

# THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY.

VOL. VII.

JULY, 1927.

No. 7.

## The Virgin Birth of Christ.

Essay read before a conference by REV. G. ALBERT SCHULZE  
and published by request.

### V.

The disgrace of being the earliest known impugner of the Virgin Birth falls upon the head of Cerinthus, a contemporary of the Apostle John. Cerinthus taught that Christ, the son of Joseph and Mary, at his baptism received the *ἄνω Χριστός*, "the Christ [from] above," who, however, departed from Him before His suffering. Soon after Cerinthus, the Ebionites, a Jewish sect, appeared upon the scene as champions of the purely human origin of our Lord. They taught that He was a mere man, whom God had elected to the Messiahship because of His extraordinary piety. In the so-called Ebionite gospel the chapters in which the evangelists teach the Virgin Birth were omitted. The Gnostics, many of them at least, could not find any room in their monstrous speculations for the Virgin Birth. They either denied the true humanity of Christ or else represented Him as a human being upon whom the *ἄνω Χριστός* descended at baptism. Of course, we find Marcion (ca. 100) and the Docetae on the side of the enemy. The philosopher Celsus (second century) delighted in pouring out his contempt upon this doctrine in particular and thereby came into conflict with Origen (*Contra Celsum*). Celsus was what the psalmist would no doubt call a brutish man; he called Jesus a bastard and spread the blasphemy that He was the offspring of an illicit union between Mary and a soldier named Panthera. It would seem that Satan finds a fiendish pleasure in stirring up men to renew the attacks of these ancient slanderers from time to time. Luther, as we have already heard, had his troubles with men who departed from the Scriptures also on this point. Schwenckfeld, *e. g.*, taught a "deification [*Vergottung*] of the body of Christ." The Anabaptists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries seem to have cherished the rather peculiar notion that Christ brought a body

---

## BOOK REVIEW.

---

**Certificate Booklets for Baptisms, Confirmations, and Weddings.**  
Two different sizes. German or English. Small size, 20 cts.; large size, 30 cts. (Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, Mo.)

The former custom of framing large certificates and then hanging them on the wall has been almost entirely abandoned. Certificate booklets can be better put away, or even exhibited, as a memento of the particular day or event. The make-up of these booklets is very artistic, attractive, and serviceable.

FRTZ.

**The Book of Job. Its Significance to Ministers and Church-Members.**  
By *L. Fuerbringer, D. D.* Done into English by *E. H. Paar.* 77 pages,  $5\frac{1}{4} \times 7\frac{5}{8}$ . 85 cts. (Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, Mo.)

This book of seventy-seven pages was originally a German synodical paper, read at the convention of the California and Nevada District of the Missouri Synod, in the year 1921, by Dr. F. Fuerbringer. Students of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, who have enjoyed the privilege of hearing

exegetical lectures by Dr. Fuerbringer know that because of his exact knowledge of the original languages and his painstaking study of the Scriptures he is an exegete filled with the knowledge of God's will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. We are glad that the lay reader, especially the English reader, is given an opportunity to get some benefit of the gifts with which God has endowed the venerable Doctor. Especially are we pleased that a popular treatment of the Book of Job is made available for our people; for we believe that the Book of Job is one of the most neglected and least understood books of the Bible. It is, however, not only a book of great literary merit, but is filled with valuable lessons for the Christian life, especially for the days of trouble and trial. — Since translating is not an easy task, we believe that the translator, Pastor E. H. Paar, of Harrisburg, Pa., deserves at least favorable mention. FRITZ.

**Foreign Missions in China.** Five lectures by *Frederick Brand*. 31 pages, 6×9. 20 cts. (Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, Mo.)

These five lectures were originally delivered over KFUEO, then printed in the *Homiletic Magazine*, and at the insistent request of many hearers are now offered in pamphlet form. On account of the present political upheaval in China the attention of the entire world is directed that way. It is likely that if the five lectures delivered by the Rev. F. Brand, the director of our foreign mission work, are offered to our people, they will gladly buy and read them. The subjects of the addresses are the following: "My Trip to China," "The Need of Foreign Missions, or the Missionary Motive," "Survey of Christian Missionary Activity in China from Apostolic Times," "The Effect of Protestant Missions in China," "The Present Political Unrest in China and the Foreign Missions." FRITZ.

