

THE
WITNESS OF THE GOSPELS

BY
WILLIAM PARK ARMSTRONG, M.A.
PROFESSOR IN PRINCETON SEMINARY

FROM THE PRINCETON THEOLOGICAL REVIEW
JANUARY, 1904

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MR. PRESIDENT AND GENTLEMEN OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS:—It is with a deep sense of its responsibilities that I have accepted your call to the Chair of New Testament Literature and Exegesis. In formally entering upon its duties I am conscious of the greatness of the work, its importance for the Church we serve and its close relation to the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. It is my earnest desire that grace may be given me to be found faithful in the administration of the high trust which you have committed to my charge. I am well aware of its difficulties. They do not, however, weaken my conviction that in loyalty to the pledge which I have taken, in loyalty to the truth as it is given me to see it, in patient and honest investigation, they will provide opportunities for a deeper insight into the manifold wisdom of God.

With a painful appreciation of my own limitations and a keen feeling of my unworthiness to follow in the footsteps of those illustrious men of God, Dr. Charles Hodge, Dr. Joseph Addison Alexander, Dr. Caspar Wistar Hodge and Dr. George Tybout Purves, who here served their Master and are now fallen asleep, I take encouragement both from your call and from the cordial support and sympathy which the Faculty of the Seminary have given me during the four years I have spent in pleasant and grateful association with them. When I first came among them, they were the men whom as a student I had learned to love and respect. Two have now departed. One, the noble scholar, learned instructor and devoutly Christlike man, the Rev. Dr. William Henry Green, who opened to me the Scriptures of the Old Testament. Following him likewise into his rest my friend and beloved teacher whose work I am now called to continue, the Rev. Dr. George Tybout Purves. At his feet I first learned to love with enthusiasm the New Testament of our Lord, and for one brief year I enjoyed the privilege

* Inaugural address delivered before the Board of Directors of Princeton Theological Seminary in Miller Chapel on induction into the Chair of New Testament Literature and Exegesis on Friday, September 18, 1903.

of sharing with him his plans, hopes and labors for this Chair. To his memory, which is blessed among the sons of Princeton Seminary, I gladly and from my heart pay a tribute of love and honor and gratitude, in recognition of his life of self-sacrifice and devotion and of his splendid scholarship, ever aglow with the warmth of close contact with life. His sympathies were wide, his labors unceasing, his ideals of Christian service the noblest and most unselfish, and these, with his enthusiasm for his work, springing from a strong conviction of its value, and his deep interest in men, made him a power for good to all those who knew him. He was always both a teacher and a preacher, teaching us to love truth and reverence it as the revelation of God. He knew its beauty, and might have exclaimed with the Jewish philosopher, *τὸ δ' οὐτως ἐν βίῳ καλὸν ὡς ἀκροασιᾶ.** But he knew also that its relation to life was more vital than the satisfaction of the æsthetic sentiment, touching as it does the very springs of all truly moral and rational life. In seeking truth he taught us to seek God; to cherish every revelation that through it He might make to us; but chiefly to know, revere and trust the revelation which He has been pleased to make through His written Word and in His Son, and through its intimate appropriation to gain sustenance for our spirits, that we might realize in ourselves His purpose to the praise of the glory of His grace. "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." To serve, to know, to love the truth, and thus to serve Christ and God, was the service of freedom which he taught us, and in his life he showed to us its joy. From such a memory I take inspiration as I face the possibilities of the future, thankful for the heritage which through him whom I was permitted to know has come down from the past, and cherishing the hope that the same spirit of loyal devotion to the truth as it is in Christ will continue with me during my work in Princeton Seminary.

I shall not attempt at this time to give an account of Dr. Purves' conduct of the New Testament Chair. One well qualified to speak, himself a New Testament scholar and a classmate and colleague of Dr. Purves, has, as the Faculty's representative, addressed you in commemoration of his services.† It is my desire, however, if only briefly, to make mention of them again. The relation which Dr. Purves sustained to Dr. Caspar Wistar Hodge is well known. For

* *Philo de judice*, M. II, 346.

† An address delivered in Miller Chapel on November 26, 1901, by B. B. Warfield, D.D., LL.D. Cf. *The Bible Student*, Vol. iv, No. 6, December, 1901, pp. 310-323; Purves, *Faith and Life*, Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1902, pp. ix-xxx.

eight years (1892-1900) he strove to maintain in the department of New Testament studies the same high standard of excellence which Dr. Hodge had established, and in the light of the progress of scientific investigation to deepen and broaden the foundations he had laid. By the inauguration in 1893 of a professor of Biblical Theology his work was divided, but in 1899 its needs had again become so pressing that an Instructor in the New Testament was appointed to give opportunity for the further enlargement which he planned.

To those who sat under Dr. Purves his controlling interest seemed to lie in the field of exegesis; and here he revealed careful and exact scholarship, sanity of judgment, thoroughness of method and forcefulness of presentation which made disciples of his pupils. And yet exegesis was with him always a means to an end. With true historical sense he sought by it to understand and interpret to his students the sources of early Christian history, while with this was united the deeper religious interest of one who had made his own the principles of the Protestant Reformation. Hence, while his chief interest and work was directed to the New Testament, he sought to study also with his students the historical environment in which it arose. Even before he came to this Chair, when invited to deliver the L. P. Stone lectures, he chose as his subject *The Testimony of Justin Martyr to Early Christianity*,* thus revealing an interest and an insight into the historical problems surrounding the origin of Christianity which characterized in a marked degree his subsequent work. To this his articles and reviews† bear witness, as does also his admirable book entitled *Christianity in the Apostolic Age*.‡ He loved exegesis and he loved it as a teacher. To it in his classroom he gave himself with compelling intensity which kindled an abiding and commanding interest in the New Testament. Rightly to estimate its effect one must weigh the influence which has gone out through the lives of his students who, scattered throughout the world, bear testimony by their work to his power as a teacher. His work will endure, engraven as it is upon the hearts of the living, and for it Princeton Seminary may well be deeply thankful.

* *The Testimony of Justin Martyr to Early Christianity*. Lectures delivered on the L. P. Stone Foundation at Princeton Theological Seminary in March, 1888. Randolph & Co., New York, 1889.

† Among others *The Presbyterian Review*, October, 1888, p. 529ff.: "The Influence of Paganism on Post-Apostolic Christianity"; *The Presbyterian and Reformed Review*, 1895, p. 239ff.: "The Formation of the New Testament"; *Ibid.*, 1898, p. 23ff.: "The Witness of Apostolic Literature to Apostolic History."

‡ *Christianity in the Apostolic Age*. Charles Scribner's Sons, 1900.

It is fitting that I address you on some theme in the department of New Testament Literature and Exegesis. For purposes of lower criticism the New Testament falls naturally, by reason of the nature of the materials upon which we are dependent, into four sections: the Gospels, the Acts and Catholic Epistles, the Pauline Epistles with Hebrews, and the Apocalypse. Equally natural for purposes of historical study is the twofold division by which our principal sources for the history of the Church in the days of the apostles—the Acts, Epistles and the Apocalypse—constitute, because of their close interrelation, one group; while the Gospels, the chief sources for our knowledge of the life of Christ, may be treated as forming another group. This division, of course, is a broad one, and does not obscure the fact that a very close relation subsists between the Gospels on the one hand and the Acts and the Epistles on the other. The Acts and Epistles contribute much to our knowledge of the life of Christ; while the Gospels, regarded as literary products, fall within the history of the apostolic Church. But if the epistolary literature of the New Testament be in part earlier than the Gospels, and the Gospels fall within the history of the apostolic or post-apostolic Church, there emerges for the student of New Testament literature and exegesis a problem of some importance. Has the testimony of the Gospels been deflected, distorted or discolored by the environment in which they arose, and if so, to what extent? It is my purpose to face this problem, and to consider in some of its aspects the question of the trustworthiness of our Gospels as sources of our knowledge of the life of Christ; or, more briefly stated, my subject is "The Witness of the Gospels." Such a subject may be approached from a number of viewpoints and discussed in many different ways. For my present purpose the discussion may be ordered under two principal lines of thought, namely, the character or nature of the Gospel witness, and its origin in relation to its value.

THE CHARACTER OF THE GOSPEL WITNESS.

The word Gospel (*εὐαγγέλιον*) means good news, though in Aramaic the root *בשר* does not indicate so plainly as the Greek the kind of news.* It occurs frequently both in the Epistles and in the Gospels, where it means a message rather than a book. In the Epistles and Acts it is used of the message which the apostles proclaimed concerning Christ; in the Gospels of the message of

* Dahlmann, *Die Worte Jesu*, S. 84.

