

**THE VIRGIN BIRTH
OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST**

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Chapter Three -

VARIOUS ATTEMPTS TO EXPLAIN THESE FACTS

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I. THE EXPLANATION OF THE EARLY CHURCH

The controversy over the person of the Lord JESUS CHRIST is nothing new. It began soon after the writings of the New Testament.

In the writings of Justin Martyr, we have our first account of the group which denied the Virgin Birth of JESUS. "For indeed, my friends, there are some of your own race who confess that He is CHRIST with whom I do not agree, nor would the majority but maintain that He was born a man from men; of those who have come to the same way of thinking as I, since we have been commanded by CHRIST Himself to obey not human teachings, but the things that were proclaimed through the blessed prophets and taught by Him."

1. The Early Debate of the Two Nature Theory

The controversy began to rage. Two schools of thought developed. One denied the humanity of JESUS, the other denied the Deity of JESUS.

2. The Early Attempts to Explain CHRIST

First, we look briefly at the early attempts to state the doctrine of CHRIST's person.

(1) The Ebionites (A. D. 107) held that CHRIST was merely a man. He did not possess a divine nature. As man He was in peculiar and special relations with GOD, and from His baptism onward enjoyed the unmeasured fulness of the presence and power of the HOLY SPIRIT. Ebionism shared the intense monotheistic belief of the Jews, and on this account recoiled from attributing divine qualities to CHRIST.

(2) The Docetans (A. D. 70-170) denied the reality of CHRIST's human body. They embraced the philosophic view current among the Gnostics and Manicheans in the early Christian centuries, that matter is inherently evil. Their view of CHRIST was the result of an effort to reconcile the purity and glory of CHRIST's person with their philosophy. Thoroughly false as it is, the Docetic view is one of the landmarks in the early history of doctrine, showing the exalted place CHRIST held in the estimation of men.

(3) The Arians (A. D. 325) held that CHRIST was more than man, but less than GOD. He was the first and greatest of created beings. The Arians thought that the Sonship of CHRIST involved subordination and origin in time. The Logos united humanity to himself in the person of CHRIST. But the Logos was not a being equal with GOD, but derived and dependent. The Arians were condemned at the Council of Nicea in A. D. 325, and the view has never had wide acceptance in the succeeding centuries.

(4) The Appolinarians (A. D. 381) denied that CHRIST had a human mind or spirit. He possessed a soul or vital, animating principle of the body. The divine Logos took the place of the human mind or spirit. This involves a trichotomous view of human nature which is unwarranted, and it denies an essential element of human nature itself.

(5) The Nestorians (A. D. 431) denied the union of the human and divine natures in CHRIST's person. There was simply a close and intimate connection between the human JESUS and GOD. It was GOD and man thus morally related to each other, but not united in an incarnate life. It was an alliance between GOD and man rather than GOD becoming man.

(6) The Eutychians (A. D. 451) held that the human and divine natures of CHRIST mingled into one. The inevitable result of this was that the human was overpowered by the divine and absorbed into it. The Eutychians were known also as Monophysites, because they virtually denied the human nature of CHRIST and reduced the two natures to one.

The definition of CHRIST's person which has been most generally accepted was that of the Council at Chalcedon (A. D. 451).

3. The Council of Chalcedon (A. D. 451)

The Council of Chalcedon holds that in CHRIST's person there are two natures. A complete human and a complete divine nature are united in the one person. The requirement has ever been that we must not "divide the person or confound the natures."

From the Council of Chalcedon in 451 A. D., ***"We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach the men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord JESUS CHRIST, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood: truly GOD and truly man, of a rational soul and body, co essential with the Father according to the Godhead, and coessential with us according to the manhood, . . . to be acknowledged in two natures, without confusion, without mutation, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but, rather, the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one person and one hypostasis."***

4. The Apostles' Creed

While the Apostles' Creed in an older form dates back into the second century, the Apostles' Creed as we have it today in many of the Protestant Church hymnals, was formulated soon after the Council of Chalcedon.

"I believe in GOD the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth: and in JESUS CHRIST His only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the HOLY GHOST; born of the virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into Heaven; and sitteth on the right hand of GOD the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead."

"I believe in the HOLY GHOST; the holy Catholic Church; the Communion of Saints; the Forgiveness of sins; the Resurrection of the body; and the Life everlasting. Amen."