**The Larger Stewardship.** By *Charles A. Cook*. 118 pages, 5×7½. Paper, 25 cts. (The Judson Press, Philadelphia, Pa.) Order from Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, Mo.

The money problem in the Church will best be solved when the larger question of stewardship is well understood in the light of the Gospel. We agree with Dr. Cook, the author of *The Larger Stewardship*, that "we must get back of the money question to the man himself, back of the collection to the character, back of what a man gives to what he is"; we would add: and back to a right understanding of the true relation of the Christian to all his material blessings, as this relation is taught in the Bible. Christians are not always conscious of their heavenly citizenship and of the demands which this makes upon their natural endowments, their time, their service, and their money; in short, Christians must better learn to consecrate themselves, and all they have, wholly to the Lord, who died for them and rose again. Since it does not yet appear what we shall be, we are too often too much engrossed with the things of this life. Says Dr. Cook: "There are vast resources of wealth in the possession of Christian men and women which have not yet been brought under the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit and that are not being administered along stewardship lines for Christ and the evangelization of the world. A more thorough and more general campaign to inculcate stewardship of this type needs to be vigorously prosecuted in all the

churches. But important as this phase of stewardship is and great as is the necessity for an earnest continuation of propaganda on its behalf among the churches, there is a stewardship that is greater and much more important. This larger stewardship has to do with the life, the inner life, of the believer and with all the outer expression of that life. No man can be fully the kind of steward God wants him to be in relation to wealth until he learns the deeper lessons in the essentials of true stewardship living and service. . . . Greater power in the Church and larger service for Christ by the Church, because of the richer faith and fuller consecration of individual Christians, must come through an apprehension and application of this larger stewardship. Stewardship of money is only a fraction of our full Christian stewardship." The more comprehensive study of stewardship is treated by Dr. Cook in his book *The Larger Stewardship*. He has written paragraphs on the following topics: The Larger Stewardship; The Stewardship of Personality; The Stewardship of Talents; The Stewardship of a Calling; The Stewardship of Influence; The Stewardship of Opportunity; The Stewardship of Time; The Stewardship of Substance. Pastors will do well to purchase the book and pass on its information to their members. It must, however, be understood that the only proper motive power for all stewardship is the love of Christ. A concluding chapter stressing this fact would, we believe, have greatly enhanced the value of Dr. Cook's book.

FRTZ.

**Systematic Theology.** By *Wilhelm Herrmann*. Translated by *Nathaniel Micklem* and *Kenneth A. Saunders*. \$1.50. (The Macmillan Company, New York, 1927.)

The translators say: "For a generation Dr. Wilhelm Herrmann was one of the most influential and respected of the religious teachers of Britain as well as of Germany. He was the most outstanding figure of the Ritschlian school, which has profoundly affected British thinking. Marburg became before the war something like a place of pilgrimage for younger theologians from the British universities." These young theologians would, of course, bring up the great question whether the Bible or experience is the basis of faith. They were taught this: "Such an assurance [of the forgiveness of sins] cannot come to us through any doctrine which we are prepared to accept, but only through a fact which is rooted in our own life as a working of God that we have ourselves experienced" (p. 120). They would inquire further: Is, then, the Scripture of any value to us? Surely; "every man we meet who experiences inward emancipation through God is God's word to us. But this significance attaches in a preeminent degree to the expression of faith which we find in unequalled measure in Holy Scripture" (p. 150). Were the Scriptures inspired? I prefer to call it "the tradition about Jesus" (p. 47). Then the Scriptures were not inspired? "This doctrine of 'inspiration' has now become so untenable in evangelical Christianity that it no longer finds any theological support" (p. 61). How can we know which portion of this tradition about Jesus is authoritative? "First, we must be in a position to search out in the Scriptures those ideas which impress us as belonging to faith; secondly, obedience to Scripture should be required of no man as regards those passages in which he personally does not hear

God speak to him. . . . The birth of faith within ourselves is the sole means whereby we may distinguish between such passages of Scripture and those others in which we can apprehend God for ourselves" (p. 72). These uninspired Scriptures are not reliable throughout? "Historical criticism may, and even must, question the certitude of this tradition" (p. 77). But, Doctor, to ascribe erroneous teachings to the Bible will imperil men's salvation! On the contrary, "the doctrine of a double predestination, which, following Rom. 9—11 Luther [!] and Calvin developed even more crudely than Augustine, has no basis in faith. . . . But the fact that the Bible contains such a development of thought as we find preeminently in Rom. 9, 20—23 should subserve our salvation if it brings us to face the question whether we are prepared to follow Scripture even in that which we cannot understand to be a notion rooted in our faith. If we decide to do this, we are treating the Bible as a law-book, which requires from us external obedience" (p. 134).