Christ concerning the kingdom of God. The apostolic usage continued for some time, and lies at the basis of the titles given to our Gospels. The message concerning Christ was conceived as unitary, and hence the different Gospels were regarded as but different narratives by their several authors of the one Gospel. We have four such Gospels in the New Testament; and out of the differences and the agreements between them arise very intricate and difficult literary and historical problems. It is clear that the fourfold Gospel furnishes us with a twofold message concerning Christ; that of the three synoptics which, whatever be the cause, present the same general features, and that of John.

What are the chief characteristics of this twofold tradition concerning Christ? In order to ascertain them and properly to estimate it, it will be necessary to bear in mind several things. The Gospels are manifestly Christian documents. They were written to meet the needs of the Church, and like the apostolic Gospel-preaching they contain a message about Christ which is at the same time a witness to Christ. What effect this has on their value as trustworthy historical sources we shall consider later. Here it is important to note their close connection with the apostolic idea of the Gospel. In accordance with this, three characteristics of the Gospels in their twofold witness to Christ stand out distinctly: an account of the facts of Christ's life, including the environment in which He lived and the character of His teaching; a very distinct estimate of His person; the significant prominence given to His passion.

Of the synoptic Gospels only Matthew and Luke give the narrative of Christ's supernatural birth. Luke alone gives us a glimpse into the boyhood of our Saviour, and tells us of His normal development during the period previous to His entrance on His public ministry. All three agree in connecting His ministry with that of His forerunner, John the Baptist; and from this point on their representation is in broad outline the same. Matthew's arrangement, however, is topical, and Luke furnishes material not found in either Matthew or Mark. Matthew and Luke, moreover, give us a much fuller account of the teaching of Jesus. But the picture is the same in all. They represent John's work as prophetic and preparatory for the Messianic work of Jesus. After the baptism of Jesus, His temptation in the wilderness and the imprisonment of John, Jesus comes into Galilee. He takes up the call of John to repentance, and adds to it the call to belief in the Gospel which was His own proclamation of the kingdom of

God. We see Him moving through Galilee in a ministry of healing and teaching. He gathers about him a band of disciples; and the people flock to hear him, bringing their sick that He may heal them. In the midst of this popular enthusiasm we are struck by two things: the character of His teaching and His intentional avoidance of the Messianic title. He is training the people and His disciples to appreciate the spiritual character of the kingdom, and His avoidance of the Messianic title may have served simply a pedagogic purpose, or, as is more probable, it may have been practised by Jesus in the control which He exercised over the events of His public Messianic work. It is not long, however, before opposition from the religious leaders of the people, the Pharisees, arises, and the enthusiasm of the people begins to wane. The opposition found its occasion in the neglect by Jesus and His disciples of the Sabbath customs; but this only served to make clear the opposition in principle between the two forms of religious life thus brought into conflict. The legalism which had become all-pervading in the religious life of the nation found itself face to face in the person of Jesus with the denial of its *raison d'être*, and through its accredited representatives it was logically compelled to crush Him. "It was expedient that one man should die for the people."*

From this time Jesus began to devote Himself to the instruction of His disciples, with a view to preparing them for the issue which He foresaw. He continued to speak to the people, but He spoke in parables, while in His relations with His disciples He seems to have been intent upon deepening in them a clear and abiding insight into the significance of His own person for the kingdom which He had been proclaiming. The Pharisees meantime had taken council with the Herodians to kill Him. News of His work had reached Herod; and the feeding of the five thousand had made plain the fact that the old Messianic ideal still controlled the popular mind. Jesus turns now to His disciples. At Cæsarea Philippi He calls forth by His question the confession of Peter. From this time on he seeks to make clear to them that He must suffer and after three days rise from the dead. Jerusalem is now His goal; and here, after having given His disciples further instructions regarding the future and having come into conflict with the Jewish leaders, He is crucified by order of the Roman Procurator, and on the third day rises again.

In the Gospel of John the course of the narrative is somewhat differently ordered. Just as in the synoptic Gospels, Jesus at the

* John xviii. 14.

opening of His ministry is brought into contact with John the Baptist. Here the fourth Gospel adds the testimony of John to Jesus, and tells of a work of Jesus in Jerusalem, Galilee and Judea previous to the imprisonment of John the Baptist. Withdrawing through Samaria He comes into Galilee, but concerning the length of His stay and the nature of His work there we learn little. What strikes us at once in this account of the early ministry of Jesus is not so much the additional information which places the beginning of Christ's ministry earlier than the time mentioned by the synoptics, nor the fact that its scene lies chiefly in and about Jerusalem, but the difference in method. The Messianic claim is here openly witnessed to by John. Christ Himself by cleansing the temple publicly assumes the function of the Messiah, and in His conversation with the woman of Samaria distinctly asserts His Messiahship. His words in the temple* and His conversation with Nicodemus make it clear, moreover, that even at this early time He looked forward to His passion as involved in His Messianic work. Passing over much of the work in Galilee, the fourth Gospel tells us of the beginning of the conflict between Jesus and the rulers in Judea, the question as in the synoptics being the violation of the Sabbath or the fundamental antagonism between Jesus and legalism. In the sixth chapter the fourth Gospel joins the synoptics in the narrative of the feeding of the five thousand. John tells us that Jesus walked in Galilee, for he was unwilling to walk in Judea because the Jews sought to kill Him.† With his interest in the ministry of Jesus at Jerusalem, John tells us of Jesus' visit to the city at the Feast of Tabernacles, and again at the Feast of Dedication. The resurrection of Lazarus constitutes a crisis in Jesus' relation to the leaders at Jerusalem, and from this time on, after the withdrawal to Ephraim, Jesus sets His face to Jerusalem and the last Passover. As in the synoptic Gospels, so in the Gospel of John, Jesus is represented as performing wonderful works of healing. In both He raises the dead. So also in regard to the teaching of Jesus. In both He is a teacher, though the character of the teaching preserved in the two traditions differs markedly both in form and content. In the synoptic Gospels the teaching of Jesus centres chiefly around the kingdom, its character and the conditions of entrance. The form for the most part is gnomic or parabolic. In the fourth Gospel the teaching of Jesus centres about His own person, His relation to God and His own significance for the kingdom which He

* John ii. 19.

† John vii. 1.

was founding. The form is closely related to the nature of the themes discussed, and is thus more theological—informed by direct intuition of spiritual realities.

But beside the general environment in which Jesus' ministry of healing and teaching is set, the Gospel witness contains also an estimate of His person. From the sketch given of the Gospel witness to the character of Christ's ministry, there can be little doubt that the Gospels represent it as Messianic and Christ as the Messiah. Whether Christ Himself claimed to be the Messiah has indeed been questioned, and recently denied by Wrede,* but, as it seems to me, without good ground.† Here, however, we are concerned simply with the fact that the Gospels so represent Him; and for the present we may leave open the question of His own claim. In Matthew and Luke the genealogies trace Christ's line of descent through David. His birth in Bethlehem, the city of David, is significant to Matthew because of its Messianic associations, while Luke connects Christ's birth there directly with the fact that Joseph was of the house of David. In fact, in both Matthew and Luke the whole infancy narrative is controlled by the thought that in this child the long-expected, prophetically proclaimed Messiah had come. The prophetic message is taken up by John the Baptist; and the baptism of Jesus, whatever else it may have meant, certainly, according to the Gospel narrative, signified for Jesus the voluntary assumption of His Messianic work; while the temptation which followed this baptism is represented as a trial of the Messiah in view of His office and prospective work. In His temptation Jesus as the Messiah relates Himself specifically to His future Messianic work by maintaining His loyalty to the spirit of dependence on God, of filial obedience and trust, in which He was determined to fulfill the work to which in the baptism He had just consecrated Himself. However much He may have charged secrecy on those who recognized in Him the Messiah, He nowhere disavows the title. He accepts the confession of Peter; He calls Himself frequently the Son of Man; He is called the Son of David, the Son of God; and by His triumphal entry into Jerusalem He most publicly proclaims His Messianic dignity. In the fourth Gospel the testimony of John the Baptist to the Messiahship of Jesus is given explicitly; and Jesus Himself, from the very opening of His public ministry in Jerusalem, makes definite and distinct claim to be the Messiah.

* *Das Messiasgeheimnis*. 1901.

† Cf. O. Holtzmann, *Das Leben Jesu*, 1901, and *Zeitschrift für die Neutest. Wiss.*, 1901, S. 265; J. Weiss, *Das älteste Evangelium*, 1903.

