

Recent writings on the Miracles

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Any study of any aspect of the life of the historical Jesus is complicated because of the fact that the gospel accounts of his ministry are interpretations and applications of what he did and said rather than straightforward accounts of his life and activity. Add to this the fact that many Christians today seriously question the possibility of miracles and either dismiss them as fables or explain them as the result of Jesus' extraordinary psychic gifts, and one becomes aware of the difficulty and delicacy of the task of drawing any conclusions about the miracles, about their historicity, and about their place in modern Christianity. Yet the complexity and sensitivity of the topic has not daunted the exegetes, and recent years have given us a constant flow of books and articles on the miracles. The aim of the present essay is not to attempt the impossible task of reviewing this immense body of literature, but to draw attention to some approaches and trends in modern miracle studies and to examine at some length a few of the more recent books. We will pay special attention to the historical questions raised by the miracle stories, and we treat only of the synoptic miracles, omitting those of John which give rise to somewhat different problems.¹

Trends in Miracle Studies

One of the striking things about the works of recent writers on the miracles is the lessening of emphasis on the apologetic value of the mighty deeds of Jesus.² Not that these writers would deny the teaching of Vatican I that the miracles are most sure signs of divine revelation (cf DS 3009). Nor would they despise the assertion of Vatican II that 'the miracles of Jesus also confirm that the kingdom has arrived on earth' (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church no. 5). But they do not look upon the miracles as events *praeter, extra, or contra naturam*³ which prove the divinity of Jesus and the validity of his claim. It is not the exceptional quality of the biblical miracles that give them meaning, but the whole religious context into which they fit. They are to be regarded, not as phenomena that transcend natural causes but as part

¹On the Johannine miracles see, for example, Jürgen Becker, *New Testament Studies*, 16 (1969-70), 130-148; R. E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John* (1-12) (Anchor Bible), London: Chapman, 1971, pp. 525-531.

²Cf. e.g., R. E. Brown, *New Testament Essays*, London-Dublin: Chapman, 1965, pp. 169f.

³For a brief study of the miracles from the point of view of science and physics see Mary Hesse, *Miracles and the Law of Nature*, in C. F. D. Moule (editor), *Miracles, Cambridge Studies in their Philosophy and History*. London: Mowbray & Co., 1965, pp. 35-42. For a philosopher's view of miracles see Richard Swinburne, *The Concept of Miracle*, London: Macmillan & Co., 1970.

of the life of the Jewish and Christian communities which regarded the miracles as proofs of God's special care and never-failing support of his people.⁴ The gospel miracles in particular are to be understood as signs of the entry of God's kingly power into the world, signs of God's *agape* for the world and of the salvation given in Jesus Christ.⁵

Form-criticism and redaction-criticism have taught us that the miracle stories like the other gospel passages must be understood against the background of the theological and missionary interests of the early Church in which they were formed.⁶ The evangelists were not mere chroniclers who attempted to give a disinterested account of how Jesus performed his many miracles. Each evangelist had his own kerygmatic and doctrinal interests and these are reflected in his treatment of the miracle stories.⁷ It is not surprising then that many recent studies of the miracles have paid special attention to the individual evangelist's redaction and application of the miracle stories and to the meaning these had in the early Church. The starting-point for many writers is not the question Did Jesus work miracles and which miracle stories are authentic?. Their question is rather How did the evangelists understand and interpret the miracles (which of course they accepted as historical)?.⁸ Here we may remark that the most exhaustive study of the miracle stories, that of H. Van der Loos,⁹ fails to take the results of form-criticism and redaction-criticism into consideration. His work of 750 pages is really an anthology of the many opinions that have been expressed on the miracles from the points of view of medicine, natural science, history of religions, etc. But because of the author's failure to pay attention to redaction-criticism in his study of the individual miracles this otherwise excellent reference book is somewhat defective.

