

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

THE POVERTY OF CHRIST.¹

THE distinctive function of historical criticism being, as its name implies, that of judgment or discrimination of the material placed before it, we cannot expect from it any increment of fact not previously given within the field of its operations. It can sort out, classify, co-ordinate, accept or reject such evidence of the past as has been supplied to it; it can allow light from all quarters to play upon the objects of its survey, irradiating their relations and indicating certain conclusions regarding them, but it can add nothing. It may stimulate research and assist discovery, but nothing new emerges from under its own hands. As in physical, so in historical science, we require positive observation of hitherto unknown things, and not merely the formulation of what has already become known if we are really to rise above the level at which mathematical restatement on the one hand or criticism on the other begins and carries on its salutary work. The first books of Livy, for example, critically examined, have been long deprived of their credibility, while antiquarian labours and discoveries are continuously increasing the sum of genuine information regarding ancient Rome, and Assyrian excavations promise to provide, in some measure, that illumination of the Pentateuch which criticism had proved to be a desideratum it could not, of itself, supply.

This principle, if principle so self-evident a maxim can be termed, obtains, perhaps, its most important illustration in the case of the historical contents of the New Testament.

¹ Murtle Lecture, University of Aberdeen, February, 1905.

Whatever addition to the facts therein stated is made must proceed *ab extra* ; critical analysis can, at its very best, but sift and rectify by means of recognized criteria. These criteria may themselves be derived from the results of recent thought and research, and so far they may lend to the effect of their application the appearance of novelty ; but unless they have brought with them fresh facts which may not merely serve as embroidery, but can be legitimately interwoven with the substantial tissue of the written record which they are employed to test, they can do no more than eliminate what they find to be false, or alter and transpose what lies before them in apparent disorder. Now, since the whole of the New Testament is concerned with the life and death of our Lord, whatever value modern criticism can justly claim in its endeavour to set these in a proper light must entirely depend on the successful exercise of its discriminating powers upon the canonical books as they have come down to us. No new discovery regarding the life of Jesus has enriched either the gospel narratives or the few references to it in the Epistles of Paul with fresh matter. What has been brought to bear upon them has been either the accepted rules of merely literary and textual criticism or those which guide modern historians in the separation of the legendary from the real, the comparison of existing accounts of contemporaneous events, and the determination of the authorship, as well as of the sources to which the information of the various writers has been due. It is quite true that in the Lives of Jesus, now so common, which have been drawn up on the assumption that there is sufficient material in the New Testament for the compilation of a satisfactory biography, philological, geographical and archæological inquiry has furnished their composers with ornamental appendages to their work in ever increasing quantity, but it may be safely affirmed that absolutely nothing has been brought to the surface which has had the

effect of enlarging our knowledge concerning Christ Himself and the incidents of His sacred career as hitherto and from the dawn of Christianity derived from the New Testament. On the contrary, if the unceasing and strenuous activity of critics, commentators, and controversialists during the last three-quarters of a century, pursued with the utmost liberty of inquiry and discussion, has had any result at all, that result has been mainly distinguished by its limiting and negative character. Nor can this surprise us. The preliminary condition involved in any acknowledgment of the authority of the books of the New Testament to dictate to mankind matters of belief—of their credibility in short—is recognition of the supernatural, which has been openly disowned by the mass of the representatives of “scientific” Biblical criticism. Clearly what remains of the contents of the books when the supernatural is withdrawn can only be an insignificant transcript of material fact, a thin residuum shorn of all religious value. It cannot, of course, be overlooked that men of the very highest ability and scholarship at home and abroad have resisted, and defeated to a large extent, the tendency to humanise the New Testament. Nevertheless it is idle to deny that every one of the Lives of Jesus published at the present day, the most orthodox included, bears manifest marks of the influence of the modern positive spirit. The core and essence of all New Testament teaching—to wit, the incarnation of God in Christ together with its incalculable implications—is either altogether dropped out or occupies quite a secondary place beside fanciful, rhetorical, one might say semi-patronising descriptions of the child, the youth or the man Jesus as He has presented Himself to the biographer’s imagination. There is no biography, properly so called, of Jesus either in the Synoptists’ or in St. John’s Gospel. The single end and aim of the Evangelists is to create and sustain belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God

in the flesh—not to arouse interest in a being of superior humanity by such a story of His life and death as professional critics and authors of our time may be pleased, in the absence of any other, to produce.

