For Idea and Reality.

A Journal,

edited

by

R. Nielsen,

B. Bjørnson and Rud. Schmidt.

Year 1870. First Volume.

Copenhagen.

Chr. Steen & Søn, Publishers.

Printed by Louis Klein.

Translated from the Danish

An Interpretation of the Sacred History.

---

[289] When great questions are in motion, and the views fit to bear arms take the field, it is not unusual for the campaign to be opened with a sharp declaration of war. Each of the contending parties then regards its standpoint as a rock-solid stronghold, an impregnable fortress, from which sorties can be made in various directions against the main force of the enemy, while the standpoint itself is secured on every side against any attack. Here there is no talk of negotiations, amicable agreements or mutual concessions. The whole truth is on the one side, the whole untruth on the other; so it is *to be or not to be*: what cannot stand must fall. Worldly-wise prudence does not like decisions of this kind; it assumes, without having looked, that there is right and wrong on both sides. So one hushes the combatants and would gladly conjure away the storm. But it is in vain, when breathing is heavy and the air close.

In the life of culture there are intermediate states, when it almost looks as if mankind, out of sheer cleverness, were about to become foolish, when one explains
[290] the phenomena without troubling about their essence and can answer all questions about them save those that actually concern the matter. The powers of the spirit slacken; reason dozes, one would think it were taking an afternoon nap, while a thousand thoughts of waking understanding swarm in the day like humming gnats in the heat. It is in such intermediate states that the doctrine of the middle way flourishes, for "the middle way is broad" and grows ever broader. A pretended critical, but in reality uncritical, heaping together of all manner of literary remains, an indigestible mixture of heterogeneous components — fragments of old, shattered, collapsed theories — accumulate and settle fast as a dam against all principles, like stirred-up mud against the fresh current of thoughts, like dregs and gravel that clog the wellspring of the ideas. Under such circumstances it will then be necessary that it come to a break, to a final reckoning, and that the challenge be to life and death.

But a dispute can also be conducted on peaceful terms. Instead of beginning with an emphasis on the points that exclusively mark the disagreement, one may reverse the procedure and make a beginning by bringing out the presuppositions on which complete agreement prevails. With the agreement as starting point it will then gradually be possible to make it evident in what the disagreement consists, whence it springs, and what significance it actually has. In the present case, where the subject is an interpretation of the sacred history and of the criticism that forms

the foundation of the interpretation, we choose the last-mentioned procedure. We do so all the more gladly because the work to which we in this treatise intend to *[291]* refer the judgment of the credibility of the evangelical accounts is a fruit of many years of careful research, a work of scientific value, which presents essential points of agreement, namely: *Interpretation* of the Synoptic *Gospels by Dr. H. N. Clausen* (Copenhagen 1850) (Fortolkning af de synoptiske Evangelier).

In the part of the Introduction that deals with "the historical character of the Gospels" the reverend interpreter, as far as the scientific side of criticism is concerned, has set up principles which, in their generality, must indeed be regarded as unassailable. We can summarize these principles under the following three points of view. 1) *The ancient ecclesiastical assumption that in "the subject of the evangelical account, Christ's earthly life and ministry, one had a purely historical material, a series of indisputable facts", is critically untenable.* A distinction must be made between profane and sacred history. "The historical material that fills the evangelical account cannot, with regard to its inner nature, be likened to anything else… It is the wonderful, the inexplicable, the supernatural that is here the account's red thread, that indicates its keynote; even where the miracle does not step forth immediately, where the events for a time fit into the accustomed course of the natural connection, the whole nevertheless moves on the dark, holy ground of mystery". The interpretation must therefore be determined by the conception of the miracle.

2) *To deny the possibility of miracle is to deny the sacred history.* Yet it by no means follows from this that one should be minded to give up the possession of such a history, *[292]* "in so far as by this is understood a history of the wisest teacher in the world and the holiest man, or the possession of a Holy Scripture in which this man's teaching and the history of his life have been preserved". But the task becomes that of explaining the supernatural in a natural way; and to solve this task one can go two ways.

One can, on the presupposition that the narrative contains a real occurrence, a truthful event, in which everything took place naturally, seek to explain the semblance of the supernatural partly by the evangelist's lack of ability for clear and distinct presentation, partly by his limited conception of the connection of things and his original bent to see the natural in a supernatural light. Thus, for example, Jesus' words to Peter on the occasion of the demanded temple tax (Mtth. 17:27): "Go thou to the sea, and cast a hook and take the first fish that cometh up; and when thou openest its mouth, thou shalt find a stater; take that and give it to them for me and thee", are, according to Dr. Paulus, supposed to be a speaking proof of the evangelist's linguistic

helplessness; for what he actually wants to tell is that Christ said to Peter: "Thou art a fisherman, cast the fishing-hook, and from the first best fish that thou loosest from the hook thou wilt doubtless raise the money needed". The historical ground on which the evangelical account must be assumed to rest is, under this treatment, more and more hollowed out, the kernel of full reality dwindles away, and only the shell remains.

So one came then — "at an even pace" — onto the second way, "the mythicizing
[293] treatment", whose most significant representative is Strauss. That the sacred history is a myth, a web of myths, means that what we have before us here are not real facts, but only religious representations; "Thought works after the manner of instinct. It is the strong, as yet undeveloped urge to clarify for itself what fills the innermost being of the soul that sets the powers of the spirit in motion; it is the moral-religious ideas that work their way out of the spiritual state of ferment toward clarity and rounded definiteness, as they step forth in bodily form as definite personalities, in a manifold of figures, positions in life and deeds". The sacred history is, in other words, a product of unconsciously poetizing imagination.

