article. Nevertheless, the Messianic character of our prophecy excludes the indefinite or generic use of the article, and demands a specific "almah". Drechsler remarks: " Der Artikel steht hier in seiner allerhaechsten und gewoehnlichsten Bedeutung, naemlich als den allgemeinen Begriff auf ein bestimmtes und bewustes Individuum restringirend."(1) It is a maiden whom God Himself elected from eternity, and for that reason the Prophet may calmly say "The Virgin". This is further attested to by the context, for the Immanuel passage does not end with this verse. Its refrain is heard through the following chapter in connection with the Assyrian invasion (8,8.10), and finally culminates in the magnificent predictions of chapters 9 and 11. In our passage the virgin conceives, in chapter nine the son is already born, and chapter 11 pictures him as ruling. The mother is of the house of David, and we believe she is the same person referred to in Genesis 3,15, and again in Micah 5,2, where only the bearing one is spoken of.

To maintain that the Prophet here refers to a married maiden of his own time whom he designates when he speaks these words, to look upon "haalmah" as a general term including all the women who were pregnant when the prophecy was given and would soon conceive, or to contend that the Prophet had

(1) Drechsler - Comm. Jesaia - p.286.

in mind his own wife, or the wife of the king, is to do violence to the entire passage.

The import of the prophecy can now readily be grasped. The perpetuity of the house and throne of David were at stake. Ahaz had refused a sign, and now God takes the matter in His own hands. Through his messenger he threatens Ahaz and all the unbelievers in Judah, and at the same time comforts the "remnant". To the believers God gives the guarantee for the perpetuity of the house of David in this child, Immanuel. The vision of the Prophet sweeps far beyond present events, and beholds in this son of the Virgin, the Messiah, the security of the promise to David, and the hope for the future of the world. The other elements of the prophecy fall naturally into their place on this interpretation - even the time element of which critics make so much, because to the Prophet's mind the child is already conceived, and about to be born. Some may find in chapter eight a nearer or lower fulfilment, as the birth of the son of the Prophet , who bears a significant name , and is likewise accompanied with promises. However that does not fill the meaning of this prophecy of Immanuel, nor did the latter ever receive its fulfilment till, as Matthew narrates, Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea.

The idea of a peculiar birth for the Messiah was also hinted at by one Isaiah's contemporaries, Micah, in the prophecy about the ruler from Bethlehem - "until the time come when she that travaileth hath brought forth".(1) There can be no mistake about it, the Messiah is meant, and here too, we find no mention of a father. Jeremiah also seems to touch upon the subject, when he says, "The Lord hath created a new thing in the earth. A woman shall compass a man". Once more, not a word of a male parent.(2) Were we to consider all the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament,

(1) Micah 5,3.
(2) Jeremiah 31,22.

with their descriptions of the eternal, divine, universal King, the Lord of Righteousness, etc., we should no doubt easily be convinced that the Subject of these passages could be no human being, born of flesh, but the God Incarnate. Some prophecies hint at it, Isaiah plainly foretells the Virgin Birth, and in so doing describes her with the best Hebrew word at his command, and harmonizes perfectly with the New Testament accounts of the Birth at Bethlehem.

The New Testament.

If the Virgin Birth actually took place, there were in the nature of the case two primary witnesses to the fact - Mary and Joseph. Mary's version of the events that led up to the miraculous conception and birth are to be found in Luke, the "woman's Gospel". He begins his Evangel with the remarkabe story of the conception of John, the forerunner of Jesus, and suddenly goes over into the wonderful narrative of the Annunciation.

Luke 1,26-27.

A half year had passed since the conception of John, when God sent down the angel Gabriel to Nazareth of Galilee, to a VIRGIN. The Greek word is " παρθένος ", "a virgin, i.e., either a marriageable maiden, or a young (married) woman, but the common term for virgin.(1) That Luke actually has in mind an unmarried maiden becomes evident from his next statement, "espoused to a man whose name was Joseph". The word "μνηστεύω" means to woo, to ask in marriage, to be promised in marriage, to be bethrothed".(2) Here then is a virgin, betrothed to, promised in marriage to Joseph, "of the house of David"; a maiden who has not as yet lived with a man in holy wedlock. The author of our Gospel continues by introducing her to us, and assures us once more that she is a VIRGIN: "And the Virgin's name was Mary."