Free inquiry into the literary origin and composition of the Gospels has never been prohibited by the Christian Church from the days of Hegesippus downwards. Its latest outcome would seem to show how much they are deceived who look in the New Testament for a Life of Jesus in the sense in which modern historians, whether holding to the right or to the left of the creeds, understand the term. It is admitted on all hands that the source of the evangelical narratives is traditional, and that the traditions could not have been committed to writing either in Aramaic or Greek sooner than at least forty years after Christ's death. It is also generally acknowledged that this traditional source was two-fold, consisting first in the common circulation and repetition among the primitive Christians of logia or sayings of our Lord ; and second, in the oral transmission of certain incidents occasioning or occasioned by the logia, or regarded as memorable in themselves. Combining both, certain memoirs or *ἀπομνημονεύματα*—to use Justin's phrase—were published, setting forth “ all things that Jesus began to do and teach until the day in which He was taken up,” and depending more or less, according to the inclinations of these various compilers, on the logia on the one hand, or Petrine tradition on the other. These memoirs themselves, in the course of time, being professedly a declaration of the “ things most surely believed,” underwent changes and modifications at the hands of successive editors corresponding to the evolution of Christian doctrine and the struggle for existence on the part of that great potential organism, the Catholic Church, until the final redactions appeared, which became canonical and constitute the Gospels in their present permanent form.

If the foregoing summary statement of the origin of the Gospels be in any degree correct, it is quite manifest that the very utmost care must be taken and the very greatest difficulty encountered in constructing out of them a consecutive and reliable, not to say a complete Life of Jesus. As a matter of fact all the four Gospels offer to the customary historicist, quite apart from any theories as to their authorship and subsequent revisions, an almost insoluble problem, so remarkable are the omissions of what is expected, the presence of what is incapable of explanation, the disdain of chronological order, and the positive assertions of things altogether superhuman and unworldly. When, furthermore, the question of the primary source of their contents and the manner of their own production is considered, according to the hypothesis just indicated, the difficulty already so great of drawing up a Life of Jesus correctly, answering to the position and character assigned Him by the Evangelists, becomes, I venture to say, insurmountable. Not that the Gospels have thereby ceased to be the rule of our belief regarding our Lord, or that they and the rest of the New Testament have failed to furnish us with the sum total, objectively considered, of our holy religion, but that the religious element whereby alone the sacred Scriptures can and ought to be interpreted has been inoperative, and only methods in general use of ascertaining and relating ordinary fact have been brought into play. Given religious faith in Christ as the God-man, and the difficulties vanish, because the interest and importance of His human life are then seen not to be at all due to that life itself but to the Divine life which it incorporated and with which it was inseparably associated. Given no more than belief in His existence as Jesus of Nazareth, and the narrative of His life is buried under a mass of incoherencies, contradictions and impossibilities from which the boldest, the most ingenious

and most sanguine designer of biographies cannot hope to effect its resurrection. In brief, as Neander long ago perceived, the rejection of the Divinity of Christ lies at the bottom of every endeavour to clear the Gospel record of its supposed legendary or mythical portions so as to unveil the positive figure of His humanity as it toiled and taught, suffered and died. But with this denial of the Divine nature of Christ's personality, not merely the Gospels, but every book of the New Testament, become eviscerated and the attempt to utilise them for historical purposes self-condemned, suicidal.

I have reached the point with which it is my purpose to deal in my remaining observations. On the supposition, at which we have arrived, that from the standpoint of modern criticism the evangelical record, tested and estimated by strictly positive standards of investigation, leaves but a slender remnant of material, utterly insufficient for a satisfactory account of the life of Jesus, are we to surrender ourselves to despair? My answer is that we are not, and that starting from facts which are universally acknowledged, we are driven to the conclusion that the New Testament, in declaring the unique Divine incarnation of Jesus, presents words of absolute truth and soberness pregnant with the effect of dissolving the darkness that envelopes the origin and contents of the Gospels. I venture to offer, not an apologetic disquisition, but a view of our Lord which, although confined at the outset within narrow limits, seems to me to expand into a full perspective of His life and work the more our attention is concentrated upon it.