It is often claimed today that the portrait of Jesus as a miracle worker has to some extent been influenced by the more or less contemporary figures of the hellenistic divine man (*theios aner*) and of the wonder-working rabbi. L. Sabourin who gives an excellent

⁴Cf. F. Mussner, *The Miracles of Jesus. An Introduction*. Translated from the German by A. Wimmer. Shannon: Ecclesia Press, 1970, pp. 5-18; R. H. Fuller, *Interpreting the Miracles*. London: S.C.M. Press, 1966, pp. 8-17; L. Sabourin, *Old Testament Miracles in Biblical Theology Bulletin*, 1 (1971), 227-261.

⁵Cf. Mussner, *op. cit.*, pp. 41-53; R. E. Brown, in the *Jerome Biblical Commentary*. London: Chapman, 1968, 78:126.

⁶Cf. A. Vögtle, in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, 2nd edition, Freiburg: Herder, 1965, vol. X, pp. 1259-1261; Mussner, *op. cit.*, pp. 55ff.

⁷K. Kertelge, *Die Wunder Jesu nach dem Markusevangelium. Eine redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung*. (StANT, 23). Munich, 1970. studies Mark's theological interest in the miracle tradition which he took over from his sources. See also Kenzo Tagawa, *Miracles et Évangile. La Pensée Personnelle de L'Évangéliste Marc*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1966. H. J. Held, *Matthew as Interpreter of the Miracle Stories*, in G. Bornkamm—G. Barth—H. J. Held, *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew*, translated from the German by Percy Scott, London: S.C.M., 1963, pp. 165-299, shows how Matthew applied and interpreted Mark's miracle stories.

⁸See, for example, Xavier Leén-Dufour's study of three miracle stories (Peter's mother-in-law, Mk. 1:19-31 par.: the stilling of the storm, Mk. 4:35-41 par.: the epileptic demoniac, Mk. 9:14-29 par.:) in *Études d'Évangile*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1965, pp. 124-226; P. Lemavche, *Le Possédé de Gerasa*, in *Nouvelle Revue Théologique*, 90 (1968), 581-597; C. Schütz, *Die Wunder Jesu*, in *Mysterium Salutis*, III, 2. Einsiedeln, 1969, pp. 97-123.

⁹H. Van der Loos, *The Miracles of Jesus*, Leiden: Brill, 1965.

summary of the hellenistic and rabbinical stories on which the gospel miracle accounts are supposed to be modelled, concludes that 'to judge from the known documentation . . . the gospel miracles belong to a quite different category'.¹⁰ But while one can confidently deny that the synoptic miracle stories depend directly on hellenistic wonder tales one can, and indeed one must, allow that they are to some extent influenced by them. But this is not surprising since Palestinian Judaism of the time of the evangelists was influenced by hellenism and those who formed that tradition would not have escaped that influence.¹¹

In reading the recent literature on miracles one can hardly escape the nagging feeling that the historical reliability of the gospel narratives has been greatly eroded by modern critical studies. One notices the hesitation, the uncertainty and the vagueness which mark statements on the historicity of most of the miracles. R. H. Fuller, for example, asks Did Jesus do miracles? and having examined the sources he answers: 'while the tradition that Jesus did perform exorcisms and healings (which may have been exorcisms originally) is very strong, we can never be certain of the authenticity of any actual miracle of the gospel. While a few of them may rest upon specific memory, most of them have probably been shaped out of generalised miracles'. The author believes that many of the miracle stories (e.g. the dumb demoniac, Mt. 12:22 par; the withered hand, Mt. 12:9-14 par) 'will not be stories of what Jesus actually did on a specific occasion, but will represent the kind of thing he used to do'.¹² Alan Richardson¹³ writes in the same vein and believes that we cannot be sure about the historicity of any recorded miracle. He goes as far as to say that 'it is not possible to state more than that Jesus was believed by those who knew him best to have worked the very miracles which the prophets had associated with the dawning of the Messianic age'. F. Kamphaus¹⁴, having examined several miracle stories (Mk. 2:1-12 par; Mk. 4:35-41 par; Mk. 6:30-44 par) in the light of modern research concludes: 'On the miracle stories treated of here this much must be said: that Jesus healed the sick cannot be contested as a matter of historical fact. . . . With regard to the story of the storm on the lake there are, it is true, numerous parallels. But this does not of itself prove that the story is unhistorical. It must have its basis in an event which took place on the lake in which the disciples in their distress actually experienced Jesus' help. In the case of the miraculous

