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## Some Difficulties in the Speech of Stephen, Acts 7.

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The interpretation of the magnificent speech — Bengel calls it *documentum Spiritus pretiosum* — delivered by Stephen before the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem encounters a number of difficulties which at first sight appear somewhat formidable and, accordingly, have been used by critics of the negative school to impugn the inerrancy and credibility of the sacred narrative. To show that these difficulties are by no means insuperable, and that the poison fangs of criticism are not so dreadful as their possessors would make them out to be, is the purpose of this discussion.

1. Stephen's speech was made to disprove the accusation that he had been speaking blasphemous words against the Temple, etc.; chap. 6, 13f. To a superficial reader much of what Stephen says will seem to be beside the mark, having apparently no bearing at all on the point at issue. On this account there have been some who have declared the speech to be fictitious, an invention of St. Luke. But a careful study will reveal the pertinence of all of Stephen's statements. His account of the history of Israel, terminating so abruptly with the reference to the building of the Temple by Solomon, was intended to show that God's revelation in the golden period of Israel's past was not given in the Temple, this structure having not yet been erected, but here and there, wherever the fathers were sojourning, and that hence the teaching of Stephen, when he pointed to the abrogation of the Temple-worship, was not blasphemous, as true religion was by no means dependent on the existence of the Temple and on residing in the land of Canaan. Thus the speech was an effective rebuttal of the charge of blasphemy raised against him.

2. Stephen begins his speech with stating that God appeared to Abram when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran

## THE THEOLOGICAL OBSERVER.

The **Episcopal Church and the Apostles' Creed.** — "The most definite declaration of belief made by any Protestant Church during the last five years of religious controversy," says the editor of *Time* (November 26, 1923), "was made at Dallas, Tex., by the bishops of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States, which is the counterpart of the Anglican or State Church of Great Britain. In their declaration the bishops leave no room for quibbling. They present the Apostles' Creed and say in effect: 'Take it or leave it.' The Apostles' Creed affirms that Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary, that He descended into hell, that He rose [bodily] from the dead, and now 'He sitteth on the right hand of God.' These statements have been stumbling-blocks to many within the Church and without. The bishops emphatically pronounce that belief in these statements has been, is, and shall be required of all those who desire baptism or ordination in the Protestant Episcopal Church. Teaching of these facts' concerning Jesus Christ is obligatory upon every deacon, priest, and bishop. At Dallas the 'faith of our fathers' triumphed without opposition. No bishop dissented, and it was probably the first time in two thousand years of Christianity that so many bishops have assembled to discuss their creed and have not disputed among themselves. Five bishops prepared the report, which was received with loud and prolonged applause. It was adopted unanimously. Henceforth the creedal position of the Protestant Episcopal Church is as definite and clear as the latest and most exact map of the United States." The following excerpts from the bishops' report are quoted: "Some test of earnest and sincere purpose of discipleship for belief and for life is reasonably required for admission to the Christian Society. Accordingly, profession of the Apostles' Creed, as a summary of Christian belief, stands and has stood from early days along with renunciation of evil and the promise of obedience to God's commandments as a condition of baptism." "To deny, or to treat as immaterial, belief in the creed in which at every regular service of the Church both minister and congregation profess to believe, is to trifle with words and cannot but expose us to the suspicion and the danger of dishonesty and unreality."

We, too, of course, are glad that the Apostles' Creed "was accepted at Dallas without opposition by the bishops of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States," although, as Lutherans, we fail to see why such an occurrence should be regarded as extraordinary. If the Episcopal Church is a Christian Church, it cannot do otherwise than accept that Creed, which summarizes the fundamentals of the Christian faith. But the mere accepting of the Apostles' Creed is no guarantee that the Episcopal Church will on that account preach God's pure Word. From the very start the Calvinistic churches have denied that Scriptural doctrine which is embodied in the words of the Creed: "He descended into hell," and with a little juggling it will be possible for liberalistic preachers within the

Church to set forth all their modernistic views in spite of the public confession of the Apostles' Creed. The event at Dallas was a poor victory for the Episcopalian Church. That the event had to be staged at all is a *testimonium paupertatis*.  
MUELLER.