The facts to which I refer are few in number, and, as far as I am aware, have never been doubted or denied. They are no more than two—His poverty and His death by crucifixion. As a third fact, equally recognized as such by all, but not involved in His own personal earthly experience, I shall advert to the immediate rise of Christian belief.

In the midst of the confusion engendered by the interminable speculations and controversies relative to the birth of the Christian religion one cannot help feeling a certain sense of satisfaction in lighting upon some unchallenged and unchallengeable affirmation in connexion with that momentous event. The opportunity of enjoying this pleasure is naturally rare, for any such incontrovertible statement must answer apparently incompatible demands as to the absence of the supernatural and harmony with dogma which the scientific mind on the one hand, and the theological on the other, are bound to impose. No doubt the existence of the Gospels themselves and of the Christian Church during well nigh two thousand years are absolutely beyond the range of dispute, and these, as well as many more extraneous facts of a sure character, have their own relation to the subject specially under review—the life of our Lord. What is wanted, however, is no undeniable statement of circumstances fitted to shed light on His life, but of particulars of that life itself to which all will assent. I set aside as utterly unworthy of any examination the extension of the mythical theory to the personality of Jesus. Only ignorance and unreason can even imagine that extremity of unbelief. That Jesus did actually live in Palestine stands forth, I take it, as sure a fact as that we ourselves exist, and equally certain and of universal acknowledgment it is that He lived a poor and lowly life. It is this latter proposition I now wish to establish.

The references to Christianity in Pagan authors of the first two or three centuries are few, but they are invested, for obvious reasons, with great historical value, although we can hardly say whether their paucity results from ignorance or contempt or actual loss. Brief as the allusion by Tacitus is to Nero's persecution, I think we may infer from his language, as well as from that of his friend, the younger Pliny, in the famous letter to Trajan, something pointing to

the fact under consideration. Had the worldly position of Jesus been one of dignity, His personality would surely have received some kind of special description. Tacitus would have said more than "Christus supplicio affectus erat" had he known Him by repute as more than a common criminal belonging to the lower classes, and Pliny would surely have informed the Emperor of the worldly rank of Him to whom devotion was paid "quasi deo" had his status been deemed worthy of record in any document known to the Proprator or of remembrance in general tradition. Their relation of events leaves Christ Himself in an obscurity which the Divine honours said to have been rendered Him only deepen. The ribald language employed by Celsus in his "True Word" regarding the parentage of the meanest of "Seriphians," the popular anecdote told by Eusebius of the relatives of Jesus appearing before the Emperor Domitian, who dismissed them as harmless sons of toil, if also sons of David, and the whole tenor of Pagan opinion as reported by Minucius Felix, Justin Martyr and the other apologists, down to the sneers of Julian and of the learned sophists of his day at the Nazarene, show that the poverty of Christ, no less than His Cross, never ceased to be to the classical Greeks and Romans foolishness. That Alexander Severus placed His image in the lararium of the Imperial palace was (if the story be true) a mere piece of sentimental Syncretism. It was taken for granted all along that He was a man of extremely humble birth and condition.