3) *The basic condition for a true historical conception of the sacred history is a believing acknowledgment of the possibility of miracle.* "That a history which, precisely as historical reality, has become the turning point in the religious history of the world, and in the long series of centuries has passed over and into the Christian life, should let itself be dissolved and spun out into an idealistic-speculative symbolism — that the personal life of Christ, which in all its main stages of humiliation and exaltation, of suffering and glorification has become the center of a reality of the highest significance, of a communal faith and a communal life with world-transforming power, of devout contemplation and worship, of poetry and art, of praise and imitation, should all at once be torn out of the bright day of clear reality and set in a hazy twilight, since by
[294] an unexampled and inexplicable illusion it is supposed to have happened, a series of symbolizing narratives — one knows not when or how — came to be accepted as real history of a teaching and miracle-working, a suffering and crucified, a risen and ascended Redeemer and Savior, an object of confession and invocation in an ever greater sphere: this is so monstrous a claim that the Christian world, not excepting even its great indifferent part, would have to be brought to pause, to stop thoughtfully and enter into itself". The sacred history is therefore the history of miracle, a real history of real miraculous deeds.

On these points there is here, as said, complete agreement; but now there is in the

evangelical accounts not merely something that is an object of scientific examination; here there is also something that is an object of faith: the history, as sacred history, is a history of faith. When the relation between faith and knowledge is now to be more closely determined, the disagreement begins.

That faith and knowledge must, as it is put, be reconciled with one another, is granted by all who assume that religion and science can be united in one consciousness. It is not the possibility of reconciliation, but its conditions, about which the dispute is.

Do faith and knowledge have the same principle, or are there here two mutually different, absolutely heterogeneous principles? That is the question. The reverend interpreter assumes the former, we the latter; an invaluable aid to clarifying the matter we have in the sacred history.

If the scientific use the author has made of the principles he has set up can really furnish proof of the identity of principle of faith with knowledge, then we see ourselves compelled to give up our way of looking at things; but if it turns out that *[295]* the interpretation before us speaks precisely in the most forcible way for a difference in principle between faith and knowledge, then the interpreter himself surely cannot deny such a difference without coming into conflict with his own principles.

Scientific criticism is, as is also especially stressed, to aim at "a separation of superior and subordinate parts of Scripture, more or less warranted in the historical respect". "When the Gospels thus contain, alongside accounts whose origin can be traced back to the apostolic eyewitness, a few narratives which are distinguished from the properly historical kernel of the Gospels by the complete uncertainty concerning the paths of transmission by which they have come into the hands of the evangelical authors (so the evangelical pre-history in the first chapters of Matthew and Luke), when, over against accounts in which what happened and is told steps forth in clear visibility, there stand a few others that betray an uncertain, doubting conception in the narrating witness himself, and thus let the event told remain in a mystic half-darkness (this holds, for example, of the temptation in the wilderness, of the transfiguration on the mountain, of the walking on the sea, of the resurrection of the dead of Jerusalem); when, alongside many merely apparent discrepancies, where the semblance of mutual contradiction dissolves on closer consideration into a higher or lesser degree of accuracy and completeness, there are found a few differences that cannot be removed in any satisfactory way (as, for example, the indication of the time of the last Passover meal); then it cannot be the right way — because it is a way that *[296]* leads to no resting-point — when a concept of the character of divinity is here set up

which by a decree of power is to strike down doubt and frighten objection back. For it is to put the cause of faith on the extremest and most dangerous point to demand the unnatural of the believer: that he is to keep his eyes tightly shut, or that, seeing, he is to renounce the ability to see":

This way of looking at things must, in the scientific sense, be regarded as entirely justified. The reverend interpreter, in pleading the right of criticism, is so far from making too strict demands on science that we must rather regret that in carrying out these demands he has not been strict enough. But what follows now from this with regard to faith?

It is remarkable, however, that precisely those sections which, according to the above statement, belong among the historically uncertain, not to say unhistorical, are, with few exceptions, included among those which in the course of the church year are read aloud for the edification of the congregation. If we now hold fast with the author to the presupposition that the truth of faith in the sacred history is to be clarified, grounded and determined by scientific interpretation of Scripture, then it is easy to see what follows from this. For from this it follows: that *in the proportion that the credibility of those evangelical accounts is weakened in science,* must *it also be weakened in the congregation.*

If science is really to exert any influence in principle on faith, then it must obviously
[297] be able, little by little, to transform the congregation's religious consciousness, make it attentive to the nature of "the historical material in the Gospels", open its eye to "a separation of superior and subordinate parts, more or less warranted in the historical respect". As long as the congregation continues to listen to the Gospel of the Annunciation, to the Gospel of Christ's birth, of the Wise Men from the East who saw the star, etc., and mark well, listens without scientific criticism, it will naturally take the events quite as they are told, ascribe to the supernatural the same historical reality as to the natural, and think that it is all — "both certain and true in every way". But as the hearers, with the help of science, are put deeper into the critical view, faith and with it hearing will change. It will then be understood that these "fragmentary narratives" are of doubtful origin, that "a mythicizing dressing", an "embellishing setting", has stepped in "supplementing and shaping" to make good "the scantiness and wavering" in the historical traditions. The congregation will then, when it hears the angels' song of praise, not let itself be infatuated by a conception of real angels, but content itself with the real shepherds — for the reality of the shepherds scientific criticism can vouch — but as for the angels, will bethink itself of "the dramatic use of

the Jewish conceptions of the appearance of the world of spirits in human fashion in the human world, in Jewish form, even to the giving of names and ranks". The enlightened congregation will in faith understand that the miracle of the star is not any proper miracle, but a remarkable phenomenon, composed of a natural sign in the *[298]* heavens and an optical illusion; "for if I can say of a star that it goes before me, while rather I go in the direction toward it, then I can also say that it comes to stand here or there, while it is rather I who come to stand in such a way that I see it just there, as over a house".

