A RE-STUDY OF THE VIRGIN BIRTH OF CHRIST

GOD'S SON WAS BORN OF A WOMAN: MARY'S SON PRAYED "ABBA FATHER"

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DR. ROBINSON, who is Professor of Historical Theology in Columbia Theological Seminary, Decatur, Georgia, has been an Editorial Correspondent of THE EVANGELICAL QUARTERLY for twenty years, and we have learned to appreciate very highly his association with us in this way. It is ten years since we last published a paper of his, so we are specially glad to include in our "Christmas number" this study of the biblical witness to the virgin birth of Christ.

THIS[1] is a plea for another look, a more believing consideration of the New Testament testimony to the virgin birth of Christ, a fresh recognition that we are dealing here not with individual opinion but with the corporate conviction of the primitive community. When Paul is arrayed against Luke on this matter, all the close ties between these two servants of Christ are ignored. A presentation of the Third Evangelist as an isolated voice may suit the current cult of personality or the modern myth of the individual, but it forgets that the Third Gospel (Luke 1: 1-4) as definitely professes to express the faith of the witnessing, worshipping fellowship as does Paul's *kerygma* of the resurrection in 1 Cor. 15: 1-7. When Mark is cited against Matthew one is neglecting that close parallelism of the two which leads many scholars to look to the close of Matthew when they wish to fill out what seems to be an incomplete ending of Mark. The birth accounts in the first and third Gospels articulate the Spirit-wrought faith always in the heart of the primitive community, which comes to expression also in sacramental worship[2] and in sundry creedal statements.

[1] Parts of this article are re-printed from *The Presbyterian Journal*, Asheville, N.C., with permission. Appreciation is also expressed to Rev. James B. Torrance of Edinburgh University, Guest Professor at Columbia Theological Seminary, for helpful suggestions, several of which have been cited in the article.

[2] Cf., e.g. the eucharist service in *The Apostolic Tradition.*

I. PAUL PROCLAIMED GOD'S SON BORN OF A WOMAN

Those of us who read our New Testaments beginning with the four Gospels need to remember that current scholarship finds in the Epistles the earliest writings preserved in the New Testament. Accordingly its consideration of the birth of Jesus starts with Paul's references thereto, such as Gal. 4: 4; Rom. 1: 3, 4 and Phil. 2: 5-11.

(*a*) *Paul's Contacts*

One ought, however, first to visualize the Apostle Paul in the context of his life situations, in order to understand his references to the birth of Jesus. Gal. 1: 18-19 may be paraphrased thus:

> Three years after my conversion I did go up to Jerusalem to ascertain from Cephas as much as I could about Jesus Christ. For fifteen days I stayed with him, including in my historical inquiry conferences with none of the other apostles except James, the brother of the Lord.[3]

At a later conference, Gal. 2: 1-10, John, to whom the Saviour had entrusted Mary (John 19: 20-27), was also present. On the occasion of this conference, Paul was ministering to the physical needs of the poor Judaean saints (Gal. 2: 10; cf. Acts 11: 27-12: 25), and they would scarcely have failed to reciprocate by sharing with him their knowledge of spiritual things (cf. Rom. 15: 27; Gal. 6: 6; 1 Cor. 9: 11).

The links between Luke and Paul include the large space given to Paul in Acts, the "*we* sections", and the accord between the Gospel of the Forty Days in Luke 24: 25-27, 46-47, the sermons in Acts, and the *kerygma* in the Epistles. For Paul, Luke is his beloved physician (Col. 4: 14), his fellow-worker (Philem. 24), probably his true yokefellow (Phil. 4: 3), his only companion as martyrdom approaches (2 Tim. 4: 11).

In Luke 1: 1-2, the repeated use of the first person plural "us" indicates that the matters related in Luke-Acts were those which were delivered by the eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word not only to the Third Evangelist but also to those about him, including Paul. Thus through Paul Luke would have had access to "leads" and information furnished by such men as Cephas, James, John, Barnabas and Mark, and, of course, there would have been a "feedback" to the apostle from Luke's research.