What does experience and what do those portions of Scripture which are true teach concerning redemption? "In the orthodox doctrine of the *munus Christi triplex* the largest place is occupied by the doctrine of redemption. . . . According to this doctrine, God is reconciled by the sacrifice offered to Him. The satisfaction offered by Christ to the righteous God in place of the sinner (*satisfactio vicaria*) should therefore be the basis of our confidence in God's forgiveness. . . . Such a conception, however, is entirely un-Biblical" (p. 118ff.). How, then, did Christ, according to the non-orthodox, the liberal, the Biblical (?) view, redeem us? "For Jesus it must have been inconceivable that His work was necessary to effect a change in God's attitude to sinners. . . . This unlimited, indestructible goodness of God toward every one in whom there is still any trace of longing for Him Jesus depicts both in the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15) and also when He bases the command to love one's enemies upon God's own attitude towards His enemies (Matt. 5, 45)" (p. 121). "That Jesus Christ has the power to redeem us can only mean that our present experience of the reality of His person convinces us as nothing else does that God will accept us" (p. 115). Then, since Christ's work did not consist in His expiating for our sins, but in bringing us the assurance that God is Love, demanding no satisfaction, what does Scripture and the Church mean by the term "forgiveness of sins"? "To accept God's forgiveness means that we become aware in a fact of our experience that the same God who judges us for our sins seeks us to unite us with Himself" (p. 118). "In the cross such men always see the complete manifestation of the fact of God's desire to say to them that their guilt, however grievous it be, shall not separate them from Him. This is the forgiveness of God which we experience" (p. 124). "He can be certain of his salvation only by keeping before his eyes the fact of God's grace directed towards him. This, however, happens in faith or in trust in Jesus Christ; for herein it becomes clear to the sinner that in spite of his sins God treats him as His child" (p. 130). Then, after all, faith saves? That is "the conception which we find in Jesus and in Paul, that the sinner is saved by faith" (p. 113). You do not mean by faith the acceptance of the Gospel promise of forgiveness? No; "faith is the attitude of entire surrender to the spiritual Power there revealed" (p. 60), "the assurance

that, since this man does not cast her away (Luke 7, 36—50), God Himself would accept her" (p. 118). What, in a word, does redemption and salvation by faith mean? "Redemption consists in the revival, in man, of the faith which his sins had destroyed. . . . The beginning of redemption lies in that transformation of our attitude to God which is brought about by the Redeemer" (p. 113). That is certainly not the teaching of Paul and Luther? It certainly is. "According to the doctrine of the Reformers justification is a judgment of God upon the sinner, whereby God says to him: 'Thou art fit for communion with Me.' That hits off correctly in general terms the Pauline notion of justification" (p. 131). In the last analysis, Doctor, what saves man? "Jesus tries continually to make clear what real righteousness is, and He tries to stimulate men to put their trust in the goodness of God. . . . We are only in reality submissive to the power of God when we stand to Him in a relationship of absolute trust and in inward independence practise the good we know; when, that is to say, our conduct is authentic obedience" (p. 45f.). This is "the fundamental thought of Jesus' Gospel, that it is in God's rule in our hearts that our salvation consists" (p. 115).