Christian tradition unquestionably confirms and was no doubt the main source of heathen opinion on this point; but I have thought it right to adduce the latter in view of the possibility of the adherents of the mythical hypothesis attributing Christian belief in the outward indigence of Jesus to the desirability of seeing in it the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy. The lowly king and the 'Ebed

Jahve, without form or comeliness, could only appear in an appropriate character and environment, and hence, it may be alleged, the ascription of poverty to Jesus. But the universal testimony and belief of mankind after the Christian era, so far as it is known to us indirectly by the silence of Pagan writers and positively by the abundant and uniform declarations of the followers of Jesus themselves, disprove, if anywhere, the idea of a mythical creation here. No sooner has tradition crystallized itself in the literary form so well preserved throughout succeeding ages than it is marked by no more distinguishing feature than this, that it sets forth Christ as a man destitute of external means and resources. He is the reputed son of a carpenter. Nay (although the reading in Mark is open to dispute)¹ He is Himself a carpenter, having learned a trade like other Jewish youths. It is quite tenable, indeed it seems to be extremely probable, that the word τέκτων, usually translated "carpenter," may be more accurately rendered "builder," that there may be in it a deep symbolism, and that the incident recounted in the Synoptics, where it occurs, may not have been part, after all, of an original Galilean remembrance. But even this possibility will not militate against the conclusion generally drawn from the passage, of the humble and obscure position of the person of whom it tells. Every portion of the Gospel narrative, synoptical or Johannine, accords with this view and deepens the conviction of Christ's complete lack of worldly wealth. He seems to have had no house of His own. The fishermen who were His first disciples plied a poor calling on a fresh-water lake, and it is vain to re-clothe them, as some biographers of Jesus have done, in the dress of well-to-do citizens, bourgeois of Capernaum. If Galilee was as thickly populated and prosperous in Christ's time as Josephus repre-

¹ Wellhausen, *Das Evangelium Marci übersetzt und erklärt*, p. 45; Orig. c. Celsus, vi. 36.

sents it to have been, he was a very poor man indeed who did not share its prosperity, who was homeless, and whose intimate friends had no money in their purse when, from higher motives than this world could inspire, they went about on His errands. There are some very touching suggestions of the depth of our Lord's poverty scattered throughout all the four Gospels on which it is hardly necessary to dwell. He is largely dependent on the benevolence and hospitality of others, his brethren of the common people. When He wanders through Samaria, His disciples, having left Him to procure provisions, ask one another on their return, "Hath any man brought Him aught to eat?" implying that his receipt of casual charity was quite a normal and usual occurrence. His benedictions on the poor reflect His own condition, as if He were Himself one of the Anijim, or an Ebionite both in principle and practice.¹ In short, the voice of trustworthy tradition on the mode of Christ's living as well as on His shameful manner of death consistently and continuously testifies to His utter poverty and humiliation. The Church has never, from the first, rejected or repudiated it. Irenæus (Latin version) named Christ "homo indecorus," and Jerome, the "unus homo illo tempore contemptibilis," while later on, to the admiration of the whole Christian world, Francis of Assisi beheld in poverty, and almost in poverty alone, the way to imitation of the Saviour and fellowship with His Apostles.

I am now, I hope, justified in holding the general consent of mankind to the first fact sufficiently established, and proceed to the second, with which it is closely connected—Christ's death by crucifixion.

We are not here concerned with the incontestable evidence for the crucifixion. The broad fact of its occurrence is beyond all challenge, and the diversities of its sad fourfold narration in the New Testament are easily ac-

¹ Cf. Loeb, *La Littérature des Pauvres dans la Bible*.

counted for by the fluctuations of the stream of tradition and its entrance into different minds in the sub-apostolic communities so long as sixty years or more after the event. From our present point of view its peculiar interest lies in the corroboration it affords of the testimony otherwise borne to the exceedingly abject and almost servile social station of Jesus among His contemporaries. Crucifixion was not a Jewish mode of execution. Persons convicted by the Sanhedrim of blasphemy against the Mosaic law were, according to the prescriptions of the law itself, stoned to death, as was the proto-martyr. It was a Roman punishment—"crudelissimum teterrimumque supplicium"—and the best authorities on the subject¹ inform us that it might be inflicted in consequence of any one of those modes of passing sentence, namely (1) by the ordinary magistrates as free citizens of Rome; (2) by the pontifices on assailants of vestals or other criminals legally within their jurisdiction; and (3) by any recognized authority on slaves. That the Roman law was adhered to at our Lord's crucifixion, as related in the Gospels, is shown, among other things, by the parting of His garments among the soldiers, an act recognized as a military right in the section of the *Digesta* relating to *pannicularia*, and brought by the Evangelists Matthew and John into relation with a verse of the Psalm the first words of which, as we learn, were among our Lord's last ere He died. The trial must, therefore, have likewise been a Roman one, and consequently the crucifixion must have followed not on a conviction of blasphemy against the Temple or Mosaic law, which it was incompetent for the Roman Governor to find, but on that either of *crimen majestatis*, or of some such offence as might involve the execution of a slave. Now, Pilate distinctly declared that Jesus was innocent of the charges brought against Him, that is to say, so far as they

