

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php



Quar. Jour. Econ.

THE
BIBLIOTHECA SACRA

ARTICLE I.

CONTRIBUTIONS FROM THE HISTORY OF
RELIGIONS TO THE NEW TESTAMENT.¹

BY DR. J. M. S. BALJON, PROFESSOR OF DOGMATIC THEOLOGY IN
UTRECHT UNIVERSITY, THE NETHERLANDS.

THE inquiry after the origin of things has always claimed in large measures the attention of serious and thoughtful minds. This proves the philosophical disposition of man. It will not do that we can describe and determine a phenomenon: we also want to know how it became what it is. We desire not only to know the river in its course and to picture the beautiful pasture-lands and valleys through which it flows, but we desire also to know its origin, the very place from which it comes. No atomistic view of history will pacify us, nor the simple description of persons and conditions alongside of and after one another, which is the history merely of most patent facts. We demand an organic, historic view. We want to understand the life of the nations,—the private, hidden, and social life. We want to interpret that life, among other things, from the life, the thought, and the labors of preceding generations. Our civilization must be interpreted from the factors which now make their influence felt, and also from

¹Translated from the Dutch by the Reverend John Hendrik de Vries, D.D., Saybrook, Conn.

those of bygone ages. And, applied to religion, this means that, more than ever, the theologian directs his attention to the private, spiritual life of the people, which we call piety.

Does not theology root in the life of the people, and is it not the reflection of what there takes place? The historic view of the theologian has involuntarily come under the influence of the general historic view, and is daily under its power.

The two departments in which it is my honor to serve this University—New Testament Exegesis and Patristic Literature—might be classed as a separate rubric in the encyclopedia of Christian Theology, viz., under the so-called Literary Theology, but they sustain a sympathetic relation to Historic Theology. An exegete who understands his task does not rest content with questions of grammar and textual criticism, but strives to have an historical understanding of what he has read, and to grasp its historical background and temper. Thus life and animation are imparted to the material he handles. We who are exegetes and critics have also come under the influence of the general trend of our times and are bound to reckon with it. He who discerns the signs of the times knows that the spirit of the times is not favorably disposed to pure exegesis and critical studies. Since New Testament exegetes and critics have frequently seemed blind against the fact that, however interesting, as studies, textual criticism, exegesis, and introduction are, they never can be an end in themselves, but merely serve as preparatory steps to the higher aim, viz., the history of primitive Christianity,—which enables us to understand the life and thought of primitive Christendom, of the leaders and of the peoples, of apostles and of prophets, and also of the masses of the people that know not the law,—the reaction has not remained want-

ing. And yet, however much these studies may suffer neglect at many hands, their defense lies not in my province at this time. This has been well done from this place on other occasions, and no one really questions any longer the necessity of such investigations. Rather let me direct your attention to an effort which is widely put forth in our times; to wit, to call in the aid of the history of religions to interpret the origin of representations, usages, and morals of the primitive Christians. For here we have to do with a new method of interpretation of the origin of many representations of original Christianity and with a new method of work in the studies of the New Testament.

The whole civilized world has been moved by the well-known Babel-Bible conflict. Representations of the Old Testament, narratives of the Creation and of the Flood, laws and customs, angelology and demonology, as well as eschatological representations, it is said, must needs be interpreted by the theology of the surrounding nations, especially Babylonian, Persian, or Egyptian. This thought is not entirely new to us. Years ago the definite results of this study were in evidence. Now, however, the attention is directed to it more than formerly and the public at large takes more notice of it. This same method of interpretation is now applied to the New Testament, in the interpretation of many narratives from the life of Jesus as well as of the Epistles and the Apocalypse of St. John. This is called in Germany the *religionsgeschichtliche Methode*. I know of no adequate expression for this in our language, but would formulate my theme something like this: "The Aid which the Study of the History of Religions provides for the Study of the New Testament."

When even Christian dogma must needs be interpreted not

merely by Old Testament representations, the individuality of eminent Christian thinkers, the influence of the life of Christian communion, but also from less definite Israelitish or Christian thought, and particularly by the inworking of Hellenistic philosophy, how much easier is this "religions-geschichtliche Methode" applied to the New Testament narratives! Numerous analogies can here be indicated from ordinary, profane literature.

It is a known fact that many stories and folk lores which were current in Europe during the middle ages must be explained by Indian influences. The Christian narrative of Barlaam and Josophat is of Indian origin. Consciously or unconsciously the East affected the West and the West adopted many things from the East, the influence of which is still felt in our own days. Thus this so-called "religions-geschichtliche Methode" is not entirely new to us who are students of the New Testament. Forsooth there is little new under the sun. In the first place, it has been applied already for some time to the Apocalypse of St. John; and I add at once, that it was done with benefit. But also, with reference to the whole New Testament, it was mentioned in the Rationalistic period at the end of the eighteenth century, when it was in vogue to point out parallel narratives from antiquity, by which to show that Christian truth is intelligent, *vernunftmässig*, and to posit theology as the so-called liberal theology.

Yea, I may go back still further. Justin Martyr, one of the earliest Christian apologetes, and soon others in his wake, in order to make Christian truth acceptable to pagans, pointed out the analogy, for instance, of Jesus' birth with that of heroes and sons of gods, and thereby actually put the narratives concerning this on the same line. When in other religions, such as for instance in the wide-spread cult of Mithras, these

apologetes found customs and representations which reminded them of Christian baptism and the Lord's Supper, they explained them by the influence of demons, who by analogous heathen representations sought to deceive good Christians, and turn them from the faith. This is indeed no scientific interpretation; but I name these incidents, in order to show that even in the early centuries of our era views of similar analogies or parallels were current. Truly this was not very meritorious. To heathen students these similarities of representations must have been apparent. This is known of Celsus, the great antagonist of early Christianity.

For the sake of an intelligent and orderly treatment of our subject, let me direct your attention to a few fixed points about which there is no difference of opinion, or at least very little. Do not smile at these so-called "fixed points" in the face of the great difference of opinion which is current among theologians regarding earliest Christianity. I may at once set your minds at rest, and show that here we enter a domain which belongs to the so-called neutral zone. Here theologians of the right as well as of the left side may confidently meet one another, as in other domains, and be mutually helpful to each other. At the new Roman Catholic theological faculty at Strasburg, the first theological promotion took place upon the presentation of a theme which is borrowed from the circle of my present studies. Even they who, contrary to my view, apply a very severe theory of inspiration to the Bible, such as the ancient Jew applied to the Old Testament, and the followers of Mohammed to the Koran, even they can make use of the results of this study. That the form of divine revelation joins itself to existing forms is really self-evident. But the boundary line between the so-called profane

and sacred sciences is not so sharply drawn as some would make it appear, so that on one side all is light and on the other all darkness. He who represents it in this fashion—and our age inclines to sharp antitheses—turns the question into a caricature. A good Reformed theologian believes in the existence of what in terms of dogmatics is called “common grace.” It is likewise the rich idea of a representation of Christian antiquity, that when Christ descends into Sheol, according to the well-known doctrine of the *descensus ad infernos*, not merely the patriarchs, but also Plato and other noble philosophers, go forth to meet their Lord, and voice their feelings of gladness at his appearing. Truth, wherever found, is of God. *Anima naturaliter Christiano.*

