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## ARTICLE IV.

AN ATTESTED OR A SELF-DEVELOPED SAVIOUR  
— WHICH?

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IT has been the doctrine of the Christian church that the miracles wrought by Jesus Christ were evidence of his divine mission. Outside the church the doctrine has been largely rejected, the fact of miracles often denied with contempt. Some philosophers have said that the occurrence of miracles, if actual, could not be proved; no amount of evidence, it was held, could overbalance the improbabilities in the case. The difficulties that beset the subject have been felt within the church. Distinguished theologians have maintained that a naked miracle cannot be proved, that there must be an antecedent probability of a supernatural interposition before it can be made credible. Some who have desired to relieve the Scripture narratives of the difficulties under which they labor, have suggested that the so-called miracles were merely the product of natural but occult forces. Some speculators of high standing have taught that miracles are now impedimenta that encumber the church while they have admitted that signs and portents were necessary at the introduction of its teachings. There are those who seem to think that Christianity is a structure so erect, stately, and complete that it may be estimated by itself, accepted for what it is seen to be. Whether or not it was surrounded by miracles at its foundation need

not concern us now, it is said, we may overlook or forget that question.

The aim of the present essay is to ask whether they may be overlooked. Is or is not the system an essentially modified one because of its miracles? Is there or is there not a noticeable contrast between the Jesus of the Gospels stripped of all references to the supernatural and the Jesus of the Gospels bringing with him supernatural attestations of his mission?

In the first place all will admit that, the Gospel narratives being accepted, the beginning of Christianity was encompassed by an atmosphere of miracle. Signs, wonders, mighty works, were the warranty of its genuineness, the indication of its origin, the assurance of its beneficent mission. It needed no commendation, no explanation. No Gamaliel stood sponsor for it. John the Baptist was simply a herald announcing that a greater than he was coming. The Founder of the Christian system brought the evidence of his power and authority with him. Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, came to him and said: "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God; for no man can do those miracles that thou doest, except God be with him." Miracles in multitudes accompanied the teachings of Jesus; they were expected wherever he went. He healed diseases, cast out devils, corrected deformities of nature, wherever he encountered them. It was considered an exception if he failed of a large display of his power. Where the people could not appreciate the moral import of his mission, he might not do many mighty works, except to lay his hands on a few sick folk and heal them. In these mighty and significant deeds the divine Master stood alone. There were no imitations, no rivalries. There are no counter records like those in the days of Moses: "The Egyptians did so with their

enchantments." There were not then, are not now, any enchantments that cure epilepsy or heal a withered hand.

It is maintained, however, by many that these Gospel narratives are not to be fully accepted; that all supernatural interpositions are to be discarded. That the atmosphere of miracles is deceptive. While it is admitted by all that Jesus is one of the great men of the race, perhaps the foremost man, it is held that the marvelous works attributed to him are mythical; that about him, as about other religious leaders, fabulous reports of superhuman deeds have gathered.

#### I. JESUS AS A SELF-DEVELOPED SAVIOUR.

Without discussing at all this mythical theory, we propose to ask, What may we believe concerning this wonderful man even if the objection to miracles is granted? What place is he, as man of simply human capacities, entitled to in the history of the world?

1. His most characteristic trait was his habit of communion with God. Many of the scriptural statements asserting that he is in the Father, in the bosom of the Father, that the Father has renounced the judgment of the world and given it to the Son, under the present supposition would necessarily be given up; but intimate communion would still remain. He had long seasons of converse with God in prayer. He resorted to mountain retreats at night that he might have undisturbed intercourse with the Father of spirits. He saw God's work, kindness, ordering of human affairs, in the events of nature. To him it was a divine overruling that clothed the grass, fed the sparrows, and took in charge the wants of men. He could doubtless say, 'I am never alone, but the Father is with me.' He must have felt that there was a special call upon him from God to a work of ministry in the world.