¹ Mommsen, *Römisches Strafrecht*, p. 918.

lay within his own cognizance as a judge. Yet he sanctioned the crucifixion of the Innocent One. In the immense difficulty which besets every attempt to explicate the narrated details of this most solemn and hallowed event may we not be permitted to conjecture that Jesus, although not actually a slave, was treated under cover of some juridical fiction or other as if He were one, and that the last and greatest indignity He endured was due, so far as its external causes were concerned, to the misfortune of poverty, which in all ages has exposed its friendless subjects to the risk of injustice and oppression? "He was hanged on a tree." The words suggest to us our own mode of capital punishment, and the mere suggestion appears revolting; but it is no paradox to affirm that the Divine claims put forth on behalf of the sufferer on Calvary must have seemed to the secular intelligence of His time as wild and preposterous as would be similar demands in the name of a man executed in our own prisons. One really cannot wonder, when we think of it, at the Graftito in the Kircherian Museum, and the scoffing spirit of the Roman lad who scratched it as late as a century afterwards.

It will, indeed, remain for ever a marvel absolutely inexplicable to non-Christians, and even to Christians one of the mysteries which only their faith elucidates—this cross of Jesus and the death upon it of the Son of God in "the form of a servant." The Apostle Paul has shown us how to regard it so as to understand its true cause and significance, and to render quite superfluous any answer, satisfactory or otherwise, to the questions put by historical criticism either about the preliminary trial or the parties responsible for the subsequent deed of blood. The *μορφή δούλου* was to him the body of One who was equal with God; of One who, having renounced for the time the glory proper to Divinity, became obedient even unto death. This great fact of the Kenosis, or renunciation, not of His

Divine nature but of His celestial majesty, on the part of Christ, eclipsed in St. Paul's mind every other; and although the possibility exists that his use of the term *δούλος* lends indirect support to the hypothesis which I have just made bold to indicate, employed as it is by a writer who might have been an eye-witness of the crucifixion, there is enough in the whole passage in Philippians to warrant belief in the unmitigated poverty of Christ without straining it to that extreme. Neither here nor in the similar language reminding the Corinthian converts that Christ for their sakes became poor would Paul have so expressed himself had not the words "servant" or "slave" and "poor" connoted a concrete reality familiar to the consciousness of his readers. The almost complete silence of Paul on the life of Christ has often and naturally been the subject of comment, and wears an even more singular and strange look than the darkness that broods in the evangelical record over nearly all of that life except the one or the three years preceding its close. The key to his reticence is manifestly the same as that which is applicable to every other extraordinary feature of the New Testament—the Divine Nature of Christ. Ere Paul wrote his Epistles, and long ere the Gospels were drawn up, communities of worshippers of Jesus Christ had been formed calling themselves Churches of God, who paid the Saviour supreme adoration, believed in His resurrection from the dead, and looked for His coming again. To such communities Paul's letters were addressed. Their existence constitutes, as proposed, the third fact to which attention is invited.

This fact is again one beyond the range of dispute, for the genuine letters of Paul, whether they be four or fourteen in number, have come down to us, and they deal with nothing else than with it and its aspects. The Gospels were composed under influences emanating from these religious societies, and by their members the tradi-

tional sayings of our Lord were preserved and transmitted to posterity, along with the addenda bearing on the occasion of their utterance. It is of the utmost importance to remember that Jesus had lived for thirty, or perhaps fifty, years in Palestine, had finished His ministry, and had passed away without committing a single word to writing, and necessarily prior to the rise of a single tradition regarding Him. Until He became the object of religious worship and belief on the part of so considerable a number of people throughout the world that they could be called collectively an ecclesia, no document whatever that we know of mentioned His name. The Acts of Pilate, the letter of Abgar of Edessa, and the reference to Him in Josephus' *Antiquities* are spurious. The Gospels themselves may cover only one year of His earthly course, leaving us to conjecture no more concerning the rest than that it was spent in poverty and in doing good. The very first notice of Him in books occurs in the Epistles of Paul, who, as we have observed, never alludes to His upbringing or manner of life.