From the scientific standpoint of faith it has often been complained that the personal devil is to be in the history, and that it is extremely difficult for science to get him driven out of the consciousness of believers. An essential obstacle lies without doubt in the fact that the congregation every year on the first Sunday in Lent hears the Gospel (Mtth. 4) about the temptation in the wilderness, and — naturally without any criticism — takes the narrative as a real event, an essential part of the sacred history. But when science has got its altar candle lit and the "mystic half-darkness" in which the event is shrouded begins to disperse, the congregation will surely find "the weight of the difficulties that press upon the whole conception of the devil's personal reality, in quite a peculiar way strengthened by the relation in which he here steps forth toward Jesus. For as regards the devil, the procedure in the whole difficult struggle, the flatness in the arranging and introducing of the temptations seems just as hard to reconcile with the shrewdness and calculating cunning that were here supposed to reach their climax, as, on Jesus' side, the patience in continuing these negotiations, and in letting himself be led by the evil spirit from place to place through the different stages of the trial, is hard to reconcile with the ideal of moral *[299]* purity that must at once have withdrawn from contact with the unclean". Once it has really dawned upon the enlightened congregation that the history of the temptation, historically understood, is by its "flatness" equally compromising for Christ and for the devil, then faith will probably have to be content with the scientific explanation that the whole "is probably founded on a communication from Jesus about something he had experienced in his soul in the solitude of the desert, whereby it must for the rest be left undetermined whether the disciples understood what was communicated as something experienced inwardly or as something experienced outwardly".

If one takes the reverend interpreter's declaration, that it is scientific criticism that is to test, find out and ground the historical truth of the Gospel accounts, in full earnest, then one must, as to the above-mentioned section, greatly wonder at our

clergy. For whether it be the Gospel of the temptation or of the Annunciation or any other Gospel whatsoever that constitutes the Text of the Day, the edifying discourse proceeds without more ado from the presupposition that the Gospel read aloud is in all parts historically credible. The priest is silent about the difficulties, passes over the critical misgivings and lets nothing be noticed. It is, according to the interpreter's way of looking at things, a manifest violation of the sacred truth. Such a violation of the duty of truth cannot be excused by ignorance; it must then have its ground in this, that in the pulpit "the unnatural" is demanded of the preacher: "that he is here to keep his eyes tightly shut, or that, seeing, he is to renounce the ability to see".

[300] It is true that the rule holds that one must not give the simple-minded offense; but truth is after all always truth, and the truth must out. If the principle of faith is really one with the principle of knowledge, then there can not possibly be one truth of faith in science and an other in the congregation, one on the professorial chair and another in the pulpit.

The nearest way to root out superstition and promote religious cognition of truth would then be: to exclude from the annual cycle of Gospels the sections about whose historical credibility science entertains well-founded doubt. But when the talk is of complete credibility and historical reliability in all essential features, for which sections of the sacred history does science dare scientifically to vouch?

That "the Transfiguration on the Mount" and "the Walking on the Sea" can come into consideration just as little as "the history of the temptation" or the "fragmentary narratives" that furnish "the pre-history", the interpreter himself has already indicated.

The Transfiguration on the Mount (Mtth. 17, Mark. 9, Luk. 9) *drops out;* it is not a picture with distinct features of historical reality that we have before us here, but "a mist-picture in mystic half-light". He (Christ) *was transfigured before the disciples,* but in what the transformation actually consisted criticism cannot find out. "How the intimated metamorphosis is to be conceived: as extending to the inner nature of the body — and in that case, how compatible with Jesus' true humanity — or as

[301] merely apparent with regard to the outward appearance; — how the presence is to be conceived of the two heroes of Judaism" (Moses and Elijah) "the representatives of the Law and the Prophets: real or visionary; — what purpose is to be ascribed to the described meeting, and what is to be thought the subject of the conversation, — how the voice from the cloud and the words uttered are to be explained: all this is a matter of questions to which a tolerably satisfactory answer would have to be found, in order that the story told might become an object of conception and presentation.

But from the nature of the narrative it is evident that and why no such answer can be given. For the three eyewitnesses" (Peter, James and John) "were heavy with sleep, they did not know what they said, for they were sore afraid"; when they at last came to themselves and "looked round about, they saw no man save Jesus only".

The Walking on the Sea (Mtth. 14, Mark. 6) *drops out.* The interpreter maintains with philological right that there is here no talk of a walking *by* the sea or *toward* the sea, but literally of a walking *on* the sea, *across the sea,* and refers to Job 9:8, where it is said of God that he walks upon the deep as upon a floor. The whole narrative, he says, "obviously has this explanation as its presupposition; for while the disciples in the ship were in the midst of the sea, it is said that Jesus would have passed them by, and they were amazed, supposing that it was a spirit they saw before them". So far criticism, on the presupposition of the possibility of miracle, makes no scientific objection to the event; but — naturam furca — now it comes. The story of Peter, who also wants to try to walk upon the water, a characteristic scene, which completes the *[302]* picture and gives it a rich symbolic meaning, criticism cannot approve. The edifying discourse, however, speaks in an entirely different tone. "These are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; this word we would apply to our sacred narrative read aloud, of the Lord's walking on the Lake of Gennesaret… If we believe in him who has raised the dead, who has ruled over the law of death, should we then not also believe in him who has ruled over the law of gravity? We should then also learn this from our Gospel, that what matters is to have steadfastness, constancy in faith, that we not, like Peter, begin in faith the walk, but when we see the strong wind, become afraid, doubt and sink". That is very edifying indeed. But when the identity of principle of faith and knowledge is held fast, the foundation of this edifying talk becomes hollow and floating. The preacher speaks of something that never happened. Criticism has "well-founded conjecture" that "the episode of Peter" is a later addition, owing to the Greek translation or revision of the Gospel of Matthew — "a conjecture which is corroborated by the whole character of this narrative, which reminds one of the embellishing and intensifying tendency in the apocryphal Gospels".