(1) Thayer, "Greek-English Lexicon Of The New Testament". Used of one's marriageable daughter, I Cor.7,36ff; of a pure virgin, II Cor.11,2: Mt.25,1.7.11; Lk.1,27: Acts 21,9: I Cor.7,25.28.33; also of a man who has retained his chastity, Rev.14,4.
(2) Cp. Thayer, sub "μνηστεύω".

Verse 28

Entering Mary's home, the Angel begins to address her with highly significant terms; "Hail, thou art compassed with grace, the Lord is with thee." "Χαριτόω" - is to make graceful, to pursue with grace, compass with favor, honor with blessing; to be taken objectively and never subjectively. The Angel means to say that Mary has received blessing and grace from God, and adds the parallel statement, "the Lord is with thee," to substantiate the first. If the Lord is with anyone, then surely the grace and blessing of God rests upon that individual. Out of all the virgins of the world and of all times God selects one, Mary, to bestow upon her His grace in a special measure. We are being prepared for what is to follow.

Verse 29

The strange salutation of the Angel greatly agitated and perplexed Mary (διαταράσσω). She revolved the saying in her mind, debated with herself, and filled with fear, she wondered what it all could mean. "ποταπός" denotes wonderment. "εἴη" i.e. the optative signifies the subject's interest in the personal meaning of the question. She is concerned with the meaning of the greeting for herself.

Verses 30-33

But the Angel quiets her: "Fear not, Mary, for you have found grace by God." This assurance carries the same weight as the above "The Lord is with thee". Now Mary is prepared to a certain extent for the astounding message. "And behold, thou shalt conceive ("συλλαμβάνω"- seize, take, conceive of a woman) in thy womb, and ("τέξῃ" (τίκτω) i.e. bring forth a son, and thou shalt call His name Jesus." We can imagine the astonishment of Mary at these words from the Angel. She was not even married and should soon become a mother? And what of the significant name, the name Jesus, Help is Jehovah, or "Gotthilf"? How

her amazement must have increased when the Angel continued: "And he shall be great, and shall be called the son of the Most High, and the Lord God shall give to Him the throne of David, His father; and He shall ruler over the house of Jacob eternally, and of His kingdom there shall be no end." The Angel asserts with powerful words that Mary's son, Jesus, should be God and man. The "Most High" is an Old Testament term for God. (1) It is God who gives Him "the throne of David, the house of Jacob", over which he rules "eternally". Who could be so blinded with unbelief that he should not see in these words the promise of the Messiah, the fulfillment of Messianic prophecy? A virgin shall conceive, and in her physical body bear a son, who shall be the son of David, and at the same time Son of God - a God-man. (2) Of what earthly king could it be said that he should rule eternally, and His kingdom be "without end"? Who shall deny that the Angel does not here foretell the incarnation of God through the virgin Mary? Israel had been looking forward to this coming of its Deliverer, the Messiah, for centuries and now the time for His appearance was ripe. The mother of Jesus is filled with wonderment; she is unable to grasp or comprehend the wonderful things that were told her by Gabriel. Bewildered she asks herself: how shall this happen to me, an insignificant, humble, obscure virgin. Her thoughts are then converted into speech.

V.34. "But Mary said unto the Angel: how shall this be, since I know no man?" Mary was ready to see and believe the message from God, but she feels constrained to ask a natural question: I am but a virgin, and have not as yet come to know a man. " γινώσκω " - means "to learn to know, to come to know: By a Hebraistic Euphemism, it is used of the

(1) Is.14,14;Dan.4,17;24,25,34; Hos.7,16 etc.
(2) 2.Sam.7,13.

carnal connection of male and female." (1) This is Mary's own clear confession that she was still a pure virgin. This same phrase is used of Rebecca, Gen.24,16, of Jephthah's daughter, Judg.11,39, and of the virgins of Jabesh Gilead, Judg.21,12. The virgin is perplexed,because she feels the proximity of the fulfillment of the Angel's words, and cannot comprehend them, since she was as yet unmarried and pure.

