But let us glance, in conclusion, at the bearing of
the above principle on Christ’s relations to science
and criticism.

Christ says of God, “He maketh His sun to
rise.” The question will be asked, “Are we to
accept this statement as scientifically accurate?”
An answer is not difficult. If it were of practical
benefit at that moment that Christ should under­
stand how false were the popular views of astron­
omy, then, doubtless, he would exercise His power
of divine insight and understanding. Few, how­
ever, will suppose that there was any occasion for
Christ to take a deeper view of the laws of Nature
than did the Jews around Him.

“But how,” some one will ask, “how was Christ
to tell that any subject deserved or demanded the
exercise of His divine consciousness without first
viewing it with His divine powers? On what
principle did Christ determine whether it was
worth His while to bring His divine powers to
bear upon any given subject of thought?”

To that question an answer might most justly be
declined. To find, as a fact, that Christ acted upon
the principle mentioned above is one thing, but to
explain how a person who was divine as well as
human could so act is quite a different sort of
problem. This, however, we may suggest. As a
man, our Lord may have been able to subdivide
beforehand the subjects of His meditations and
inquiries so as to settle in a manner satisfactory to
Himself which subjects solely concerned Himself
and which subjects would affect others. In
addition to this suggestion, we need to bear in
mind that Christ’s divine foreknowledge may have
forewarned Him against thinking too deeply on
certain subjects—those subjects, namely, that were
to be veiled from Him during His earthly mediator­
ship.

But there is another question that has often been
asked. When Christ speaks of David writing a
psalm, are we to accept this statement as authori­
ting the tradition, or as a mere accommodation to
popular views that had but little spiritual impor­
tance?

When Christ uses Old Testament quotations
conveying great spiritual truths, the importance to
all concerned is so vast that we cannot understand
Him to speak with merely human wisdom as far as
the lessons taught are concerned. But as far as
authorship and readings are concerned, it seems
likely that Christ would consider these questions
of so scholastic a character and so utterly out of
touch with the moral and spiritual interests of those
around Him, that He would scarcely concern
Himself with the accuracy or inaccuracy of the
traditions involved.

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The Gospels and Modern Criticism.

By the Rev. Arthur Wright, M.A., Fellow
and Tutor of Queens’ College, Cambridge.

If Mr. Halcombe will do me the justice to read
again the opening sentences of my third article,
he will see that the strong expressions in the third
paragraph to which he takes exception were not
directed against him, but against an imaginary case
put forth to illustrate the direction which the argu­
ment would take, and to excite the interest of the
reader upon whose attention considerable demands
would be made.

Secondly, if he will notice the presence of the
definite article in one sentence and its absence
from another, he will see that my logic is not so
absurd that he need stoop to ridicule it. The con­
text also makes the meaning clear. A man may,
I declare, take into account all the facts relating to
the subject which he is studying, and yet construct
his system in defiance of other facts external to it,
but belonging to the universal order of things, and
not to be neglected with impunity.

Thirdly, I cannot admit that I have damaged my
cause by allowing that such a man’s system may be
wrong, and yet incapable of refutation. To show
this, I will take an example from the present con­
troversy. The four Gospels declare that our Lord
predicted on one occasion that St. Peter should
deny Him thrice. They then describe how this
prediction was fulfilled to the letter. But Mr.
Halcombe’s principles lead him to maintain that
our Lord twice foretold St. Peter’s denials, and that
St. Peter denied Him six times. It is impossible
for me to refute this. For anything that I know to
the contrary, St. Peter may have denied Christ nine
times as some harmonists have held, or twelve
times, or any number not less than three. Some
able expositors have thought that though there
were only three denials, yet the second and per­
haps the third may have been twofold or manifold,
several persons speaking at once, and St. Peter
replying to them all. As an historical critic, I
should say that the presumption is very strong that
there were only three denials; but as we have three
(not four, for St. Matthew only reproduces St.
Mark) separate accounts of these from three
different witnesses, whose recollections were im­
perfect, the details do not exactly agree, and cannot
be accurately pieced together. For historical truth
is seldom the same thing as absolute truth.

In proof of this last contention, I would point
(1) to the fact that we have two editions of the
Lord’s Prayer differing (like the two editions of the
Ten Commandments) not inconsiderably (accord­
ting to the true text) from each other. (2) We
have four accounts of the origin of the Lord’s
Supper so widely divergent that it is impossible to
recover the exact words of institution.³ (3) St.
Matthew’s Gospel contains the command to baptize
in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of
the Holy Ghost, but St. Luke in the Acts of the
Apostles, and St. Paul in his Epistles, always de­
scribe baptism as administered in the name of Jesus.
If therefore in these matters of the highest moment
verbal accuracy is set at nought in Holy Scripture,
we are not likely to arrive at truth by becoming
slaves to the latter in smaller matters. But as Mr.
Halcombe has challenged me to examine in detail
any one of ten fourfold narratives, I will take St.
Peter’s denials for the purpose.