"*The Stilling of the Storm on the Sea of Galilee*" (Mtth. 8, Mark. 4, Luk. 8) *drops out, in order that the congregation* may not take offense at the striking misunderstanding that has crept into the presentation, a misunderstanding so great that scientific interpretation completely transforms the historical character of the event. All three *[303]* Gospels, namely, place the emphasis unanimously on this, that storm and waves must

obey Christ's almighty word. But science understands the matter differently: the whole significance lies in the contrast between the Master's "exalted calm" and the disciples' "anxious timidity", so that Jesus' threatening words "were rather probably addressed to the disciples than to the elements, to weather and wind". — There are, if we follow the scientific criticism, still many sections that on account of historical unreliability must be excluded, indeed so many that one cannot suppress the question whether in the end a single one remains.

It is, we repeat it, by no means our opinion that the reverend interpreter in his investigations has gone too near the historical facts. On the contrary! if the demand of science is to be satisfied in any measure, no one will surely be able to treat the evangelical history with more caution or greater readiness to let the wonderful step forth with the stamp of historical reality everywhere where it is possible, than has been done in the work here under discussion. But precisely this endeavor: *from science to secure and ground the supernatural in the content of faith*, has, as we shall presently see, brought about a weakening of the principles, a groping and wavering in the judgment of the phenomena, which approaches the unprincipled.

To meet the objections that the unbelieving criticism (Strauss, Weisse, B. Bauer) has raised against the healing of the centurion's servant (Mtth. 8, Luk. 7) as a "healing at a
[304] distance, without there being any question of the sick person's own faith", the author remarks: "although it must be admitted that thought finds it easiest to appropriate and hold fast the miracle where it appears bound to faith as a middle term…, yet the same evangelical miracle-type appears everywhere where the holy will reveals itself as the mighty will, in the bodily world as in the moral". Here, then, the cause, the holy, mighty will, is made the mark of the miracle.

But this mark is effaced again where the talk is of the healing of the woman with the issue of blood (Mtth. 9, Mark. 5, Luk. 8). As the narrative is given in Mark and Luke, "it leads namely with necessity to the conception of Jesus' miraculous power as working… without the ground of the activity being to be sought in the determining might of the will… The healing power is thus here presented as set in motion by the mere outward touch, and the healing that followed proceeds as a physical phenomenon, where the thought involuntarily presses upon one of the electric apparatus, filled with the strong power, which needs only to be brought near a body in order to stream out into visible effects". Strictly speaking, such a miracle ought now to be rejected outright; but one can instead reject the mark, give up the definite purpose of the mighty will, hold to the believer and make faith the electric

conductor of the miracle-power.

This scientific conception has edifying warrant in Schleiermacher's sermons. "Deeply and ingeniously", says the Interpreter, "Schleiermacher has expressed himself on this problem: that just as the spiritual influence that proceeds from the individual *[305]* has only a small part of its ground in the determinate will and purpose, but such a circulation of the spiritual forces takes place that the best can be effected without the one who effects it being able to say anything of it, so it was also with Jesus' miraculous deeds in the bodily sphere, which just thereby removed themselves from the usual course of things and approached the characteristics of the spiritual life; there as well as here faith, longing and yearning were the only condition for becoming a partaker of the miraculous working".

If the reader will not rest content with the Schleiermacherian analogy, but finds the event unreasonable, then critical interpretation still has the natural way out of seeking the ground of the unreasonable in a misunderstanding on the part of the evangelists. Matthew gives the narrative briefly and places the power of the healing in Jesus' words: *Daughter, be of good comfort, thy faith hath made thee* whole. One can now assume that this is precisely the historical element, while the narrative in Mark and Luke "makes the impression of traditional elaborations, formed by reflection on the manner and way of the healing".

The natural way out is, however, the most dangerous. It is true that at first glance it seems quite plausible that an evangelist in all good faith may have come to use one legend or another in which the miraculous, through additions and "traditional elaborations", has been misunderstood: it is then not the evangelist, but the legend, that is to blame for the misunderstanding. But if we look more closely, the matter stands differently. For the evangelist who can take up legends that put the miracle in a false light thereby precisely reveals that he lacks view of the distinguishing mark of *[306]* the miracle, that, to put it bluntly, he is not able to distinguish between true and false miracles.

That an Evangelist may have erred in giving some historical outer side, a name, a determination of time and the like, is unessential, for an Evangelist is no scientific, critical investigator of history; nor is there anything exactly unreasonable in his having, by making use of reports of legendary, uncertain origin, in his presentation confused "what was experienced inwardly with what was experienced outwardly," for in the religious sense the outward always receives its significance through the inward. But to suppose of an Evangelist that in thoughtless credulity he has approved

narratives that in reality distort the miracle, is by no means admissible, for that is to destroy his credibility as an Evangelist. What the interpreter adduces in this respect in excuse of what is little credible in "the embellishment of the miracle with the woman with the issue of blood, with the walking on the sea, with the stater in the fish's mouth, with the resurrection of "the Jerusalem dead, etc., is not an excuse but an accusation; it is sheer doubt of the sacred authors' ability to handle the historical material, veiled objections to their credibility.