¹⁰ *Biblical Theology Bulletin*, 2 (1972), 281-307; the quotation is from p. 305. See also P. J. Achtemeier, *Interpretation*, 26 (1972), 174-197; Howard C. Lee, *New Testament Studies*, 14 (1968), 232-246.

¹¹ See Morton Smyth, *Prolegomena to a Discussion of Aretologies, Divine Men, the Gospels and Jesus*, in *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 90 (1971), 174-199; Kertelge, *op. cit.*, 73-77. If one accepts the view of G. Schille (*Die Urchristliche Wundertradition. Ein Beitrag zur Frage nach dem irdischen Jesus*, Stuttgart, 1967) that the miracle stories originated in North Galilee where Greek influence was undoubtedly very strong one can admit even more readily that the Gospel miracle accounts would have been influenced by the hellenistic wonder-tales.

¹² *op. cit.* pp. 18-39; the above quotations are from pp. 19, 32 and 39.

¹³ Alan Richardson, *The Miracle Stories of the Gospels*, London: S.C.M. Press, 1941, pp. 128-130.

¹⁴ F. Kamphaus, *The Gospel for Preachers and Teachers*. Translated from the German by David Bourke, London: Sheed & Ward, 1974, pp. 158f.

feeding it is extremely difficult to break through the successive stages of literary adaptation to a historical nucleus'. A. Heising¹⁵ examines the New Testament stories of the multiplication of bread and their many points of contact with Old Testament passages (the narrative of the manna and quails, the miracles of Elijah, and Psalm 23). He admits that the literary similarity of the gospel narratives with these texts tells us nothing about the historicity or non-historicity of the evangelists' miracle stories. But he does seem to favour the view that the multiplication of food never happened. What is of importance, he says, is the message of the stories, namely that Jesus is a greater prophet than Moses or Elijah or Elisha, and that like Yahweh, Jesus the Good Shepherd is always with his people to lead and nourish them.

Nevertheless, even those authors who are most aware of the problems surrounding the question of the historicity of miracles would not agree with Bultmann that the question is of no interest. Indeed they would agree that even though the historical aspect of the miracle stories as such was not to the forefront of the evangelists' mind we cannot escape it. If revelation took place through the words and deeds of Christ, as the Second Vatican Council's *Dogmatic Constitution on Revelation* (no. 2) says, then we must be interested in these words and deeds. And since miracles figure so largely in the gospel accounts of the deeds of Jesus we must inevitably raise the question of their historicity.

Whether Jesus worked any miracles

F. Mussner reminds us that historical investigation of the miracles must ask 'whether Jesus of Nazareth worked any miracles at all, or whether the accounts of miracles in the gospels are merely post-Easter "entries" in the pre-Easter life of Jesus'.¹⁶ Mussner himself believes that there seems to be a number of miracles of Jesus which may be considered as *ipsissima facta* of Jesus, that is as 'deeds which are typical of him and which he alone would have performed' (27). According to the author the account of the healing of the leper in Mk. 1:40-45 offers an example of such an *ipsissimum factum* of Jesus, and Mussner examines the passage at some length (28-39). The story has an "anti-pharisean front" which shows that it cannot be separated from Jesus' historically proven arguments with the scribes and Pharisees and their views (38f). The anger of Jesus (Mk. 1:41) is explained as anger at the injustice done to the lepers by Israel's pious leaders. By touching the leper (v. 41) Jesus rejected Israel's tradition of avoiding lepers. In v. 44 Mussner chooses the translation 'as evidence against them' rather than 'as evidence to them' and sees in the phrase a grave incrimination of the unbelief of the leaders who still refuse to accept Jesus who had worked such a miracle. The author claims

¹⁵A. Heising, *Die Botschaft der Brotvermehrung*, Stuttgart, 1966. See also by the same author *Exegese und Theologie der Alt- und Neutestamentlichen Speisewunder in Zeitschrift für Katholische Theologie*, 86 (1964), 80-96.