According to Mr. Halcombe’s view, St. John was
the first to write an account of what happened.
He did so within a few weeks of the events, when
everything was fresh in his memory. He knew
that our Lord had twice predicted St. Peter’s fall,
that St. Peter had been guilty of six denials, and
that the cock crew twice. Instead, however, of
giving us the truth, the whole truth, and nothing
but the truth, he has recorded the first prediction,
the first, third, and fourth denials, and the first cock
crowing. What reason can be given for his sup­
pressing one half of the incidents? We know of
none that will bear examination.

Shortly afterwards St. Matthew, knowing the
whole truth, and having St. John’s Gospel before
him, deliberately suppressed one half of the truth,
and gave us only what his brother apostle had
omitted. Again we ask, Why should he have done
this? and we are referred to the principles on
which he is held to have constructed his Gospel,
which principles we do not admit.

Soon afterwards St. Mark, with the two Gospels
before him, wrote an account in which he followed
St. Matthew in selecting the prediction and the
denials, but recorded both the cock-crowings (there
are great textual difficulties here, of which Mr.
Halcombe takes no account), and altered St.
Matthew’s simple expression “wept bitterly” into
a word the meaning of which has never been

cleared up. Some translate, “He buried his face
in his mantle and wept”; others, “He wept pro­
fusely”; others, “He began to weep”; others,
“When he thought thereon, he wept.” Is it not
more probable that St. Matthew altered St. Mark’s
obscure word into a simple one than that St. Mark
altered St. Matthew’s lucid phrase into an incom­
prehensible one? I should say that the priority
of St. Mark is much supported by this one case.

And whence did St. Mark learn about the
“twice”? Did our Lord really speak the word, St.
Peter recollect it, and St. Mark record it, though
other catechists let it drop, as I hold? Or did St.
Mark infer from the context that He must have
spoken it? And if St Mark was indeed so anxious

to put the narrative right on the smaller matter,
why did he not correct “thrice” into “six times,”
and give us the six denials? Or did he not per­
ceive that there were six?

St. Luke comes next, and having the three
Gospels will surely at last give us the whole truth.
Not so. He picks and chooses in a bewildering
way, following St. John in recording the first
prediction and the third denial, but in other
particulars preferring St. Matthew.

And why is this improbable doubling of
incidents, which not even Tatian allows, forced
upon us? Because “standing and sitting are not
the same thing”; because one narrative has
“Woman, I know Him not”; another, “Man, I am
not.” For the sake of these, and a few other
minute differences, the fourfold “twice” is dis­
regarded, the fourfold narratives are declared to be
half the truth. Historical probability yields to
verbal precision. Yet such a protest against the

¹See an article on Professor Gardner’s pamphlet in the
Churchman for March (London: Elliot Stock. 6d.).
make, that the Shemul, which every pious Jew in our Lord’s time is believed to have repeated daily, is given in a different form by three evangelists, but not once correctly (Mark xii. 30; Matt. xxii. 37; Luke x. 27). It may be expected that every Jew would know the names of the twelve tribes of his nation, yet a list of them is given in the Apocalypse in which Joseph and Manasseh are put instead of Ephraim and Manasseh, Levi is inserted though he had no lot with his brethren, Dan is excluded (Rev. vii. 5-8). Facts like these meet us everywhere when we undertake a careful study of the New Testament, and they warn us against believing in verbal inspiration. If we do, our faith will receive a shock every time it encounters a difficulty, a shock from which I would fain rescue the devout reader. Verbal inspiration has been generally surrendered, not because it is impossible, for of that we do not profess to judge, but because it is not supported by the evidence.

Mr. Halcombe asks whether an investigator is one who grovels amongst facts. The offensive word is not one which I should have chosen, but, as he will have it, I must reply that the example which I gave of the Ptolemaic astronomers abundantly shows that it is possible for the most patient and conscientious analyst to grovel amongst facts when he has no clue to their orderly arrangement. The history of misdirected effort all the world over only too firmly establishes the truth of this sad assertion.

In his second objection, Mr. Halcombe seems to have forgotten that in 1886 he published, and in or about 1892 republished, a volume, entitled Gospel Difficulties; or, The Displaced Section of St. Luke, in which he declared that the displacement “must have been done either by a copyist or by revisers, inasmuch as, for reasons which will be stated, it could not by any possibility have been done by St. Luke himself.” This is my authority for accusing him of dissecting and reconstructing St. Luke. If he wishes to repudiate the book and its teaching, no one will rejoice more than myself. My other statement is based on pages 121, 122 of The Historic Relation of the Gospels.

Mr. Halcombe seems to think that he has refuted my assertion that the Synoptists contradict each other in the matter of chronological arrangement by admitting that they do so throughout one long period, and in one other case. I leave my readers to judge what his indignant jury would say to this. The assertion that I wholly ignore and misrepresent the facts would not be lightly passed over before such a tribunal. But God forbid that controversies like these should be settled so.