2. Jesus was impressed with the idea that he had come to a needy and sinful world. He felt it to be his duty to do what he could for its reform. He considered corruption and iniquity to be wide-spread, general. He designated his contemporaries as an evil and adulterous generation. He considered the boasted righteousness of the leading men of his day to be hollow; the significant phrase "Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites," has come down from him. He denounced their traditions as devices by which they made void the law, as an excuse for neglecting their duties, and a means of self-indulgence. He condemned the cities of Palestine as more guilty than Sodom and Gomorrah and destined to a severer judgment. He announced that he had come to such a people to restore them to a life of integrity. He came to seek and save the lost. He was sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and enlarged his offers of mercy by the declaration that whosoever believed on him should not perish but have everlasting life. He affirmed that his sayings were a firm foundation on which it was safe to build: "Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, who built his house upon a rock." He had pity on the victims of falsehood, on those wearied by fruitless toil, on those enslaved by a sanctimonious righteousness, and said to them, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

3. Jesus was a man of independent thought; he did not hesitate to set up his opinion boldly in opposition to current sentiments and practices. He was accustomed to say, "But I say unto you," in opposition to popular maxims and established customs. He would even nullify the permission of the old divinely ordained laws, and insist upon precepts adapted to a later and better civilization. Things tolerated because

of the hardness of heart prevailing among an uncultivated people he would displace by that which was more mild and humane. Yet he claimed to be acting in accord with the spirit of the laws. His mission was not to destroy the law or the prophets, but to fulfil them. In his reforms he passed beyond the law and the prophets, and in his own realm was original. He set a high value upon the passive virtues, pronounced blessings on the meek, the humble, the peace-makers, the pure in heart. He counselled also the endurance of violence rather than resentment: "But I say unto you, that ye resist not evil"; "But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you." In all such instructions he spoke without apology or explanation. He spoke as if he apprehended the truth with perfect clearness, and needed no support from precedents. Those who listened to him said he spoke as one having authority; by which they meant, as one who thought for himself and relied upon his own judgment as to truth and justice.

4. In his efforts to reform the world, Jesus was eminently a teacher. This term might be used in our English New Testament where he is called the Master. His teachings cover the entire range of moral duties, are set forth with the utmost clearness, and are never in a single instance open to objection. The truths he would inculcate are often expressed with a condensation that sinks into the memory and a pointedness that carries conviction. "O ye of little faith" is the permanent rebuke of the timid disciple. "The Son of Man is Lord also of the sabbath" is a truth that forever sets mercy above formal righteousness. When he says of the sparrows, "God feeds them," he teaches us that there is a providential care pervading the creation. That he came not to be ministered unto,

but to minister; that he came to seek and save the lost; that he came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance; that he came to set men at variance; that he came to open blind eyes; that he came to make blind (convince of their blindness) those that claimed a clear vision, are truths that awaken inquiry with every Bible student, and disclose ever new views of this messenger sent to the world.

But the main teaching of Jesus was not by proverbs, axioms, and pungent phrases. He preached to the multitudes, and his sermons are the priceless treasure of the world. He conversed with people by the wayside, with gathered guests at feasts, and with peasants in their rural homes; and the hearers said, Never spake man like this man. Perhaps the crowning glory of the New Testament teaching is to be found in the parables. Here we have an eternal possession. The principles of righteousness, of wisdom, of fraternity, of the workings of nature, are set forth in these discourses with imitable beauty. The parable of the sower, the parable of the tares, that of the net, that of the foolish virgins, the prodigal son, the good Samaritan, the man who built upon a rock, stand as beacon lights in the progress of the world. Each stands by itself an independent whole. Nowhere in literature are characters more distinctly drawn. There are no scenes in Shakespeare or Bunyan, no passages in Macaulay or Carlyle, more invulnerable in their wholeness, more unconquerable in their self-preservation, than these utterances of the Man of Nazareth.

5. What did this man of wonderful gifts and the most benevolent disposition effect in his generation? In the summing up of his life, what was the result?

