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Good Works.

Translated from Dr. E. Preuss's *Die Rechtfertigung*, Part IX.

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(Continued.)

In the light of this simple description of the procedure at the Last Judgment we also understand Luke 16, 9, where Christ says: "Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that, when ye fail (*ὅταν ἐκλείπητε*), they may receive you into everlasting habitations." Luther says: "When I come before God's Judgment, a poor man to whom I have done good will stand in heaven and say: 'He washed my feet; he gave me meat, drink, clothing.' That man will certainly be my friend and a witness for my faith, whatever words he may use to express his testimony. At that time a beggar will be of more use to me than St. Peter." (St. Louis Ed., XI, 1951.) Aegidius Hunnius writes to the same effect: "On the Last Day the poor will receive their benefactors with the testimony which the Son of God will bear in their stead and in their name in favor of the godly persons who were wealthy. By this testimony He will show publicly that their faith was not hypocritical, but abounded in good works and therefore was a genuine and living faith. For this fact there will be as many witnesses as there are persons who were succored by them in this life." 1)

This public justification does, however, take place not only on the Last Day, but very often also before that day. For did not the Lord publicly absolve the great sinner in the presence of the Pharisee and his company? (Luther. St. Louis Ed., VII, 1456 to 1461.) And always according to the works. Christ said to the

1) In novissimo die recipient benefactores suos egeni suo testimonio, quod illorum vice atque nomine Filius Dei perhibebit piis divitibus, publice testificaturus, fidem eorum non inanem, sed bonis operibus gravidam atque sic vivam veram et non simulatam fuisse; cujus tot habebunt vivos testes, quot ex pauperum grege beneficentiam eorum in hoc mundo sunt experti. (Aegidius Hunnius, *De Justificatione*, 231.)

The Troubles of the Interpolationists.

III.

The purpose of these lines is not to establish the Virgin Birth. That is established by the clear statements of Scripture in Luke 1, Matt. 1, Is. 7, 14, etc. Nor is it our chief purpose to disprove the theory that portions of Luke 1 are interpolations. That was effectually done in the first section of the first part of Dr. J. G. Machen's article on "The Integrity of the Lucan Narrative of the Annunciation." There the case, as to this point, might have rested. By the providence of God we have in Luke 1, 34, 35 an uncorrupted text. By the first law of textual criticism the case of the interpolationists is at once thrown out of court. The manuscripts yield them no evidence. Then why should Dr. Machen devote so many pages to the examination of this theory? It is done, though he does not state it in so many words, for the purpose of illustrating anew the truth that, when men set out to assail any doctrine and statement of Scripture, they are forced to abandon, sooner or later, in a more or less flagrant manner, clear thinking and logical reasoning. The theory of interpolation under discussion does not cause us any trouble. But it involves its advocates in serious difficulties. We take great pleasure in offering a final instalment of extracts from the article.

"So far we have been considering the arguments that have been advanced in favor of the interpolation theory. It is now time to consider a little more specifically the positive arguments that may be advanced against it. . . . The strongest indication of all, perhaps, is found in the total impression that the narrative makes. If we could imagine ourselves as reading this narrative for the first time and reading it without Luke 1, 34 f., it would seem disorganized and overwrought almost from beginning to end. The truth is that the child whose birth was prophesied by an angel and was greeted, when it came, by a choir of the heavenly host, is inconceivable as a mere child of earthly parents. . . .

"Some of the details in Luke 1 and 2 which presuppose the Virgin Birth are of a subsidiary kind. But their cumulative effect is very great. Thus it has been well observed that Mary's words of submission, Luke 1, 38, are without point if there has been no prophecy of the Virgin Birth in what precedes. These words are natural only if what has been promised involves shame as well as honor. And those who include v. 38 in the interpolation only heap difficulty upon difficulty; the whole scene is left hanging in the air.

Let v. 39 follow immediately upon v. 33 and see what effect is made. Again, there is no point in the praise of Mary's faith in v. 45 if Mary has not in what precedes given an expression to her faith. V. 45 presupposes v. 38 — and the stupendous miracle, the promise of which Mary had believed, with the acceptance by Mary of an experience that involved possible shame for her, and that was quite unique in the history of the human race. This praise of Mary's faith and the spirit of the narrative from beginning to end seem empty and jejune unless the reader has in mind the miracle which really forms the center of the whole. The account of Mary's visit to Elisabeth also constitutes a clear refutation of that form of the interpolation theory which includes in the interpolation vv. 36 and 37. Why did she go at all, and especially, why did she go in haste? Without vv. 36 f. the whole account of the visit is left hanging in the air. So vv. 36 f. must stay in. But they presuppose vv. 34 f. The narrative hangs together. The removal of the supposed interpolation throws all into confusion. . . . The account of Mary's visit to Elisabeth presupposes Luke 1, 34. 35, as Hilgenfeld has pointed out, in still another way. The conception is regarded as already having taken place, else Elisabeth's words in v. 42 seem overwrought. (Matt. 1, of course, puts the matter beyond any possible doubt, but our author is building his case on the Lucan narrative alone.) Then, if Mary is regarded as already married to Joseph, how is this hasty journey away from her husband to the home of a kinswoman to be explained? But if Luke 1, 34. 35 stands, it is the most natural thing in the world for the angel to suggest, and for Mary to carry out, a visit to her kinswoman, who also has passed through a wonderful, though, of course, far inferior, experience of God's grace. But if Luke 1, 34 f. is omitted, everything is at loose ends. Finally, what is said Luke 2, 51 seems without point if Jesus was born of Joseph and Mary by ordinary generation.