¹⁶*op. cit.*, p. 1.

that these and other anti-pharisean elements in the story allow us to conclude that the miracle is an *ipsissimum factum* of Jesus. Indeed he maintains that a whole series of miracles, mainly sabbath healings, which contain a similar anti-pharisean front can also be regarded as *ipsissima facta* of Jesus in the sense described above.

Mussner's method of studying Mk. 1:40-45 and his interpretation of the text have raised some questions. Rudolf Pesch, a Catholic theologian at the University of Frankfurt, has written what is in effect a long critique of Mussner's method and conclusions.¹⁷ The title of Pesch's work (*Jesu Ureigene Taten*) is a translation of Mussner's phrase '*ipsissima facta Jesu*' and most of the work (pp. 52-117) is an examination of Mk. 1:40-45, the text to which Mussner had given considerable prominence. In his first chapter Pesch (17-34) shows that while Jesus' own words (Mk 3:22-27 par; Lk. 13-32) the accusation of the Jews (Jn. 7:22, 8:48, etc.) and the testimony of the Babylonian Talmud (Sanhedrin 43a) all testify to Jesus' activity as an exorcist, we haven't a single authentic account of an actual exorcism. The gospel exorcism stories (e.g. Mk. 1:21-28; 5:1-20; 7:24-30) are so influenced by the Christological and missionary interests of the Church that they are Christ-stories rather than Jesus-stories, and cannot therefore be used to prove that Jesus actually cast out demons. Pesch is a little more positive in his judgement of the healing stories and he accepts as historical the cure of Peter's mother-in-law (Mk. 1:29-31), the withered hand (3:1-6) and the blind man of Jericho (10:46-52).

In his second chapter (35-51) Pesch examines the 'word-tradition' (Mt. 11:5 par; 10:8; Lk. 4:27) which seems to prove that Jesus cleansed lepers. However, he comes to the conclusion that none of these logia can be regarded as authentic sayings of Jesus. They cannot therefore be used to prove that Jesus cured lepers. They may be based on the community's awareness of the fact that Jesus had cured lepers, but in themselves they cannot be taken as proofs of that fact.

The author then offers an excellent study of Mark 1:40-45. Having reconstructed what he considers to be the pre-Markan form of the narrative—which in fact, Mark took over almost unchanged from his source—he goes on to show that it follows the pattern of a popular hellenistic miracle story. But the pre-Markan story was also marked by a strong Christological interest, for Jesus was shown to be able to cleanse a leper, a feat which was considered possible for God alone. Like Elisha of old (cf 2 Kings 5) Jesus, the prophet-of-the-end-time could free a man from leprosy. Like Moses who stretched out his hand to perform mighty deeds (cf Ex. 4:4; 7:19; 8:1, etc.) so now this prophet-like-Moses stretches forth his hand and with a word cures a leper. The offering made to the priests as a 'testimony to them' (Pesch chooses this translation rather than Mussner's 'against them') is also a proof of the divine power of Jesus who can perform such a miracle. The proclamation of the miracle by the cured man reflects the mis-

¹⁷Rudolf Pesch, *Jesu Ureigene Taten? Ein Beitrag zur Wunderfrage*. (Quaestiones Disputatae, 52), Freiburg im Breisgau : Herder, 1970. Cf. *Irish Theological Quarterly*, 38 (1971), 275-278.

sionary interest of the Church which proclaimed the greatness of Jesus. Pesch concludes that the story originated in a situation where Jesus was celebrated as the prophet-of-the-end-time, and that it is based, not so much on a historical tradition about an actual cure which Jesus performed, as on the early Church's Christological and missionary interests.