As belonging to the fixed points, I reckon with the following: The Gospel of St. John begins with the beautiful prologue, which is classic of content and sober of form: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehendeth it not.” Here we have the known doctrine of the Logos, developed in the prologue of the Fourth Gospel and which I take to be the subject of the entire Gospel. This thema is summarized in the well-known verse: “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” This Logos doctrine is derived from the Logos doctrine of Philo, the well-known Hellenist. Although this philosopher was a Jew, his speculation is not immediately derived from the Old Testament, since, in its entirety, the Old Testament contains proverbs of

the wisdom of life, Chokma literature, but no formulated philosophy. Here Philo built upon foundations that were laid by Plato. The *λόγος νοητικός* of Philo is the *ιδέα ιδεών* of the well-known Greek philosopher. The revelation of God is the Logos, the embodiment of the thoughts of God. God, in so far as he reveals himself, is called Logos. The Logos, however, in so far as he reveals God, is called God. Though I recognize the great difference in the Logos doctrine between Philo and John, a difference which is immediately connected with the different idea of God as held by each,—yet, that with the progress of about five hundred years of religious development the writer of the Fourth Gospel should have derived the idea of the Logos immediately from the Old Testament seems to me very improbable. In several points, such as in its well-known antithesis between flesh and spirit, light and darkness, being from above and from beneath, the Fourth Gospel joins itself to Alexandrian Hellenism. In all honesty I do not see, not only what scientific, but also what religious difficulties can be raised to disprove the hypothesis, that, for the form of his Gospel, which by its entire structure seemed intended for cultured readers of high, spiritual standing, the evangelist attended the school of Philo.

With Paul I trace a like influence of Hellenism in his psychology and in his view of flesh and spirit, as well as in his allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament, which both Jews and Christians had appropriated from the old Greeks, who tried to make the offensive narratives of Homer and Hesiod concerning the gods acceptable to the people.

I find still another fixed point, where foreign influences have affected the writers of the New Testament, in the manner of expression which Paul has derived from the language of the mysteries. It is well known that not only the ancient Greeks,

but also the founders of Mithraicism and many others, in their religious instruction made a distinction between *esoterici* and *exoterici*, the initiated and the non-initiated. Alongside of the knowledge which fell under the reach of the uninitiated, or the large multitude of people, there was also a knowledge for the more deeply trained, or initiated, who were admitted to the holy mysteries, and for which at times different degrees of knowledge were demanded.

There was either a faint impression abroad, or it was clearly perceived, that the narratives of the gods and goddesses were no pure reality, but that for the most part they were originally myths of sun, moon, and stars, which men had represented as gods. Thirst after mystic contemplation came in as another factor, together with the desire after a more substantial and more accurate knowledge. Separated from the people, in the solemn stillness of the evening hour, man was prepared to meet the divinity in a blessed ecstasy of soul. Especially in the mysteries of the later rituals of Mithras, although even in earlier times, purifications, or *lustrationes*, took place. People sat at a common table and took bread and wine, as in the Lord's Supper. Paul made no distinction among Christians between initiated and uninitiated, but he too spoke of mysteries, which were hidden until the light of Divine revelation shone upon them. The counsel of God for the salvation of the heathen and the temporary rejection of Israel were to him a mystery even as the person of Christ himself. He also knew a wisdom for the full-grown, and not for babes, a wisdom not of this world. Not the distinction of intellectual development and civilization, but the difference in spiritual development and experience, sanctioned the mention of hidden things. For children there was milk, and strong meat for the full-grown. All the children could gradually become adults.

If, among the Greeks, a seal was spoken of, by which to indicate a sacred and solemn ceremony which betokened admission to the fellowship with the divinity, Paul also speaks of baptism as of a seal, and of "a being sealed." In the early history of Christian literature the same ground was held when baptism was viewed not merely as a seal, but also as an enlightening.

But the eschatological representations form the most fixed domain, where foreign influences upon Christian thoughts are traceable. It is characteristic that many religions—such as those of the Babylonians, Persians, Egyptians, Jews, and Christians—in their representations of the beginning and end of things have uttered similar or related thoughts, and have appropriated many things one from the other. Who does not remember the cosmogonies of the ancient peoples, the flood records of Israel and Babylonia?

But to return to my subject, who is not reminded of the apocalyptist? The apocalyptist labors to unveil the mysteries of the future by the higher light, which the seer, who speaks in ecstasy or exaltation of spirit, professes to see. His spiritual eye is opened, so that he sees what another does not see. He hears what others do not hear. His voice is one of warning, but to all that of a comforter. In times of oppression and shame, of persecution and scorn, the apocalyptist is born, and the eye is fixed upon the glorious future which is at hand, when light shall overcome darkness, right triumph over wrong, and God shall wipe away all tears from the eyes. The Paradise condition is reborn and the golden age begins. Frequently the apocalyptist appears in the person of a man from the hoary past who is introduced as speaking. He views history in the light of his times, gives retrospective prophecy, to which he adds corrections appropriate to his age. It is

characteristic that the apocalyptist is more writer than seer, and that he works with old data and old material. Apocalyp-tists are not creators of new forms, but in old forms they ex-press new thoughts. If the apocalyptist works with old data it is self-evident that he is not too choise in the selection of his material, and employs sacred as well as profane repre-sentations as long as they further his purpose and provide food for his imagery.

According to the Apocalypse of St. John the seer is on the Island of Patmos, to receive the Word of God and the testi-mony of Jesus. To the seven churches in Asia Minor he brings the greetings of peace from him who is and was and is to come, i. e. from the eternal God, who remains forever equal unto himself, and from the seven spirits before his throne. In holy ecstasy of mind he beholds the Messiah in a visionary state, with an image borrowed from Daniel, that of a Son of man, who presents himself as high priest and king, and accepts attributes which belong to God. He sees him walking among the seven golden candlesticks, holding seven stars in his right hand (Rev. i. 16). This latter circumstance, however, does not prevent the Son of man from laying his hand a little later upon John, and saying for his encouragement: "Fear not, I am the first and the last." In another vision John is admitted to the holy of holies, and he sees the throne of God, covered with glory and majesty, symbolically expressed. Lightnings and thunderings proceeded out of it. Afterwards follows the noteworthy and picturesque description: And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven spirits of God.

In chapter v. 6 the apocalyptist speaks of the seven eyes of the Lamb, which are also said to be the seven spirits of God sent forth into all the earth. This representation, it seems to

me, cannot be explained by the candlestick with the seven arms of Exodus xxv., nor from the candlestick seen in vision in Zachariah iv., where the prophet declares that the seven lamps are the eyes of the LORD, which run to and fro through the whole earth. Here we must needs call in the help of the star-gods of the heathen, such as those of the Babylonians and the Mithras worshipers. The Pleiads, the sun, moon, and five known planets received special homage. With Israel these gods of light became angels, high guardian angels, representatives of God. Thus it came to pass more especially with the Jews that the gods who, according to heathen faith, held sway over nations, rivers, lands, etc., were translated into guardian angels of nations, rivers, and lands. Thus we can say that the stars were taken to be the eyes of the divinity, and in public worship were represented by torches. Otherwise these symbolical representations remain inexplicable to us. That after all they cannot be fully understood, even as many other representations of the apocalypticist, needs no demonstration. One goes too far¹ when the seven stars of Revelation i. 16 are taken as those of the small bear in view of a reference from a Mithras liturgy, according to which Mithras grasps with his right hand the golden shoulder of an *οχ*, i. e. *ἡ ἄρκτος ἢ κινούσα καὶ ἀντιστρέφουσα τὸν οὐρανόν.*²

I will not mention all the analogies which exist between the Apocalypse and Babylonian mythological representations. With a single word allow me, however, to fix your attention upon Revelation xii., where in a most unique way the birth of the Messiah is described. It is represented there as a something that must take place, and hence in this form can-

¹ See H. Gunkel, *Zum religionsgeschichtlichen Verständnis des Neuen Testaments*, 1903, p. 40.