"We ought," says the reverend author, "to let ourselves be guided by Scripture itself to the true concept of the holy word of revelation." Yes, so we ought. But this principle is surely forgotten or pushed aside, every time we demand a quite different presentation of the wonderful from the one that is notoriously given to us; every time we refer to "later, askew, misinterpreting reflections" and are on the point of setting
[307] our own so-called scientific conception of miracle higher than the evangelical one.

How little, as far as the miracle is concerned, one can be minded to let oneself be "guided by Scripture to the true concept," the criticism of the miracle of the feeding (Mark. 6, Mtth. 14, Luk. 9) offers a telling example. "For exegetical consideration," says the author, "the miracle that five thousand were fed with five loaves and two fishes has as complete an outward warrant as any of the evangelical miraculous deeds." None the less scientific criticism must feel itself highly dissatisfied with this miracle. The reason is "that what here confronts us is an act of power, in the absolute incomprehensibility of the creating divine force.... A prodigy (τέρας) stands before us that closes itself to every effort of thought and dismisses every question that seeks an answer as unanswerable." — This uncertain conception of the supernatural, at odds with itself, this wavering reasoning for and against, these irresolute estimates of reasonable, little reasonable and unreasonable events, this unfruitful weighing of probable, little probable and improbable miracles, is equally ill-fated for religion and science: it makes faith doubting and knowledge unprincipled.

It can be proved from the work of interpretation we are considering that the sacred history must in principle exclude science. By admitting the possibility of miracle knowledge has set its absolute boundary and thereby spoken its last word. History has, however, not a general possibility but real facts, these signs, these visions,
[308] these revelations, these miraculous deeds conceived in determinate representations, as its content. If science were in any way able to pass a well-grounded judgment on the individual miracles appearing in determinate phenomena, then it would first have to discover the laws according to which the supernatural can express itself

and intervene in the natural. If it is now, as we *all know, wholly ignorant of these laws, then its* criticism is without a standard: either it must let the miraculous deeds stand for what they are: improbable, incomprehensible, or it must seek to dissolve every single determinate representation of every single determinate miracle into the indeterminate, indeterminable possibility of "the wondrous." In the first case science will withdraw from the sacred history, in the latter case its criticism will dissolve the sacred history.

Our reverend interpreter has perhaps not reflected that the real result of his work, so significant for science, is a consummated dissolution of the evangelical history. And yet the dissolution is undeniable. There prevails in this interpretation from first to last such a divorce between the natural and the supernatural that only the natural becomes historical, while the supernatural — the in itself indeterminate and indeterminable — withdraws from every possible historical apprehension. It is said in the introduction to the first section that scientific criticism will "secure the historical kernel" by separating it from "the embellishing setting" and in particular "maintain the historical reality of a wondrous ground-fact in Christ's entry into the world"; but whoever trusts that here, with the assistance of criticism, he will find either proofs *[309]* for the reality of the wondrous ground-fact or closer information about its historical character, will be greatly disappointed.

How did it actually come about with the announcement of the birth of John the Baptist? One does not know. Luke (1:5—25) describes it, to be sure, in detail; by adducing the nearer circumstances and incidental circumstances the Evangelist doubtless thinks that he makes clear to us the conception of what is supernatural in the event and tells a truthful story. But the interpreter is of another opinion. He thinks that what the Evangelist here tells is not any real event, not any truthful story, but an Old Testament embellishment of a family legend. "Just as it is probable that traditional legends were used that were preserved in John's family, so it is obvious that the Old Test.'s narratives of the birth of Samson and of Samuel (Judg. 13. 1 Sam. 1) have served as models in the individual features." What is it, then, that has actually happened? One does not know: the event itself falls outside history.

How did it come about with the announcement of Christ's birth? One does not know. Matthew (1:18—25) and Luke (1:26—38) think, to be sure, that they are able to impart reliable information and give us each his contribution; but that is a pious fancy. Criticism proves that there is no connection between "the two accounts," since the one obviously makes the other superfluous. "Nothing is surely in itself more natural

than that, about an event in which the supernatural lost itself in mysterious obscurity,
[310] there should be different narratives in circulation; and in any case there has, on the part of the narrators, been no thought of uniting them with one another; for it cannot be denied that — after the angelic revelation to Mary — the dream-vision for Joseph stands little motivated."

Can the angels' revelation to the shepherds (Luk. 2:8—20) *be regarded as a historical event*? Yes, in the pulpit, but not in science! Here, to be sure, is a ground-fact; but when criticism has got "the setting" separated from "the kernel," then the wondrous ground-fact disappears in the obscurity of legend and finally dissipates in an ingenious psychological ambiguity. For we must, with Schleiermacher, "assume that this history, only after Jesus's reputation had been established, was drawn forth from oblivion by the recollection of individuals; but that it is neither an air-bubble puffed together out of nothing nor a deliberate invention is vouched for us by the ease which the Christians of that region had in questioning Mary, who necessarily must have known about it, or those disciples with whom she had most lived, about the nature of the matter." Thus something must have happened, something wondrous, but what sort of thing is it? One does not know. The purpose of the event is namely not to be sought in "the more remote effect which it produced, after its resurrection, so to speak, but only in the immediate one on the shepherds themselves. The private revelation to the shepherds can now be explained in a quite natural and yet almost supernatural way by this, that someone or other among them has, "in his peculiar piety," asked for a sign. "This was granted them, as history teaches, and in this, in such great times not
[311] rare, satisfaction also of the longing of individuals lies the remarkable and divine."