This representation, in fact, lies so plainly upon the face of the Gospels that it will not be necessary to treat it in detail.

It is important, however, for our conception of this aspect of the Gospel witness to notice, that the character of the Messianic work which Christ performed is intimately bound up with what He was, or with what He is represented by the Gospels to have been. While He came as the Messiah, He did not fulfill His work in the manner popularly expected. His work was through and through self-determined, the conscious carrying out of a purpose definitely formed. Back of His work stands the volition of a person dependent only on God. He is represented distinctly as the creator of His work, never as its product, the child of circumstance; and this is the representation in the synoptic Gospels as well as in John. It is true that we do find adjustment of His work and teaching to the changes which took place in His surroundings during His public ministry, but never a departure from His controlling purpose nor an alteration in the character of His work. It is consistently determined throughout in the interest of moral and spiritual renovation. Hence the central place of His person in His whole work and teaching. In the synoptic Gospels emphasis is laid at first on His message, but it is ever His message through which, by its very character, the dignity of His person and His authority clearly appear. In John's Gospel the determining relation which Christ sustained to His Messianic work is characteristic. From this point it is now not difficult to understand the transcendent significance which the Gospels assign to the person of Christ.

In the opening chapters of the first and third Gospels we find the narratives of His supernatural birth. It is often affirmed that they belong to the secondary strata of Gospel tradition; but here again we are concerned with the representation of our Gospels as they stand; and this must be distinguished from the further questions as to how they came to give such a representation and what value, in view of its origin and character, we may allow to it in forming our view of the actual occurrence. The fact that two of the Gospels contain such narratives constitutes them a part of the Gospel witness and cannot be without significance for its representation of the nature of Christ's person. As we watch the progress of His ministry in the synoptic Gospels, we are impressed by the power which He exercises in the performance of miracles, by the authority with which He speaks, by the spotless purity of His life, by a consciousness in which no trace of a sense of sin can be found, which acknowl-

edges its dependence on God, but knows Him in intimate, unbroken communion. At the request of His disciples He teaches them to pray, embodying in their prayer the petition "forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors"; but in His own prayer-life He does not associate Himself with them. Twice He is represented as the recipient of direct testimony from heaven—at the baptism and on the Mount of Transfiguration. He claims that He is greater than the temple. As He stands before the high priest He not only definitely asserts His Messiahship, but asserts for Himself the prerogative of a seat at the right hand of power—an assertion at once interpreted by His auditors as blasphemy.* Finally, on the third day, He rises from the dead, and after being seen by His disciples, He ascends to heaven. In view of this representation of the course of His ministry and characteristics of His life, there can be little doubt that underlying their representation of the Messiahship of Jesus there is a deeper and more fundamental estimate of His person, which conceived of Him as by nature sustaining a unique relation to God and thus, in respect of being, the Son of God. The Messianic implications of this term should not obscure to us the fact that in the Gospels there is this deeper meaning given to it which does not always appear, but which is bound up with their account of who this Messianic Son of God really was.

In the fourth Gospel this view of the transcendent significance of Christ's person is not merely the view of the author of the Gospel. It is represented also as that to which Christ in His whole activity of miracle-working and teaching bears witness. The prologue of the Gospel begins with an account of the pre-existent Logos, describing His relation to God as direct and immediate,† and His essential nature as divine. Then follows an account of His activity, His incarnation and the witness of John the Baptist, together with that of the author. The identification of the Logos with Jesus Christ, concerning whom the fourth Gospel is written, is made in ver. 14. Whatever be the source of the form of the Logos-doctrine—whether it came to John from Philo's doctrine of the Logos or from the Jewish Memra—John has given to it a content distinctively his own by connecting it directly with the historical person of Jesus Christ. It was, moreover, well adapted to convey his idea, for it cannot escape us that what John is here intent upon emphasizing is not simply the divine origin of the person of Jesus

* Mark xiv. 61f.

† The preposition *πρὸς* suggesting the idea of mutual intercourse between persons (Aall, *Gesch. der Logosidee*, II, S. 111).

Christ—the description of Him as a unique pre-existent divine being standing in closest relation of loving complacency to God, and in the ultimate character of His being, God; but with this also the idea of His revelation-character as the mediator of true knowledge concerning God. As between finite spirits the word performs a most important function in common intercourse, so in the revelation of God to men which John describes as light, the mediator was the word incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ—for the enlightening work of revelation made sufficient by His relation both to God and to men. Of both He had intimate knowledge, being with God in the bosom of His Father and being God—being also the agent in Creation and the light of men. For this conception John had, beside the natural basis in the spiritual significance of the word as a means of communion, also the fact that the Old Testament Scriptures were to him the word of God*—possibly also before John wrote the designation “word of God” (*ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ*) had been applied to the Gospel message†—while Philo, following the Greek philosophers, especially Heraclitus, gave it a prominent place in his system of thought. John, however, by identifying the eternal Logos, conceived not abstractly as wisdom or reason but personally, with the incarnate Christ, gives to it its peculiar Christian content. For though Philo sometimes personified the Logos, it meant with him an abstract conception without Messianic associations, certainly without definite identification of the Logos with the Messiah.‡ Whether John was the first to make this identification or not we do not know. It has been urged that the way in which the Gospel opens suggests that the connection of the Logos with Christ had already been made. The Logos-doctrine was certainly current. Hence, John does not affirm there is a Logos, and this Logos is Christ. He seems intent rather upon defining its content or fixing the predicates which, in view of the identification which had been made or which he proposed to introduce, could under it be made of Christ. §

That the prologue of the fourth Gospel gives us the idea of its author about Christ is rendered certain from the first Epistle of John. || Is this, however, the view which obtains throughout the Gospel? Opinions differ as to the relation of the prologue to the

* Cf. x. 35, v. 38. Cf. also Heb. iv. 12; 1 Peter i. 2; James i. 18.

† Holtzmann, *Handkommentar*, S. 32; Weizsäcker, *Das Apostolische Zeitalter*, S. 32; Harnack, *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, 1892, S. 223^f.

‡ Aall, *Geschichte der Logosidee*, I. S. 213f.; II, S. 110. 146^o.

§ Cf. Harnack, *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, 1892, S. 222f.

|| i. 1-4. Cf. also Apoc. xix. 13.

rest of the Gospel. On the one hand, it is said to contain the key to the Gospel, being a summary or the quintessence of the Gospel. The Gospel would thus appropriately be called the Logos-Gospel, and the Christ whom it portrays the Logos-Christ. The Gospel has, according to this view, been constructed under the influence of an idea, its whole narrative being controlled by and in explication of this idea.* On the other hand, the prologue is said to constitute only the introduction to the Gospel, the Logos-doctrine being dropped after the eighteenth verse. "The prologue of the Gospel," says Harnack, † "is not the key to the understanding of the Gospel, but rather prepares the Greek readers for this. It takes up a known thing (Grösse), the Logos, works it over and reshapes it, attacking implicitly false Christologies, in order to substitute for it Jesus Christ, the *μονογενὴς θεός*, or rather to disclose it as this Jesus Christ. When this has been accomplished, from that moment on the Logos-idea is dropped. The author tells only of Jesus for the purpose of grounding the faith that He is the Messiah, the Son of God." One thing is clear: John does not place in the mouth of Jesus the *terminus technicus* of the Logos-doctrine. For though the term Logos recurs frequently in the Gospel, both in the narrative portions and in the words of Jesus, in no instance after the prologue is it used in the technical sense which it there has. From this it would appear that the author knew how to distinguish between his own thought about Jesus and the words of Jesus which he records. The two, it is true, are often very closely related, especially in respect of form, and John frequently intentionally adds to the words of Jesus words of his own. ‡ It would be wrong, however, to infer from this that the prologue stood in no close relation to what follows. The dropping of the technical use of *ὁ λόγος* is significant, but chiefly from a formal point of view. In the prologue the term Logos is a central unifying idea, under which a number of ideas are subsumed which give it its content—ideas such as life, light, truth and the relation of the personal Logos to God and

* Baur, Holtzmann, Weizsäcker and Schmiedel

† *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, 1892, S. 230f: Der Prologue des Evangeliums ist nicht der Schlüssel zum Verständniss des Evangeliums. Sondern er bereitet die hellenischen Leser auf dieses vor. Er knüpft an eine bekannte Grösse, den Logos, an, bearbeitet ihn und gestaltet ihn um—falsche Christologien implicite bekämpfend—um ihm Jesus Christus, den *μονογενὴς θεός*, zu substituieren resp. ihn als diesen Jesus Christus zu enthüllen. Von dem Momente an, wo dies geschehen ist, ist der Logosbegriff fallen gelassen. Der Verfasser erzählt nur noch von Jesus, um den Glauben zu begründen, dass er der Messias, der Sohn Gottes sei.