² See A. Dieterich, *Eine Mithrasliturgie*, p. 14.

not be the work of a Christian, but must be the work of a Jew which was taken up by a Christian. The seer observes a woman, clothed with the sun, the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She was travailing in birth, when another sign appeared in the heavens, a great red dragon, which waited to devour the child as soon as it was born. After it was born the child was caught up to heaven, and a conflict ensues between Michael and his angels and the dragon, which ends in the defeat of the dragon. The origin of images must not be looked for with the Jews, but with the Babylonians. With the Jews the angels are taken to be men, but the heathen recognize also female divinities. From the insignia of the woman she is the queen of heaven, and involuntarily we call to mind the Babylonian Damkina, the mother of Marduk, or, according to others, the Egyptian Hathor, the mother of Horus. That a heavenly being who governs sun and moon can also suffer pain is a representation which can be understood only in a mythological way. The red dragon is the old king of the world sea, who has his abode in the abyss. Tiamat is his name, and he undertakes a conflict with the God of light. Thus the old myth of the victory of the young god of light over the evil powers of darkness became to the Christians a symbolic indication of Jesus' triumph over Satan and of the glorious ending of his life. Jesus became the God of light, the *Sol Justitiae*, and the woman the idealized Israel. I do not believe that the apocalypticist himself has known the origin of these images or symbols. Too much is wanting in the closer application of the same. But, be that as it may, we must in either case look for the origin thereof.

And now in our comparative investigation we come to the more contested points. In the first place, there is the supposed

agreement between the Buddhistic and Christian narratives, by which the dependence of the latter upon the former is asserted. These two religions have frequently been compared with each other, and—to name no others—a Schopenhauer did not hesitate to exalt Buddhism above Christianity. Both religions have points of agreement. They are universalistic, ethical, and so-called religions of salvation. But in this matter of redemption the difference is great. Buddhism proclaims salvation from suffering, i. e. from existence; Christianity brings salvation from sin. The subject in hand does not permit me to go further into this. The question is: In how far have influences of Buddhistic origin affected Christian narratives? It is self-evident that here the difference of the religious viewpoint makes itself felt. He who accepts that in the life of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels there are many legends and little history will be more inclined to look for parallel narratives from which to interpret sacred history, than he who, impelled by an exalted veneration of the person of Christ, accepts these Gospels as history rather than as products of poetic fancy. When one starts out from the position that Christianity is the outcome of a great syncretism, from which the Christ must be interpreted as a very common and natural product, one will sooner look for Buddhistic influences, than when Christianity is viewed as the work of the Christ—as I am convinced that it is—and full scope is allowed the person—I say not of the Founder of our religion—but of our Mediator and Lord, which the Christian church has done these nineteen centuries.

I state this in advance that I may correctly place before you the question which is here at stake, and that I may candidly confess that entire objectivity, or I had better say impartiality, is here impossible. Though I gladly add that they, also, who

stand upon my theological viewpoint take notice of the results of the study of the history of religions and reckon with it. Truth goes above everything else. No dogmatic proposition may take away from us the sharpness of our historical sight.

The attempt has been made to indicate parallels in the narratives of the births of Jesus and Buddha, and between the several Buddhistic narratives and that of Simeon in the temple, the twelve-year-old Jesus, Jesus' baptism, the temptation of the Lord, the call of the disciples, the Samaritan woman, the widow's mites, Peter's walk upon the sea, the parable of the lost son, the narrative of the man born blind, the transfiguration on the mount, etc. When these narratives are compared, as a rule the text of the Gospels and the texts of the Buddhistic narratives are placed side by side, and it is interesting to note that some strikingly similar points, upon a closer investigation, appear to be quite different. For instance, in Luke ii. we are told of Simeon that "he came by the Spirit into the temple." I would say, he was led by the Spirit of God, so that it was a Divine providence that the way of the infant Jesus and that of the devout Simeon crossed one another.¹ Of that wise Asita, however, who, according to the

¹ Dr. G. A. Van den Bergh van Eysinga (*Indische invloeden op oude christelyke verhalen*, 1901, bl. 29) interprets *ἐν τῷ πνεύματι* (Luke ii. 27) by: "in a magical manner," with a reference to 2 Kings ii. 16; Acts viii. 29; Rev. xvii. 3; *Hermas Visio* i. 1; ii. 1. R. Pischel (*Deutsche Literaturzeitung*, 1903, no. 48, sp. 2938, 2939) is not averse to this interpretation, and takes it for granted that *ἐν τῷ πνεύματι* originally rests upon the Buddhistic "Pfad des Windes." In connection with Luke ii. 25, 26, he observes that the absence or want of *dylan* (Luke ii. 27) is very striking. For myself I believe that no one would have thought of a magical coming of Simeon into the temple, had not the above-mentioned parallel narrative of Asita been mentioned in connection with it. Simeon is not far distant from the temple, and does not appear there suddenly; but he is in Jerusalem, and betakes himself to the temple. Luke ii. 25, 26, teaches that the Holy

Buddhistic narrative, took his departure from the Lalitawistara, in order that he might welcome the new-born Buddha, we read in the particular parallel passage, that by magical powers he took his way through the heavens, or, according to the still later narrative of the same subject in the "Buddhacarita," that he was carried thither by the wind. Such comparison of particulars, however, is of little service to our purpose. Here one can at most but speak of an impression alongside of, or over against, impressions of others which would prove but of little interest. To enable you to pass an independent judgment upon the matter, I will pursue a different course.

I requested my friend Dr. Caland to select from the more frequently mentioned parallels one or two which, among the authorities upon the subject, are held to be conclusive, and which seem to be strikingly similar, and begged him to translate for me the text from the Sanscrit into the Dutch language. In consultation with me he chose, among others, the narrative of Simeon in the temple, to which I referred above, and compared therewith for me the visit of the wise Asita to the new-born Buddha as we find it recorded in the seventh chapter of the "Lalitawistara." To rehearse the story of Simeon in the temple in your hearing would almost be an insult. But let me point you to the Buddhistic narrative, which is mentioned in connection with it.¹ It reads as follows:—

Spirit was upon him, and that a divine communication was given him by the Holy Spirit. That which immediately follows, viz. he came by the Spirit into the temple, simply means that, led by the Spirit of God, he appeared in the temple. The absence of *ἀγλα* detracts nothing from the significance of *πνεύμα*.

¹ Vg. Lalitawistara, chap. 7 (p. 101, ed. Lifmann).

"At that time there lived in the neighborhood of the Himalayas a seer whose name was Asita, who had been instructed in the five (sciences), with Naradatta his sister's son. Immediately after the birth of the Bodhisattwa he saw several wonders, curious signs and miracles. He saw sons of the gods go through the sky, and as they uttered the word 'Buddha' and waved their flowing robes, with great joy they moved hither and yon. The thought came to him: I will see what this means. Overlooking with his spiritual eyes the entire country of Dschamboedwipa, he saw in the beautiful city of Kapilawastu, at the house of King Coeddhodana, a new-born lad, all aglow with the splendor of a hundred good attributes, revered by all beings, the body being decorated with the two and thirty marks of the great man.