When the young pilgrims heard the master declare: "In general, it is the way of Jesus to take the language of Old Testament religion very seriously" (p. 46), and: "The notion that a creature such as the devil can bar the way of the seeker after God must ultimately be rendered impossible by the religious knowledge of God's omnipotence. . . . It is true that Jesus shared in the idea of a devil, as He did, in general, in the whole world-view then current in Israel," some of them may have inquired: Is Jesus Christ true God? "From the prophets, the servants of God, He distinguishes Himself as the 'Son of God' (Matt. 21, 34—39)" (p. 48). Does that mean that He is true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, the Second Person of the Trinity? "The word" (person) "does not indicate three divine personalities"; "The doctrine of the Trinity must always start from the fact that God reveals to us His single nature in this threefold way (economical Trinity)" (p. 151f.). Then, since there is no eternal Son of the Father, why is Jesus called the "Son of God"? "Jesus becomes for us the evidence of the reality of the God whom He calls His Father; for every feature of the tradition in which we find His inner life expressed combines to depict a man who derives from his confidence in God the power to accomplish the greatest tasks and to bear the heaviest burdens" (p. 77). "We have no terms in which we can adequately express this relationship of Jesus to God. We can only represent it by the Biblical expression offered us in the New Testament, Son of God" (p. 139). What is meant by the divinity of Jesus? "The more God becomes to us a reality of experience, the more we realize God's rule in us, which alone can redeem us. But the effect Jesus has upon us is that in His working we are bound to see God Himself turning to us and ready to save us. Whoever has this experience in connection with the person of Christ will find growing within him this thought of Christ's divinity" (p. 138). In short, Jesus is not true God? "It will not do to seek to base Christian faith upon the hypothesis that in Christ divine nature is united with human nature. . . . Luther continued to employ the inadequate notion of a divine nature in Christ" (p. 141f.).

And the young pilgrims went forth from Marburg and preached Ritschlianism, Unitarianism, rationalism, heathenism, in all the world. — An Episcopalian divine of St. Louis preached the other day in Des Moines and was quoted thus: "We are to remember that Christ is not a reformer, but a liberator, to set free the full potentialities of human life, to ransom His people from the thralldom of their conception of an angry God, and win them to the God of mercy and love." This divine had been making pilgrimages, if not to Marburg, then at any rate to a colony of Marburg.

E.

**The Message of Jesus.** A Survey of the Teaching of Jesus Contained in the Synoptic Gospels. By *Harvie Branscomb*, Professor of New Testament, Duke University. \$1.00.

This book is to belong to the "Bible Text Series," of which Dr. E. B. Chappell is editor and the various volumes of which are to be used "by adult classes and study groups." To understand the present volume, one must bear in mind that it is designed to discuss the message of Jesus as far as this is contained in the synoptic gospels. What Jesus taught according to the fourth gospel is to be dwelt on in another volume. There is much that is good and helpful in this book, but to a number of statements we either have to take exception, or we have to regret that they are not without ambiguity. When the writer, on page 18, says that Mark first accompanied Paul and Silas (instead of Barnabas), that is, of course, merely a little slip. But we cannot condone this statement of his about Mark: "Occasionally he cannot resist the temptation to tell a good story, whether it be important for his purpose or not." Again, why does the writer say with respect to Matthew: "There are certain strong reasons for thinking that he was not the sole author of the completed gospel as it now stands, but that he wrote perhaps an earlier form of the gospel or else a document, such as a collection of Jesus' teachings, which has been incorporated into it"? An unbiased investigation will show that these "strong reasons" have very little solid ground to rest on. The statement on p. 37: "It is just as clear that Jesus did not read the Old Testament as all of equal worth," is ambiguous. If he means that not all parts of the Old Testament are of equal significance, he is right; but if he means to say that some parts are more inspired than others, we have to demur. Furthermore, is it true that Jesus "taught primarily a certain religious view of life"? Was not the main element of His teaching the good news of God's grace and of the redemption? The remark on p. 48: "In the actual concrete world Jesus saw God everywhere; he had imagination, or rather, I should say, eyes to see," hardly speaks of Jesus with the reverence which we owe Him. Can a Bible Christian accept the statement that for Jesus "the elaborate angelology of Judaism is purely conventional"? — But enough of such details. What I consider as the most serious fault of the book is that it does not dwell sufficiently on what Jesus taught concerning universal sinfulness and of His own redemptive work. It is true that as far as the latter is concerned, the last chapter of the book has a few sentences on it, but they utterly fail to do justice to what the synoptic gospels report as to the teaching of Jesus in this matter. I should not advise that this book be placed in the hands of our Sunday-school teachers.