According to the Anti-Marcionite Prologue, "Luke accompanied

[3] The only appearances to single individuals listed in 1 Cor. 15 are just those to these three conferees, Cephas, James, Paul. H. Riesenfeld, *The Gospel Tradition and Its Beginning* (London, 1957), p. 19, holds that the chief concern on this visit was for Peter to test Paul as to his knowledge of the words and deeds of Jesus and his ability to transmit them (e.g. 1 Cor. 11: 23 ff.).

Paul until the latter's martyrdom." Eusebius (*H.E.* iii. 4) speaks of Luke as especially intimate with Paul, and his interpretation of Paul's phrase "my gospel" as a reference to the Third Gospel at least supports a connection between Paul and the Lukan writings. According to Irenaeus (*Against Heresies* ii. 14. 1-4), "Luke was inseparable from Paul, his fellow-labourer in the gospel . . . he was entrusted to hand down to us a Gospel; he learned nothing different from Paul." On the basis of Dr. Arnold Ehrhardt's careful research, the relevant section in the *Muratorian Fragment* is thus rendered:

> The third book of the Gospel, that according to Luke, was compiled in his own name on Paul's authority by Luke the physician, when after Christ's ascension Paul had taken him to be with him, like a legal expert.[4]

As a *iuris studiosus*, then, Luke prepared "the authentic knowledge" of the Christian origins to present as Paul's defence before His Excellency Judge Theophilus.[5]

The apostle's epistolary references to the birth of Jesus are best interpreted as being written on the basis of Paul's acceptance of an account of the Incarnation given him by one of the pillars of the primitive fellowship and recorded later by his companion Luke.

(*b*) *Galatians* 4

In Galatians 4, Paul is talking about our redemption from the bondage of the law and its curse into the freedom of the sons of God. Here he says that God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law that he might redeem those under the law. Thus he teaches the Divine Fatherhood and the human motherhood. He mentions neither a divine mother nor a human father.

In this chapter the apostle uses two different Greek verbs, one to describe the birth of God's own Son, and another that of the birth of Ishmael and of Isaac. This distinction is indicated in the King James Version which renders one "made" and the other "born", but is lost in the revised versions which render both verbs as "born". Ishmael is *begotten* (*gegennētai*) according to the flesh (vv. 23, 29), while Isaac is *begotten* according to the Spirit, according to the covenant of promise. But Paul speaks of the birth of God's Son in a far more supernatural manner, never as begotten, but as *born* (*genomenon*) of a woman, *born* under the law, and else-

[4] A. Ehrhardt, "The Gospels in the Muratorian Fragment," *Ostkirchliche Studien*, ii. 2 (1953), p. 125, cited by J. Stevenson, *A New Eusebius* (1957), pp. 144-145. [This article is reprinted in A. Ehrhardt, *The Framework of the NT Stories* (Manchester, 1964), pp. 11-36.]

[5] Cf. J. Knox, *The New Testament* (1963), p. 19: "Your Excellency," Governor or magistrate Theophilus.

where (Rom. 1: 3) as *born* of the seed of David.[6] Since both Gal. 4: 4 and Rom. 1: 3 come from the *kerygma* which the apostle received, they show that while the pre-Pauline proclamation included the physical birth of a woman, of the seed of David, it avoided saying *begotten*, which in that connection would have implied a human father. Using the same distinction, Matt. 1: 18 changes from the sundry begettings, *egennēsen*, of the genealogical table and introduces the coming of Jesus as a birth, a *genesis*.

The fourth chapter of Galatians, which narrates these three different kinds of births, describes our sonship as wrought by "the Spirit of His Son."

In this context, the phrase "the Spirit of His Son" reaches its full implication only on the assumption that the Spirit acted in his most eminent way in God's sending forth his Son born of a woman, of which action even His mighty works in making us sons of the Father and in Isaac's being born according to God's promise are but partial analogies.