**Will It Eventually Come?**—Last fall (*Time*, October 29, 1923) the Congregationalists proposed a union with the Presbyterians. The Presbyterians received the proposal cordially, yet difficulties in the way of uniting are so great that no hope of immediate union is entertained by either body. The Presbyterian Church is a national organization, advocating the presbyterial system. The center of Congregational life is the local church. There is, therefore, a very serious difference as regards polity which keeps the two denominations apart. However, the main difference applies to doctrine. The Presbyterian Church has a creed, and Fundamentalists in the Presbyterian Church insist upon the creed, while there is no one creed for all Congregational churches, which are essentially Unitarian. Dr. J. Ross Stephenson, President of the Theological Seminary at Princeton, N. J., is chairman of a committee whose business it is to discover whether anything can be effected without loss to the Presbyterian creed or Presbyterian organization. Meanwhile the budget of the Presbyterian Church for the coming year amounts to \$17,000,000, an increase of \$2,000,000. Of this amount, \$7,000,000 will be spent for foreign missions.  
MUELLER.

**A False Hope Concerning the Hereafter.**—In the *Independent* (November 10, 1923) H. Abye Prichard, Honorary Canon of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York, ventures the following statement concerning death and the hereafter. He says in part: "What is death but the taking away, not of the spirit from the body, but of the body from the spirit? What is it but to leave that spirit unconfined and untrammelled by a somewhat clumsy contrivance of flesh and blood and bones, freed to expand its energies into all the spaces of whatever dimensions there may be? What is it but the open door which sets before the spirit the power of all knowledge without the restrictions of the brain, the majesty of all will without the weakness of the body? What more noble conception can we have than that the dead are present with God and men to construct the perfection of the world, to repeal the wanton laws of crime and sin and selfishness, and to write in undying letters the charter of human brotherhood? If this may be the conviction of our thought, the world becomes less hopeless, and the future, far out on the horizon, shines magnificently bright. . . . We have every authority for believing that spiritual progress is developed in discipline, in action, in growth, and that, at the end, the spirit comes to a full and immediate knowledge of God. That such knowledge will be beautiful and satisfying no devout man can doubt, for he knows that God acts in love and is Love; and no more beautiful and satisfying vision than that of love was ever imagined by any child of God. That is the hope of immortality."

Every Christian knows that this is not "the hope of immortality"

that is offered to man in the Word of God. According to the clear teachings of Scripture there is a gulf-wide difference between believers and unbelievers. Unbelievers will not enjoy the eternal presence of God, but will be forever separated from God. Nor is it true that spiritual progress is developed in discipline, in action, in growth; and that, at the end, the spirit comes to a full and immediate knowledge of God. Unless a man believes, and his entire action and growth flow from faith in Christ as the only Source of all good, no one may hope to come to a knowledge and fruition of God in the hereafter. If the Canon of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine wishes to serve the cause of Christ and benefit his fellow-men by writing articles concerning the hereafter in public periodicals, he could do no better than to set forth the clear and unmistakable teachings of the Scriptures. Disseminating Pelagian and paganistic views concerning the hereafter only augments the confusion, unbelief, and atheism that are rampant not only in the world at large, but also in the Episcopal Church, of which Canon Prichard is a member. Let ministers use the press, but not abuse it.

MUELLER.

**The Readableness of the Bible.**—Under this caption the *Literary Digest* (November 17, 1923) quotes Thomas L. Masson in the *Christian Herald* as favoring Bible-reading without the usual paraphernalia of questions and answers and explanatory notes, which, according to his opinion, hedge in, rather than promote, Bible-reading. Having himself discarded these "hindrances to Bible-reading," he began to search the Scriptures for himself, and some of the results he has described as follows: "The Bible is the most economic book in the world, for it renders all other books superfluous. . . . So far as I have been able to discover, there is not a single word in it that you cannot understand as soon as you look at it. . . . You do not have to read it through, you can pick it up anywhere; any part of it gets better every time you read it." Mr. Masson, the former literary and managing editor of *Life*, believes that the Bible is not only readable, but can also be made readable for great numbers of people, if they can rid themselves of systems and of the things that have been written in its favor. He says: "The Bible is not competing with any other book. It is the bed-rock foundation of all our literature, and therefore, if you want to know anything, the Bible is where you must go to find it. No newspaper man, no sage or scientist, no philosopher or statesman, has ever been able to get up early enough in the morning to get ahead of the Bible. Being so compactly written, without a superfluous word, no word in it can therefore be overlooked, and that is why it must be read without any ambition, that is, any thought that one may acquire a reputation as an authority for having read it. That is why it can never be read by any method or system. It is too big for systems; it comprehends man himself and all his thoughts. It is, in reality, a great gallery of superb human portraits."