When we come to his more practical works, beyond his private ministrations, his characteristics, viewed from a human

standpoint, seem less positive. He has much to say about a kingdom, but apart from his words the kingdom hardly appears. It is pointed to as the abode of human blessedness. "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," was the bugle call of the new era; and before the advent of its Founder the Baptist proclaimed its coming. The beatitudes are the laurel wreath over its entrance, and that it may come is the petition put into the mouth of the disciples when their leader taught them to pray. On his trial before Pilate he avowed himself a king, denying, however, that he was an earthly ruler. Moreover, he did not manifest himself as an organizer. It is true he chose twelve disciples, and commissioned them to act as his representatives, and to proclaim throughout the land the approach of the kingdom. But none of the twelve appear as efficient officers in the new kingdom, except by a spiritual interpretation. The building up of the church was the result of a later inspiration and the work of converts of succeeding years. Jesus departed without seeing an establishment embodying his ideas and appropriating earthly forces.

6. It is to be noticed, also, that, while the precepts inculcated by the divine Teacher are a perfect rule for conduct, his method of life was not an example that can be followed. He went from place to place, said of himself that he had not where to lay his head. He seems to have been dependent, to a large degree. There were women who cared for him and ministered to him of their possessions. Some, at least, of his disciples had remunerative occupations, and he had friends at different points in Palestine where he was of course a welcome guest. Of his employment before his three years of public ministry we know nothing, except that he was spoken of as a carpenter, and the son of a carpenter. We know that he had long seasons of prayer, and that he went about doing good. So far

we can in spirit, and to some extent in practice, imitate his example.

7. When we eliminate all that was supernatural from his life, and contemplate him simply as a man who had fulfilled his calling, his career, though brief, is a very distinct picture. He was a man with wonderful endowments, and his words and deeds are a priceless legacy to mankind; but he did not acquire a great influence over the nation in his own day. His chief influence has been the effect of his teaching upon succeeding ages. He was at times an object of intense curiosity among the common people, but was not on the whole popular. He was always an object of suspicion among the leading citizens, continually watched and criticized, and at an early age condemned and put to death by the ruling powers. His devoted followers cherished his memory with deep affection, but the people at large do not seem to have greatly regretted his loss. His life had been a reproof to them; he did not encourage their national conceit; he did not foster any self-complacency; he did not flatter them with the thought that they were the objects of God's overflowing love. He impressed upon them the doctrine that their access to God's favor was through himself. They were to pray for blessings in his name; if the Son should make them free, they would be free indeed. The sins of the people he denounced as unprecedented. The peculiar sins of the magnates, even of the middle ranks of the community, he lashed in the severest terms. At the close of his life the antagonism between himself and the mass of the people was complete. His last days were passed under deep depression. There are those who now attribute the agony of Gethsemane to his grief over a life ending in failure, in defeated attempts and hopes disappointed. It remained for him only to accept the decree of the ruling au-

thorities and die as a malefactor. The sad conclusion of the expectations of his disciples must have been expressed in these words, "But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel."

## II. JESUS AS AN ATTESTED SAVIOUR.

Jesus as he is presented in the Gospels subjected to a drastic rationalistic criticism appears as an object of highest admiration, almost of adoration. But he could be called the Saviour of the world only as a teacher of truth and of morals that at once purify the personal character and render one helpful to his fellow-men. Would it add to this man's power of service in the world if he were possessed of gifts attributed to him in the Gospels? If he had miracle-working power, would he be a more efficient Saviour? Does he as presented in the full Gospels add to the instructions that enlarge our knowledge, a spiritual force that is effective in moulding the character of men? Does he take such a position, because of his miracle-working power, that he becomes, or at least assumes to become, both an authoritative teacher and a spiritual dictator?