Again, in the same context, in Gal. 4: 6 (cf. Rom. 8: 15), Paul states that God's sending the Spirit of his Son into our hearts enables us to cry "Abba, Father." Now the fact that this word also occurs in Mark 14: 36, which in its definitive written form is dated later than Galatians, does not prove that Mark fabricated this as part of a Gethsemane legend to justify Paul's theology. So able a scholar as J. Jeremias accepts this as Jesus' own word which Paul quotes. But if the apostle cites a word from Jesus, may he not in the same context have in mind that event by which he who already had a divine Father received also a human mother, which same event was later recorded in detail by Matthew and by Luke? "He, who was the Son of God by nature, has been born of a virgin, that we might become sons of God by grace, and with Him cry 'Abba Father!'"[7]

(*c*) *Romans* 1: 1-4

In Romans 1: 1-4 Paul sets forth the gospel of God which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures. This concerns His Son as the seed of David (cf. Acts 13: 23; 2 Tim. 2: 8) and as the Son of God. Thus they point back to Isa. 9: 6-7 where the Divine Messiah is promised to sit upon the throne of David (a prophecy which is echoed in Luke 1: 7, 32; cf. 1: 69; 2: 4, 11), and to Isa. 7: 13-14, where the house of David is warned not to weary God by declining to ask a sign, and God Himself gives

[6] This distinction was called to my attention by James B. Torrance.

[7] James B. Torrance.

the sign of the virgin-born Immanuel, which verse is applied to the birth of Jesus in Matt. 1: 22-23 (cf. also Matt. 1: 1, 6, 17, 20; 2: 1-16). These references to Davidic descent in this *kerygma* as in Matthew and in Luke indicate that Isa. 9: 6-7 and 7: 13-14 were included in the testimonies from the Old Testament commonly used in the primitive Church. Accordingly, Ignatius (Smyrn. 1: 1; Eph. 18: 2) understands Paul's contrast here between the seed of David according to the flesh and the Son of God according to the Spirit as carrying with it as its necessary presupposition "born of a virgin", even as Matthew, Luke, and the Creed unite *conceived by the Holy Ghost* and *born of the virgin Mary*. It should also be kept in mind that in Rom. 1: 4 the divine side of Christ is designated in a mighty manner by the resurrection from the dead, even as on the same miraculous note of the resurrection Paul begins the Epistle to the Galatians. Both when he is quoting the primitive *kerygma* (as in Rom. 1: 3, 4 and 1 Cor. 15: 4, 5) and when he is writing without reference to that tradition (Gal. 1: 1), he glories in the supernatural resurrection of Christ.

(*d*) *Philippians* 2: 5-11

In Philippians 2: 5-11 Paul cites a hymn or a creed from the primitive *kerygma*. According to this summary, a pre-existing Divine Person was born in the likeness of men. He who was fundamentally in the form of God took the form of a servant. He did not like Adam grasp after equality with God but emptied or poured himself out unto death (cf. Isa. 53: 12) for others. This presentation of him as an Eternal Person ought to alert us to the realization that Paul and the primitive disciples he is quoting did not think of our Lord's birth in the same way as they did of the births of temporal persons. As "being made in the likeness of men and found in fashion as a man" shows that "Christ even as man is, in the deepest ground of His existence (*Seins*), a being (*Wesen*) of a different kind" (Joh. Schneider, *TWNT*, V. 197), so the phraseology of this passage intimates that His becoming in this likeness of men was in a way worthy of God's eternal Son. The stupendous miracle of the Incarnation here proclaimed implies a presupposition on the part of Paul and his precursors which is only adequately accounted for in that physical miracle of our Lord's birth found in Matthew and in Luke. And the account of the Virgin Birth makes intelligible how the Jesus whom Paul preached had only a Divine Father and only a human mother.

[8] R. Bultmann, *Th.d.N.T.* (v.a. 1961), p. 53; Eng. trans., *Theology of NT* i (1952), pp. 50, 131.

(*e*) *Other Texts*

In Romans 8: 3 the stress is on the wonder of the fact that He whom God sent in the likeness of sinful flesh to deal adequately with sin is His own Son. Something new and miraculous in his origin is indicated in the description of the second man as from heaven (1 Cor. 15: 47). Likewise the permanent dwelling in Christ of all the fullness of the Godhead in a bodily way (Col. 2: 9) is highly congruent with his being conceived of the Holy Spirit (cf. Athanasius, *contr. Arian.* iii. 26. 29-21).

(*f*) *Paul's Faith*

Of course, if one approaches the subject on a purely naturalistic premise, then the Virgin Birth could not have occurred and the hypothesis of a legend to fit Paul's gospel may be the most reasonable assumption. But Paul is not anti-supernaturalistic when it comes to the things of Jesus Christ. He entered the Christian life by a supernatural encounter with the risen Lord Jesus, he gloried in the power of His resurrection, he lived in the blessed hope of His parousia. Accordingly, there is nothing in Paul's epistles, gospel or life which warrants the assumption that a legend must be constructed by Matthew and Luke to account for his teachings. Rather it is more in accord with Paul's affirmations, his citations of the primitive *kerygma*, and his presuppositions to assume that he, like Luke, received from the first disciples and held as a fact the Virgin Birth of Jesus.