"Having seen this, he said to his disciple Naradatta: 'Know, my pupil, that in Dschamboedwipa a great jewel is originated. In the city Kapilawastu at the house of King Coeddhodana a lad is born, all glittering with the glory of the one hundred good attributes, revered by all beings, and equipped with the thirty-two marks of the great man. If he continues to dwell in the city he shall bear rule over a fourfold army and be a world-governing, triumphant prince: virtuous, a king of righteousness, in the possession of the power and might of his subjects,¹ and equipped with the seven jewels: the wheel, the oliphant, the horse, the jewel, the woman, the major domus, and the commandant. In the possession of the seven jewels he will get a thousand heroic, vigorous, strong and army-destroying sons. He shall subject unto himself this great, ocean-bound earth without the means of punishment or use of arms, but simply by his own power, and by virtue of his upper-majesty he will establish a kingdom. When (on the other hand he goes) out from the city, and begins a roofless life, he will become a Tathagata, an Arhant, entirely illumined, a guide, who receives no guidance from another, a lawgiver, a light of this world. Now we will go to see this for ourselves.'

"Then the great seer Asita, with his sister's son Naradatta, went up like a flamingo, raising themselves above the air, and fled to the great city Kapilawastu, and, when arrived there, he suppressed his supernatural power, entered the city on foot, and betook himself to the house of King Coeddhodana. When this was reached he remained standing at the gate of the house of King Coeddhodana. There at the gate of King Coeddhodana the seer Asita saw several hundred thousands of people collected together. Now the seer Asita approached the keeper of the gate and thus addressed him: 'Go, my friend, and announce to King Coeddhodana that a seer is standing at his gate.' After the porter had said to the seer Asita, 'Good,' he went to King Coeddhodana, and, with hands reverently folded, thus

¹ The text here is not certain.

spake to King Coeddhodana : ' Know, Sire, that a reverend, aged, and long-lived seer stands at the gate, and says, that he desires to see the king.' Now King Coeddhodana commanded that a seat be placed in readiness for the seer Asita, and spake to the porter : ' Let the seer in.' Whereupon the porter left the royal palace and said to the seer, ' Come in.' Then the seer Asita approached the place where King Coeddhodana was, stood before him, and spake to the prince : ' Long live your Majesty! Reach an old age and protect thy kingdom after the laws of right and duty.'

"After King Coeddhodana had honored the seer Asita by offering him Arghya and water to wash his feet, and had given him a friendly welcome, he invited him to take a seat. Seeing that he was comfortably seated, he reverently and kindly (?) addressed him as follows : ' I do not remember that I have (ever) seen thee, O Seer! Why then have you come and what is your desire?' At these words the seer Asita spoke to King Coeddhodana : ' To thee a son is born, O Prince! And I have come to see him.' The King replied : ' The lad is asleep, O great seer. Wait a moment until he awakes.' The seer spoke : ' Such great men, O King, do not as a rule sleep a long time. Such worthies are active.' Out of sympathy with the seer Asita Bodhisattwa effected a cause to awake (the lad). Thereupon the king Coeddhodana, after carefully taking the lad Sarwarthasiddha in both arms, handed him over to the seer Asita. When Asita saw the Bodhisattwa, he expressed great joy : ' One of wonderful beauty indeed is here come into the world.' When with these words he had risen from his seat, and had folded his hands reverently, and cast himself at the feet of the Bodhisattwa, and, with turning the right side toward him (three times), had approached the place where he was, and had taken the Bodhisattwa on his lap, he was lost in deep thought.

" Seeing the two and thirty marks of the Bodhisattwa, Asita now surmised that the lad shall become either a mighty prince or a Buddha. Seeing him, he groaned, shed tears, and sighed deeply. When the king saw this, he asked with much concern, why the wise one wept. This one answered : ' I do not weep on account of the lad, O Prince! No evil shall come upon him, but I weep for myself.' ' And what for?' ' I am old and aged, and am at the end of life, and this lad Sarwarthasiddha shall undoubtedly obtain perfect enlightenment, and afterward shall cause the highest wheel of right to revolve. [Hereupon follow prophecies concerning the Bodhisattwa.] Because, however, it shall not be permitted us to see this Buddha jewel, I weep and sigh with great sadness of heart.' Then he foretells the king that the prince shall not abide in his house, because he bears upon himself the thirty-two chief marks and the eighty secondary marks which mark him as belonging to a something higher. After he enumerated these signs, he concluded with these words : ' In the possession of

these marks the lad will not dwell in a house; without doubt he will depart and become a hermit.'

"When King Coeddhodana had heard from the seer Asita these prophecies concerning the lad, he was pleasantly affected, excited, filled with joy, happy, and rejoiced. He rose from his seat, and, having cast himself at the feet of the Bodhisattwa, he spake these words: 'Blessed art thou of Indra and (all) the (other) gods, and by wise men art thou honored, thee the physician of the whole world. I also (praise and) honor, O Lord!' Then King Coeddhodana provided the seer Asita and his sister's son Naradatta food and clothing, and walked around them, turning to them his right side. After which the seer Asita departed by means of his magic power through the air and returned to his hermit hut."

How sober, simple, and true is the narrative of Simeon, how artificial and legendary that of the Buddha!

As regards the form and content, the difference between these two narratives is so great that he who attributes dependence to one upon the other has, as it seems to me, no conception of historical criticism. He who interprets the narrative of Simeon from that of Asita freely lays himself open to the charge of wilful refusal to take the narrative of the godly Simeon as history, and such wilfulness betokens a narrow viewpoint. And let no such dealings be accounted scientific. A motive such as this, viz., that an aged philosopher visits a new-born child on whom the world has set great hopes and gives it his blessing, is so common and natural that we have no need to look for an interpretation of the same. Bear in mind that the "Lalitawistara," in the edition known to us, dates from the second century after Christ. I grant that several parts which appear therein are much older, which older records may include the visit of Asita to the Bodhisattwa. The "Boeddhacarita," by Acwaghosha, however, which in the comparison is also referred to as a source, must have been written about two hundred years after Christ, and upon good authority the introductions to the Dsjataka's are

considerably younger. They are even placed as late as the fifth century after Christ. For any comparison with the New Testament, therefore, this literature can safely be passed by. The hypothesis presented by Seydel concerning a Buddhistic gospel, which also belonged to the sources of the synoptists, especially of St. Luke, is so precarious that in my "History of the Books of the New Covenant" I have not given it the honor of a mention. It is only from the third century after Christ that we have historic data of relation between Christianity and Buddhism, and after a twenty years' study of early Christianity I have discovered no traces of an unconscious influence of Buddhistical data.

A close relation, and even a mutual inworking, has also been asserted between the Mithras cult and the Christian religion, to which in the next place I call your attention. F. Cumont, a Belgian scholar, has lately pointed out the significance of the Mithras cult. This religion had so wide a spread in the early centuries after Christ, that it threatened to become a mighty opponent of Christianity. It is only when Christianity became a state religion, that the Mithras cult gradually lost its significance. I repeat that it lost its significance gradually, since for long times even Christians remained faithful to the service of Mithras and worshiped the *Sol invictus*, as Mithras was called. On the twenty-fifth of December the birth of Mithras was commemorated. In the course of the fourth century the commemoration of Christ's birth was changed from January 6 to December 25, probably with the intention of weakening thereby the Mithras cult, and of imparting a Christian tone to a pagan festival, such as has also been done with the festival of St. Nicholas.¹

[¹ In the Netherlands, St. Nicholas is celebrated on the fifth of December.—Tr.]