If, then, by any imaginable fortuity, the curtain were suddenly lifted which conceals from us the man Jesus—the Sun of Righteousness indeed, but not yet encircled by the brilliant corona due to the effect of His existence on the life and thought of a later time; if we could view Him for a moment apart from the devotion, honour and reverence begotten by the posterior record, what should we see? We cannot answer the question in any degree proportionate to its profound interest, but this we can reply: We should behold a poverty-stricken man, and therefore, being poor, obscure and unnoticed among the masses to whose number he belonged. But now shift the scene twenty years farther along the stage of time, and what again do we see? No longer this poor man in the flesh, whose figure has disappeared, but crowds of His worshippers who are ready to

die sooner than disown the faith which concentrates itself on nothing else than His person and work. How can the transfiguration be explained? It is not enough to say that He was so good and pure and loving and wise that He attracted to Himself troops of friends who learned from Him the general fatherhood of God, and who made Him, as far as their recollections of Him allowed, their example and guide. That will not fit into the framework given by our earliest informant, the Apostle Paul. Nor will it satisfy the conditions of the problem, as I shall endeavour to show, to allege that He claimed, or others claimed for Him, that He was the Messiah of the Jews, for He had no such rank or status as could invest the claim with those probabilities of right which would have attracted the crowd, and His death, at all events, effectually disposed of its successful vindication. But mark, it was just in His death that His worshippers recognized Him to be Divine, believing it to be the climax of His work on earth, the means of their own salvation, and the portal through which He returned to the Divine glory He had temporarily forsaken. Many of these worshippers of His had known Him personally before He died. Theirs was no belief in abstractions, but in a person familiar to them—a poor, lowly, penniless man. Yet they worshipped Him before He died, and their worship of Him was deepened and renewed by His very death. It became so contagious that from year to year, from century to century, it spread until all the world went after it. The only solution of this great historical enigma, and one which, as I think, we are compelled to accept from the bare consideration of the three facts brought forward, lies in this fourth fact to which the others lead up, that Jesus *was* God, God incarnate. He *was* the God-man. In no other way than by the recognition of this fact can we explain the immediate uprising of the adoration of One who lived like a mendicant and died like a slave. What

signified His outward circumstances to those who beheld God the most holy in Him? These trivial externalities stood in no conceivable relation to the transcendent revelation of which His worshippers were the spectators, unless it were to enhance it by His embodiment of the very quality which in their sacred Scriptures was set forth as the constant antithesis to wickedness. Their first and best concern was with Him as the sinless One, the express image of the Godhead, and hence the earliest exponent of their faith knew not Christ at all after the flesh, and gave his readers no information as to His earthly career, but only as to what He came to accomplish—the redemption of mankind from moral woe through His death and resurrection.

The strongest objection that can be made to the preceding treatment of my subject will rest in all likelihood on the ground of its diminishing the historical authority of the Gospels, first by taking no account of the Messiahship of Jesus, so clearly exhibited there, and, secondly, by ignoring the virgin birth and miracles of Jesus. Now, no doubt, the notion that the true historical substance of the Gospels is constituted by the claim of Jesus to be the Messiah and by its consequences, forms the basis on which all the current biographies of our Lord rest. Nor, certainly, can it be set aside. But in what manner was the hope of a Messiah generally conceived at the time of Christ? Neither as that of a deliverer from the oppressors who destroyed Jerusalem, like the revived Messianism prevalent when John's Gospel was composed, nor as the Messianic hope expressed in Daniel and in the Book of Enoch, the product of national animosities excited by Antiochus Epiphanes, and other enemies of Judaism. That kind of hope had died down ere Jesus was born, and had left a vivid eschatological expectation of heavenly benefits, of a deliverer from moral evils besetting the in-