Mr. Masson does not state whether this is all the benefit he derived from his Bible-reading. He has nothing to say about the religion of the Bible. However, we assume that he purposely did not

refer to the doctrinal content of the Bible. What he means to show is that so much is being written about the Bible that the average reader can no longer afford the time to read the Bible itself. In this assertion there is, we believe, much truth. Not to read books about the Bible, explaining the Bible, but to read the precious Word of God itself is the command of our Savior. God's Word is spirit and life. In it God speaks to man, and the Holy Spirit expounds to the reader the great concepts of sin and grace. We do not despise commentaries, — no Bible student can afford to be without them, — but no Christian can afford to read the Bible less and study commentaries more.

MUELLER.

**A Very Unchristian View of a "Christian."** — A very unchristian view of a Christian is strikingly set forth in the *Herald of Gospel Liberty*, a Campbellite paper. Branding the doctrinal differences of the various churches as "denominational tommy-rot," the writer says: "To suppose that God made folks so that some of them had to be Methodists and some Presbyterians and some Lutherans and some Christians, and so on *ad infinitum*, is so ridiculous that it has no place in the sane thinking of men — outside of their theological delusions. God did not make embryo Methodists and Presbyterians and Christians, etc. Babies are born as susceptible of being trained for any one denomination as for any other, as every preacher preaches when he is in his sanest moments and pleading for Sunday-school work instead of defending denominationalism. There is not a thing in all of Christ's teaching that indicates that denominational division is necessary either to present His Gospel or to satisfy human nature. Apologists for denominationalism must be made plainly to understand that these fallacies with which they have justified division in the Church can no longer have any place in honest and careful thinking."

That God did not make embryo Methodists, Presbyterians, Christians, etc., is a truth which no man has ever questioned. As a matter of fact, God is not the Author of any division in the Church, nor does He desire His followers to be divided into factions. All believers should be united in teaching and confessing the whole counsel of salvation, yes, every doctrine which God has published in His Word. That divisions exist is due to the fact that men will not accept and preach God's Word in its purity and entirety. Divisions have their source in the pride and arrogance of the carnal heart. However, this very fact imposes a clear duty upon all true believers and professors of the Christian faith. Over against all who deny the Word of God in whole or in part, they must bear emphatic testimony not only by word, but also by deed, avoiding those who "cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which they have learned." Unionism and syncretism, which the writer in the *Herald of Gospel Liberty* defends, is the great curse of the Church to-day, and to defend it means, in the last analysis, nothing less than destroying the Gospel. Not the objection of true believers to false doctrines, but just such statements as the writer has made must be classified as "incorrigible tommy-rot."

MUELLER.

“Some Aspects of Luther” was the subject of the Stone Lectures at Princeton Seminary for the current academic year. Dr. J. A. Faulkner of Drew Seminary was the lecturer. He divided his subject as follows: 1. Luther’s Conversion. 2. Luther and Christ. 3. Luther and Church and State. 4. Luther at the Bar of Critics: I. Theology; II. Morals. 5. Luther’s Permanent Significance. So far we have seen in print only a part of the last lecture in the *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* for November (pp. 4—8), from which we cull a few statements that show the lecturer’s trend of thought: “The fundamental thing that Luther did was to find for himself, first by a study of the New Testament and second by his own experience, Christ’s and Paul’s doctrine of justification by faith alone.” “By restoring justification by faith, he rediscovered Christianity as a religion.” “Luther discovered man. Not in the sense of the Humanists, not man as an object of study or of curiosity, but man as a creature of God, who now first comes to his religious rights before his Creator alone, without the intermediaries of angels, saints, Mary, Pope, bishops, priests. This also is the outgrowth of the principle of justification by faith.” “Luther was the first to introduce and relentlessly carry through a religious standard of value of the Bible.” (This is the critical point in most modern discussions of Luther’s attitude toward the Scriptures. The majority of reviewers represent Luther as an arch-liberalist. Dr. Faulkner says: “Some have claimed that Luther broke through the authority of Scripture as a norm, as he did other human authorities. I do not find it so. I think Kunze is right when he says that Luther felt the authority of Scripture as the correlate of his freedom of faith and indicated it in this sense. The freedom from human authorities which he won for himself and all other Christians was not a freedom from the Scripture, but with the Scripture: ‘We are called unto liberty, so that it is not necessary to believe as true what another man thinks or says, but we are content to believe in that which we are taught in Scripture.’ [Assertio omn. Articul., Weim. Ed. 5, 160.]”) “Luther had a firmness in holding what he believed to be true and a certain recklessness as to consequences which seems to me one of the divinest things about him.” “Luther revolutionized the whole theory and practise of the religious life by making divine again the common life of man.” “Luther restored marriage to its place of honor.” “Nor can we do justice to Luther’s permanent place in history if we fail to mention his catechetical influence.” The concluding paragraph of the lecture reads: “I close. I came across an original judgment of Luther from a Scotch Presbyterian layman, which I quote as making amends somewhat for the one-sided criticism of another Scotch Presbyterian layman, Sir William Hamilton:—

There have been loftier schemes of reform before and after Luther, but never did a scheme that was realizable to the last letter spring from the brain of a single man. Luther was a man of supreme common sense. He looked the world straight in the face and saw life in all its littleness as well as greatness, but never lost faith in its possibilities. His sincerity, too, was unimpeachable, and in his nature there was no room for valseh [= Falsch]. (J. G. Robertson, *A History of German Literature*, 1902, p. 171.)