“But it is time to turn from such general considerations to an argument of a more specific kind. This argument is found in the remarkable parallelism that prevails between the account of the annunciation to Mary and that of the annunciation to Zacharias. This parallelism shows in the clearest possible way that the verses Luke 1, 34. 35 belong to the very innermost structure of the narrative. In both accounts we find 1) an appearance of the angel Gabriel, 2) fear on the part of the person to whom the annunciation is to be made, 3) reassurance by the angel and pronouncement of a promise, 4) a perplexed question by the recipient of the promise,

5) a grounding of the question in a causal clause, 6) reiteration of the promise with reference to something which in both cases is in the nature of a sign. The facts may best be indicated if we place the two sections in parallel columns. . . . But if vv. 34 and 35 were removed, this parallelism would be marred at the most important point. What, then, does the interpolation hypothesis involve? The supposition that an interpolator, desiring to insert an idea utterly foreign to the original narrative, has succeeded in inserting that idea in such a way as not only to refrain from marring the existent parallelism, but actually to fill up in the most beautiful fashion a parallelism which otherwise would have been incomplete! We should have to suppose that the original narrator, though he did not include the Virgin Birth, left a gap exactly suited to its inclusion. . . . It appears, therefore, — if we may use, for the moment, the language of textual criticism, — that ‘intrinsic probability’ and ‘transcriptional probability’ are here in admirable agreement. On the one hand, the verses Luke 1, 34, 35 are really in the closest harmony with the rest of the narrative; but on the other hand, that harmony is not of the obvious, superficial kind, that would appeal to an interpolator. Indeed the very difficulty that we found in the interpretation of Mary’s question in v. 34 may be turned into an argument, not for, but against, the interpolation theory. The difficulty is of a superficial kind, that would probably have been avoided by an interpolator; the underlying harmony is of a kind worthy only of such a writer as the original composer of Luke 1 and 2. . . . *Real* harmony with the rest of the narrative and *superficial* difficulty — these are the recognized marks of genuineness in any passage of an ancient work.”

According to Weinel and others only the four words “seeing I know not a man” constitute the interpolation, and the words of the angel in v. 35 point to an activity of the Holy Spirit securing the greatness and holiness of the son, without at all excluding the human agency in his conception. “Surely the minimizing interpretation which Weinel advocates for v. 35 is unnatural in the extreme. Why should it be said, ‘The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee,’ if the activity of the Spirit terminates upon the child in the womb rather than upon Mary? Why should not some expression like that in Luke 1, 15, ‘He shall be filled with the Holy Ghost,’ be used if the work of the Spirit in both cases is essentially the same? . . . A second objection to Weinel’s hypothesis is found in the parallelism with the annunciation to Zacharias to which attention has already been called. — Weinel’s hypothesis would force us

to suppose that the original narrator left a gap in the structure of one of his parallel accounts, and a gap so exceedingly convenient that when by the insertion of four words an interpolator introduced into the narrative a momentous new idea, the most beautiful symmetry of form was the result. . . . In the third place, Mary's question, in the shortened form to which Weinel's hypothesis reduces it: "How shall this be?" seems to have no point; it is a meaningless interruption of the angel's speech. . . . The original narrator would at this point have suddenly descended to banality; and the beautiful naturalness and symmetry which now appears in the passage would be due, not to the author, but to an interpolator. . . . There is another objection that is perhaps even more serious still. It is found in the extraordinary restraint which Weinel's hypothesis is obliged to attribute to the supposed interpolator. An interpolator, we are asked to believe, desired to introduce into a Jewish Christian narrative a momentous idea, the idea of the Virgin Birth, which by hypothesis was foreign to the narrative. How does he go to work? Does he even mention it plainly? Not at all. — On the ordinary form of the interpolation hypothesis we were called upon to admire the extraordinary literary skill of the interpolator; . . . on Weinel's hypothesis it is the extraordinary restraint of the interpolator which affords ground for wonder. The surprising thing is that, if the interpolator was going to insert anything in the interest of the Virgin Birth, he did not insert far more. . . .