Who was Mithras and where did his religion gain the largest following? With the Iranians he was originally the God of the heavenly light, who by the religious reformation of Zoroaster, even as the other Persian gods of nature in consequence of his (viz., Zoroaster's) dualism, was robbed somewhat of his majesty and glory. The people at large, however, remained devotedly attached to him. In the time of the Achæmenides, especially under Artaxerxes Mnemon (402-365 B. C.), the ancient god of light appears as the Lord of Hosts and obtains a general recognition. The Mithras religion coalesced with the Babylonian worship of the stars, and in this mixed form penetrated after the victory of Alexander the whole of Anterior Asia. Mithras appears by several names, such as Mithridates of Pontus, the enemy of the Romans. The Romans probably became acquainted with the Mithras cult in Cilicia, where, especially in Tarsus, Mithras was largely worshiped.

Almost simultaneously with the Jewish religion Mithraicism made its entrance in Rome in the year 63 B.C. From there it spread itself, by means of the soldiers, the slaves imported from the East, and merchants, over the then known world, Greece excepted. At first it found acceptance with the lowest classes, but later also with the higher, and even among the highest. Nero—as we shall see further presently—allowed himself to be worshiped by the Armenian King Tiridates as an emanation of Mithras, and with the Roman emperors the conviction gained ground more and more that their alliance with the divinity, from which they derived the image of the crown with radiations, would add great lustre to the emperorship. Commodus (180-192 A.D.) even allowed himself to be inducted into the mysteries of Mithras. In the third and fourth centuries the Roman emperors paid religious honors to

Mithras. This is even told of Constantine the Great, of whom coins have been preserved with the superscription *Soli Deo Invicto* or *Soli invicto Comiti*. Brief, however, was the glory period of Mithraicism under Julian the Apostate. Thereafter its pomp went down and came to naught. Enmity discovered itself with the Christians against the worshippers of Mithras, who were accused of being guilty of the persecution of the Christians under Diocletian. Manicheanism contains still traces of the ancient worship of Mithras.

In the time of the Roman emperors the Mithras cult was a sort of pantheism, which exhibited traces of influence from the Babylonian doctrine of the planets, and Greek philosophy, especially that of Stoa. Originally Mithras was not the principal god in Mithraicism, but Zrwan Akarana, the father of Ormuzd, and Ahriman, the highest, eternal, unknowable being, whose name is unutterable. The Greeks beheld in him the personification of time and eternity and of the infinity of the world. He holds the keys by which he opens the gates of heaven, through which the sun passes out and in, and through which also souls descend to earth and return to heaven. He is the heavenly doorkeeper, as Peter is in the Church of Rome. Mithras is also the mediator between the unknowable, highly exalted God and the living human race upon the earth. He is the Logos of the Christians. He protects the truth, the good, everything that is pure, and is the enemy of all falsehood and deceit, of Ahriman and his hellish domain. On the bank of a river—as it appears from the representations in bas-relief—under the shadow of a sacred tree, the divine child was born from a rock in a very wonderful way. Wherefore he is called The One Born from a Rock, or Petrogenes. Shepherds saw the wonder, worshiped the child, and offered him the firstlings of their flocks and of their harvest. Mithras soon

grew to be a healthy and an athletic lad. With a dexterous hand he cut the fruits of a fig-tree and clothed himself with its leaves. All this took place before there were any people in the earth, the shepherds of course excepted. And now Mithras engaged in the great conflict. He combats the sun god and conquers him, after which he enters into a covenant of friendship with the vanquished one, on whose head he places the crown with radiations, and from now on they mutually sustain one another.

The most important combat of Mithras is with the bull, the first living creature which Ormuzd has created. Mithras captures the animal, grasps it by the horns, and jumps upon his back. After the bull has escaped, Helios sends Mithras his raven with the demand that he shall kill the bull. However much it went against his wishes, Mithras offers the bull in the cave after he had recaptured it. A miracle took place. From the body of the dying animal sprang all sorts of herbs and plants. From his tail spring wheat and grains, from his blood a vine from which wine is prepared for the holy supper in the mysteries. In vain the evil spirit sends unclean animals, such as scorpions, gnats, and serpents, to poison the well of life. From the seed of the bull all useful animals appear. From his death originates life.

Meanwhile the first human pair had been created, whom Mithras protects against the attacks of Ahriman. Ahriman brings a drought upon the earth, but Mithras shoots an arrow against a rock, from which at once proceeds a stream of water. Ahriman wants to depopulate the earth by a flood, but by a divine command man built an ark, in which he saves himself with his family and his cattle. Ahriman destroys the world by fire, so that all habitable places burn up, but the creatures that were created by Ormuzd escape with the help of Mithras

also out of this danger. Mithras has now fulfilled his earthly calling. He has a last meal with Helios, at which bread and wine were used. Afterward with him he ascends to heaven in a chariot of the sun, in order henceforth to live with the other gods as an immortal, and from thence to protect the faithful.

That there are parallel passages between the religion of Mithras and Christianity is *lucē clarius*. Mithras reminds us of the significance of Christ as Mediator, in so far as he too is the Mediator between heaven and earth, God and man. With Mithras, also, the earthly career brings him difficulty and strife, but to humanity blessing and salvation. His life indicates a continuous struggle of the good against the evil. In the representation that Mithras was born from a stone, Firmicus Maternus (fourth century after Christ) sees an imitation of the representation that likens Christ to a cornerstone. Even as at the birth of Christ, so with Mithras' birth, shepherds appear, who kneel in adoration. The parallel is striking, but I take it to be accidental and see no dependence of Christendom upon the Mithras cult nor of the Mithras cult upon Christendom. The story of Matthew ii., that wise men came from the East, who, being star-gazers, had seen a star of peculiar lustre, which they connected with the birth of a man of significance, a divine light, has only recently been connected with the Mithras cult.¹ The Magi are taken to have been adherents of Mithras, whose priests preferred to be called Magi, and the star which they saw is supposed to refer to the same religion. But the latter inference is arbitrary, since in the East, even as in the antiquity in general, astrology was a well-known phenomenon. One of the factors which must be counted within the historic-genetic interpretation of this nar-

¹ A. Dieterich, *Zeitschrift für die neuest. Wiss.*, 1902, pp. 1-14.

rative is the incident, described by Dio Cassius (bk. lxxiii. chaps. 1-7), of the journey of Tiridates, who, with a great and glittering retinue, arrived in Rome 66 A.D. At Naples already he met Nero and worshiped him. But the acme of the festival is reached in Rome, when the people of all classes stood attired in white togas, decked with laurel leaves, surrounded by the soldiers most beautifully equipped with glittering arms. Nero appeared in the market-place in shining robes, attended by the senate and his body-guard, and Tiridates, with his retinue, approached him to offer him divine honors. He called himself his servant, and openly declared that he came to Nero, his god, to worship him, even as Mithras (*Σὸς δὲ δοῦλός εἰμι καὶ ἤλθόν τε πρὸς σε τὸν ἐμὸν θεὸν προσκυνήσων σε ὡς καὶ τὸν Μίθραν*).