In his public life Christ himself is the wondrous ground-fact; but that criticism cannot here either come to terms with the historical phenomena of this ground-fact we have already seen in many examples. In order not to reject all individual miraculous deeds, and yet to keep one's head above water with regard to the multiplicity, the reasoning understanding ascribes to and denies the Savior natural and supernatural gifts, as it may best happen to fall out. That Jesus, according to what we have heard about the centurion's servant, did have gifts to heal a sick man at a distance, is tacitly conceded; but that he also had gifts to be able to see an ass at a distance, is not conceded. "The ass" — it is said of the entry into Jerusalem (Mtth. 21, Mark. 11, Luk. 9) — "is fetched by the two disciples from the village lying directly opposite, probably Bethphage." All three Evangelists are, to be sure, agreed in laying stress on the wondrous prediction that they would "find" the ass, and thus hint at a "mysterious connection in the whole

occurrence." But in this criticism cannot support the sacred authors. Science must find it probable that "either the necessary further information was added by Jesus, or else a previously made arrangement on Jesus's part must be understood."

Yet another trait. The interpreter lets it be heard that the Transfiguration on the mount is hard to reconcile with "Jesus's true humanity"; here, then, no supernatural ground-fact is to be thought of; but can *the Resurrection and the Ascension* then be *[312]* better reconciled with "Jesus's true humanity"? Here we must hold fast to a mysterious fact. But the mysterious fact is so far from clearing itself up in the presentation that it on the contrary makes the presentation unclear. "The mutual divergences with which the four evangelical accounts of the resurrection cross one another" have so disturbing an effect that "only with great uncertainty can a more or less coherent narrative be produced, by putting them together with one another"; in other words: what was really to be told, the supernatural *How* of the occurrences, is not told; what was here to be attested is not attested. And that is quite in order, it cannot be otherwise. The ground of the uncertainty lies by no means in any carelessness or neglect on the part of the eyewitnesses, it lies in the nature of the event, in "the overpowering impression by which the first eyewitnesses had to be seized, in which connection it comes especially into consideration that the tradition in its individual features has here had its first warrant in the uncertain observation of the female witnesses."

As it goes with the Gospel of the Resurrection, so it goes also with *that of the Ascension.* The Ascension is attested as a ground-fact, as an article in a creed, but of the Ascension itself no history is given. And why not? Because the wonderful ground-fact stands in manifest conflict with all history. What cannot appear in a determinate form in a determinate manner, cannot either occur at a determinate place at a determinate time, cannot become event; but what by its nature cannot become event, cannot become historical either. Criticism sets an insurmountable gulf between *[313]* the fact of the Ascension and "the *form and manner* in which this fact, this wondrous entrance into heavenly glory, is to be thought accomplished." Yes, the Ascension is, when we look more closely, not even a proper fact; it is a "closed mystery," but a closed mystery is no fact. "Had there not," with this the reverend interpreter concludes, "been here a closed mystery already for the Apostles, then neither the omission of the greatest σημεῖον" (sign) "in the two apostolic Gospels would be explicable, nor the obscurity in which the allusion in the two other Gospels is held." This is the end of the sacred history — in science.

This remarkable circumstance, that so clear, so acute an author, so practiced in

critical thinking, so familiar with his great scientific apparatus, as Dr. H. N. Clausen, has by carrying through his principles arrived at a result that is precisely the opposite of that at which he originally aimed, raises the presumption that in the principles themselves there must lie hidden a bewitching obscurity, a dazzling ambiguity. We shall endeavor in brief to uncover this ambiguity.

That, according to principle (1), a distinction must be made between profane and sacred history is undeniable; but the question is wherein the distinction consists and how deep it is grounded in the matter. The "historical credibility" is of another nature, of another origin, and has a quite different ground in sacred history than in profane.

[314] To the concept of *credibility* corresponds the concept of faith; the credible is the object of faith. From this it follows that the concept of credibility must change when the concept of faith changes. But now there is, at the evangelical-Protestant stage of cultivation, hardly anyone, I should think, who will deny that religious faith (fides religiosa) is essentially different from what is called in the common sense historical faith (fides historica).

Merely historical faith concerns events that in their time were the object of outward, immediate experience, and about which the eyewitness can to that extent be assumed to have had reliable knowledge. Events of this nature all belong under the law-governed order of things that forms the firm foundation of outgoing observations, of sensory experiences. In the apprehension of such events the outer will everywhere be determinative of the inner. The eyewitness has to keep to what has shown itself, to reproduce what was experienced, as a mirror gives the image of the object, not to mix in anything of his own, not to put color on the facts. By meeting these demands an eyewitness is credible. He, on the other hand, who hears or reads the account and thus apprehends the event at second hand, cannot, like the eyewitness, have an immediate knowledge of what was experienced, but must content himself with a faith, a historical faith.

If historical faith now rested solely on an unbounded trust in the individual veracity of the narrating eyewitness, such a faith could not possibly support any scientific

[315] edifice. History would on these terms not be a science. But precisely the circumstance that here there is talk only of facts that are subject to natural conditions and to the universally valid laws of spirit of human life, makes it possible that historical faith can be grounded, in that the accounts are subjected to a criticism, and their credibility is tested.

The credibility of a historical event is sufficiently grounded when it has been made

evident that one cannot deny such an event without denying all history. Probability is the measure of credibility: the more probable an occurrence is, the more credible. But probability is in turn determined by the inner as well as outer connection of the facts adduced. Thus an occurrence, an action, a trait of character, which, torn loose from connection with the rest, would be improbable, can by all-sided, comprehensive comparison become probable. Grounds of probability of tested validity are sufficient for profane history.