Having thus come to the conclusion that the healing of the leper is not an *ipsissimum factum* of Jesus, Pesch sharply criticises Mussner's study of the Markan passage (81-84). He accuses him of begging the question of the historicity of the story. And indeed it is fair to say that Mussner does fail to examine the story in the light of form-criticism and redaction-criticism, and that in attempting to discover the meaning of the story he seems to take its historicity for granted. But in replying to Pesch's argument Mussner can, with a certain justification, object that his critic relies too much on form-criticism and that his literary analysis of the text leaves the question of the historicity of the narrative untouched.¹⁸ And indeed one can admit that the results of Pesch's excellent analysis of the text are correct without coming to the conclusion that the miracle never took place. For even if the author of the gospel narrative followed the pattern of hellenistic miracle stories this in itself is not a proof that his story is fictitious. If those who formed the gospel tradition were convinced that Jesus was the prophet-of-the-end-time it is not surprising that they should use Old Testament narrative about prophets (e.g. Moses, Elijah, Elisha) to describe the Master's activity and the fact that they did so does not necessarily mean that they falsified his portrait. Besides, there might be more than Pesch is willing to admit to be said for Mussner's claim that stories like Mk. 1: 40-45 belong to a Palestinian milieu and that they can be properly understood only in the context of Jesus' controversies with the Pharisees and Rabbis. This does not prove the historicity of the stories but it does suggest that they should not be lightly attributed to hellenistic Christianity.

Following the method he had used in analysing Mk. 1:40-45 Pesch (114-134) discusses the story of the cure of ten lepers (Lk. 17:11-19). Again he concludes that the story is not based on an actual event in the life of Jesus but on the Church's Christological and missionary interests.

In his final chapter (135-158) Pesch considers the miracle stories from several points of view that have a bearing on fundamental theology. In discussing some of the criteria which can help us to decide whether a particular gospel narrative is historical or not (136-143) he follows the lines taken by other writers who have studied this problem.¹⁹ He agrees with other authors in pointing out that the gospel miracles are important not as extraordinary feats of power, but as deeds that get their meaning from the mission and message of Jesus.²⁰

¹⁸Cf. *Theologische Revue*, 68 (1972), 177-185.

¹⁹Cf., e.g., R. Latourelle, *Gregorianum*, 54 (1973), 225-262; F. Lentzen-Deis, *Theologie und Philosophie*, 43 (1968), 400-402.

²⁰See Mussner, *The Miracles of Jesus*, pp. 41-44; Sabourin, *Biblical Theology Bulletin*, 1 (1971), 71f.

But many other things he has to say will disturb one who has been accustomed to an older style of Fundamental Theology. For there is not much point in saying with Pesch (149) that the 'mighty deeds' of Jesus contain an 'implicit Christology' and an 'implicit soteriology' if, as Pesch himself would have us believe, these mighty deeds are reduced to a few cures that any charismatic of the time could have performed. The theologian can hardly be satisfied with Pesch's claim (151-157) that Jesus' words give meaning to his deeds, if we do not know what these deeds were. And how can the miracles be 'illustrations' (151f) of the message of Jesus if we do not know what the actual miracles were?

Pesch is very conscious of the fact that our modern understanding of the gospels has given rise to the need for a new treatment of the miracle stories (11f). He has shown that a critical examination of these stories raises many problems for Fundamental Theology. His own entrance into the area of theology (chap. 5) is made with the intention of offering some guidelines to the theologian who studies the miracles. He knows he is giving no final solution to the problems raised by critical examination of the gospel texts, but he does raise a great *quaestio disputanda*, namely, How are the theologians and exegetes to deal honestly and openly with the gospel miracle stories so that these can find a place in the Church's theology and preaching today?²¹ Pesch, the exegete, has done an admirable job in showing where the exegete stands, and his theological suggestions should stimulate the followers of Fundamental Theology to take another serious look at their approach to the miracles.