‡ Cf. also I Cor. xi. 26.

to the world. These ideas, however, recur in the subsequent description. On the other hand, the view which finds in the prologue the formative idea of which the Gospel is simply an elaboration cast in the form of history, rests on a particular theory regarding the origin of the prologue. If the prologue be the result of reflective speculation cast in the form of the Alexandrian philosophy, then the Gospel must likewise be interpreted as ideal history. This, however, unduly exalts the purely formal side and has to face the fact, that the central and controlling idea, as technically formulated in the term *ὁ λόγος*, plays no part in the subsequent narrative. If we banish the background of history from the prologue, they are most logical who banish it also from the Gospel.* Another account of the origin of the prologue will enable us to do greater justice to the Gospel as it stands complete together with the prologue. We will seek its genesis in the history which follows—a history which had long been the cherished tradition of the Church; which had already found written expression in the synoptic Gospels, of which Matt. xi. 27f. was an integral part; and thus ultimately in the person of Jesus Himself. In the history which follows we find that Christ is identified with His gifts. He is Life and Light and Truth. As in the synoptics, He works miracles and is distinctly declared to be the Messiah. He receives the Spirit at His baptism, and bears the titles Son of Man and Son of God. His heavenly origin constitutes one of the features of John's Gospel. In dependence on God, who had sent Him, and therefore making God's will the inner law of His life, He is yet conscious of unity with God—"I and the Father are one."† Here, then, even more clearly than in the synoptic Gospels, I think we shall find underlying the whole witness of the fourth Gospel to Christ not merely the Messianic idea, but with it also the deeper conception of the real nature of Christ's person to which the prologue bears unmistakable testimony. And this not simply as the view of the author. It is represented as that to which Christ Himself bears witness in word and work.

The third characteristic of the Gospel witness to which I desire to call attention is the prominence given in all our Gospels to the passion of Jesus. In itself it is so apparent as scarcely to require proof. If we take Caesarea Philippi as marking the time when the

* The one view destroys the significance of the prologue, the other destroys the significance of the rest of the Gospel.

† John x. 30; cf. Lütgert, "Die johanneische Christologie," *Beiträge zur Förderung christlicher Theologie*, III, 1899.

passion-idea explicitly emerges in the synoptic Gospels, though there are traces of it earlier,* we shall find that in Matthew chapters xvi. 21–xxviii. 20, in Mark chapters viii. 31–xvi. 8, and in Luke chapters ix. 22–xxiv. 53, or about half of the synoptic Gospels, are devoted to this period; or if we take the arrival of Jesus in Bethany before the last Passover as the actual beginning of the passion-narratives, we find ourselves in the synoptic Gospels at Matt. xxvi, Mark xiv and Luke xxii; or if we begin with Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem, at Matt. xxi, Mark xi and Luke xix. 28f. In the fourth Gospel the passion idea appears at the very beginning (ii. 19), and in chapter xii Jesus is in Bethany six days before the last Passover. The details of this period in Christ's life are more numerous, and with the exception of the feeding of the five thousand, which constituted the Galilean crisis, it is the only period for which we have four parallel sources. We have already noticed how soon both in the synoptic narratives and in that of John the leaders begin to plot His death.

My purpose in calling attention to this fact is to seek from it the light which it should throw on the character of the Gospel witness. Being a marked and characteristic feature, it cannot be without significance for our idea of this witness, which must in turn affect our conception of the nature of the Gospels. It will be important, therefore, to notice that the passion-narrative of the Gospels, both in its prophetic announcement and in its subsequent realization, has a twofold issue. The passion of which the Gospels tell us is suffering and death followed by resurrection. It is represented, moreover, as the passion of Him whom, in their whole narrative, they declare to have been the Messiah. The passion is accepted by Him voluntarily in the fulfillment of His Messianic work, and is therefore set forth by them as an integral part, the culmination of that work. Jesus is to them the Messiah, realizing His work through suffering and crowned with victory by the resurrection. His death follows as the result of His consistent adherence throughout His public ministry to the principles which determined His work and made it what it was. Hence its fundamental significance and hence the prominence which is assigned to it in the Gospel witness.

But what was there in the nature of Christ's work which thus made His death an integral part of it? Was it simply that His teaching differed from that of the religious leaders of Israel, that it exhibited a fundamental opposition to their legalism, and that

* Cf. Mark ii. 20.

His death was the result of unfavorable circumstances, like that of many a reformer? Or is there a deeper reason lying in the nature of His Messianic work? Such a reason is not fully formulated in the Gospels, but we may find a hint of it in their connecting of Christ's work with sin. John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus, preached a baptism of repentance unto the remission of sins (Mark i. 4), and proclaimed the coming of the Messiah, who should baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. Jesus began to preach in Galilee, saying, "Repent and believe in the Gospel," and throughout His ministry He is represented as having authority to forgive sins.* In Mark x. 45 we read, "For verily the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many,"† the idea of ransom (*λύτρον*) being most naturally connected through that of sacrifice with sin. In the Gospel of John we find in the testimony of the Baptist to Jesus the words, "Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world!"‡ In most of these instances Christ's relation to sin is represented as one of personal authority over it. To the passage in Matthew (Matt. xx. 28) which connects this with His death should be added the words uttered by Christ at the institution of the Supper on the eve of His death (Matt. xxvi. 27f.): "And he took a cup, and gave thanks, and gave to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is shed for many unto remission of sins."§ These hints are sufficient to establish the fact that Christ's Messianic work had reference to sin, and that in it as thus conceived His death played an important part. If Jesus spoke of His sufferings beforehand to ears hard of understanding, the Gospels give clear evidence that His words were not forgotten in circles where the memory of the past was faithfully cherished, and that His suggestions as to the relation of His sufferings to sin were not neglected.||

The results of our analysis of the character of the Gospel witness may be briefly summed up. It tells us of Jesus of Nazareth; how He lived and wrought and taught in Jerusalem and Galilee. It tells us that this Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah. It tells us that He sustained a unique relation to God by nature and not by His Messianic work only. It tells us that He suffered and rose again. It gives to His sufferings an important place in the nar-

* Mark ii. 5f.; cf. also Matt. i. 21, Luke i. 77, vii. 47, xxiv. 47.

† Cf. Matt. xx. 28; John x. 11.

‡ John i. 29.

§ Mark and Luke do not have *εις ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν*

|| Cf. Luke xxiv. 47, and in opening chapters of Acts.

rative of His work, and suggests a connection between His work and the forgiveness of sin. The period covered by this witness is chiefly that of the public ministry of Jesus; only Matthew and Luke giving glimpses of His infancy, while John gives a vision of the eternal background from which Christ came to take up His Messianic work. But John, like the synoptists, is concerned to trace this work only from its official assumption by Jesus.

From these facts we may draw certain conclusions about the nature of the Gospels which contain the witness. They are manifestly not intended to be biographies or to furnish us with a scientific life of Jesus. They are rather witnesses to the life and work of Jesus, chiefly during His public ministry. What is narrated beyond this—the infancy narratives in Matthew and Luke and the prologue in John—has distinct reference to it. They are thus witnesses to the person and work of Jesus as Founder of the Christian religion, to the facts and forces which centred in the person from whom it took its origin. They were written by men who were Christians and are thus essentially Christian documents. Drawing either from their own immediate knowledge or from the sources which were accessible to them, these men wrote the Gospel narratives primarily for the Church and for the purpose of confirming faith.* So far as their narratives are history, therefore, they wrote history with a religious motive or purpose. They wrote for faith, and in the interest of the faith which they shared. This faith may have been without basis in fact; but as we can scarcely charge the evangelists with intention to deceive, we must, on the hypothesis of deception, hold that they were themselves unconsciously deceived. Where, then, shall we seek the cause of this deception—in Jesus or in the evangelists? And if there be deception, to what extent has it affected their narrative? Does it extend to the narrative of fact—for much of which we have only their testimony, which in turn is part of their belief—or does it extend simply to their estimate of Christ's person, or again, does it extend only to the miraculous? If we are successfully to separate the trustworthy and the untrustworthy in their witness, we must have some sure canon of criticism to guide us. The first condition, however, of fair criticism is a fair estimate of what the Gospels are, as the only safe ground from which to estimate their value. To set up an arbitrary standard and judge them deficient because they do not conform to it is to condemn them without a hearing, and must result in an altogether unfair estimate of their real significance.