Otherwise in sacred history. Here the grounds of probability must be reduced to a subordinate value; for that on which everything depends is the miracle, and the miracle is by its nature the improbable. The difference between a miraculous deed and a plain historical fact is so thoroughgoing that historical faith transforms itself and merges into the religious. It is here, as far as apprehension is concerned, not the outer that immediately determines the inner, it is conversely the inner that essentially determines the outer. Consider whichever of the evangelical miracles one will, then it shows itself at once that the phenomenon, the outer, admits of a double explanation. *[316]* It may be a disappointment, a deception, a strange coincidence, a surprising natural event, and it may be a work of God. Christ raises the dead: the daughter of Jairus (Mtth. 9), the widow's son at Nain (Luk. 7), Lazarus of Bethany (John 11). Of the first two raisings it is now at once evident that they could be explained by the eyewitnesses in two ways: the unbelievers might indeed say that the so-called dead were only apparently dead. As for the raising of Lazarus, the palpability with which the miracle appears has not been able to prevent a part of those present from *having regarded the whole as a deception.* It is expressly said that some of them went to the Pharisees and informed against Jesus, and that the Pharisees and the chief priests, precisely on account of this information, resolved in council that "the seducer of the people" should die. If we consider the miracle of the resurrection[1)], the same thing shows itself. "There was (Mtth. 28) a great earthquake; for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, came and rolled back the stone from the entrance and sat upon it. But his appearance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow. And the guards trembled for fear of him and became as dead." — Immediately after these words one would now suppose that the soldiers on watch really had seen the angel in the lightning and thus had become eyewitnesses of a real miracle. But that this was not the case is clearly evident from this, that the guard let itself be bribed by the chief priests. Had those on watch regarded the whole as anything other than a terrible *[317]*

[1)] Cf. *On Obstacles to and Conditions for Spiritual Life in the Present Age.* Postscript, pp. 297—310.

natural event, they would surely not have had the courage to lie.

If it now lies in the nature of the case that the apprehension of miraculous events is conditioned by the eyewitness's religious faith[1)], then the Evangelists too cannot confine themselves to reporting what they have plainly heard and seen, but must present and describe what they *believed they had heard and seen,* what they really experienced in faith. The sacred history has no foundation of knowledge; it is a history of what was experienced in faith, a history of faith, a history of believers for believers.

From this point of view the ambiguity contained in the interpreter's principles will already begin to show itself. The reverend author emphasizes that the Evangelists' relation to the material that "fills out the evangelical account" cannot have "the same definite firmness and determinateness as where the historian is placed before a historical material in which nothing goes beyond the boundary of the customary and in itself credible"; he maintains, in good agreement with principles (2) and (3), that where the historical content is of so peculiar a character that "the whole moves on the dark, holy ground of mystery," there "the religious way of looking cannot remain without determining influence on the critical assessment of the historical character of the Gospels." Here is the ambiguity. The ambiguous lies in the way in which the religious is combined with the scientific.

[318] By calling religious faith to his aid, the interpreter thinks he has won a sure foothold against those who, in apprehending the miracle as "the plainly contrary to nature, that which is incompatible with the laws of thinking as with those of nature," would maintain "that the evangelical history cannot have taken place in the way it must have, according to the common understanding of the evangelical account." Here it is now at once striking that the author is in the main not really at odds with the opponents he wants with all his might to combat.

The critics who resolutely deny the possibility of miracle (Strauss, Weisse and others) arrive with full scientific consistency at the well-known result: "the divine cannot have happened in this way; what happened in this way cannot be divine." But our interpreter, who has declared himself at odds with the modern thinkers as to the presupposition, has, strangely enough, become agreed, or at least almost partly agreed, with them in the consequence. By holding fast to the separation of what he calls "the outer side of the Gospels and the evangelical core-essence" his

[1)] On the logical impossibility of apprehending a miracle as any other plain historical fact, cf. The Logic of the Fundamental Ideas II, pp. 208—210.

interpretation is, as we have seen above, in all essential points a veiled confirmation of the Straussian proposition: "the divine cannot have happened in this way." The author promises himself something great from the separation he invokes; by it "it will become possible for apologetics victoriously to repel the unwarranted conclusions which anti-evangelical criticism will draw from it." But it will not become possible; anti-evangelical criticism will win precisely on account of the separation; it will ask, and with full right: "what good does it do that something wonderful is assumed to *[319]* have happened here, when one cannot be told what it is that has happened?"

If it is to be more than a figure of speech that the sacred history is a history of revelation, then it is really not admissible to let the supernatural hide in a "mystic half-darkness" and keep itself as "a closed mystery" behind the legendary accounts. To say of the Evangelists' relation to the given material, the material in their narratives, that this relation cannot have "the same definite firmness and determinateness" as that of other historians, is, bluntly, to admit that the evangelical history, strictly speaking, lacks credibility, that the history of revelation is a history that reveals nothing, — lucus a non lucendo.

As a history of revelation the sacred history differs from the profane in this, that it has *religious* faith as its *original and independent principle of cognition.* Revelation and faith are correlative concepts. As revelation is, so is faith, and as faith is, so is revelation; their essentially operative unity is the spirit; but the revealing expression of the spirit is the word. Let us then once more fix our gaze on the supernatural facts, to see what lies in them.

The miracle by its nature cannot possibly be any plain outward object of experience. The sensory eye sees the lightning from heaven, but the eye of faith sees the angels at the grave. The first immediate impression is terror; out of terror understanding is born, and out of understanding the presentation in the word. It is the work of the spirit, and as the spirit is, so is the word. If the word is legend-like and floating, *[320]* without "firmness and determinateness," then the spirit is without certainty, without clarity, without truth; but if there is really truth, historical truth in the working of the spirit, then there is also really truth, historical truth in the word.

The ambiguity of the principles now shows itself from a new side. The reverend interpreter feels full well that the merely scientific principle, which is otherwise sufficient when it is a matter of a criticism of a piece of world history, is by no means sufficient when it is a matter of a criticism of the sacred history. So he calls faith to his aid; but in all indeterminateness, for "the religious way of looking," which "cannot

remain without determining influence on the critical assessment of the historical character of the Gospels," is floating and indeterminate. The scientific is the main thing, faith only an emergency aid, which is to be trimmed to science.