(*g*) *Theological Significance*

The miracle by which God inserted Jesus into the lineage of David furnishes the prototype for the grafting of the branches of the wild olive into the ancient tree of Israel (Rom. 11: 17). Thus the Christian believers became children of Abraham, not on the basis of physical Jewish descent, but by the miraculous act of God's free grace. And unless one "has comprehended the Virgin Birth as the miraculous basis of his salvation he will either underrate the completeness and radicality with which the transformation of his predicament has taken place in faith or he will ascribe to a human potentiality what is possible only as the work of God in us."[9]

The Virgin Birth takes seriously the acts of the living God bringing the messianic order into history. From this new *genesis* (Matt. 1: 18) the *eschatos Adam* (1 Cor. 15: 45) became the life-giving Spirit who works the *palingenesia* sealed in baptism (Tit. 3: 5) and realized at the Parousia (Matt. 19: 28; cf. Luke 22: 30). "The new race was born anew (from above) in the Virgin Birth of

[9] Otto A. Piper, *Interpretation*, April 1964, p. 148

the *eschatos Adam*."[10] Thus, "the birth of Christ is an eschatological event inhering in the New Age, and is itself a manifestation of the expected outgoing activity of the Spirit in the latter days." Thereby, "God has set in motion the train of events which will culminate in the final judgment of the world and the salvation of the elect."[11]

When God gave personal existence in the Person of His own eternal Son to this historical man, the glory of the Incarnation called for such a miracle as the virgin birth to indicate this new, this mighty thing that God had done, coming into our life for us men and for our salvation. Since Adam was the responsible person who involved the race in transgression (Rom. 5: 18; 1 Cor. 11: 3; 1 Tim. 2: 13-14), so in a supernatural way the male parent was set aside. The virgin who yielded herself to the Word of the Lord as His servant conceived by the Holy Spirit and bore God's Holy Child (Luke 1: 35). Thereafter, in His life He knew no sin (2 Cor. 5: 21), He became obedient unto death (Phil. 2: 8), for our offences He endured its curse (Gal. 3: 13) and was raised for our justification (Rom. 4: 25). Thus is He at God's right hand, the Lord our Rightousness (Jer. 23: 6; 33: 16; 1 Cor. 1: 30; Rom. 8: 34; 1 John 2: 1), the basis on which God mercifully forgives our sins, the Beloved in whom we are received and by His Spirit cry, "Abba, Father" (Gal. 4: 6).

(*h*) *Probable Cause for Silence*

If one wishes to go into the question as to why Paul and Mark do not explicitly mention the Virgin Birth, we are left to our surmises. And yet believing extrapolation is more likely to be in accord with the primitive household of faith than is naturalistic conjecture. It is probable that the primitive narrative and the passages speaking of the Birth of Jesus which Paul cites from the primitive *kerygma* make no explicit mention of the Virgin Birth in order to protect Mary during her lifetime. The first and third Gospels were presumably written after her death. The seemingly inept way in which the opening of Mark refers to Isaiah, according to the critical text ascribing to Isaiah passages which are cited from Malachi and from Isaiah, could mean that he also had other passages from Isaiah in mind, such as 7: 14, which is used in Matthew 1: 23.[12] When the Resurrection was proclaimed the un-

[10] So James B. Torrance.

[11] A. Richardson, *An Introduction to the Theology of the NT* (London: SCM, 1958), p. 175.