* Luke i. 4, John xx. 30.

Being what they are, can we trust their witness? This raises for us another line of thought which I propose to consider in one of its aspects. Since much will depend in our answer to this question on the view we take of the way in which the Gospel witness came to be what it is, it is important to treat briefly the origin of this witness in relation to its value.

THE ORIGIN OF THE GOSPEL WITNESS IN ITS BEARING ON THE VALUE OF THAT WITNESS.

This genetic question cannot be thoroughly discussed apart from the question of the origin of the documents in which this witness is contained; and this in turn involves the intricate problem of their mutual relations. The neglect of this feature was one of the chief defects of the pre-Tübingen criticism of the Gospels, and, strangely enough, is characteristic likewise of the neo-Tübingen criticism of the Gospels by Prof. Schmiedel. Into the details of the origin of the Gospels it will not be possible to enter now. In general, two questions may be distinguished; the when and the how, or the time and the manner of origin. Concerning the former, I shall assume the second half of the first century as a fact sufficiently established by historical criticism and widely recognized; I shall assume also that the synoptic Gospels are earlier than the fourth Gospel. Concerning the latter, I shall be compelled to limit myself to the single problem of the influence of environment or purpose on the general product called the witness of the Gospel whose character I have just discussed.

That the witness of the Gospels purports to be historical will scarcely be denied. Opinions may differ as to the extent of its historicity. In case historicity be denied *in toto*, then some satisfactory account must be given not only of how it came into existence, but also of how it obtained such wide and early acceptance. In case varying degrees of historicity be allowed, some satisfactory canon for separating what is true from what is false in its representation must be established. The first possibility may, I think, be neglected. The Gospels reflect too plainly the political, geographical, social and religious situation of the first century for historical criticism ever successfully to deny that historical elements were woven into their very structure. Historical persons known to us from other sources appear in these pages and each in his own character and place. Hence from early times, among those who have given the subject serious consideration, critical opinion has either accepted their witness as trustworthy

or, on the premise of partial historicity, sought to determine how much is historical.

The early Fathers—who are sometimes spoken of contemptuously as deceived deceivers,* while again the pre-Eusebian age receives high praise as being almost as familiar as we are with the higher criticism in both its forms, historical as well as literary†—accepted the Gospel witness as trustworthy. Papias wrote a Commentary on the Gospels, adding in exposition of them traditions of a trustworthy kind from disciples of the Lord. Justin Martyr made extensive use of them. His disciple, Tatian, used the four Gospels in constructing a harmony. From the time of Irenæus, Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian, they were extensively used, not only as trustworthy, but as the authoritative court of appeal in argument with opponents. But even at this time there were not wanting those who denied the complete trustworthiness of the Gospel witness. Some of the Gnostic sects accepted one of the Gospels, some another (Iren., c. h. iii, 11, 7). Marcion in particular received only Luke, whose text he subjected to critical purification on the ground that it had been corrupted by the Church in the interest of its doctrine. Marcion's text thus subjectively reconstructed found favor for a time with a number of modern scholars, such as Ritschl, Baur and Schweigler, who claimed for it priority to our text; while van Manen posits for Marcion's Luke and our Luke a common source. Within the Tübingen School, however, exception to Baur's view was taken by Volkmar and Hilgenfeld; while Dr. Sanday‡ has pointed out that in those passages of Luke which are not found in Marcion's Gospels there are found the same characteristics of style and diction which mark the body of the Gospel common to Marcion and the supposed Catholic enlargement. But if the principle which underlies Marcion's attack on the text of Luke be discredited, then his rejection of the other Gospels can have little weight in our estimate of them. Among the later Fathers, Augustine and Chrysostom gave attention principally to the interrelation of the Gospels; and during the mediæval and Reformation periods likewise the historico-genetic problem received no adequate discussion. Signs of a change began to appear in the French scholar R. Simon (+1712) and in Semler (+1791) of Halle. In 1828 Paulus sought in his *Leben Jesu* to apply the principles of

* Corssen, "Monarch. Prologue," *T. u. U.*, XVII, S. 109, n. 1. Cf. Julicher, *Göttingische gelehrte Anzeigen*, 1896, S. 811f.

† Bacon, "The Johannine Problem," *Hibbert Journal*, 1903, p. 179.

‡ *The Gospels in the Second Century*, p. 204ff.

rationalism to the interpretation of the Gospels, explaining the miracles as due to natural causes. Here must also be mentioned Bretschneider, who in his *Probabilia* (1820) attacked the historicity of the fourth Gospel. About this time Schleiermacher was lecturing in Berlin on the life of Christ (1819, edition 1864). But though he held the fourth Gospel to be more homogeneous than the synoptic Gospels, which were in his opinion fragmentary aggregates wanting in chronological arrangement,* and thus assigned to the fourth Gospel an important rôle in his constructive work, he still exercised an *a priori* criticism of the contents of the Gospels, rejecting much of the miraculous† and explaining the rest in a manner much akin to the rationalism of Paulus.‡ This period was brought to a close and the impetus for a new discussion of our theme was given by the appearance in 1835 of Strauss' *Leben Jesu*.

In this book Strauss sought to ground his rejection of the Gospel witness by a theory of mythical origin. The Christ of the Gospels was the creation of the imagination of the Church; the myths concerning Him, having grown during the period of oral transmission, were embodied in the Gospels. The advance made by Strauss consists in his adding to the rejection of miracle or its rationalizing explanation a theory to explain the origin of the content of the Gospels. The Messianic idea furnished a starting-point, a motive, and the mythical imagination of the Church created the Christ of the Gospels. It cannot escape us that what we have in our Gospels, according to this criticism, is ideal history, or history written under the formative influence of an idea. There is thus a manifest purpose or tendency. Strauss called the product myth rather than legend, and did not attempt any careful separation of the historical minimum underlying it. His criticism of the content of the Gospels gave, however, no satisfactory account of the Gospels, § and though in the new edition of his *Leben Jesu*|| he adopted the general results of the Tübingen criticism, he still showed little appreciation of or historical insight into their character and origin.

Baur and his school, though still making the impossibility of miracle an axiom of historical criticism, sought to understand the Gospels as literary products of the first two centuries. When so regarded the Gospels are seen to reflect the conditions

* *Leben Jesu*, S. 401.

† The supernatural birth, S. 51, and ascension, S. 500.

‡ The resurrection explained by lethargy, S. 413f.

§ Cf. Holtzmann, *Einleitung*, S. 348.

|| 1864.

under which they were written, thus furnishing us with an objective standard for separating the earlier elements from the perverting influence of a later time. In the application of such a standard it is manifestly of the highest importance to fix accurately the forces and characteristics of the apostolic and post-apostolic ages of the Church's history. Fundamental and determining for this, in Baur's view, was the division of the Church into two antagonistic parties--the Jewish-Christian or particularistic party, with the original apostles and James at its head, and the Pauline or universalistic party, with Paul and his followers at its head. The opposition between the two parties was at first bitter, but gradually grew less and less until, under the pressure of heresy from within and persecution from without, the two were merged into the early Catholic Church. The literary remains of the first two centuries reflect this controversy in its different stages, and hence the necessity of determining the tendency of a document in order to ascertain its date and relative historicity. In the hands of this criticism our Gospels became party documents, Matthew representing the Jewish Christian, Luke the Pauline party, Mark, according to Baur, representing a later conciliatory stage, while John brought into synthetic unity earlier elements by regarding them from a higher plane. Where the idea or tendency was not consistently carried through, traces of redaction were discovered.

Baur's results have been modified by his followers, and Ritschl, at one time a disciple of Baur, has pointed out that Baur gave to Jewish Christianity an undue significance for the development of the apostolic and post-apostolic Church, the literary evidence demanding rather the view that Gentile Christianity was its constructive and organizing factor. The Dutch school, moreover, following the eccentric results of Bruno Bauer, but by a different method, reject entirely the Hegelian conception of development by antithesis which underlies Baur's whole theory, and substitute for it that of a gradual development from the simple and homogeneous to the heterogeneous and complex; they thus invert the order of the second and third stages in Baur's theory. Wider knowledge of early Christian literature has also necessitated an earlier dating of our Gospels, thus introducing uncertainty into a system which determines this under the influence of *a priori* categories. The tendency criticism of the Gospels, which regarded them as party documents, being bound up with a particular theory of the development of the Church in the apostolic and post-apostolic ages, and having no greater stability than the

theory of which it was a part, failed to supply an adequate norm for separating the trustworthy from the untrustworthy elements in the Gospel witness. It was not strange, therefore, that, becoming skeptical of *a priori* systems, criticism turned its attention to the Gospels themselves, and sought by literary analysis to discover their sources. Recognizing that the Gospels were products of the apostolic age, it was seen that whatever influence the environment in which they were written may have had on them, the materials from which they were composed must have come from an earlier time. The fixity of form which, with all their variations, characterizes the synoptic Gospels could not but commend this method, and at the same time it focused attention on these Gospels as the field in which sure results might be most certainly expected. The synoptic problem, which is by no means new, thus received a new prominence at the hands, among others, of Weizsäcker, Holtzmann and B. Weiss, and more recently of Wernle. Similarly also the fourth Gospel has been subjected to a like method of treatment by Wendt.