Verse 35

The Angel permits the question and gives immediate reply: "The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; wherefore (mark the illative particle "διὸ") also the Holy One born, shall be called Son of God." Mary is assured that God would make a wonderful exception in her case; contrary to the ordinary mode of conception she should be with child through a miraculous creative act of God. The article is missing, because the Holy Ghost is thought of as the impersonal creative power of God.(2) This power shall be active upon Mary, and she shall be overshadowed by it. "ἐπισκιάζω"- means to overshadow. "Tropically, of the Holy Ghost exerting creative energy upon the womb of Mary and impregnating it (a use of the word which seems to have been drawn from the familiar Old Testament idea of a cloud symbolizing the immediate presence and power of God). (3)

"ὑψίστου"-is also without article, asserting that the miracle will be effected through the power of God. As a result of God's part in the birth, the new-born babe shall be called "Holy", sinless, undefiled, free from original sin, and finally, "be called God". There would be no interposition of a human father - that would only result in another sinful being - no, the virgin shall by a supernatural act, conceive, and bear the Holy One, the Son of God, God Himself.

(1) Thayer, sub "γινώσκω".
(2) Meyer's Commentary,Vol.IB (1878) p.262.
(3) Thayer, cp. Exod.40,45;Nu.9,15, the Messianic prophecy Dan.7,14 etc.

Verses 36-38

The Angel, as if to strengthen Mary's faith in such a remarkable event, and to reassure her in her difficult position, tells her of the miracle wrought upon her kinsman, the aged Elizabeth, who, though she was long past the normal age of child-bearing, nevertheless was now in the sixth month of her pregnancy. And by way of ridding the humble Virgin of all doubts or misgivings, the Angel concludes with the powerful statement: "For with God nothing is impossible". But Mary needs no more persuasion. Quietly, with a humility and a faith that is incredible, she resigns herself to the protection of the Lord. She says in substance, if not in word; "Here I am send me, send me!" As stated in her own words, "Behold, the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to Thy word!" Mary was willing to believe that she, a virgin, should become the mother of God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, without the presence of a human father. This God Himself tells us through His Evangelist Luke.

Verses 39-80

With a light and joyful heart the young maiden hurries to her kinswoman Elizabeth. These two women would have much in common, and many things to discuss. The Benedictus that follows, the Magnificat, the prophetic saying of Zacharias, all are in perfect harmony with the miraculous birth of the Messiah. It is remarkable that during these discourses no mention is made of Joseph.

Luke II,1-7

Then came the decree that startled the world and stirred up the nations. A census was to be taken and each citizen was to register in the city of his birth. Joseph also found himself obliged to travel to Bethlehem of Judaea, and made the trip with Mary, "the one betrothed to him, being great with child." The same verb is used as above, namely "μνηστεύω".

Mary is still the betrothed of Joseph, promised to him in marriage, but it is evident, the consummation of the marriage, the becoming of one flesh, has not taken place. In the same plain unaffected way, Luke describes the birth of Jesus. (V.6-7)

The message of the Angel of the Lord, the hymn of the hosts, the behavior of the shepherds, Mary's actions, the prophecy and the blessing of Simeon, the effect upon Hannah, the peculiar construction of the first verse of the Genealogy, and every subsequent detail of the Gospel of Luke, fit nicely into the virgin-birth narrative. Luke certainly teaches the birth of Jesus of Nazareth from the Virgin Mary, conceived by the Holy Ghost. This is the story of a guileless, simple, humble, and utterly sincere maiden - a story that has no element that might cause in us a suspicion of its sincerety - a modest, straight-forward, sincere, consistent, and reasonable narrative.

We have heard the testimony of Mary, now let us consider Joseph's corroboration of the same, who next to his betrothed, would be the most intimately concerned about the birth.

Matthew I , 1-23

Matthew sets out to give the "generation" of Jesus Christ, the son of David. Tracing his lineage down to "Joseph, the husband of Mary", he deftly avoids calling Jesus the son of Joseph, as we have seen above.

Verse 18

"But the birth of Jesus Christ was thus (in this manner)." Matthew is not intent on describing the process of generation, but contrasting the manner of Christ's origin. He knew as well as we do of the preexistence of the Messiah according to His divine nature; now he will describe His entrance into our flesh. "When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child in her womb of the Holy Spirit." When her pregnant condition became evident, Mary was still

living with her parents, since the public confirmation of their betrothal had not as yet taken place. "πρίν "-"wie seit Luther die meisten Ausleger anerkennen...dass sie noch nicht das haeusliche Beisammenleben begonnen hatte. Es soll angedeutet werden, dass die Ehe noch nicht geschlossen war, als die Schwangerschaft der Maria offenkundig ward." (1) "συνέρχεσθαι "- to come together, used of conjugal cohabitation. The " ἐκ " often expresses origin, source, cause, after verbs of begetting (2) . To be found with child before the consummation of marriage, placed Mary in a distressing and humiliating position. But the Evangelist immediately explains this condition with the words: "by the Holy Spirit." Matthew thus introduces a virgin, betrothed to a man, and pregnant due to the working of the divine power of the Holy Ghost.