[12] In the light of his record of the virgin birth in Matthew, the first evangelist could record the people of Nazareth asking, "Is not this the carpenter's son?" (13: 55), without anyone being misled. In Mark, how-

believing council of priests and elders paid the soldiers to say that the disciples stole the body of Jesus (Matt. 28: 11-15). An imperial rescript from the middle of the first century has been discovered at Nazareth decreeing death for anyone who steals a corpse. This could well have been used by Herod in his execution of James and his plan to execute Peter (Acts 12: 1-3). The third member of the inner circle was John. As a result of these acts inspired by the animosity of unbelieving Jews, the disciples may well have asked John to leave Jerusalem with Mary, whom Jesus had committed to his care. Rev. 12 may preserve echoes of such a flight. In the same connection the disciples could well have determined to keep an even more complete silence on the Virgin Birth lest that lead to Mary's death, as the proclamation of the Resurrection had led to the death of James. According to Acts 12, Barnabas and Paul were at this time in Jerusalem with relief from Antioch, some of which would have been gladly used to finance such a move for John and Mary, and at his release, for Peter.

II. JESUS TURNED TO HIS FATHER, PRAYING ABBA

According to Mark, he whom adversaries derided as the son of Mary (6: 3) prayed to God as "Abba Father" (14: 36). This description, "the son of Mary", as well as the invidious reference to him as "a glutton and a drunkard" (Matt. 11: 19; Luke 7: 34), means that opponents as well as friends denied that Jesus was the son of Joseph. Moreover, this struggle between those who believed him to be begotten by an act of the Divine Creator and those who spoke of Mary as an adulteress had already begun during the lifetime of Jesus.[18] And such rejection of Joseph as the father of Jesus would have sifted down from the elders to the children of Nazareth, leading to unkind words on the playground.

With this background, it is interesting to note that Jesus was unique in addressing God as "my Father", the Father of the individual, and in using therewith the little child's word for his parent, "Abba, 'Daddy' ".[14] In the episode recorded in Luke 2: 41-52, the fact that Mary rather than Joseph admonishes Jesus, and the interplay in which her "your father" (meaning Joseph) is revised by Jesus to "my Father" (meaning God) indicates that the mystery of his birth had been revealed to Jesus and was shared by Him

ever, which has no birth narrative, the question is rather, "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary?" (6: 3).

[18] So E. Stauffer, *Jesus and His Story* (New York, 1960), pp. 15-18, 213.

[14] J. Jeremias, *The Central Message of the NT* (London: SCM, 1965), pp. 17-30.

with Mary and Joseph. Thus "my Father" occurs among the first words on the lips of the twelve year old (Luke 2: 48-49).

This raises the question: As Jesus joined James, Joses, Judas, Simon and the little sisters in calling Joseph "Abba", did some playmate deride him as not being Joseph's son? And did this lead to a conversation in the carpenter's shop in which Joseph told Jesus the story of his birth as we have it in Matthew? Or did Mary who had treasured these things in her heart open the account to the weeping lad in the nursery as the Lukan record has it? And with the Word, the boy Jesus found One more ready to give His Spirit from heaven than Joseph and Mary were to give food to their bairns (Luke 11: 11-13). As He later did with the disciples (Gal. 4: 6; Rom. 8: 15), this Spirit bore witness with Jesus' spirit, crying "Abba, Father" (cf. Mark 14: 36). In the light of the issue raised by his virgin birth, and by the grace of the Spirit, Jesus said "Abba" no longer to Joseph but to God (Luke 2: 48-49; Matt. 23: 9).

On the completion of his mighty work for us, Jesus ascended to make His Father to be our Father, His God to be our God (John 20: 17). Thus, the virgin birth, derided by some, believed by others, had its vital part in giving to the world the Christian name for God, *the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

III. THE WITNESS OF JOHN

In John, the believer must be born from above, born of the Spirit, after the analogy of Jesus, who was born not of the mingling of bloods by the fleshly desire of a human husband—but of God.

The accounts of the rebirth of believers by the Spirit in John 1: 13-14 and 3: 3-8, 18, 31, as well as his begetting in 1 John 2: 29; 3: 9; 4: 7; 5: 1, 4, 18, are so patterned after the birth of Christ Himself that they would imply the Virgin Birth to instructed Christian readers.[15] Furthermore, several of the church fathers, including Irenaeus and Tertullian,[16] whose writings precede any extant manuscripts of this part of John, used texts which carried this verse in the singular, thus:

> In the name of Him, who was born not of bloods, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of an husband (*anēr*) but of God.