Was Jesus a Magician?

Many gospel commentators have drawn attention to the fact that certain elements in the miracle stories have some similarity with contemporary magical rites and formulae. In the story of the Gerasene demoniac (Mk. 5 :1-20), for example, scholars have noticed several points of contact with such rites and formulae. The demoniac's cry to Jesus (v. 7) may, according to some writers,²² have originally been a magical formulae. The verb *orkizo* (I adjure) used in that verse is a technical term in pagan exorcisms. In asking the demon's name (v. 9) Jesus acts like contemporary exorcists who tried to gain power over demons by finding out their names. The command of Jesus to the demon ('come out of the man', v. 8) is the usual formula of exorcism in the magical papyri. The sending of the demons into the swine (v. 13) also has a parallel in contemporary incantation texts.

It is not surprising then that the magical texts of the ancient world have attracted the attention of scholars who study the miracles. In a recent volume²³ John M. Hull, Lecturer in Divinity at Westhill Col-

²¹On the question of the need for such honesty and openness see M. Seckler, *Plädoyer für Ehrlichkeit im Umgang mit Wundern, in Theologische Quartalsschrift* (Tübingen), 151 (1971), 662-684.

²²Cf., e.g., R. Pesch, *Ecumenical Review*, 23 (1971), 362.

²³John M. Hull, *Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition* (Studies in Biblical Theology, Second Series, 28), London : S.C.M. Press, 1974.

lege of Education, Birmingham, has collected the sources of our knowledge of hellenistic magic (5-19), examined the main features of the magical rites (20-44), studied the relationship between miracle and magic (45-72) and finally suggested in chapters 5-7 (pp. 72-141) that the three synoptics show an awareness of the magical ideas and practices. He shows that in Jewish-hellenistic tradition both Moses and Solomon were regarded as magicians (32ff) and he asks if the magical aura of these two great figures has not passed over to Jesus. He finds that there are many similarities between the synoptic exorcism stories and similar ones in the magical papyri. The healing stories of Mark in particular fit into a magical context. In the story of the healing of the deaf mute (Mk. 7:32) the points of contact with the magical texts are clearest. Here Jesus takes the man aside privately, puts his finger in his ears, spits, touches his tongue, looks up to heaven, sighs, utters a word of command, and the man is instantly healed (73). Luke's world-view has many points of contact with a magical understanding of the world, and in the third gospel the power which Jesus and the apostles exercised is presented like the power from the heights familiar to the hellenistic world (115). Matthew, on the other hand tends to purge the Markan material of details which give rise to magical interpretation (116).

At the end of his study Hull asks 'was Jesus a magician?' and he answers 'we have made little attempt to press back behind the records to the original beliefs and attitudes of Jesus. We can venture to suggest, however, that Jesus did not think of himself as a magician. . . . But to the early Christian the myth of the magus was helpful in various ways; it drew attention to certain aspects of the salvation of Christ in a manner which no other myth was able to do. . . . But perhaps the most abiding impression left by the New Testament treatment of Jesus as the Master Magician is the restraint of that treatment'³ (45).

Not everyone will agree with all Hull's assertions and conclusions. Thus, for example, one need not agree that the retention of the Aramaic *Ephphatha* in Mk. 7:34 indicates that Jesus acted as a Jewish wonder-worker (85). But by collecting so many magical texts and by considering the New Testament passages that seem to have some similarity with them, the author has done a great service to students of miracle stories.

Conclusion

Today when philosophers and scientists are so sceptical about the possibility of miracles, when some exegetes say that the miracle stories must be demythologised, when some historians of religion conclude that the Gospel miracles are no more historical than the hellenistic wonder tales of the New Testament period, and when many of the faithful feel embarrassed by the miracles, it is important that thorough scholarly research should discover the true value and meaning of the miracle narratives. The works we have studied or mentioned show that such thorough research is being undertaken. An awareness that

our future treatment of the miracles must differ from what it has been in the Fundamental Theology of the past, should not deter scholars from studying the miracles but should rather stimulate them to seek a new understanding of the gospel stories. The gospels are indeed documents of faith, but it is important to know if the gospel stories are based on fact and if Jesus actually performed mighty deeds which are the signs of his desire to save the world. There still remains much work to be done in this large area where so many thorny questions arise and where exegetes and theologians must collaborate if the miracles are to retain a meaningful place in the Church's life and teaching.