1. He called upon his disciples to accept him at his own estimate of himself. He told them that if their own discernment did not reach to the assurance that he was endued with superhuman power and authority, they could at least believe for his works' sake. When he sent forth the twelve to preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand; he told them "to heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils"; and, to assure them that they need not fear a lack of power, he adds, "Freely ye have received, freely give." The most emphatic assertion of power occurs in connection with the healing of the boy possessed of a dumb spirit. The child was pining away, foaming and gnashing with his teeth, under torture by the demon within. The case seemed to be one be-

yond the power delegated to the disciples. The Master said, "Bring him unto me." The father said, "If thou canst do anything, have compassion on us." Here we have the only recorded instance of a rhetorical reproof from the lips of the divine Teacher. He repeats the father's words as an exclamation — "If thou canst!" It was not for that father to raise the question of can or cannot, it was for him to believe. "All things are possible," says the Lord, "to him that believeth." The ruler of the worlds had but to speak the word and was obeyed. The philosophy that portrays the relation of man's faith to God's power has not yet been unfolded; but if we may accept this narrative, the power to work miracles resided in him who appeared on earth as the Son of man and the Son of God.

2. Our Lord's treatment of his disciples, indeed of all the persons with whom he came in contact, so far as we know, was in harmony with the power attributed to him in the Gospels.

He assumed a superiority of position and native gifts above his fellow-men. "Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not." That is, had not repented because of his teachings. He taught the quibbling Pharisees, whom he called fools and blind, that the temple was greater than the gold which it sanctified, yet that he himself was greater than the temple. He boldly assumed a superiority to persons famous in Jewish chronicle. "The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonas, and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here." In like manner he declares that a greater than Solomon is here, and one who lived before Abraham. The position of teacher, master, even dictator, was one which he

accepted as his due, as one which no one would think of questioning. "But be not ye called Rabbi, for one is your master, even Christ"; "Ye call me Master and Lord, and ye say well, for so I am." This point does not require enlarged treatment; the supereminence of the Saviour is implied in all his saving work. Though he came not to be ministered unto but to minister, the very thought brings to mind a higher world and a sovereign power from which the ministrations are to come.

3. Our Lord in the exercise of his supernatural gifts manifested a consciousness of sovereignty. His forerunner proclaimed that the kingdom of heaven was at hand. He acknowledged before the Roman governor that he was a king, but not after an earthly fashion.

a. In the realms of external nature he exercised his sway with perfect freedom and perfect confidence. "He arose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. But the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!" He walked upon the water, and he fed the multitude with a few loaves and fishes.

b. There are realms of more subtle forces than storm and gravity where he displayed his might. The human body is an organization embracing nervous entanglements and elusive infirmities that baffle all investigators. Psychical research is still outreached by the problems it encounters in the human system. Jesus was able to alleviate the pains of those in distress and heal the infirmities of the diseased. "And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of disease and all manner of sickness among the people." The apostle gives the following list of his patients: "all sick people

that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatic, and those that had the palsy." There is nothing said of hesitancy or questioning, of resorting to a new remedy when another had failed, but by a touch of the almighty hand the ailments of muscle, nerve, and brain took their flight.

c. The realm in which our Lord put forth his most positive commands was the spirit-world. Here he exercised his sovereignty as if he were in his own dominion. A zealous pioneer preacher, impressing upon his hearers the power of Jesus, exclaimed: "See how the devils fell right and left, shrieking in terror wherever he went." The impression he made in dealing with demons was distinct and decisive, and was not confined to a few fanatical followers. "And they were all amazed, insomuch that they questioned among themselves, saying, "What thing is this? What new doctrine is this? for with authority commandeth he even the unclean spirits, and they do obey him." Our Lord's direct hostility and intolerance were directed against the devil. His language was, "Get thee behind me, Satan."

He asserted his personal authority most distinctly when he was accused of casting out devils by Beelzebub. Onlookers intimated that he was in league with the prince of devils. After showing them that in their charge they condemned themselves and were at war with common sense, he says: "But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you."