"What needs finally to be emphasized is that the *difference* between the two accounts (of the annunciation to Mary and of the annunciation to Zacharias) is at least as significant in establishing the original place of the Virgin Birth in Luke 1 and 2, as is the similarity. In fact, the very similarity finds its true meaning in the emphasis which it places upon the difference. One obvious difference, of course, is that the annunciation of the birth of John comes to the father of the child, while the annunciation of the birth of Jesus comes to the mother. What is the reason for this difference? Is the difference due merely to chance?" The author, talking to his opponents in the language of higher criticism, proceeds to point out that, if, on the one hand, the narrative is quite unhistorical, as Harnack claims, the legend lying back of it could not attribute such importance to the mother, giving her the central place instead of Joseph, unless she was regarded as a parent of the Child in some sense that did not apply to Joseph; that, if it regards the relation of Joseph to Jesus as being similar to that of Zacharias to John, it is puzzling that Joseph is not made the re-

ipient of the angelic promise; and that, if, on the other hand, the narrator was bound by historical tradition actually coming from Mary, the prominence of Mary in the narrative remains significant. Are we to suppose that Mary attributed that prominence to herself without special reason? So, then, whether this narrative be treated as a purely human product, or whether it is treated as given by inspiration, both parties are confronted by this difference in the two accounts of the annunciations. What accounts for the difference? "The prominence of Mary as compared with Joseph, which is so strikingly contrasted with the prominence of Zacharias as compared with Elisabeth, clearly points to something specially significant in her relation to the promised child, something which Joseph did not share. In other words, it points to the supernatural conception, which is so plainly attested in Luke 1, 34. 35. The removal of these verses by the advocates of the interpolation theory has really deprived us of the key that unlocks the meaning of the narrative from beginning to end.

"There is, moreover, another way also in which the relation between the two accounts of annunciations presupposes the Virgin Birth. It is clearly the intention of the narrator to exhibit the greatness of Jesus in comparison with His forerunner John. But in the annunciation of the birth of John the manner of the birth is given special prominence. The child, it is said, is to be born of aged parents, and around this feature a large part of the narrative revolves. . . . Are we to suppose that it is the intention of the narrator that, while John was born of aged parents by a special dispensation of divine grace, Jesus was simply the child of Joseph and Mary? Vv. 36 and 37 surely provide the true key to the relation between the two accounts; the angel there points to the coming birth of John from an aged mother as an example of that omnipotence of God which is to be manifested in yet plainer fashion in the birth of Jesus. . . . A wonderful, if not plainly supernatural, conception in the case of John followed by a merely natural conception in the case of Jesus, which the interpolation hypothesis requires us to find, would have seemed to the composer of the narrative to involve a lamentable anticlimax. The entire structure of the narrative protests eloquently against any such thing. At this point an objection may possibly be raised. . . . If the author was ordering his material with such freedom as to exhibit the parallelism that we have discovered, must he not have been quite free from the

restraint which would have been imposed upon him by information concerning what actually happened to Zacharias and Mary? In other words, does not the artistic symmetry which we have discovered in the narrative militate against any acceptance of its historical trustworthiness? . . . In reply it may be said simply that our argument has not depended upon any particular view as to the way in which the symmetry upon which we have been insisting came into being. It would hold just as well if the author merely reproduced a symmetry which was inherent in the divine ordering of the facts, as it would if he himself constructed the symmetry by free invention. In either case the symmetry would be intentional in his narrative. Moreover, even in a thoroughly accurate narrative there is some possibility of such a selection and ordering of the material as shall bring certain features especially in view. . . . That parallelism, we think, was inherent in the facts; and the writer showed himself to be not merely an artist, but a true historian when he refrained from marring it. . . . In either case, however the parallelism came to be there, whether the narrative is historical or the product of free invention, it certainly, as a matter of fact, is there; and an interpolation theory which holds that it was originally defective at the decisive point is faced by the strongest kind of objections that literary criticism can ever afford.

“Our conclusion, then, is that the entire narrative in Luke 1 and 2 finds both its climax and its center in the virgin birth of Christ. . . . The account of the lesser wonder in the case of the forerunner, the delicate and yet significant way in which Mary is put forward instead of Joseph, the lofty key in which the whole narrative is pitched, — all this is incomprehensible without the supreme miracle of the supernatural conception in the virgin’s womb. The interpolation hypothesis, therefore, not merely fails of proof, but (as fully as can reasonably be expected in literary criticism) is positively disproved.”

These considerations will, of course, convert no man to the Christian faith. It serves, indeed, a good purpose to devote some little time to laying bare the pitiable weakness, before the forum of reason, of the position of the impugnors of the Virgin Birth. But the basis of this doctrine is the simple statement of Scripture. We believe it because of what is written in Luke 1, Matt. 1, and Is. 7, 14. That is the inspired Word of God. Let a man read and ponder these simple statements, and one of two things will happen — he will either confess with the Christian Church: “Conceived of the

Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary," or he will continue to go against God's Word, and then something worse than mere discomfiture before men will come upon him. Falling on this stone, he shall be broken, and the stone falling upon him will grind him to powder.

E.