The theologian will not be disturbed when he sees the exegete who studies the miracle stories follow the method of research which the secular historian follows in his investigation into the events of the past. But he will not expect the New Testament critic to be more critical than the profane historian. He will not be impressed by the scholar who looks for a complicated solution to a problem when sound reasoning can suggest a more straightforward one. He will not, for example, look to the creative activity of a hellenistic Christian community for the origin of miracle stories if the Gospel evidence shows that the earliest Palestinian witnesses to Christ's life were convinced that he had in fact performed miracles. These witnesses knew Jesus, or they were in a position to examine the evidence of his miraculous activity. If they assert that Jesus worked miracles they do so because Jesus had actually performed works which no one else had performed (cf. Jn. 15:24). It was not their belief in the divinity of Jesus that led them to postulate miracles. It was rather the other way round. They proclaimed Jesus to be God because the whole course of his earthly existence—the claims he made, his authoritative teaching, the mighty deeds he performed, and above all his glorious resurrection—led to the conclusion that God was in him and with him.

Acceptance of the general statement that Jesus performed miracles does not, however, put an end to the problems of the exegete and the theologian. For examination of individual miracles shows that while many miracle stories have a ring of truth about them which convinces everyone, others are far less convincing and tend to be rejected even by moderate scholars. Thus, for example, the story of the withering of the barren fig-tree (Mat. 21:18 par) is by no means as reliable as the healing narratives in Mark 1:21-2:12. Yet, even if critical examination of some miracle stories leads to negative conclusions about their historical reliability the theologian is not distressed. For doubt about the factuality of one or other miracle account does not discredit the whole Gospel witness to the fact that Jesus did perform extraordinary deeds.

When, however, the theologian can confidently affirm that Jesus did perform miracles he will not claim that this truth alone proves the divinity of Christ. For according to the New Testament there were others besides Jesus who performed signs and wonders (cf. Rom. 15:10f.; Acts 2:43; 3:1-10, etc.). But once a person believes that

most extraordinary of all miracles and accepts that the Son of God went about among men doing good, he can understand the place of miracles in his life. As the believer considers the mighty deeds which Jesus performed in favour of the blind, the lame, the sick, in short, in favour of those who were in any kind of need, he can understand them as manifestations of God's saving and healing activity in the world. He can interpret them as signs of the inauguration of the new heaven and the new earth of which the prophet had spoken (cf Is. 6:17; 66:22). He can see them as heralds of that era which is an anticipation of the age when every tear will be wiped away and when there will be neither crying nor pain any more (cf Rev. 21:4).

Was Paul a Male Chauvinist?

Christine Butler

Poor St Paul : with, 'Wives be subject to your husbands', he has a pretty bad reputation as a misogynist. I will try to show, however, that examination of his writings proves that this reputation is undeserved and to indicate how it has grown. So that it has become what Dr Caird describes as: 'one of the most firmly held of the prejudices and half truths which together comprise the biblical semiliteracy of the man in the street'.

I cannot here go into a detailed exegesis of all the extracts from St Paul's letters in which women are mentioned, but one central point must be made clearly from the start. St Paul had one main concern. That was, to preach the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus. His mission was not concerned with women as women, or with their place in society or even in the local churches. It was not as a sociologist that Paul wrote but as an apostle. He was concerned above all to preach what Christ had done for all mankind. He was concerned to show people how a new relationship with God could be found through being in Christ. The new relationship with God came through the new covenant established by Christ's death and resurrection. Through baptism into Christ, people were given the new seal; just as circumcision had