[15] So, in effect, B. Lindars, *NT Apologetic* (1961), p. 213, E. C. Hoskyns and F. N. Davey, *The Fourth Gospel* (1947), pp. 163-6; W. Temple, *Readings in St. John's Gospel* (1952), p. 13; C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel according to St. John* (1955), pp. 137-8; A. Richardson, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

[16] Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, iii. 16. 2; 19. 2; Tertullian, *De Carne Christi* 19; cf. also Justin, *First Apology* 32: 9, 11; *Dialogue* 54: 2; 63: 2; 76: 2.

This reading is preferred by sundry scholars, among them C. C. Torrey and Oscar Cullmann.

At her first appearance in the Fourth Gospel (John 2), Mary's acts and words indicate that the mother knows the secret of her Son and is counting on Jesus' power to work miracles, signs of His glory and vindications of her honour. The signs which Jesus did convinced Nicodemus that Jesus was a teacher come from God. To this ruler of Israel, "Jesus says—You must be born from above! That is, the counterpart of the Virgin Birth must take place in us, if we would belong to the New Race. Just as in Paul: when Christ died, we died in Him nineteen hundred years ago—but the counterpart of that has to take place in us today by the Spirit; as we rose *in Christ's* resurrection nineteen hundred years ago, so the counterpart of that has to take place *in us*. So John's Gospel, chapters 1 and 3, seems to say, when Christ was born of a virgin (from above) we were born anew (the *palingenesia*, when *ho logos sarx egeneto*) nineteen hundred years ago, but the counterpart of that has to take place in us today. What we *are in Christ*, we have to become *in ourselves* by the Spirit, and one day shall become in ourselves, in the final death and resurrection—in the final *palin-genesia*." "We became sons of God in the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus. We become sons of God by the Spirit of adoption, which adoption is *In Christ* as well as through Christ."[17]

IV. TEXTUAL QUESTIONS

In the Greek text, the opening chapters of Matthew and of Luke present clearly the Virgin Birth of Christ.

For generations the people of God have found the beautiful, straightforward accounts of the Advent in Matthew and in Luke clear and convincing. But recent versions have introduced ambiguities by disregarding the canons of objective scholarship in the establishment of the best Greek text and its accurate translation. Accordingly it is necessary to examine briefly these cases.

(*a*) *Matthew* 1: 16

Moffatt's New Testament renders Matt. 1: 16 thus:

> and Joseph (to whom the virgin Mary was betrothed) the father of Jesus, who is called Christ.

The more recent *New English Bible* lists only "one early witness" for this reading, which one according to Nestle and Huck-Lietzmann is the Sinaitic Syriac translation of this text. And this reading "is no evidence that Jesus was born by the natural process of generation, but is an indication that the Syriac translators mis-

[17] James B. Torrance.

understood the significance of *egennēsen* (begat)."[18] But in 1949 a volume entitled *Gospel Parallels* was put out under the aegis of three prominent members of the RSV Committee using the RSV version of the Synoptists. Though professedly based on the Huck-Lietzmann *Synopsis of the First Three Gospels* this work erroneously asserted that several of these variant readings described Joseph as the father of Jesus, whereas the evidence as cited by Huck-Lietzmann and by Nestle shows that only the Sinaitic Syriac so reads. While a revised edition of the *Gospel Parallels* repeated this error, it has been corrected in the 1960 reprint of the same.[19] From the *Gospel Parallels* edited under a committee of RSV scholars this inaccurate treatment of the text was taken into a footnote in the 1952 RSV which reads

> Other ancient authorities read, Joseph to whom was betrothed the virgin Mary, was the father of Jesus who is called Christ.

At a meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society in Chattanooga early in 1953 I pointed out this error, which was then called to the attention of Dr. Henry J. Cadbury of Harvard, who had the inaccurate footnote deleted from the RSV. By that time, however, many copies of the 1952 RSV had been sold and some two million owners are not aware that this footnote is erroneous.

(*b*) *Matthew* 1: 23

Again, both the Moffatt and the Goodspeed versions render the regular Greek word for virgin when it occurs in Matt. 1: 23 as "maiden". Moreover, the RSV translators permitted the Jewish member of their Committee to write into the *Introduction to the RSV Old Testament*, p. 30, an entirely unsupported charge that the primitive Christians introduced Christological elements into the Septuagint text, in particular that they introduced into Isa. 7: 14 the Greek word *parthenos*, meaning "virgin", in lieu of *neanis*, meaning "young woman". Since there is no evidence in any text of the Septuagint for this assertion, it must be labelled a calumny.[20]

[18] R. V. G. Tasker, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (Tyndale Press, 1961).