5. The Affirmation of Faith

"We believe in GOD the Father, infinite in wisdom, power, and love, whose mercy is over all His works, and whose will is ever directed to His children's good."

"We believe in JESUS CHRIST, Son of GOD and Son of man, the gift of the Father's unfailing grace, the ground of our hope, and the promise of our deliverance from sin and death."

"We believe in the HOLY SPIRIT as the divine presence in our lives, whereby we are kept in perpetual remembrance of the truth of CHRIST, and find strength and help in time of need."

"We believe that this faith should manifest itself in the service of love as set forth in the example of our blessed Lord, to the end that the Kingdom of GOD may come upon the earth."

II. PERIOD OF THE DARK AGES

By the period of the Dark Ages, we mean that period that falls in between the fall of the Roman Empire and the revival of Learning.

This period is sometimes given from 400 A. D. to 1400 A. D., but we usually think of it as about 500 A. D. until 1500 A. D. It is referred to as the Dark Ages because it is the period of intellectual stagnation.

The six centuries following the collapse of the Roman Empire are especially dark in the sense that there is an insufficiency of historical evidence to construct any definite history of the world at that time. However, there are some generalizations that can be accurately made.

1. Rise of Roman Catholicism

The rise and development of what we now know as the Roman Catholic church occurred during this period.

It is sometimes stated that all Christians belonged to the one church during this period.

There is one sense in which that could be counted true, but another sense, in which it is far from true.

It is true that since Constantine had united the church and state, the church was dominant at this time and throughout the known civilization, the church ruled and coerced and forced everyone, to a certain extent, to acquiesce to her demands.

In that sense, all people had to obey the church since it was a coercive institution, but the sense in which it is not true to say that it was all of one faith is the fact that there were groups living under that ecclesiastical suppression that never for one minute subscribed to any of her teachings.

2. Corruption of Religion

It was during this period that the church and religion sank to the bottom in her sordid, sinful corruption. Catholic scholars today blush, but admit the truth of the corruption of her priests and popes.

3. Superstition of the Established Church

It was during this time that the church developed such a superstitious theology. They began to put spiritual significance in ceremonies, in rituals, in creeds, in relics, in places, in buildings and the whole framework of the church dissolved into a coercion in observing superstitions.

4. Mandates of the Established Church

The church issued such edicts and mandates that regulated and subjugated people's lives that it was unbearable.

5. Disgust, Tension and Unrest of the People

While nothing big happened during the period known as the Dark Ages, the significant thing is that all the foundations for the Renaissance, Reformation and the Revival of Learning were all laid in the hearts of the people during this period of coercion and suppression.

6. Rebellion Beneath the Surface

While they acquiesced and obeyed eternally for awhile, in their hearts, they were purposing and preparing for a new day.

7. The Attitude of the Church Toward Science and Learning

Man was beginning to discover himself and his world.

The Church was reluctant to accept any kind of learning. None was allowed to think or write outside the church.

We recall the persecution of Sir Isaac Newton when he discovered the Law of Gravity.

The established corrupt church must always hang its head and blush at this historical fact.

III. THE RENAISSANCE AND THE REFORMATION

You can fool all the people some of the time, and some of the people all of the time, but you cannot fool all of the people all of the time.

The Renaissance and the Reformation is a proof of that statement.

For our convenience here, we shall classify the beginning of the Renaissance and the

Reformation and the Revival of Learning with the beginning of the 15th Century A. D.

1. A New Science

Here we have bursting forth on the world a new science.

We mention three developments that appeared during the first part of the 15th century that are very significant for our purpose:

(1) *A new geography*

This new geography revealed to the man of the 15th century a new earth and a new world.

Prior to this time, Europeans had generally believed that the earth occupied the center of the universe and that it was flat and had corners and sides, but the voyage of Columbus revealed the fact that wrecked Medieval man's smug little concept of an earth-centered universe.

A precious child called "science" was born here and by experiment and logic, this child was destined to explore every accessible area of the earth and heavens.

(2) *A new astronomy*

This new astronomy overthrew the theory and forced man to reconsider himself in relation to time and space.

One paragraph from astronomy will illustrate what I mean here.