“Goethe said of Luther in one of his conversations with Eckermann: ‘He has worked for many a good day, and the date of the day in the far centuries when he will cease to be productive is not to be seen.’” Before Goethe, Lutherans had expressed Goethe’s thought in the lines:

Gottes Wort und Luthers Lehr’  
Vergehet nun und nimmermehr.

Judging from the excerpts given, the Stone Lectures of this year promise to offer us something good. Let us hope that we will not be disappointed when the entire series that was delivered on successive days from October 15 to 20, 1923, is published. DAU.

The newspaper discussions, during the Advent and Christmas seasons, of the Virgin Birth by the clergy of various Protestant churches were indeed verging towards the scandalous. Not that the subject was unbecoming, but the treatment for the most part was. However, Algernon S. Crapsey, by his article “The Shame of the Churches” (*The Nation*, January 16), does not improve matters when he takes the bishops to task and calls them childish for taking the stories of the birth of Christ literally. “The instant we remove these stories from their home in mythology into the sphere of literal history,” he says, “we destroy their charm and make of them mere stories of the nursery.” It is likely that the writer applies the mythical view also to the story of Adam’s Fall, of the resurrection of Christ, of the future Judgment, etc. The Virgin Birth has an internal connection with all these matters. *Not* to take these matters literally is the greater shame, and a shame with appalling consequences, Mark 8, 38. The practical meaninglessness of the discussion, at least between the two leading parties to it, and the mispent zeal that has gone into it, is characterized by Mr. Crapsey in these words of withering scorn:—

“The deepest disgrace of this quarrel between the High Church, as represented by the Bishop of New York, and the Broad Church, whose chief spokesman is the rector of the Church of St. Bartholomew, is that it is practically a quarrel about nothing. The bishop says Jesus is to him very God of very God; the rector says that Jesus is to him his divine Lord and Master. Such being the case, it would seem the sacred duty of the bishop to obey his God and of the rector to follow his divine Lord and Master. And if the bishop did obey his God, and if the rector did follow his divine Lord and Master, would not these two meet in the midst of the stern moralities and severe spiritualities of the Sermon on the Mount, and meeting there, must not each fall down on his knees and cry, the bishop to his God, the rector to his Lord and Master: ‘Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner’?

“From that high altitude would not the sinful futility of his cathedral building be manifest to the bishop? Would he not see that to get the wherewithal to build his cathedral he must be careful not to offend the landlords and the money-lords of the city? Looking down from Morningside Heights, he would see landlords exacting exorbitant rents for tenements unfit for human habitation; he would

see pale, anemic women climbing darkened stairways to sleep in the fetid atmosphere of unventilated rooms; he would see weary workmen heavily slumbering in the same bed with wife and children; he would see the crowded tenements, the breeding-place of sexual vice in its fouler forms of sodomy and incest.

"And going to the Stock Exchange, the bishop would see the money-lords by the manipulations of the market robbing the innocent, impoverishing the widow and the orphan, and giving the tithe of these ungodly gains to the building and support of his cathedral.

"It would then come home to the bishop as a student of history that in every age the building of temples and cathedrals has been the cardinal crime of the bishops and the priests. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, when the bishops were exhausting the labor of the people in the building of the cathedrals, the people themselves were living in wattle huts without window or chimney, frightened by the dark and smothered by the smoke. It was the sale of indulgences for sin to raise the money to pay for the building of the greatest of all the cathedrals, the Basilica of St. Peter in Rome, that roused the wrath of Luther, causing him to hurl his anathema at this wickedness and create the great schism in the Church.

"One single night spent by the Bishop of New York alone on the mount of the sermon would, if he has any intelligence, any heart, any soul, make him ashamed and afraid, and his quarrel with the rector of St. Bartholomew's would be as nothing in comparison with his quarrel with his own soul."

DAU.