That the evangelists were students of Gospel history before they became contributors will scarcely be denied by those who admit any basis of fact in their narratives. Those, therefore, who were not eye-witnesses must have gained their information about the facts which they narrate indirectly, either through oral or through written sources. That this was the case may be seen quite clearly in the prologue to the third Gospel, where the author tells us of the status of his subject at the time of writing, mentioning the work of his predecessors, his own investigation, the standard which he has adopted, and finally speaking of his purpose in writing. We thus learn then that the author of the third Gospel had predecessors, with whose work he was most probably acquainted, but that for him, as for them, the normative source guaranteeing the trustworthiness of the narrative was the *παρεξέδοσαν* of those who from the beginning were *ᾠτόησαν καὶ ἠκηροῦσαν . . . τὸν λόγον*.* But granting the use of sources both written and oral, the determination of these must remain very largely hypothetical. In broad outline an agreement may be reached; but with little to guide us save a comparative induction, conclusions as to details depending so largely on the personal equation will remain uncertain. Dr. Weiss' "apostolic source" impresses others as a torso without natural beginning or satisfactory ending. Holtzmann held one theory of the Urmarkus

* Zahn's inference that the prologue excludes the knowledge on Luke's part of a Gospel written by an apostle seems to me justified (*Einleitung*, II, S. 364).

source, Weizsäcker another. Eventually Holtzmann withdrew the Urmarkus theory altogether.* Wernle posits an original Greek Logia source, coming from the circle of the original apostles, used by both Matthew and Luke. Before it reached Matthew, however, it had passed through the hands of a number of redactors (Q^1 , Q^2 , Q^3), one of whom (Q^1) gave to it its Judaistic tone.† In the fourth Gospel, where we have no comparative results to direct us, the separation of its sources is even more problematical; while the manifest unity in diction and style leaves such an analysis without formal support in the Gospel.

If, however, such an analytic study of the Gospels should not only discover for us the fact that there are sources lying back of and imbedded in our Gospels, but should also, in a measure, determine what they are in general and their history, the problem of separating the trustworthy from the untrustworthy in the Gospel witness will have been pushed but one step further back. The deflecting influence may have been introduced by the evangelists, and if so, we shall have solved the problem when we have identified and set aside so much of their contribution as served this end. Or the deflecting influence may have found its way into the sources before they reached the evangelists, and if so, it must be eliminated. Then the residuum will constitute the Gospel witness in its purity. Such a separation cannot, however, be carried through, either in the Gospels or in their sources, without some principle of discrimination. This may be sought either objectively, after the manner of Baur, in the history of which the Gospels form a part; or subjectively, in some idea which shall furnish us with the key to the problem. Faith in a particular solution of the synoptic problem underlies the one form, skepticism in regard to any solution of it the other.

Weizsäcker, who has contributed materially to the study of the synoptic Gospels in his advocacy of the two-document hypothesis, conceives of the sources of these Gospels as products of the early Jerusalem Church. In this environment, the centre of living tradition about the life and teaching of Christ, the sources of the Gospels grew, and, before the destruction of Jerusalem, had taken on so fixed a form that the authors of the Gospels introduced very few changes into them, the composition of the Gospels falling after the creative period in the history of the Gospel tradition. To understand the Gospels we must under-

* *Einleitung*, S. 350.

† *Die syn. Frage*, S. 231.

stand the growth of their sources, and this must be studied in the environment from which they came, the early Jerusalem Church. Such a study will, moreover, serve a twofold purpose. Not only will it disclose to us how the Gospel tradition grew; it will shed light also on the Jerusalem Church by recovering for us documents which were formed in accordance with her needs, and upon which these needs in some instances exercised a creative influence. Following on the oral tradition, the sources of the Gospels began to take on a fixed or written form with the spread of missionary activity from Jerusalem into the diaspora. First the words of Jesus were collected and organized into groups, then came a narrative collection likewise organized into definite groups. The two sources of the synoptic Gospels thus grew to meet the needs of believers who required the information about Jesus which was current in the Jerusalem Church. In these two sources as used in the Gospels different strata may be discovered by bearing in mind their Jerusalem origin. In the Logia as preserved by Matthew, prominence is given to Christ's opposition to the Pharisees and Scribes, and to their piety, reflecting the separation of the Jerusalem Church from Judaism and its authorities. In the Logia of Luke, however, prominence is given to the poor, reflecting a later time in the life of the Church. The Gospel sources are, however, not only reflections of the condition of the Jerusalem Church—emphasizing in the teaching of Jesus what was valuable for her life in its different stages—they are in some instances the direct result of her creative activity, as in the parable of the tares.* Significant is the following statement: "From the beginning the tradition consisted not in mere repetition, but in repetition combined with creative activity."† Similarly also in the narrative sources. Written in Jerusalem with a practical purpose, little attention was given to chronological arrangement, and as the events are localized principally in Galilee, there was of necessity an ideal projection which resulted in generalities, such as the mountain, the sea, the city and the desert. Here also different strata in the tradition appear. The narratives of the first stratum show Jesus in His regular activity—in the work of His calling, in His intercourse with all sorts of men. The later stratum is characterized by symbolical representation or allegory, and is best seen in such narratives as the feeding of the five and four thousand and the transfiguration. The faith which created these narratives used them as the means of expressing what it had in

* *Das apostolische Zeitalter*, S. 384.

† S. 393, English translation, II, p. 62.

Jesus. Jesus had become the subject of teaching (*Lehre*), so that this form of teaching was intended not as history but as the symbolical representation of His nature. Conservation and free development went hand in hand in the narrative as in the *Logia* source, revealing a development which as compared with other lines, such as the Ebionite, has the merit of being consistent.*

Such a view is manifestly less burdened than was Baur's with a particular theory of the development of apostolic history. It gains in consistency by limiting both locally and temporally the formative influences which produced the synoptic Gospels. It has the merit of seeking to understand the Gospels in relation to their environment, and it commands our assent in fixing upon the Jerusalem Church before the year seventy for the origin of the material which underlies their common tradition. In regard to the nature and extent of this influence Weizsäcker's view seems less objective. Of fundamental importance in his theory is the distinction between reproductive and creative tradition. If this be established by evidence, he will have discovered the principle of separation which, on the theory of partial trustworthiness, is needed in order to account for the Gospels and their witness. Among the instances of creative tradition Weizsäcker cites the fact that Luke omits the cursing of the fig tree and replaces it by the parable of the fig tree.† From the fact that Peter and John were still active when the narrative of the transfiguration took on fixed form in Jerusalem, he infers its symbolical or allegorical character.‡ Such inferences may seem possible to some, but they furnish at best but an uncertain basis for so far-reaching a principle.

Schmiedel has less faith in the solution of the synoptic problem. He says: "The great danger of any hypothesis lies in this, that it sets up a number of quite general propositions on the basis of a limited number of observations, and thus has to find these propositions justified, come what may." § Or again: "We have to reckon with an immense range of possibilities, and thus security of judgment is lost."|| Manifestly some other course must be followed. "On the one hand, we must set on one side everything which for any reason, arising either from the substance or from considerations of literary criticism, has to be regarded as doubtful or as wrong; on the other hand, we must make search for all such data as, from

* *Das apostolische Zeitalter*, 369ff.

† S. 396.

‡ S. 397.