dividual man, to whom the end of life is always truly the end of the world. "It may be affirmed,"¹ says a scholar well entitled to pronounce a judgement on this point, "that at the time of Christ belief in a Messiah influenced but a small section of Jewish society, and that section one given to admiration of Apocalyptic literature." But Jesus, as a teacher, stood on the old prophetic ground and the whole tenor of His words shows that the higher spiritual hope which Messianic belief had begun to appropriate and assimilate was nothing else than that which He expressed, inspired and encouraged. Far, therefore, from damaging the supposition of an immediate and intuitive, although often dim perception of His Divinity in the minds of those who in the midst of His poverty came into contact with Him, His admitted Messiahship supports and confirms it.

Next, as to the miracles, my purpose being to suggest a demonstration of the superhuman element in the life of Christ, even when these are eliminated, they require no special mention. Assuredly they place stumblingblocks in the religious path of many an earnest man at the present day. Why? Because, among other reasons, those who undertake to depict Christ for the modern public do so, as a rule, in order to satisfy common curiosity or to excite sensational interest in Jesus as a person who said wonderful things and did wonderful deeds, and these are often so wonderful as to be unbelievable. Not so the authors of the New Testament in any of its books, least of all St. Paul. Their statements demand, alike as the *sine quâ non* of their own intelligibility, and as the result of their perusal, belief in the Godhead of Christ. As soon as this is accorded and applied to their interpretation, much that previously staggered the ordinary powers of human judgement becomes clear and credible. Features of the narrative which, on the surface,

¹ V. Baldensperger, *Die Messianisch-apokalyptischen Hoffnungen des Judenthums*, p. 215, 3rd ed.

bear a merely historic appearance are seen to cover a symbolism even more instructive to the spiritual sense than the supernatural events they ostensibly relate. Leper-cleansing, miraculous draughts of fish, multiplication of the means of life, and many other incidents recounted by the Evangelists exhibit indeed the power of the Godhead in Jesus, but not as though it became visible in thaumaturgy and charming. The leprosy-cure of sin and the bread of eternal life are alone worthy of the intervention of a Divine Healer and Benefactor. The primary postulate of the restoration to spiritual usefulness and ease of mental comprehension of large portions of the historical books of the New Testament is simply, I repeat, confession of the incarnation of the living God in Christ. In this respect one may draw, after old-fashioned methods, an analogy between Nature and Revelation. Scientists inform us that the phenomena of the material world consist ultimately in the play of forces and movements of which they have no possible means of observation, that physics passes in the last resort into metaphysics. In revealed religion a similar transmutation takes place. History passes into theology; the doctrine explains the narrated fact. Paulinism was actively converting the world to Christ long before the traditions of Peter and his fellow-apostles took published shape, and the men, whoever they were, whose pens put them together in consecutive order were and could not but have been believers in the doctrines of their religion first, and in the facts relative to its external origin second. So is it still. The doctrine of the Divinity of Christ determines the nature of our belief in the recorded details of His life, interprets them, illuminates them and renders them food for the soul. The faith of His first disciples was kindled by their immediate apprehension of the light of His divinity seen against a dark and gloomy background. They felt, as Tertullian says, that the higher the Godhead, the deeper

the humanity. So the faith of His followers through all time is the direct result of their inward contemplation of Him as the Son of God from Eternity, and by and through this faith they understand the Scriptures. The story of His birth shows to them that the beginnings of His manhood are as mysterious as His Godhead, that its roots were absolutely lost among the millions of the poor whom the world will always have with it. He becomes to them the representative man, the second Adam, relationship with whom the meanest on earth can dare to name his natural heritage. Yet He is very God, and His poverty is but the outward type, the vouchsafed manifestation of His infinite grace and unconditioned love. May I venture to hope that such a faith, if not stimulated, has at least not been imperilled by the foregoing remarks?

J. M. ROBERTSON.