Thus in Nero he beheld a reflection of Mithras. This narrative has made a deep impression upon the contemporaries. Pliny (H. N. xxx. 16) calls Tiridates a magiēr and those who accompanied him magi. From the fact that the Magi of Matthew ii. 2 also say: "We are come to worship him," it is inferred that in the narrative of Matthew ii. the thought is expressed that Mithras would kneel before Christ. This is taken as a prophecy of the later disappearance of the Mithras cult before Christendom. This is indeed an original find, but historically not correct. If the narrative of Matthew ii. had originated in the fourth century, when the approaching decline of the Mithras cult was clearly perceived, I might readily give this view my consent, but in the latter decades of the first century, when, in all probability, the Gospel of Matthew was first known, no one had any idea of the passing away of Mithraism. Then Mithras still shone in all his glory, and his cult obtained triumph upon triumph. There may be a similarity, but, on this account, I see no dependence in the idea that there

is a conflict between good and evil spirits in the religion of Mithras as well as with Paul. Christ, as Paul teaches in Colossians ii. 15, has by his death upon the cross spoiled principalities and powers, which are angelic hosts, and made a show of them openly, and triumphed over them. In Ephesians vi. 12 he writes: "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" against which we should arm ourselves with the whole armor of God. Mithraicism as well as Christianity views the life of believers as a conflict, and teaches that, if one would conquer in the fight, he must keep God's word and law. One must strive after sanctification, and perfect purity is the highest ideal, which is so strikingly stated in Matthew v. 48: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." This similarity, also, I do not interpret from any dependence of the one religion upon the other, but from the same need of the human soul, and from the conviction that the worshiper of Mithras as well as the Christian is created after the image of God. Repeated washings and purifications were the means by which to remove the stains of the soul.

This universal human symbolism is not only found in the Mithras religion and with Christianity, but among all other nations. It is the foundation of our Christian baptism. He who would be perfect must refrain from given foods, and apply himself to chastity. This asceticism was extant in the days of Paul and was assailed by him. It is noteworthy what merit the ethics of both religions attach to the moral of a deed, and how they warn against a sickly quietism and mysticism. It is noteworthy that the believer, according to Mithraicism, in the battle he has to fight can count upon the constant aid of

Mithras. Never is his help called in in vain. He is the sure haven, the anchor of salvation, and comes to the help of the weak in their temptation. This involuntarily reminds us of what is written in the Epistle to the Hebrews (ii. 18) of Christ as the sympathizing High Priest: "For in that he himself hath suffered, being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted." As helper Mithras is ever active and on his guard, and from every conflict he returns a victor. Therefore in Persian he bears the epithet *Nabarzes*, even as in Greek and Latin the titles *ἀνίκητος*, *invictus*, *insuperabilis*.

I will not trace the views of the followers of Mithras concerning the future state of the pious and the wicked in all particulars, because here the points of contact with Christianity are few. But I will say that both religions believe in an eternal life, in an eternal weal and an eternal woe, in the immortality of the soul, and in the resurrection of the body. The adherent of Mithras imagines that heaven is divided into seven parts, each sphere of which is apportioned to a planet. Judaism of a later day also accepted seven heavens, and also St. Paul, as we learn from 2 Corinthians xii. 2, where he speaks of a man in Christ, which was himself, who in an ecstatic state was lifted up into the third heaven. But I will not speak at length in this connection of the heavenly journey of the soul, which in its flight through the seven heavens leaves desires and passions behind on every planet, in order, freed from all imperfections and sensual lusts, as an exalted being to reach in the eternal light the eighth heaven and to enjoy an endless blessedness, because it has points of similarity elsewhere, but not in the New Testament.

Alongside of the moral power which went out from Mithraicism and the Christian faith, I also find a parallel in the way in which each emphasizes the faith in the omnipresence of

God. In Mithraism, faith in the omnipresence of the gods is taken pantheistically, in Christianity the omnipresence of God is purely monotheistic. The Scripture says: "In him we live, and move, and have our being" (Acts xvii. 28). The adherent of Mithras, on the other hand, declares that he beheld the influence and might of the gods in all the elements,—in fire, by means of which he prepares food; in water, by which he quenches his thirst and purifies himself; in the air which he inhales; and in the day in the light of which he walks. In both religions, man is constantly urged to pray and have fellowship with God. The Christian enters his inner room, closes the door, and prays to the Father, who seeth in secret. The worshiper of Mithras, if he be initiated, betakes himself to the sacred grotto, which is hidden in the loneliness of the forest. The stars that sparkle in the heavens, the wind that moves the leaves of the trees, the well or brook which murmurs in the dale, the very earth upon which the Mithras confessor places his foot,—all are divine in his eyes. They quicken in him a reverent fear for Him who is in everything.

The *μύστης*, or he who is to be introduced into the mysteries, went through seven grades, whereby he obtained the names of Raven (*corax*), Hidden (*κρύβιος*), Soldier (*miles*), Lion (*leo*), Persian (*Perses*), Runner with the sun (*Ἡλιοδρόμος*), and Father (*pater*). Originally these are indications that one identified himself with the divinity, which was represented in the form of animals. The point in question is, that the persons of the first three grades were called servants, were not yet admitted to the highest mysteries, and corresponded to the catechumen of the ancient Christian church. With the fourth grade one became a communicant. The members, who by divisions were in the care of a Frater,

were called *fratres* (brothers) or *consacranei*. At the head of the *patres* stood a *pater patratus*. At every grade to which one was admitted, one had to take an oath, called *sacramentum*, when one pledged secrecy of the doctrine and obedience to certain obligations. Thus there were seven sacraments, just as in the later Church of Rome. When one became a *miles*, or soldier, he was handed a crown on the point of a spear, which he pressed against his shoulder, with the promise that he would wear none other, since Mithras was his only crown (Tertullian, *De Corona*, 15). One had to subject himself to the several gruesome solemnities, chastisements, scourgings, fire- and water-ordeals, in order to attain unto a sort of stoical want of feeling or apathy. That which, however, reminds us again of the primitive Christian church is that the neophytes were prescribed different washings, a sort of baptism, or *lavacrum*, which was designed to purify believers from moral pollution. This baptism might be a sprinkling with consecrated water or an actual bath, just as in the cult of Isis.

Tertullian compares the confirmation of his fellow-believers to the ceremony whereby soldiers were given a sign in the forehead. This sign did not consist of an anointing, as with the Christian liturgy, but of a mark burnt in with a red-hot iron, similar to what was given the recruits in the army before they were admitted to take the oath. In the Mithras cult this is probably by way of imitation of the sign which Mithras gave to Helios when he entered into a covenant with him. At least it so appears from certain representations, where Mithras lays his hand upon the head of the god who is kneeling at his feet.

Some have observed that the strongest similarity between Mithraicism and Christianity consists in the consecrated meal

or holy communion. The *μύσθη* was given bread and a cup filled with water, over which the priest pronounced the sacred formula. Later on wine was added to the water. Even as, with Christians, only the baptized were admitted to the holy supper, so, with the initiated, only they who had reached the grade of teacher. This meal is portrayed for us in a noteworthy bas-relief.¹ The point of similarity with Christianity is also unique in this particular, that the holy supper reminds us of the meal which Mithras is supposed to have eaten with Helios before his ascension into heaven. Apart from the fact that it was a memorial meal, supernatural operations were expected from this mystical feast, more especially from the pleasures of the consecrated wine. This imparted physical and spiritual power, and fortified the individual in his combat with evil spirits. One even obtained thereby a blessed immortality, for in his letter to the Ephesians (xx. 2) Ignatius calls the bread of the holy supper the medicine of immortality and an antidote of death. Justin (*Apol.* i. 66) and Tertullian (*De praesc. haer.*, 40) are greatly concerned on account of this similarity, which they take as a work of the devil, who in the Mithras cult caused imitations of Christian customs to originate, that Christians might be deceived.