"Our galaxy, of which of course the sun is a member, resembles a watch or a grindstone in shape. It consists of at least two billion suns, many of which are much larger than ours. This swarm of stars is about 300,000 light years in diameter. Work it out yourself in miles. Multiply the number of seconds in 300,000 years by the velocity of light per second, 186,300; you will find the distance about one and three-fourths quintillion miles. Then, too, the sun moves through space about 400 million miles a year, and our galaxy itself is going somewhere. Our galaxy has been coming from somewhere for millions of years; it will be going somewhere for millions of years." "MAN AND GOD" by Duke.

(3) *A new anatomy*

Right along with the discovery of this new world and a new universe led man to inquire into the anatomy of himself.

It made man question his claim to uniqueness, even among the organisms on the earth.

Man had not only believed that the earth was the center of the universe, he felt that he was a special superior creation essentially different from all other creatures. He, thus, believed himself to be unique in his nature from the point of view of divine concern.

Biological science gained in scope and in momentum. It came to include the vegetable kingdom

and the animal kingdom.

It explored the cell, complex organisms and read the massive, well-filled pages of geology.

These studies caused men to ask questions.

In view of these facts, they began to ask questions concerning their most cherished concepts.

Did life originate in a chemical reaction? If so, is life basically chemical?

Did the original unit of protoplasm, whatever the nature and cause of its origin, develop progressively into more and more complex and advanced forms until all modes and variations of man was achieved?

Do all organisms, then, have a common, chemical or protoplasmic ancestor who lived about 15 thousand million years ago?

These three movements, that is, the new earth, the new universe and the new biology represent man's expanding knowledge of himself and the impact of this knowledge upon the religious concepts and devotions was tremendous.

This brought forth another step, namely,

2. A New Philosophy

Here the systems and schools of rationalism, materialism and idealism were crystallized.

By materialism, we mean that theory which considers the facts of the universe to be sufficiently explained by the existence and nature of matter.

Some materialists have considered the soul to be a fine material substance, but most explain the phenomena of mind as a product of a vastly complex motion of atoms composing the brain.

The materialist would accept the theory that all facts of the universe could be explained in terms of matter and motion. The business of the materialist is to explain everything by physical causes which are comparatively well-defined and which excludes any interference of spiritual causes.

The significance which I am trying to point out here is simply this - This new philosophy taking on the names of rationalism, materialism and idealism was crystallized here in the period of the Renaissance and the Reformation and began to cause men to question every previous concept they had had, whether it be in social science, natural science, philosophy or theology.

The materialistic philosophy began to gain momentum and continue to gain for the next 200 years.

During this period of the rise and development of rationalism, materialism and idealism, every false system of philosophy, sociology, government, education and religion of the 19th century was formed.

Carl Marx (a German, born 1818, died 1883), Engels and Lenin (apostles of communism) were merely scientific materialists of this period.

During this period we have the French sceptics, Voltaire and Rosseau, and the English atheist, Tom Paine.

Charles Darwin lived and wrote his "*Origin of the Species*" during this period. Carl Marx was only nine years younger than Charles Darwin and lived and studied with him.

The great German philosopher, Ritzel, was only four years younger than Carl Marx and the great French liberal theologian, Renan, was only seven years younger than Carl Marx.

Another contemporary was the German theologian, Harnack, and still another was Slymarcher.

When we go back and study the new science and new philosophy of this period, we can see that all these men were, shall we say, victims of their particular turn of the century. They were living in an age when extreme reactionism was the course to pursue.

Communism is nothing more or less than materialism carried to its logical conclusion.

Modern liberalism in theology is a modified phase of materialism.

It is safe to say that all of our screwball ideologies in religion or government can date back to this period of men who breathed the air of Reaction.

You are beginning to ask by now, what has all this to do with the doctrine of the Virgin Birth of JESUS CHRIST?

This brings us to the very crux of the whole matter in a new theology.

3. A New Theology

We have spoken of a new science and a new philosophy, now there must be a new theology. Coercion and superstition had to go.

(1) *A Natural Theology*

When we consider the after effects of the Renaissance and Reformation, we would expect a natural theology to have developed; and there did come into existence a natural theology.

By natural theology, we mean a theology that leaves out the "Supernatural" altogether and is just a philosophical framework.

Harnack, Ritzel and Slymarcher must certainly be classed along with Renan as being the founders of this new theology.

Every phase of modern liberalism today is merely an echo of something these men thought or

did or said during this period.

A great number of these so-called modernists today should be charged with plagiarism instead of modernism.