By this, albeit cautious, yet most precarious combining of faith and knowledge the interpreter has prepared for himself a great embarrassment. On the one side he combats the doctrine of myth, "the mythicizing treatment," most vigorously. "An exertion to prove that what the Gospels contain and hand down is not an unconscious or half-conscious pious work of imagination, but an account of a real life-history, real occurrences and deeds," must, he says, "already now be regarded as untimely." Why? Because the way of looking is so unreasonable that the unreasonable is evident of itself. That is indeed gratifying for faith. But the gratification is not particularly great;
[321] for on the other side he combats just as eagerly the old-church way of looking, that we have before us everywhere in the Evangelists' accounts "a real life-history, real occurrences and deeds." It is a necessary concession that must be made to science.

If the reverend author could now only in some way see his way to reconcile the two mutually conflicting ways of looking with each other: then such a reconciliation would be an eloquent proof of the unity of faith with knowledge. But the reconciliation does not come about. "At the same time," he says, "as such strong and such well-founded complaints are raised against the arbitrariness and injustice to which the sacred history is delivered up by the most recent criticism — with all apparent strictness in the scientific form, yet in a little scientific spirit — the serious questions cannot be pushed aside: whether criticism has not been tempted and egged on to so hostile a bearing by an old, often repeated and very pressing challenge from the side of apologetics? whether the apologetic task can be rightly posed…, when it" (Apologetics) "continues, as hitherto, to let faith in the Bible step forth with peremptory language and anathema against every concession of phenomena that point to a human side of Scripture, continues as hitherto to demand an unconditional denial of what every comparative and testing consideration forces upon us as indubitable certainty?" In emphasizing these difficulties the reverend author is perfectly right, and the criticism of the Gospels will yet, after it has long since abandoned his standpoint, with renewed interest return
[322] to his instructive work and always count it to him as true merit that he has honestly counteracted exaggerations and kept a watchful eye on the difficulties.

But that no interpretation, were it ever the most learned, talented and acute, is able from the standpoint here chosen to remove the difficulties pointed out is clear as day. What good does it do to appeal to a "separation of the essential and the unessential,"

when the separation, according to what we have learned from the interpreter's own words, expressly shows that the essential is "a closed mystery," which cannot assume historical form, and the account in its historical form "the mythicizing garb," "the embellishing setting," which goes around "the kernel," the unessential.

Only on the condition that the principle of *faith, and thereby* of revelation is allowed to count for what it is in truth, *the sole decisive principle of cognition of the sacred history,* can the tangled knots be untied. For herein lies: 1) that the elements in the evangelical history are both *outward* — stemming from all that in outer reality was seen and heard and experienced by eyewitnesses — *and inward,* stemming from the individuals' particular apprehension of what they have in faith heard and seen and deeply lived through; 2) that the outward and inward elements are so fused together, worked together and assimilated in the sacred witnesses; *that no criticism is* in a *position to separate them from one another in the final sense;* 3) that the historical, in the events themselves as in the corresponding accounts, is neither a merely outward nor a merely inward reality, but the unity of spirit and truth, of the outward determined *[323]* by its inward, thus *Spiritual Reality, reality for the spirit.*

Under these presuppositions the difficulties can be removed, for the mistaken view from which they spring can be precisely pointed out. The Holy Scripture has, as our reverend interpreter particularly insists, not only its divine but also its human side[1)]. But apologetics and negative criticism are in this respect, in the midst of all their disagreement, precisely agreed in proceeding from the same mistaken view.

Negative criticism misjudges the spirit, goes behind the word, tests the outward facts and discovers such a multiplicity of contradictions and inner discrepancies that the whole must seem incredible. It sets a selfless idea in the place of the spirit and makes the word a myth: here the human has smothered the divine.

Orthodox apologetics nails its dogma fast and makes the evangelical history an infallible work of God's infallible Holy Spirit. But in favor of its assertion it misjudges the spirit, stares at "the outer," goes behind the word and hangs on to the letter. All the events are to be, down to the smallest features, outward, rendered with so outward, photographic exactness that the Holy Spirit must have dictated everything down to jot and letter: here the divine has smothered the human.

Then comes the apologetics of mediation. It will reconcile the human with the *[324]* divine, and hastens to commit the same error as its opponents. Instead of seeking the union of the divine and the human in the spirit through the word, it dissects the

[1)] *On Fundamental Determinations in the Self of the Spirit,* cf. Philosophy of Religion, pp. 458—486.

word, keeps to sentences, overlooks the spirit, the inward, and in the most naive way sets about the outward. It seeks the actual fact outside the word; it peeps and spies, whether it might not here or there catch a glimpse of what the real, the wondrous, actually is that stands behind the account. But all its spying is in vain. The real itself, the wondrous, will not let itself be seen; it is and remains an indeterminable "ground-fact," "a closed mystery": the apologetics of mediation discovers nothing.

For fear of "dualism" the mediating apologetics has entangled itself in the most dangerous dualism of all, the dualism of ambiguities: *one truth in the scientific, another in the edifying; one Gospel at the lectern, another in the pulpit*; *one faith within knowledge, another outside* knowledge. Should it not be time that we got this dualism cleared up. The ambiguities must go! It is not merely a pious wish, a quiet sigh of the heart in the name of faith; it is the demand of enlightenment, the stern command of the wrathful reason, of the spirit of the age in its dark majesty.

"*Cardinal, ich habe das Meinige gethan. Thun Sie das Ihre.*"

R. *Nielsen.*