I do not attach much significance to this similarity. I am willing to indicate the same, but the difference of feeling in mind and heart between the humble Christian who has celebrated the Lord's Supper and the follower of Mithras who has been initiated into the mysteries must have been very great. When his imagination had been highly wrought upon, and in semi-darkness he had been brought into a mystical mood, with the initiated of Apulejus he exclaimed (*Metam.* xi. 23 fin.): "I have passed through the gates of

¹ See F. Cumont, *Die Mysterien des Mithras*, 1908, Fig. 6, Tafel II.

death, and have crossed the threshold of Proserpina, and after having passed through all the elements, I returned to the earth. At midnight I have seen the sun send out his brilliant rays. I approached the gods of the lower-world and of the upper and I have worshiped them face to face." The Christian, on the other hand, who has received the symbols of bread and wine, who has been strengthened in his faith, and has tasted the joys of the *unio mystica*, expresses himself very differently. *Toto coelo distant.* I acknowledge the great similarity between the liturgy of the Mithras cult and that of the Roman Catholic Church as it developed itself in later times. The whole ceremonial was directed in either temple by a priest, who bore the title of *sacerdos* or *antistes*. The priesthood formed a sort of hierarchy with a *pontifex maximus* at the head, who was permitted to marry only once. Tertullian also relates that the adherents of the Persian god had their *virgines* even as the Christian, as well as *ascetes* or *continentes*. This latter is the more noteworthy because it does not harmonize with the spirit of Zoroaster to attribute any merit to celibacy.

Aside from the fact that the priest was in duty bound to keep the fire upon the altar, he was also to pray to the sun three times a day,—in the morning, at noon, and at dusk,—even as it was prescribed in the "Teachings of the Twelve Apostles," which is the oldest Christian liturgical writing or document of the first half of the second century, to pray the Our Father three times a day. Because both Mithras and Christ are each called the Mediator and the light of the world, it need not surprise us that the confusion became so great that Eusebius of Alexandria¹ communicates the fact that among Christians there were worshipers of the sun. This

¹ *Oratio περί αστραβμης*, Ed. Thilo, 1834, p. 15.

habit of comparing Christ with the sun was attacked by Augustine, who maintained that the sun himself was not Christ, but had been created by Christ.¹ The coincidence of the birthdays of Mithras and Jesus on December 25 was interpreted at a later day, that Jesus was the true *invictus*, who had overcome death. As the adherents of Mithras indicated their joy over the birth of their god by the lighting of lights, so in Jerusalem at Epiphany, which was the original Christmas, a public religious service was held in the fourth century with lights.² I would take this as a matter of course, since to the human heart light is a symbol of gladness and of exultation. Both religions celebrate Sunday as the holy day of the week. In this also I see no imitation, as has here and there been asserted. First, because the observance of this day was fixed with the Christians at a very early date. In the New Testament we trace the unmistakable signs of the same. Moreover, the origin of this celebration is very different. Since Mithras was the god of light, the day of the sun was consecrated to him. Christ, on the other hand, died on Friday and on Sunday came forth from the tomb. From this springs the Christian memorial on the first day of the week.

These two religions can also be placed side by side in this particular, that in behalf of the propaganda they did not turn or devote themselves to the cultured and more refined strata of society, but to the humble and lowly. In their missionary labors they had such great success that the followers of Mithras as well as the Christians could adopt the word of Tertullian: "Hesterni sumus et vestra omnia implevimus." Judging from the number of monuments which have been left us by the Mithras cult, it may well be asked whether, in the

¹ Tract. xxxiv. 2.

² Vgl. H. Usener, *Religionsgesch. Untersuchungen*, 1889, I. 202.

days of the Severi, the followers of Mithras were not more numerous than the Christians. Considering the size of the caves or grottos in which they congregated, the most important of which, among those that have been preserved, is the Mithraum of St. Clement of Rome, the local congregations can have been no larger than about one hundred persons. They formed a sort of moral bodies, and had something which makes us think of a consistory (*decuriones*), or *curatores*. They also had *defensores*, who pled the interests of the congregations at court, and *patroni*, who aided the congregations, which were kept in existence by voluntary contributions only, with financial support. And when I recall that the members called each other brothers, you readily understand that the comparison between Christianity and the Mithras cult has also a reason of existence in this particular.

Among the Parisian magic papyri, A. Dieterich has discovered a so-called Mithras liturgy, which he published in 1903 (*Eine Mithrasliturgie*, 1903). It represents itself as a revelation of Mithras, and must have been composed in a grotto. The initiated one purports to ascend through the seven symbolical gates of heaven, at each one of which he utters a prayer, until he arrives in heaven itself, where, in ecstatic vision, he beholds Deity. Noteworthy indeed in this connection is the mystical union of believers with the divinity, the being in it and remaining in the same, the *unio mystica*, and then the divine sonship. Between Mithras and Helios there is a relation of father and son, so that at one time Helios is represented as the only-born son of Mithras, and again, in divine union with him, is named the great god Helios-Mithras. Even as Helios is the first initiated one whom Mithras adopts into his fellowship, so is Mithras the father of his believers and initiated ones, or neophytes. This finds its analogy with

Christians in the relation of the Son to the Father and of the believers to God. In both religions we find the thought of regeneration, even as many symbolical forms occur with primitive peoples to which the same thought is fundamental. The old man dies and the new man takes his place. With the regeneration is allied the acquiring of a new name. The holy day on which the new birth takes place is called the *dies natalis* of the neophytes. This regeneration joins itself to the dying and rising again of a given divinity. With many peoples of antiquity a god is found who dies and rises again, who is descended into the realm of the dead and has ascended into heaven, as a path-breaker and exemplar of believers. Thus, for instance, at the spring festival of the Syrian god Attis, first of all his death was mournfully commemorated, and then on the third day his resurrection was joyfully proclaimed. In the mysteries of Mithras this idea of regeneration is symbolically indicated in the sacrifice of the steer. Those who were initiated called themselves "in aeternum renati." In the study of these things, however, we should be on our guard against the necessary exaggeration!

I read somewhere¹ that the central significance which the regeneration occupies in the New Testament with Paul and John is noteworthy in a more especial manner, because, with the Jews, yea with Semites in general, the image of death and regeneration is altogether wanting. I deem it possible to interpret the idea of regeneration of John iii. and of Paul from the Old Testament, without the aid of the Mithras religion. When, in his conversation with Nicodemus on regeneration, our Lord Jesus expressed surprise, that he, who was a teacher in Israel, did not know these things, he surely meant that Nicodemus should have been well versed in the Old Testa-

¹ W. Nestle, *Protestantenblatt* vom November 28, 1903, p. 385.
Vol. LXV. No. 257. 3

ment teachings, and not in the liturgies of Mithras or in the history of religions in general. That which was true and noble in the religion of Mithras was also found in primitive Christianity. But in saying so, I do not imply that Christianity has learned this from the teachings of Mithras. In the struggle with Christianity, Mithras has been worsted; and, according to the legend, after he had laid aside the Phrygian tiara, he became a pious warrior, was advanced to the rank of an officer, and later on became known by the name of St. George.