Verse 19

Joseph's natural conclusion was: Mary had been false to her nuptial vow and had sinned against the sixth commandment. And "being a just man, and not willing to make an example of her, he decided to put her away secretly." The betrothal was binding according to Jewish law, and could only be broken by legal annulment or divorce. (3) Joseph was a righteous man, that is, god-fearing, a keeper of the law, a Christian in the true sense of the word. Mary's condition seemed to make the fulfillment of their contract of marriage impossible for a religious man. On the other hand he did not wish to expose her to shame and to public reproach. (δειγματίσαι) "To appeal to the court of divorce would bring public ignominy and make her liable to severe penalties." (4) The surest and most humane procedure seemed to be the refusal of carrying out the marriage contract, quietly leaving her to suffer disgrace in her parents' home. His devotion and love for Mary softened and tempered his natural inclination to let the law take its course, and punish her for her infidelity.

(1) Meyer's Commentary, Ia (1896) p.38.
(2) Thayer sub " ἐκ " II.
(4) International Crit.Comm. Matthew-W.C.Allen,p9.
(3) See No.1,p.39.

Verse 20

Joseph was still pondering the solution of the problem when an Angel appeared to him in a dream. "ἐνθυμέομαι "-to bring to mind, to ponder, to deliberate. "Behold, the Angel of the Lord appeared unto Him, saying: Joseph, son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary, thy wife; for that which is begotten in her is of the Holy Spirit." "Behold"- a startling introduction to a message from God, for it is the Angel of the Lord who speaks. The salutation "son of David" is significant. It should remind Joseph that the Messiah must come out of the lineage of David in order that prophecy might be fulfilled; and Joseph is, therefore, to take Mary to himself without fear and to acknowledge and to adopt her child. (1) "γυνή " - is simply a woman, married, single, or a widow. Here is it used of a betrothed person. According to Jewish law, marriage began with the betrothal, and was completed in the 'taking' of the bride to the house of her husband. (2) Thus Matthew once more declares that Mary was with child before she had lived under the same roof with her husband. For the second time he also maintains that the Holy Ghost was the direct cause (ἐκ) of the origin of this Jesus. "Durch die gesperrte Stellung wird der ganze Ton auf " ἐκ πνεύματος " gelegt, sofern nicht aus suendhaftem Geschlechtsverkehr, sondern, wie Vers 18 bereits angedeutet, aus Geisteswirkung dies Erzeugnis herruehrt." (3)

Verse 21

The Angel's message reaches its climax in this verse. "But she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins." The Messenger takes for granted, yes, commands Joseph to receive Mary as his wife, for he himself shall acknowledge the child by calling him Jesus. The future serves as imperative. This construction is frequent in the Lxx and the New Testament to designate

(1) Meyer's Commentary, Ia (1898) p.40.
(2) Intern. Crit. Comm. Matthew, W.C.Allen, p.9.
(3) Cp. No.1.

divine commands and carries with it the absolute surety of their being carried out. (1) Jesus, is no ordinary name; it has the significance that Jehovah Himself appears in this child (Jehovah helps), and is explained in the succeeding sentence, "for he shall save His people from their sins." In this child Joseph should recognize the long-expected Messiah, who would free His people from spiritual bondage, for He and no other should deliver them. According to the promises, He was to come to "His people", that is, Israel, and from thence bring comfort to the whole world. Accordingly the Angel declares Christ, to be born of a virgin, conceived by the Holy Ghost, a deliverer of His people - The Messiah.