[19] Burton T. Throckmorton, Jr., editor, *Gospel Parallels* (second edition, 1949, 1957, reprinted 1960), p. 2.

[20] For a contrary opinion of another Jewish scholar compare Cyrus H. Gordon: "Therefore, the New Testament rendering of *'almah* as 'virgin' for Isaiah 7: 14 rests on the older Jewish interpretation (i.e., the LXX), which in turn is now borne out for precisely this annunciation formula by a text that is not only pre-Isaianic but is pre-Mosaic in the form that we now have it on a clay tablet" ("*'Almah* in Isaiah 7: 14" in *The Journal of Bible and Religion*, xxi, 2 [April 1953], p. 106). So also K. Stendahl, *The School of St. Matthew* (Uppsala, 1954), pp. 98, 199, "In his *parthenos* Matthew follows the LXX."

According to B. Lindars it is highly probable that Isa. 7: 14 was interpreted by Jewish as well as by Christian exegetes as referring to the Messiah of the house of David, and there is an exegetical tradition in which the "young woman" is interpreted symbolically as "the virgin of Israel" (Jer. 31: 4).[21]

(*c*) *Matthew* 1: 18-25

One cannot agree that Matt. 1: 18-25 is an alien paragraph grafted later into an earlier genealogy as a legend to support Paul's thesis that Christian believers are the children of Abraham by a miraculous act of grace, a supernatural birth of the Holy Spirit. According to Professor K. Stendahl of Harvard, both Matt. 1: 23 in its rendering of *'almah* as *parthenos* and the Matthean genealogical table follow the LXX. He finds, moreover, that the phraseology of the birth narrative is that of Matthew in which the whole context is spun around the Old Testament quotation as its nucleus and germ.[22]

(*d*) *Luke* 1: 27

Turning to Luke, one finds that *parthenos* in 1: 27 is rendered "maiden" by Moffatt and by Goodspeed and "girl" in the NEB. Yet this Greek noun regularly means "virgin" and this meaning is required by the context in Luke.

(*e*) *Luke* 1: 34

Again, Moffatt, Goodspeed, the RSV and the NEB render Mary's answer in Luke 1: 34, "How can this be, since I have no husband?" This is not an accurate rendering of the Greek verb, which means *know* rather than *have*. When the woman at the well (John 4: 17) replied to Jesus' question, "I have no husband," she used a different Greek verb from the one used by Mary. That woman of Samaria had no legal husband, though she had known several men. Mary stated to the angel Gabriel that she had known no man. Her marriage had not been physically consummated. On the other hand Mary did have a legal husband.[23] Mary's answer was not a repudiation of her legal relationship with Joseph but a denial of carnal knowledge with any man.

Dr. F. C. Grant, of the RSV Committee, admits that the older

[21] B. Lindars, *New Testament Apologetic* (1961), p. 215.

[22] Stendahl, *op. cit.*, pp. 98, 199, 135-6, 150, 204, 211. Note also that in the Ugaritic literature the virgin goddess Anat is denoted *'alma;* cf. E. J. Young, "The Immanuel Prophecy", in *W. Th. J.* xv, xvi, reprinted in *Studies in Isaiah* (1954), pp. 143-198, especially pp. 166-169.

[23] Cf. T. Boslooper, *The Virgin Birth* (Philadelphia, 1962), p. 235: "The couple is betrothed. The marriage bond has been established."

renderings of Luke 1: 34 are more accurate translations of that verse than the more recent ones. He also proposes to eliminate the virgin birth from the Third Gospel by the omission of the four words of this question and two added Greek words in Luke 3: 23.[24] But the deletion of these six Greek words from Luke 1: 34 and 3: 23 would not eliminate the virgin birth from this Gospel. In Luke 1: 27 *parthenos* is twice applied to Mary; while such scholars as K. Stendahl and M. Dibelius[25] hold that Luke 1: 31 depends verbally on Isa. 7: 14. Nor is there any agreement among scholars that these particular six words are interpolations. Boslooper concludes a survey of the field thus:

> The virgin birth cannot be displaced from the Christian faith by removing it from the text either on the basis of an appeal to a possible "natural" original of Matt. 1: 16, or by dismissing Luke 1: 34 ff. as a later interpolation.[26]

Rather the virgin birth pericopes stand as original and integral parts of the first two chapters of the First and of the Third Gospels. Arndt more sharply finds that

> Such a view simply lacks all foundation and must be called a hypothesis arbitrarily constructed to support a theory.[27]

Nor does the advocacy of such deletions justify a mistranslation. Rather, according to Occam's razor, the multiplicity of these efforts to eliminate the Virgin Birth from the Gospels betrays the weakness of Grant's case against it.