(2) Calvinism

Another reaction against this suppression of the church, a new science, a new philosophy and a new theology came John Calvin who lived from 1509-1664. He developed a system of theology known as Calvinism.

(3) Arminianism

Over against that came a man known as James Arminius, and Arminianism was born. Arminius lived from 1560-1609.

The far-reaching effects of this new thinking cannot be overstated. Extreme reaction was in the air.

Theories developed concerning the personal CHRIST.

(4) Old age-long theories were restudied and restated

(5) New theories were proposed

- a. Adoptionism
- b. Religious genius
- c. His progressive God-consciousness

IV. THE PRESENT AGE OF MODERN SCHOLARSHIP

Christian theologians are carrying on a work today that is of vast importance to the Christian church and to all those who believe in the Christian faith.

There is a theological renaissance on the move in the world today.

The most serious and sober thinking is not being done in the biological laboratory. It is not being done in the laboratories studying electronics or the atom and hydrogen bombs.

The most serious and sober thinkers of the world today are those who are thinking in terms of the Christian religion and Christian theology.

What is happening is a new determination to find out what it is that makes Christianity different.

The question is being asked, what is it that gives Christianity its own integrity, its independence and its standards of judgments over against all other philosophies and causes which bid for the allegiance of men.

This rebirth of interest in theology means a renewal of the efforts to discover the foundations of the Christian life. It was begun in 1918 when an unknown theologian named Karl Barth published a commentary on the book of Romans.

That event set the theological world afire with a determination to rethink and reconstruct all of her theology.

To get a perspective of our present scene, we must begin with the turn of the century, and that brings us up to about 1900 when in America and England we face the:

1. Aftermath of German Rationalism

We stated above that all the theories of a natural theology and all of this rank, liberal modern heresy actually began with the German theologians and German philosophers two centuries before it began to beat upon the shores of English theology.

2. The European scene at the Turn of the Century

As we approach the European scene at the turn of the century, we are faced with the battle and the struggle of conservative scholars as they are beginning to do battle with the theories of Ritzel, Harnack, and Slymarcher whom we have already discussed.

The European scene, then, was a struggle and a battle with conservatism and liberalism or modernism and fundamentalism.

3. The American Scene at the Turn of the Century

The American scene at the turn of the century was similar to that in Europe.

American theology was largely an echo of the conservatives of the English and European theologians.

The extreme left-wing theories of Ritzelism and the thinking of what has been called higher Unitarianism, put both English and American theologians in deep water.

The American scene from 1900-1925 could hardly be said to have a systemized theory of theology.

4. The Trend From World War I until World II

The trend from World War I until World War II in America gave us what can be rightly called an American theology.

We are sorry to say that this American theology which was formed between World War I and World War II was largely a liberal, modernistic theology which was merely an echo of the schools of German Rationalism and an echo from Ritzel, Slymarcher and Harnack of the 19th century.

We will now mention a few names in American theology who helped shape the modern trend in this period we are now discussing.

Among them we mention Dr. Edwin Lewis, professor of theology at Drew University. Dr. Lewis was the brain trust for all the liberals and moderns in the American schools and pulpits.

During this period, Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick, an ultra liberal and modernist, did much to disturb the fundamental thinking in American theology.

During this period, another theologian was in the making - and began to be heard along - about the time of World War II. He is Dr. Nels S. F. Ferre, who is now professor of Philosophical Theology, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee.

We are safe in saying that the majority of the American theologians whose books were published and who shaped the thinking of our large schools and universities were left-wing liberals.

That brings us to:

5. The Trend Since World War II

A ray of hope begins to emerge in America and in England since World War II.

One big ray of hope is the attitude of the scientists toward GOD and the Bible.

Some of the greatest and foremost scientists of our day are beginning to believe now in the simple miracles recorded in the Bible.

Our greatest and foremost modern philosophers are beginning to realize that Christianity and GOD are not just parentheses in the philosophy of life, but the whole sentence.

Another great encouraging note is that a great number of our modern liberal scholars have begun to swing from liberalism back to conservatism.

In this connection, we mention again the name of Dr. Edwin Lewis. Dr. Lewis is now known in theological circles as the ex-liberal. In his latest book, he confesses to the error of much of his liberalism of twenty-five years ago and expresses his conservative faith in the old time fashion.