Verses 22-23

Whether these words were spoken by the Angel (2), or are added by the Evangelist for further enlightenment, is immaterial. If uttered by the angelic messenger, then he already sees as fulfilled what really was to be consummated at Bethlehem. The statement indicates that the Virgin-birth should show, the eternal decree of God must be fulfilled. "Now all this happened, (ἵνα) in order that the Word of the Lord shall have been fulfilled, which was spoken by the prophet. " It was no accident that everything should have come to pass in just this manner, but in accordance with God's will. " διά " with the genitive has the force of "through", showing the means or instrument through which anything is effected - here with the added mention of the first cause (3). " ῥηθὲν " - is really more than "word", it means "foretold"(4) . Sayings of the Old Testament quoted in the New are often introduced in this fashion (4). What is the Old Testament word? It is the prophecy we have already considered in Is.7,14. Matthew believes that Isaiah prophesied directly concerning the birth of the Messiah from a virgin, and he looks upon this message as a "fore-

(1) Meyer's Commentary, (1898) p.41
(2) So B.Weiss, Meyer's Comm. (1898) p.42.
(3) Thayer sub " διά ".
(4) Greek and English Lexicon of the NT,E.Robinson.

telling" of God, the prime source of all prophecy. "Behold, the Virgin shall be with child (have in her womb), and shall bear a son, and they shall call His name Immanuel." The "parthenos" is apparently Mary, the betrothed of Joseph, And hence the prophecy we considered above is referred directly to the mother of Jesus, and foretells the Virgin-birth.

Verses 24-25

What effect did the angelic vision have upon Joseph? "Then Joseph arose from his sleep and did as the Angel of the Lord had commanded him, and took unto himself his wife." As soon as Joseph awoke from his sleep, he carried out the command of the Angel and received Mary, his wife. His faith had been put to the test, but with Isaac-like firmness, never wavered. He believed, therefore he took Mary unto himself. "And he knew her not (the same "ginwskw" we met in Luke - carnal knowledge), until she bore a son, and called his name Jesus." Joseph did not take Mary into his house to consummate their marriage carnally, but in order to fulfill the divine decree, according to which the Messiah should be a legitimate (though legal) son of Joseph, and thus be born of the house of David. The "ἕως [οὗ]" tell us nothing concerning the future; it merely signifies that before the birth of Jesus there had been no intercourse between Joseph and Mary. "And he called His name Jesus". Joseph obeyed the command of God through His Angel to the very letter, assumed legal paternity of the child, and gave evidence of his faith by calling Him Jesus.

That is the story of Jesus' birth from the stand-point of His legal father. Like Mary's account, as given in Luke, the story is plain, unadorned, and straight-forward. The behavior of Joseph is so natural, we could behold him as a modern man acting in the same manner under similar circumstances. Mary is a virgin, pure and simple, yet great with child "of the Holy Ghost."

Both narratives agree perfectly, both center in the one fact, Jesus is the Christ-child, conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary,

without sin, the Savior of His people. The one tells the story from the mother's side, the other presents the legal father's impression; both supplement each other, and form one complete,harmonious narrative.

On basis of these accounts, and the Old Testament prophecies,the Lutheran Church has ever confessed to belief in that fundamental article of faith "conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary." Her confessions, her leaders, always have and still do make much of this article. Following references may serve to illustrate.

Concordia Triglotta, Augsburg Confession,Art.III,p.45:

> "Also they teach that the Word, that is, the Son of God, did assume the human nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin Mary, so that there are two natures, the divine and the human, inseparably conjoined in one person, one Christ, true God and true man, who was born of the Virgin Mary..."

Concordia Triglotta, Smalkald Articles, Part I, IV.p.461:

> "That the Son became man in this manner, that He was conceived, without the cooperation of man, by the Holy Ghost, and was born of the pure, holy, Virgin Mary."

Concordia Triglotta, pp.31;461;545;577f;683f;45; 461;821.12;1017.6; 1023.24.

Doctrinal Theology, A.L.Grabner,p.100:

> "Jesus Christ is the Son of God,very God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary in the fulness of time."

Christliche Dogmatik,Vol.III,p.76 (Dr.F.Pieper)

> "Hiernach wirkte der Heilige Geist auf wunderbare Weise so auf die Jungfrau Maria ein, dass sie, die Jungfrau, die Mutter des Sohnes Gottes nach der menschlichen Natur wurde."

Accordingly the Lutheran Church has ever confessed with Luther in his explanation of the II.Article of the Apostolic Creed: "I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary is my Lord..."

The perfect agreement of this standpoint with the Biblical accounts of Isaiah, Matthew, and Luke, in particular, and with Holy Writ in general is very evident.

Importance

But why does the Lutheran Church insist so vehemently upon the fact of the Virgin-birth? If this article of faith is of no doctrinal value to the believer, if it even forms a barrier, as we have heard, between Christ and mankind, and if it is unacceptable to the modern mind, why do we so stubbornly adhere to such an "open question"? Because the Lutheran Church believes that the doctrine of the Virgin Birth is fundamental to Christian faith, and that nothing is more unwise, more dangerous, more anti-scientific and anti-Biblical in the true sense of the word, than to regard this matter as of no importance. It is not sufficient to say the fact of the Virgin Birth is absolutely true; we must say it is an important and necessary part of our faith. Let us see what would happen, were we to discard this doctrine.