(*f*) *Authentic Accounts*

In lieu of the liberties these new versions are taking with the text and the translation, the accurate rendering of the best Greek reading gives two simple dignified accounts of the virgin birth of Jesus. Their naturalness, delicacy and sobriety indicate their historic reality.[28] The Matthaean one is evidently based on Joseph's testimony and cites Isa. 7: 14; the Lukan rests on Mary's witness, and "the throne of David" (1: 32) echoes Isa. 9: 6-7.[29] These things which Mary treasured in her heart (Luke 2: 19, 51) are here transmitted to us.

[24] F. C. Grant, *Introduction to NT Thought* (1950), p. 30; *Translating the Bible* (1961), pp. 153-4.

[25] Stendahl, *op. cit.* p. 98; Martin Dibelius as cited by T. Boslooper, *The Virgin Birth* (1962), pp. 209.

[26] T. Boslooper, *op. cit.*, pp. 222, 218.

[27] W. F. Arndt, *Commentary on St. Luke* (1956), p. 55.

[28] So A. Plummer, *Commentary on Matthew* (1910), p. 4-5.

[29] The Wonderful Counsellor, the Mighty God of Isa. 9: 6 is connected with the birth of the Messiah in a Qumran Hymn, IQH iii. 9f.; cf. K. Stendahl, *Scrolls and the NT* (1957), p. 12; T. H. Gaster, *The Dead Sea Scriptures* (1956), pp. 136, 210.

A parallelism has been traced between Ruth and Mary in the account of Boaz's treatment of the former (Ruth 3: 9) and the gracious dealing of God with Mary in the annunciation (Luke 1: 38). Likewise Hannah's song of victory (1 Sam. 2: 1-10) is echoed in Mary's *Magnificat*, so that of this, together with the *Benedictus* and the *Nunc Dimittis*, Richardson writes:

> The three hymns are as Jewish as any of the Psalms of the OT, but they are as Christian as anything in the NT in their conviction that the Age of Promise was inaugurated in the hour of Christ's conception by the Holy Spirit.[80]

In their whole texture, their Aramaisms, their notes of praise to God, their repeated appeals to the Holy Spirit, these accounts are as Biblical and as Jewish as anything in the New Testament. "The source of the Gospel birth stories is not Hellenistic mythology."

(g) *The Grace of the Spirit*

When God called Mary to be the mother of His Son, He wrought the conception in her by the power of the Holy Ghost and so filled her with the grace of the Spirit that she yielded herself to His Word as the bondmaid of the Lord (Luke 1: 26-38). In turn Joseph listened to the admonition of the angel of the Lord that the child conceived in Mary was of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1: 20 f.). Likewise was it that Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit (Luke 1: 41), sang the *Benedicta*, Zacharias (1: 67) the *Benedictus* and Simeon (2: 25) the *Nunc dimittis*. And the angels sounded the *Gloria in excelsis* (2: 14) on the day and

> . . . the happy morn
> Wherein the Son of Heaven's eternal King,
> Of wedded Maid and Virgin Mother born,
> Our great redemption from above did bring.

May the Lord who confronted Mary and Joseph, James and Paul grant to His present Church the grace of humility that we may not use our critical historical science to master God's intervention in the birth of Jesus. May the risen Lord in the power of His Spirit so encounter us that in this matter also our hearts may be mastered by the obedience of faith and our minds brought into captivity to Christ.

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[80] A. Richardson, *op. cit.*, pp. 175, 173, 172, citing C. K. Barrett, *The Holy Spirit and the Gospel Tradition* (1947), pp. 6-10; and D. Daube, *The New Testament and Rabbinical Judaism* (1956), p. 33.