§ *Ency. Bib.*, s. v. Gospels, Vol. II. col. 1868.

|| c. 1869.

the nature of their contents, cannot possibly on any account be regarded as inventions."* Such is the principle proposed for determining the credibility of the Gospels, quite independently of "the determination of a problem so difficult and perhaps insoluble as the synoptical is." The method recommended is a simple twofold procedure: Reject the wrong, or the false; accept the true. The principle to guide us in detecting the false is any reason arising from the substance or from considerations of literary criticism which necessitates such a judgment. The principle for discovering the true is even more simple. The true is that which cannot be false, and that which cannot be false is that which cannot possibly on any account be regarded as an invention. In the application of this method to the Gospels the first principle discovers in the chronological framework, the order of the narrative, the occasions of the utterances of Jesus, the places and persons, the supposed indications of the conditions of a later time, the miracle narratives and the resurrection so large an element of the false or wrong as "to raise a doubt whether any credible elements" are "to be found in the Gospels at all." With this feature of Schmiedel's criticism we are brought to the point of passing over from the theory of partial trustworthiness to that of the entire untrustworthiness of the Gospel witness. By his second principle, however, a few fragments are saved from the general wreckage, and to these the high quality of absolute trustworthiness is attributed. If one principle brings the Gospels to the verge of destruction, the other exalts what it saves to a region beyond the sphere of doubt, very much as Steck comforts us for the loss of the four major epistles of Paul with the words: "If everything is unguenuine, then nothing is any longer unguenuine"† It will be clear that the passages saved by this principle will receive from it no greater credibility than the principle itself possesses. Since then it is supposed to furnish us with the criterion of absolute credibility, we cannot be wrong in regarding it as the fundamental principle in Schmiedel's criticism. If it commend itself as satisfactory and adequate, then it will have given us what we have been seeking in the theories of partial trustworthiness—a safe and sure principle

* c. 1872.

† *Der Galaterbrief*, S. 385: "Ist alles unecht so ist nichts mehr unecht. Die ganze Frage hört dann auf. Man streitet sich nicht mehr über Echtheit oder Unechtheit der neutestamentlichen Schriften, sondern man sucht eine jede aus ihrem Inhalt zu verstehen und in die Geschichte des Urchristentums an der Stelle einzureihen wo sie diesem nach hingehört."

of separation. The identification and removal of the great mass of the untrustworthy will not greatly concern us if we have in our hands a sure instrument for determining the trustworthy.

The real nature of the principle will appear in its application to the Gospels. The Gospels were written by worshipers of Jesus. They must therefore be estimated as a profane historian would estimate an historical document which testified to the worship of a hero unknown to other sources. First and foremost importance will be attracted to those features which cannot be deduced merely from the fact of this worship, for they would not be found in the document unless the author had met with them as fixed data of tradition.* The grounds of this reverence for Jesus are the two great facts that Jesus had compassion for the multitude and that He preached with power, not as the Scribes.† Briefly stated, the Gospel authors wrote for the glorification of Jesus;‡ anything not in accord with this purpose still preserved in their narratives must therefore have come to them in a fixed tradition, since their purpose bars the possibility of their having created it. § Reduced to its lowest terms, this principle may be formulated somewhat as follows: Incongruity with manifest tendency is the test of historicity. Contravention of an author's purpose is the ground of absolute credibility. The result of the application of this principle to the Gospels is the separation of five absolutely credible passages which, along with four others, might be called the foundation pillars of a truly scientific life of Jesus.¶ Of these passages Mark x. 17ff. will serve best for illustration. Jesus is represented as saying, "Why callest thou me good? None is good save one, even God." This must be absolutely authentic, because the author of the Gospel, in view of his purpose, could not have invented it. An interesting parallel to this, supported by a similar principle of criticism, is the passage in the Gospel to the Hebrews:¶¶ "Behold, the mother of the Lord and his brothers said to him, John the Baptist baptizes unto the remission of sins. Let us go and be baptized of him. But he said to them, In what have I sinned, that I should go and be baptized of him, unless perchance this very thing

* c. 1872.

† c. 1873.

‡ c. 1874.

§ That the inference from contradiction of purpose to origin in fixed tradition does not follow necessarily may be seen in Wrede's discussion of such contradictions in Mark's Gospel (*Das Messiasgeheimnis*, S. 124-129). When the purpose is made sufficiently flexible, the contradictions of it may be subsumed under it.

¶ c. 1881.

¶¶ Nestle, *Nor. Testament. Græci Supplementum*, p. 76f.

that I have said is ignorance?" Such a word, says Oscar Holtzmann, would never have found entrance into a Gospel did it not come from the mouth of Jesus Himself.*

The comparison of this principle with that of Weizsäcker is instructive. Both Schmiedel and Weizsäcker seek to separate the simply reproductive or trustworthy elements in the Gospel tradition from the creative or untrustworthy elements. Weizsäcker, however, seeks to ground objectively his judgment in respect to the latter by tracing the influence of its environment on the Gospel tradition. Schmiedel's principle is subjective, resting on the idea that only what cannot possibly be regarded as creative is reproductive. It may thus dispense with any objective historical grounds, but whether because of its subjectivity it can be regarded as a surer canon of historicity, the principle of absolute credibility, is open to question. We have already seen the insufficiency of a tendency criticism organized in accordance with an *a priori* system which yet sought justification for its results in historical evidence. A tendency criticism, therefore, which neglects such a justification from history, where its results may most readily be brought to the test of fact, may escape the fate which Baur's theory suffered from historical criticism, but only by seeking the solution of an historical problem outside the field of historical criticism.

Yet however subjective the principle, the results of its application to historical documents must submit to the judgment of historical criticism. Let us grant that the Gospels are written with a purpose, that they are tendency writings: does this destroy their historical value except in so far as they contain elements which are not in harmony with this purpose? In the first place, it should be observed that the presence of these very elements speaks favorably for the honesty of the men who, writing with a purpose, did not remove them. Moreover, it is perfectly clear that the Gospels, being written by worshipers of Jesus, were written for the purpose of narrating the facts upon which that worship was based, primarily for Christians, and with the intention of thus strengthening and deepening their faith. This faith was centred in the person of Christ, and the Gospel writers gave what they believed to be a faithful account of His life and work, in so far as they possessed information concerning it. In this they may have been lamentably wrong; the very purpose, which they do not conceal, serving as their sentence of condemna-

**Leben Jesu*, S. 36.

tion. For suppose we grant the truthfulness of their representation, then under this principle of criticism, in order to secure for it absolute credibility, they must have sought to represent the facts as they were not and retained as incongruous with their purposed representation those elements which would convey the truth to us. This is, of course, impossible, since they could not have done this without conscious intention or purpose. The question is thus forced upon us, Would it have been possible under this principle for the authors of the Gospels to have written the truth on the supposition that their narratives are true? If, however, we suppose their narratives almost entirely vitiated by their purpose, we have still to face the problem of the origin of their faith. According to the witness of the Gospel, and we may add of the whole New Testament, the creative force of the Christian faith is traced to the person of Jesus Christ. Is it historically probable, as this principle necessitates, that the order must be reversed and the Christ of the Gospels made the product of Christian faith?

Here we find ourselves again in a situation very similar to that in which Strauss left Gospel criticism. In both the Christ of the Gospels is the creation of subsequent Christianity—in the one case, of Christian faith; in the other, of Christian imagination. In both an idea plays the all-determining part. In the one case the purpose of faith to represent Jesus in accord with its idea of him produced the Christ of the Gospels; in the other, the idea of Jesus as the Messiah resulted, under the mythical elaboration of faith, in the Christ of the Gospels. Since, then, we cannot have an effect without an adequate cause, this principle in its application to the Gospels must face the judgment of history based on the fundamental principle of sufficient reason in answer to the question, Did the Christ of the Gospels create the faith of Christianity, or did this faith create the Christ of the Gospels? However plausible this principle of criticism may at first appear, it fails to appreciate the nature of the Gospels, and by setting up a standard of historicity to which they cannot conform, judges them very largely untrustworthy as sources of historical information. No one will deny that the Gospels were written with a purpose, but before we condemn them on this ground we must inquire whether the purpose which they manifest be of a kind to justify such a judgment.

But, it is said, the authors of the Gospels were worshipers of Jesus. This fact will also be admitted. How shall we account for this worship? The Gospels ground it in the whole life and

work of Jesus, by which was made manifest to His disciples the real nature of His being. When Thomas bows in worship before his Master he cries, "My Lord and my God!" It must also be borne in mind that the basis of the Gospel tradition comes to us from Jews whose ideas about the true object of worship had been formed under the influence of the Old Testament. Schmiedel, however, tells us that the grounds of this worship were two great facts—the compassion of Jesus for the multitudes and the character of His preaching.* These we learn from the Gospel account of His activity, but just why these two elements are given such fundamental significance we are not informed. Is it because they could not possibly, on any account, be regarded as inventions? And yet it can scarcely be maintained that they are so out of accord with the purpose of the Gospels as to secure for them the judgment of absolute credibility. But were this the case and were we justified in giving them this significance, it may still be questioned whether in themselves alone they constitute a sufficient basis for the worship whose genesis they are used to explain. Discovery of purpose cannot justify the judgment of historical untrustworthiness apart from the determination of the kind of purpose, neither can the discovery of a religious purpose be so conceived apart from an investigation of its nature; and finally, if the effort of faith to give an account of itself be rejected, some satisfactory explanation must be offered in its place. Such considerations make it difficult to believe that in Schmiedel's principle of criticism we have at last the sure standard by which to separate creative from reproductive faith or the norm of absolute credibility.