In the first place, no one can reject the Virgin Birth without denying the worth of every bit of historical evidence that has come down to us through the ages. We saw, in dealing with the witness of the early Church, how tenaciously the Fathers of that age held to this fact in their controversies with pagans and Gnostics - held fast to it, not simply as a piece of tradition, not simply as a miracle, not merely as a fulfillment of prophecy, but as a fact of vital, doctrinal moment. To brush aside this universal evidence of the early Christian Church is to invalidate all ancient history.

Secondly, the rejection of this doctrine leads logically to the rejection of all authority of Scripture, Old and New Testament. If we can arbitrarily drop from the Holy Writings a fact so clearly and explicitly taught, as the Virgin Birth is taught, then it is possible to reject any and every teaching of the Bible. The purity and power of the Christians Church stands or falls with the position it takes over against that Book, which has for its centre - Jesus Christ. By impugning the trustworthiness

of one Scriptural item, we open the gates for a questioning of all validity of the claim of Scripture, and our faith degenerates into a mere elective policy. And by annulling one portion relative to our creed, a similar attitude may be taken towards such portions as are authoritative for conduct etc. No, we dare not allow the devil one iota, for he shall soon wrest from us our entire Bible.

Thirdly, no one can reject the Virgin Birth without denying the whole supernatural content of Christianity. "The supernatural element cannot be eliminated from the account of the birth of Jesus except by application of rules that will strip the Bible of everything supernatural. The miraculous runs all the way through the Bible from beginning to end."(1) If this one miracle, foretold in the Old Testament, and standing at the very threshhold of the New is rejected, how can the other miracles of the Bible be accepted? Machen says: "The decision (with regard to the Virgin Birth) depends upon our point of view with regard to the miraculous in general."(2) Robert Dick Wilson has it: "The great and only difficulty (in believing the Virgin Birth) lies in disbelief in predictive prophecy and in the almighty power of God."(3) The Virgin Birth is attacked with special vehemence, because it is supposed that the evidence for this miracle is more easily gotten rid of than the evidence for public facts such as the resurrection etc. However, once we ignore this miracle, we have a fine base from which to attack and batter down every other miracle recorded in Holy Writ.

Fourthly, we come to a point that is very closely connected with the foregoing, since it deals with the Miracle Man, Jesus Christ, who in His birth, life and death revealed Himself as such. When the Virgin Birth is rejected, the testimony the Lord renders to Himself, to His infinite power, to His infinite wisdom, to His preexistence, to His eternity becomes inexplicable. The Virgin Birth involves the deity of Christ.

(1) Sunday School Times, Wm.Jennigs Bryan, Jan.1924.
(2) Princeton Theological Review, Vol. IV. Jan.1906,p.81.
(3) " " " April.1926,p.316.

He is the true Son of God, not as believers are sons of God, but as a being in a class by Himself, man insofar as He is born of a woman; God, insofar as He is begotten of God. How else could we explain this God-man, except by the historical fact of the Virgin Birth? We cannot say how the Incarnation must be effected, by what method it must come, and therefore cannot infer the Virgin Birth from the incarnation. But that is not saying that we could retain our belief in the incarnation without belief in any method of it. We might even admit that a Christian may have faith in Christ and be saved, without accepting the Virgin Birth; but it simply does not work out that way in history. The two are so closely bound together that one falls with the other. Corinthus, Marcion, the Docetae, Gnostics, and Ebionites; the Anabaptists, Schwenkfeldians, Socinians, together with Schleiermacher, and most of the impugners of this doctrine in our own day, would not and will not accept the incarnation of Christ, and hence their rejection of the miraculous birth naturally follows. "Historically and logically the divinity of Christ and the incarnation are bound up with the Virgin Birth, and no one can successfully maintain anyone of them without maintaining all." (1) Christ is God,because God conceived Him. To maintain the paternity of Joseph, as most contemners of the Virgin Birth do, is to identify Christ with man to the exclusion of divinity; and such an identification "is an unwarranted degradation of the Master or an inexcusable exaltation of sinful man."(2)