4. A miracle that called forth much comment and excited questionings as to rights as well as power was healing one sick of the palsy accompanied with the forgiving of his sins. When Jesus saw the faith of those who brought in the sick man, he said, "Son, thy sins be forgiven thee." Certain

scribes that witnessed the scene said: "Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God only?" This miracle was very distinctly one of testimony as well as a work of mercy. Our Lord made use of the occasion to give the people a larger, a profounder, view of his mission on the earth. He would have them know that he came not merely as a physician of the body, not simply a teacher of moral and religious truths, but also as one who had to deal with the spiritual life and eternal destiny. He said to the gathered throng: "That ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith to the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house." The forgiving of sins seems to have preceded the act of healing. The miracle was performed as an attestation of the Saviour's superhuman prerogative,—authority to pardon. This miracle with the accompanying events must have been a most impressive occurrence. It is carefully narrated by each of the Synoptists. A public declaration of the forgiveness of sins is reported on another occasion over one who loved much.

5. Christ's eminent glory on earth was his relation to his Father. This is a subject that cannot be set forth with definiteness, but is impressively asserted and appealed to in the Gospels. There was the closest intimacy between Father and Son in their nature. The Word was with God in the beginning. The only begotten Son was in the bosom of the Father and declared him. The Son was in the Father and the Father in the Son. There was a perfect harmony of intelligence, a mutual understanding, between them. The Son did always the things that pleased the Father, could call upon him at any time with the assurance of being heard, knew that all he asked for would be bestowed, even to twelve legions of angels.

There was a likeness between Father and Son. Though no earthly eye has seen or can look upon the Deific Glory, the Son is the express image of the Father, and those who have seen him have seen the Father. The two are one. The disciples beheld the Word made flesh, they saw his glory full of grace and truth.

There was a warmth of affection between the Father and the Son because the Father was the greater, the Son subordinate and obedient. The Son thanked the Lord of heaven and earth for ordering the relations of the teacher and his disciples, and the Almighty Creator gave authority to the Son that all men might honor him as they did the Father. Though he had the form of God he preferred not to retain the equality, but to put on the likeness of men, and take the office of servant, that he might do an appointed work. Work was his mission. He was a co-worker with the Father, and came to finish the work his Father gave him to do. He felt that he was pursuing a career already in progress before his advent, his language was, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." This calling he fulfilled till he was able to say on the cross, "It is finished."

This topic is one that cannot be fully expounded or understood. It would seem that, while Christ was on the earth, the Father came in palpable contact with it. He had in his Son a kindred medium of manifestation which was in reality himself in the flesh, and they together could take up their abode in the heart of the loving disciple. This union with the Father rises above all miraculous deeds, but was the fountain whence they flowed.

6. Christ's final and supreme gift to the world was the Comforter, the Spirit of truth, the Holy Ghost. He did not die in grief and despair. He did not leave his disciples com-

fortless. He promised, and on his departure sent from the Father the Spirit, who was to lead the Christian community into all truth. This gift was a continuation of Christ in the world and transformed his death into a victory. Christ the incarnate Saviour finished his work on the cross, but the resurrection and the descent of the Holy Spirit completed, supplemented, glorified, the mission of the Divine Man.

#### CONCLUSION.

These facts introduce us into a new world. The dome of the sky is lifted, the horizon is extended, earth is connected with heaven. The worlds temporal and spiritual are made one. God has visited his people, his people are seen to be objects of his love and care, a lime-light is thrown upon humanity at large, its dignity and destiny are revealed to us, we gaze in awe and astonishment. The divine plans are spread out before us, the eternal purposes of God are disclosed, our fittest utterance is: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord." When our eyes become accustomed to the light and we look upon the Christian system as a whole, the items that had attracted attention and awakened our wonder, to a great extent, pass from view. The restoring of a withered hand, the subduing of a palsy, lose none of their evidential value, but are no longer objects of special study. They belong to a mass of similar works all of which are obscured by the bright light that fills the entire horizon. Special miracles are stars that fade in the sunlight.

There are three great elements of the Christian system which we may, if we choose, withdraw from the category of miracles, except that all the works of creative energy are miraculous. The incarnation, redemption or atonement, and the resurrection are works of almighty power, but have not

their chief value in their evidential force. They are facts, constitutive energies, of eternal import, in the divine purpose.