In recent times, influences have also supposedly been traced in the New Testament of the Egyptian so-called Hermetical literature, or that of Hermes, secret writings from the last century B.C. and the first century A.D., which contain all sorts of reflections, upon medical, astronomical, and theological questions, which Hermes communicates to those who have been more fully initiated, a sort of gnostic literature. The Hermes of the Greeks is here the Thot of the Egyptians. Even as the original Isis cult extended itself far beyond the boundaries of Egypt, the Egyptian philosophers or Greek priests adopted a definite Hellenistic philosophy. Thus there arose a pantheistic-mystic theology with proper cosmogonical representations. Among other things it appears, from the magic papyri that belong to it, that magical formulas were pronounced in the name of different gods, even in the names of Jahwe and Jesus. Thus it seems to me that the New Testament has been used in the preparation of the Hermes literature.

In either case so much at least is true that the Logos doctrine of the Fourth Gospel bears traces of similarity with the reflections upon the *λόγος θεοῦ* of Hermes. But there is also a difference. In the Hermes literature the *λόγος θεοῦ*

is called Poimandres,¹ the divine seed, which the *βουλή θεοῦ* embodies in itself as a visible world, or by which the *βουλή θεοῦ* becomes a visible world. That which in man hears and sees, is the *λόγος θεοῦ*. He is inseparably bound up with God, the *οὐς*. Their union is life, and the whole world is animated. Next to the *λόγος* and the *νοῦς* comes as a third the *βουλή θεοῦ*, which can be both *φύσις* and *γένεσις* only because God is himself the world. Conceptions such as Logos, life, light, fullness (*πλήρωμα*), the metaphors or figures of the good shepherd and the true vine occur in the named literature and with John. But I do not accept, such as is claimed for instance by Reitzenstein, the dependence of the New Testament. Does not Reitzenstein himself acknowledge, who by his two writings "Zwei religionsgeschichtlichen Fragen" (1901) and "Poimandres" (1904) proves himself a leading authority in this department, that probably these writings appeared in the first century after Christ? It seems to me that they should be placed later rather than earlier.

Thus the dependence of the New Testament upon other writings seems more and more improbable. I will not enter upon the consideration of further particulars; such as, for instance, that influence of the Hermes writings has been traced in Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus and with the Samaritan woman and in the well-known misunderstanding in the Fourth Gospel.² He who proves too much proves nothing. This last also applies to the assertion,³ that, in his prologue on the incarnation of the Word, John should have been dependent upon the representations of the Hindoos regarding

¹ See Ed. R. Reitzenstein, 1904, p. 45.

² Poimandres, ed. Reitzenstein, pp. 246, 247.

³ J. Grill, *Untersuchungen über die Entstehung des vierten Evangeliums*, 1902, p. 347.

the Awatares, that is the descent of the god Vishnoe. But I recognize the similarity in the point that the descent of Vishnoe also has a purely ethical and exalted purpose; to wit, to further the salvation of man by a redemption upon ethical ground.

The studies, however, of W. Heitmüller "Im Namen Jesu" (1903) and "Taufe und Abendmahl bei Paulus" (1903) have attracted the attention much more widely than the aforementioned observations. In the first he endeavors to show that in the New Testament, as well as in later Christian literature, a magical use was made of the name Jesus in baptism and in prayer, as though a moral power went out from the name as such; and he supports this by numerous parallelisms from the history of religions. In the second, Heitmüller limits his investigation, and, as the title clearly indicates, he confines himself to baptism and the Lord's Supper according to the Pauline conception of doctrine. Not Jesus, but Paul, must have fostered a magical understanding of baptism and holy communion. An unnatural emphasis is placed upon the thought, which, as it seems to me, is to be taken in a purely ethical sense, that in baptism we are brought into relation with the once dead and now risen Christ; and again upon the well-known passage 1 Corinthians xv. 29, where Paul speaks of those who were baptized for the dead, as though such baptism as *opus operatum* would benefit those who had died. Paul, however, does not adopt the superstition for himself, but places himself for the moment at the viewpoint of those who did. In view of a custom which is foreign to us and is not known beyond the apostolic age, he asks what this baptism signifies, if Christ be not raised. He attacks his opponents with their own weapons and appeals here to their superstition. Also, when in 1 Corinthians xi. 30, Paul refers to many cases of

sickness and death in the church in connection with the abuse that was made of the love feasts, whereby one ate and drank judgment unto himself, he indulges in no magical representation of the Lord's Supper. The apostle does not interpret these cases of sickness and death as results of meat and drink, but as a judgment of God upon the church on account of its sins. No, with Paul, we do not meet the thought, which we face so frequently in the history of religions, that by eating and drinking of bread and wine a union with divinity is originated, and that by the use of the flesh and blood of the sacrifice one becomes a partaker of divinity. With Paul, eating and drinking is only a symbol. It is not eating and drinking in the literal sense of the word. Neither is there any mention of a sacrifice in the Lord's Supper. The partakers of the holy communion may be *ἐν Χριστῷ*. But this is not the state of the *βακχεύοντες* of Dionysos, who were *ἐνθεοί*. I will not refer to all the parallels which Heitmüller cites regarding the Lord's Supper, but only these two.

The first one he cites is this: A peculiar custom of human sacrifices is told of the Azteken, a comparatively highly civilized tribe of Mexicans. Prisoners of war who were chosen victims for the sacrifice were given the name of divinities, wore their garments, were provided for a time with all sorts of attributes, and were given honors which ordinarily were offered only to the divinity, until on the great day of the feast they were slaughtered and consumed. Second parallel: Nilus narrates that, with a tribe of Bedouins on the peninsula of Sinai, there was a custom of sacrificing in vogue, which we have to view as the oldest form of animal sacrifices. By the light of the morning, accompanied by song, the tribe walked around a camel bound to an altar. With the last notes of the song the first wound was struck in the sacrificial animal. The blood

which streamed out from this was drunk, and the raw flesh, while still bloody, wholly eaten. Try what I may, I cannot understand how any one can place side by side such customs and the Lord's Supper. Have we here indeed, "die Vorstellungswelt des Herrenmahles in primitivster Form und deshalb in durchsichtigster gestalt"¹? Methinks that such an assertion does not indicate fine religious feeling and tact. When the history of religions can bring no greater service to theology than what we find here, the study of it cannot be very significant.

The result I reach is this: The influence of strange religions upon primitive Christianity is not very important. He who would interpret Christianity can do so by means of the Old Testament, the later Judaism, and Hellenistic philosophy. By doing this he walks the old and tried way. But, above all things else, let the full light be concentrated upon the person of Jesus Christ, who is the creator or rather the center of the religion that names itself after him. If history in general cannot be understood without the significance of those exalted personalities who gave the impulse to any great movement and who cannot be interpreted as mere products of their times, how much more does it apply to the sacred history of the origin of Christianity, in view of the person of Christ! To us he is the only-begotten Son of the Father, who has revealed the Father unto us. Give Christianity confidently a place by the side of other religions. Christianity contains whatever is noble and divine in them, and still a great deal more. Christianity recognizes the problem of sin, and proclaims the atonement of the sinner with God. Safely compare the Christ with Buddha or whomsoever you please. He raises

¹ Zoo W. Heilmüller, *Taufe und Abendmahl bei Paulus*, 1903, p. 42.

himself above them all, even as, in the Jungfrauketen, the Jungfrau in all her virginal glory rises high above her surroundings. The *ὄψαν*, or seeing, of the Son of man, becomes a *θεωπεῖν*, a sight of admiration, and the *θεωπεῖν* ends in the *προσκύνησις*, i. e. in worship. *Sol Justitiæ, illustra nos!*