Fifthly. That brings us to another question - the sinlessness of Christ. While those who deny the Virgin Birth may still speak of the holiness of Jesus, they speak of a holiness far from perfect; it is not perfect because it is not inherent - it is acquired holiness. Either Jesus was also biased to sin,or we have the same moral capacities. And these two alter-

(1) American Journal of Theol, Vol XII,1908,p.204. Briggs.
(2) Sunday School Times, Jan.1924. Wm.Jennigs Bryan.

natives are really one - for to make of Christ a perfect human being, is to postulate that all men have equal power and chance to climb to heights of holiness as Jesus did. Sin, then, is not so bad at all, only a blunder or mistake due to imperfect insight into human psychology. Original sin falls, universal sin goes down with it, hell is a myth, and guilt a delusion. Certainly the fact of the Virgin Birth, both prepares us for and is perfectly consistent with the doctrine of the sinlessness of Christ. But if the former is denied, the latter will most certainly also be denied. If there was nothing supernatural about the birth of Jesus, the law of heredity must of course be allowed to operate. And once that is granted, the whole Biblical doctrine of sin goes overboard; for the Bible tells us of and teaches the total deparvity of man, and that among all sinful creatures there was but one who "knew no sin." Deny the Virgin Birth and either Christ's sinlessness or man's sinfulness must go, or both must be discarded.

Rejection of the Virgin Birth also strikes home at the very heart of Christianity by annulling the redemptive work of Christ. God is righteous and sin puts him under obligation to punish it. Expiation and purification are both necessary to save mankind from sin. This has been effected by the shedding of the blood of Jesus Christ. To effect redemption Christ had to be God and man, the Son of God born of a Virgin. Now if Christ was the son of Joseph, it follows He was no more than an abnormally pious man, yes, the perfect ideal. Then His death was no propitiation for our sins, but merely a powerful appeal to men, revealing God's love, and persuading men to reconciliation with God. The Bible gives all credit to Christ and none to man, and teaches that alone the God of the incarnation and crucifixion can give us redemption. Make Christ a mere man, and the whole doctrine of redemption must be given up.

In short, every Christological teaching of the Bible is directly and

indissolubly bound up in the miraculous origin of Christ. The denial of a supernatural entrance into the world leads logically to a rejection of the miraculous exit from the world. H.R.Mackintosh in his article on the person of Christ: "the present writer can only say that to him supernatural conception appears a really befitting and credible preface to a life which was crowned by resurrection from the dead." (1) And "if Christ be not raised your faith is in vain; ye are yet in your sins."(2) Then, too, we need not look forward to a resurrection. Accept the Virgin Birth, and our Savior, the God-man, his life, death, and resurrection follow; reject it and Christ's sinlessness, deity, His entire work of redemption, our salvation, our hope, the Book of books, yes, Christianity must necessarily be given up. It takes the Christ out of Christianity. "If men but will take Christ out of the Man class, and place Him in the God class, they will have no difficulty in understanding Him and in accepting all that the Bible says of Him", also His birth from a Virgin.(3)

With so much at stake, is it any wonder that the Lutheran Church cannot acquiesce in the opinion that the article of the Virgin Birth is doctrinally indifferent, and that it can legitimately be dropped from the public creed of the Church? Is it any wonder that Lutherans cling so tenaciously to this fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith, believing it to be essential to the full appreciation of the supernatural and divine character of Christ, and very closely connected with His entire work of salvation here on earth? The rejection of this article would be a mutilation of Scripture, a rejection of everything miraculous, a contradiction of the continuous testimony of the Church from Apostolic times, a weakening of the doctrine of the incarnation, yes, of every teaching concerning the person of our Savior; and a practical surrender of the Christian position into the hands of the enemy, the advocates of a non-miraculous, purely humanitarian Christ. And all this on insufficient grounds, because his-

(1) Hasting's Dictionary of the Bible, p.705a.
(2) 1.Cor.15,17
(3) Sunday School Times, January, 1924.

tory and the Bible absolutely and definitely prove that Jesus Christ was "CONCEIVED BY THE HOLY GHOST,BORN OF THE VIRGIN MARY!"

May the Lutheran Church ever stand fast upon the firm foundation of the Word of God, and accepting It as final authority, ever confess: "I BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST,HIS ONLY SON,OUR LORD,WHO WAS CONCEIVED BY THE HOLY GHOST,AND BORN OF THE VIRGIN MARY. "

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