1. The incarnation. God determined to bring his Son into the world, and he appeared in fashion as a man. The Word was made flesh — the Word that was in the beginning, was with God, and was the express image of the Father — and as flesh was seen and handled by his companions in the world. In what way he should appear is not for us to determine. We are told in the Gospels, that it was by virgin-birth. This is no more incomprehensible, as a work of Deity, than any other birth, and may be accepted as a doctrine most surely believed by Luke and his fellow-disciples. In any case the doctrine is not a device invented in support of Augustinian theology, but has been handed down to us from the earliest times. There is no reason why we should not accept it as it has been delivered to us, — delivered by those who certainly sought to know the truth. Our belief, however, in the divine incarnation does not depend upon any single passage of the Scriptures. The doctrine has been held by the church in all its history as one confirmed by revelation and Christian development.

2. Atonement is usually, in thought, connected with the death of Christ. Redemption is a term of broader import. But they may be used as equivalents. Sin in the divine economy is the mystery of mysteries, but is a fact, not to be set aside as unsubstantial. God, in his providential government, does not treat it as an accident or as a misfortune. That it requires serious attention and involves weighty consequences is obvious on the slightest observation. That God is too great, too majestic, a being to punish sin is contradicted by the constant current of events. That he opposes sin, would nullify its evil consequences, would defeat and suppress it, is a conviction irresistibly enforced upon us, even amid dark and inexplica-

ble events. The divine war with sin is set forth in the death of Christ, or I would make it the ministration of Christ beginning with his baptism, beginning with the words, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Here began that series of appointed deeds by which Christ set forth his mission to destroy the works of the devil. All the transactions of his earthly career, till he cried on the cross, "It is finished," were in furtherance of this scheme for defeating sin. Yet this earthly work, while a reality of almighty force, is also the symbol of a process in operation from the beginning. God is ever in contest with sin. His opposition is always effective. The offset is always at hand. He is never put upon the defensive, he has no obligations to meet, no debts to collect, the accounts are always even, the Divine Ruler is master of the situation. It is under such arrangements that Christ bears the sins of the world, bears them always, vicariously as was to be seen while he was in the flesh. The logical absurdity, of which so much has been made, that the innocent should bear the punishment of the guilty, however sound when based on human premises, is seen to be only an earthly fallacy, when the Supreme Reason dictates the process of the Supreme Redemption.

3. The resurrection of Jesus is the consummating doctrine of Christianity. If that is maintained a supernatural system of revealed religion will not be objected to. It has often been resorted to as a test case in the doctrine of miracles. And this is a proper use to be made of it, but does not present it in its full dignity. Christ healed a victim of palsy to prove that he had power on earth to forgive sin. His resurrection was not a display but occurred with none but angel witnesses. Its force as a doctrine is its evidence that salvation is a complete work. It shows that humanity is restored from its frailty to

its integrity. It is not evidence that all men will rise in glory, but that all who put on Christ and are found in him enter into the likeness of his resurrection and already walk in newness of life. We do not therefore associate this doctrine so much with miracles as with the great elementary forces of salvation, the incarnation and the atonement. We can say: "The third day he rose again from the dead, he ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty." It is not in place here to argue the doctrine but to speak of its import. As worthy of belief it has been argued with great fullness and force by Professor Denney in his work entitled "Jesus and the Gospel." It has been presented by many theologians as a cardinal doctrine, one that must be maintained against all opposition. On the other hand it has been assailed by unbelievers as the outlying position of Christianity, the one most exposed to attack. Those who accept the supernatural as an accompaniment of our Lord's life will generally hold to the doctrine.

Our only object is to bring to view and into contrast the two views of Jesus as the Saviour of mankind. Shall we hold that his incarnation and life are a constituent part of God's special process of saving men? or shall we look upon him as working out his destiny and becoming by a happy combination of circumstances the best exemplar of a holy life and the best teacher of spiritual truth? Shall we embrace a view of divine redeeming work, not subject at all points to logical argumentation, but to be received by faith? or shall we reject from the incidents of Jesus' life as myth and exaggeration all that is not to be accounted for by natural development, and consider our Saviour simply as a man of remarkable endowments and unique devotion to the interests of humanity?