Mr. Halcombe complains that I have not assaulted his main citadel, as if an adversary had not the liberty to direct his fire against important outposts, the loss of which would leave the citadel at his mercy. How much of Mr. Halcombe’s system would be left if it were established, as I have endeavoured to prove, that St. Mark wrote first, St. John last; that the records of our Lord’s life are not complete; and that what is recorded cannot always be adjusted with certainty?

I am glad that Mr. Halcombe no longer brings against me the charges of bitterness and personal discourtesy which disfigure his latest book. The time may come when he will regard me as a friend. It was my duty to hit hard, but I cannot accuse myself of hitting below the belt. If his system is true, it must be helped forward by the examination to which I have subjected it; if false, who can be so anxious to have it set aside as its author? I am simply crediting him with my own feelings when I say so. He has acknowledged one obligation to me. When he has calmly considered my objections, he may perhaps discover more. At any rate, I have endeavoured to write as a judge, not as an advocate. Edie Ochiltree, Alice in Wonderland, the Tichborne claimant, mere midsummer madness, and the like amenities, have no terror for me. Until my objections have been seriously met, I am likely to continue to feel them and to press them.

It has been said that instead of replying to Mr. Halcombe, I have wasted the space at my disposal in setting forth my own opinions. I am no destructive critic, but recognise the obligation of building up where I feel bound to throw down. Nor can I protest too strongly against the fatal mistake of including all historical critics in one class, and branding them as workers against the authority of the Gospels. On the contrary, I look to some of them as the ablest defenders of the Gospels, the great hope for the future.

The Rev. Dr. Grosart criticises one of my paragraphs: I trust that a little explanation will remove his difficulty. I had not forgotten, even for a moment, the strength of our Lord’s language in condemning the Pharisees. On the contrary, I accept it with gratitude and adoration.
But surely it is one thing to attack a class of men for false teaching, another to attack an individual for his treatment of yourself. Our Lord, when He stood before Annas, Caiaphas, and Pilate, set us a different example. If St. Paul, instead of quoting Scripture, had replied, “For my Master said, Bless them that curse you, and pray for them that despitefully use you,” it seems to me that he would have made good use of a great opportunity. He was not at that time on his trial touching the resurrection of the dead, but on the far different charge of profaning the temple. The deliberate attempt, as St. Luke describes it, to set his judges by the ears through an appeal to their religious animosities, does not commend itself to our Christian judgment. St. Paul, when he stood before Felix, confessed that the Jews had a right to complain of that one cry.

It is usual to attribute to St. Paul all the good qualities which we should wish him to have possessed. But his quarrels with SS. Peter, Barnabas, and Mark may make us hesitate. The blame is not likely always to have entirely lain on the other side. To my ear there is a ring of personal regret in the words, “Let not the sun go down upon your wrath, neither give place by so doing to the devil.” The writer of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians had not such an entire command over his temper as is commonly supposed.

The day is gone by for approving every act of Abraham or David, every word of Job or Jeremiah; and I do not think that we are detracting from the greatness of one of the noblest men who ever lived, if we refuse to admire all his actions and speeches. Rather by admitting some of his infirmities, we make him more human, more real—a greater comfort and encouragement to ourselves.

The Great Text Commentary.

THE GREAT TEXTS OF THE FIRST EPISTLE OF ST. JOHN.

“Beloved, now are we children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that, if He shall be manifested, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him even as He is.”

1 John iii. 2 (R.V.).

Exposition.

“Now are we children.”—St. John takes up the words which he has just used (“and we are”); “Yes, now are we children, children with the promise of mature development.”—WESTCOTT.

“Children,” not “sons” here. “Child” implies a future development, “son” does not.—PLUMMER.

“It is not yet made manifest.”—The Authorised Version does not correctly represent the Greek original. It is not (οἴκτος φαένεται), “it doth not yet appear,” as a result of human inference or speculation; but (οἴκτος εφανερώθη), “it has not yet been manifested or revealed.” God Himself still wraps our destiny among His “hidden things.”—BISHOP FRASER.

“If He shall be manifested.”—It is not easy to determine between “if it shall be manifested” and “if He shall be manifested”; “it,” meaning what we shall be hereafter, and “He,” meaning Christ. No nominative is expressed in the Greek, and it is rather violent to supply a new nominative, differing from that of the very same verb in the previous sentence. Therefore “it” seems preferable. “We know that if our future state is made manifest, we, who are children of God, shall be found like our Father.” On the other hand, ii. 28 favours “if He shall be manifested.”—PLUMMER.

“Like Him.”—Like God in Christ. The image in which we were made will then be consummated in the likeness to which it was the Divine purpose that we should attain.—WESTCOTT.

“For we shall see Him.”—The likeness to God may be either (1) the necessary condition, or (2) the actual consequence of the Divine vision. The argument may be: We shall see God, and since this is possible, we must be like Him; or, We shall see God, and in that Presence we shall reflect His glory and be transformed into His likeness. Both thoughts are scriptural; and perhaps the two thoughts are not very sharply distinguished here.—WESTCOTT.