The majority of the religious thinking - that has been done since World War II is toward the conservative viewpoint.

We might call this

6. The Trend of Our Post-Atomic Age

It seems that the coming of the atomic age with World War II has been a complete right-about-face in the philosophical, scientific and theological thinking of the world.

The effects of the atomic bomb was not reserved for Nagasaki and Hiroshima. The effect of those bombs have been felt in every classroom around the world.

It has made the teacher, preacher, philosopher and scientist think more seriously than anything that has ever happened prior.

(1) Liberalism still alive

Liberalism is still alive in the world and always will be.

Probably the two most influential liberals in America today (1956) are Dr. Nels S. F. Ferre and Dr. Paul Tillich.

(2) Conservatism is Gaining Ground

It is refreshing to note that the theologian we mentioned before, Karl Barth, who stirred up all this theological renaissance in 1918 with his work on Romans, still believes in the Virgin Birth of the Lord JESUS CHRIST.

I sincerely feel that this modern shake-up which happened largely between World War I and World War II is in the long run going to be good for Christianity. Modernism has had its day. It has been weighed in the balance and found wanting.

It appears self-evident that the modernists and modernistic schools have already confessed their error in their recent attitude toward fundamental Evangelism. This is evidenced in their response to the evangelistic theology and message of Billy Graham.

BBB Note: In hindsight, we now understand that these modernistic forces only "used" Billy Graham as a dupe in order to fill their own churches with the fruits of his labor. The only good thing that may have come out of that is that many of those that made professions during his Crusades may have truly been saved and have a home in Heaven. But looking at the Billy Graham Crusades from the perspective of 2005 we see that it was more a case of situation ethics for the modernist, in which the means justified their own nefarious ends. And as to Billy Graham, he was perhaps a good man that was overcome by prestige and human praise - although a reading of his autobiography even calls this into question.

By no way is this an endorsement of Barth - he was still a heretic, and as such we should separate from him and his teachings.

V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Our conclusion after this survey is very simple.

1. Some Do Not Believe

Some do not believe and some do believe is the only conclusion we can reach.

The important thing is to note the effects of those who do not believe over against those who do believe.

(1) Roll Call of Some Who Do Not Believe

We have mentioned those who do not believe such as Voltaire, Rosseau, Thomas Paine, Szymarcher, Darwin, Marx, Ritzel, Renan, Harnack and Ferre.

What has been the effects of their doubt and disbelief as it has been cast upon humanity?

No great good has come to humanity as a result of their philosophical doubt.

They have built no schools.

They have erected no orphanages.

They have held no revivals.

They have done nothing that has lifted humanity from her sin and need.

2. Some Believe

(1) Roll Call of Some Who Do Believe

We begin with Patrick, the apostle to Ireland, who was born in Scotland in 372 A.D.

He established missions and with his fervent preaching of the Gospel of CHRIST, exerted a circle of influence and did a lasting and constructive work.

We mention John Hus, born in Bohemia in 1373. He was a scholarly preacher and theologian, one of the greatest of the reformers.

John Knox, born in Scotland in 1505, educated at Glasgow University, and was pastor in Edinburgh. He hit heavy blows on the heads of the Senate, kings and queens; and before councils, he spoke fearlessly for GOD. He won thousands to CHRIST and from error.

John Wesley, born in 1703, was the founder of Methodism, and one of the greatest evangelists of all time. He was educated at Oxford.

George Whitfield was a contemporary companion of John Wesley.

Charles G. Finney, born in Connecticut in 1792, raised by unsaved parents, converted at the age of twenty-nine, was a lawyer when he was called to preach, began his ministry in a Presbyterian church, was an evangelist of wide fame and became president of Oberlin College.

Dwight L. Moody, born in Northfield, Massachusetts, 1837, stands out as America's greatest evangelist.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon, born in Essex, 1834, was a great pastor-evangelist.

Billy Sunday, born in Iowa, 1862, led to CHRIST by the street preaching of the Salvation Army,

exchanged his ball bat for a Bible, and will always be remembered as one of America's most dynamic evangelists.

Today, Fundamental preachers and missionaries, GOD's men for the hour, are leading countless thousands throughout the world to a saving knowledge of JESUS CHRIST and to a fuller and more dedicated life of service.

Yes, there are still those who do believe, and "**By their fruits ye shall know them.**"

~ end of chapter 3 ~