There were strong hints a decade ago that the Assumption of Mary would be declared by the Pope. The Catholic *enfant terrible* of America, Father Phelan of the St. Louis *Western Watchman*, refreshed the public with this devoutly Catholic sentiment: If the flesh of Christ is now elevated to the throne of divine majesty, it is only fair that the flesh of her from whom He drew His flesh be elevated thither also. He also suggested that, since the Bible has failed to report this elevation, the Pope would in due time inform the world that it had taken place, and hurl his anathema at every disbeliever of this "doctrine." There are mutterings again in the secular press that the "definition" of the dogma of the Assumption of Mary is imminent and may be proclaimed in connection with the Ecumenical Council which will be convened at Rome this spring. Then a diplomatic egg-dance of Catholic dogmaticians will begin: they will have to prove that Mary is actually elevated to equality with her Son and yet is not equal to her Son, that the Trinity has received an accession of a new element and yet is not changed into a Holy Quartet.

DAU.

"Lord, give us not much of such faith!" that was the prayerful sigh which Luther breathed after recounting the story of the collier and the doctor of theology at Prague by which he illustrated the Romish *fides implicita*. (See St. L. Ed. XVII, 2013.) In the Roman Catholic weekly *America* for January 5 Wilfrid Parsons, of the Society of Jesus, tells the public that the reason why Catholics believe



the virgin birth of Christ is "because the Catholic Church teacheth that it happened. This is in itself complete, absolute, and final proof of the truth of this doctrine." This is *fides implicita*: I believe what the Church believes — and the Church believes what I believe. It is the old dogmatic merry-go-round of the Middle Ages, made only formally a little bit stronger by the decree of the Vatican Council on July 18, 1870, which declared the infallibility of the Pope. This faith is just as efficient and useful to-day as Luther believed it to be in 1532, when he wrote: "If that is all that these two, the doctor and the collier, believed, their faith landed them in the infernal abyss. . . . Such faith does not hurt the devil a bit." Note, however, how Rome is making use of the Protestant unrest which was revealed by the recent newspaper squabble about the Virgin Birth; it tells the Protestants: We have no such trouble; we have a sovereign authority, which settles all questions of faith for us, Bible or no Bible. Come over to us and rest easy and be happy ever after. DAU.

Despotism is one of the fruits of the Great War, which was started to "make the world safe for democracy." In Austria a foreigner representing the League of Nations, Dr. Zimmermann, is in absolute control of all disbursements and revenues. In Italy Mussolini, spurning constitutional guarantees and throwing the nation's franchise to the winds, rules willy-nilly king and parliament. In Spain a general of the army has dissolved the parliament and taken over the reigns of government. In Germany, which should have held an election for members of the *Reichstag* long ago, the verdict of the nation on the two J's (Jesuits and Jews) *régime* is postponed again and again, and now the prime minister, another Centrist man, has been voted dictatorial powers as a safeguard against anarchy. With all these despotic movements the Pope is in hearty accord. Mussolini is his avowed friend. The Spanish ruler, who is king by the grace of his general, performed the foot-kissing melodrama with exceptional emphasis recently; and His Holiness is very, very well pleased with the state and trend of affairs in Germany and Austria. Have we Americans not reason to hang our heads in shame and vow to ourselves: Nevermore shall we launch upon another such enterprise! It goes without saying that Rome-rule is most benefited by despotism, but no other Church is. DAU.

There is something inexpressibly loathsome about the mental attitude towards prostrate and suffering Germany of Basil Miles, American Administrative Commissioner, International Chamber of Commerce, and his artist pal Charles Dunn. The former writes in *The Nation's Business* for December, 1923, on "Germany at the Crossroads — Comedy and Tragedy of the Mark," and the latter furnishes the illustrations in the best style of American humor, that of the Sunday paper funny sheet. It is admitted that the German Government is bankrupt [90 per cent. of the German people likewise]. German markets have been eliminated and restricted, German production impaired, the standard of living reduced, and business turned speculative to an almost unbelievable degree. But through

nine closely printed columns the reporter argues, against the belief of German collapse, that her merchants still buy with gold and are the third best customers of the United States, that Germany's gamblers build up pyramidal fortunes, that her credit operators make millions, that her workmen get a living wage, that her public utilities are functioning, that all her recreations are well patronized, that everything in Germany is "still highly organized," that her "underlying strength remains" and "her potential strength is great." What is the moral of this tale? The writer has not pointed it out, but this one readily suggests itself: The noble, disciplinary action of the fifty-seven righteous nations of the world who started out to "correct" erring Germany and force her to repent is not quite finished. Perhaps another of those inspiring posters like "Let's finish the [dirty] job!" that used to adorn our parlor windows is now in order.      DAU.

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