The question of the origin and character of the fourth Gospel in their bearing on the witness of this Gospel to Christ carries us back to patristic days. With the exception of a small sect called by Epiphanius the Alogi, its Johannine origin was not seriously questioned until the appearance of Bretschneider's *Probabilia* (1820). Modern discussion of the problem has been abundant, with wide divergence of opinion, but still very generally within the limits of the theory of partial trustworthiness. In its more recent aspects there is observable, I think, a tendency to connect the fourth Gospel either directly or indirectly with the apostle John by means of Ephesus, Jerusalem, or the presbyter John, and to recognize in the narrative-sections many authentic elements. An interesting example of this may be found in the two editions of Jülicher's *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, published in 1894

* c. 1873.

and 1901. According to the first edition, the value of the fourth Gospel consisted in the witness which it gave, not to Christ, but to the idea of Christ as conceived by a great thinker of the third Christian generation. Its connection with the apostle John, together with the residence of the apostle in Asia Minor, were rejected. In the second edition the origin of the Gospel indirectly from John in Asia Minor is affirmed, the author being an enthusiastic disciple of the apostle. Schmiedel,* it is true, sees in it only ideal history, and Kreyenbühl discovers in it the work of the Gnostic Menander;† while Zahn upholds its Johannine authorship.‡

Taking its place among the Gospels, and yet with a grandeur of its own bearing its witness to Christ, the fourth Gospel, by reason of the characteristics which separate it from the synoptic Gospels, raises its own distinctive problems. Among these, for the question we are considering, the problem of authorship plays an important part. In a measure, it takes the place in the discussion of the fourth Gospel which the problem of the sources takes in the discussion of the synoptic Gospels. If it came from the apostle John, we shall have in his authorship the guarantee of its trustworthy character. If it came from him only indirectly, then we must seek what elements he has contributed, determine whether they have in any way suffered change in transmission and reconstruct their original form. We must also ascertain whether the author had any other sources of information and, if he had, their quality; from this we must separate what he himself has contributed and estimate its value. For this process, however, the theories which deny the direct Johannine authorship of the Gospel and affirm its partial trustworthiness offer only very general criteria, suggested chiefly by the divergence both in form and content of the fourth Gospel from the synoptic Gospels.

If the two be really inconsistent, then, on the theory that the synoptic Gospels are trustworthy or at least partially trustworthy, the credibility of the fourth Gospel will, of course, be correspondingly limited. Then some satisfactory explanation must be offered of how such an inconsistent account came into existence at a time when the synoptic Gospels were not only written, but widely used and known in the circles where the fourth Gospel originated. For it is clear from indications in the fourth Gospel that knowledge of

* *Ency. Bib.*, s. v. John, Vol. II. c. 2518ff.

† *Evangelium der Wahrheit*, I, S. 368.

‡ Cf. *Theo. Rundschau*, 1899; A. Meyer, *Die Behandlung der joh. Frage*; and *Theo. Literaturblatt*, 1903; Hausleiter, *Der Kampf um das Joh. Ev.*

the synoptic tradition of Christ's life is presupposed on the part of the readers for whom it was written. To have secured the reception that it gained in Christian circles at the time when it was written, it must, on this theory of its relation to the synoptic Gospels, have had back of it a person whose authority was clearly recognized. But since this authority cannot have been ignorant of the synoptic Gospels, we must suppose that he was either unconscious of contradicting their account or, being conscious of it, he has left this to be inferred from his narrative, without himself having introduced into it a single distinct intimation of such an intention; and yet the author of the fourth Gospel speaks elsewhere quite plainly of the purpose which he had in view in writing and which is stamped clearly upon the face of his narrative. This view, therefore, of the relation of the fourth Gospel to the synoptics may be a hasty inference from their differences, for it leaves the origin of the fourth Gospel obscure. It must thus be judged unwise to accept such an inference as supplying a sure basis for our estimate of this Gospel. That there are striking differences has been admitted; but that they necessitate a theory of the relation of the fourth Gospel to the synoptics which is largely destructive of the trustworthiness of the former, can be maintained only when on this theory a rational account of the origin and character of this Gospel is given. More consistent with the phenomena of the fourth Gospel is the theory which conceives of its relation to the synoptic Gospels as supplementary, and which seeks the explanation of the differences in the time when it was written, the needs of those for whom it was written and the source from which it came.

The genetic problem is thus seen to have fundamental significance for any theory regarding the credibility of the Gospel witness. In order, however, to determine its origin, its character must be rightly apprehended. For its character throws an indispensable light on the nature of the Gospels in which the witness is contained. Having determined its character, our judgment regarding its credibility may take an *a priori* form: being what it is, the Gospel witness may be judged trustworthy or untrustworthy on the ground of its content. Or our judgment may take the historical form: in view of the origin of the Gospels which contain this witness, it may be judged trustworthy or untrustworthy.

In regard to the former, the judgment of trustworthiness finds support in the consistency of the Gospel witness with the whole apostolic testimony to Christ as found in the New Testament. The close connection of this witness with the apostolic conception

of the Gospels has been mentioned. The Gospel witness presents in historical form just those facts which underlie the apostolic preaching, together with an estimate of Christ's person and work, which, if not elaborated in doctrinal form, is congruous with the doctrinal elaboration that we find in the Epistles. That it is the witness of faith cannot invalidate this judgment, unless it be shown that faith has created a witness without basis in fact.

In regard to the latter, the historical question of value in the light of origin, the judgment of trustworthiness may be justified. The form of the Gospel witness, however close its relation in respect of content to the apostolic preaching and doctrinal teaching, makes it impossible to explain this witness as the product rather than the source of this teaching. Thus we do not find in the Gospels the formal statement of the doctrine of justification by faith or of the atonement. But we do find there a prominence given to the passion of Christ which lays a basis in fact for the central and determining significance given to these doctrines by Paul. "Christianity was from its beginning a religion of redemption. It was not first made so by Paul."*

We cannot, however, estimate fairly the origin of the Gospel witness apart from the origin of the Gospels. To estimate the latter, historical criticism must ascertain and seek to understand the environment in which the Gospels were written and the source or sources from which they came. For its guidance it will find traces in the Gospels themselves which reveal something of the time and purpose of each. The opinion of the early Church about their origin will also be of service. It will be clear from such a study that the Gospels, like the Epistles, were concretely motived and written to supply some need in the life of the Church. Each Gospel, moreover, with dependence on a common tradition or departure from it, has its own portrait of Christ which the author sought to produce from the materials at his command. To the understanding of all this, the study of origin cannot but contribute materially. But when the environment has been ascertained and its influence traced in the Gospels thus produced, we desire to know the nature of this influence; and this must be judged in the light of its effect. Has the pure Gospel tradition been discolored? And if so, how may it be restored to its former purity?

The review we have taken of the attempts which have been

* Feine, *Jesus Christus und Paulus*, S. XII. Cf. also Loofs, *Herzog Realencyc.*, 3. A., B. iv, s. v. Christologie, S. 17, l. 30.

made to secure this end by a critical separation of the reproductive from the creative elements in the genesis of the Gospels and the Gospel tradition has discovered to us no principle to guide us safely through such a process. That there is a trustworthy reproductive element is generally admitted. The failure to identify the creative or untrustworthy element must lead us to question its existence, since it owes its existence to a particular theory of the relation of the Gospels to the environment in which they arose. Such a theory cannot be accepted as solving the problems raised by its conception of this relation, until the more fundamental problem into which these are merged has found a satisfactory solution in the separation required. The facts, however, do not necessitate such a theory, since they are capable of explanation on another view of this relation. This view, while recognizing that our Gospels are historical documents, whose origin in space and time constitutes a proper theme for historical investigation, yet holds that the influence upon them of their environment has not destroyed their trustworthiness; recognizing also that their content is grounded in historical fact, it finds the creative influence, as distinguished from the reproductive, not in the later environment and embedded in the Gospels, but underlying the Gospels and centred in the person and work of Jesus Christ, to whom they bear witness. Such a view is ready to trust the witness of the Gospels, making confession with it of Jesus Christ as Lord and God.

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