bei aber zum Angriff vorgeht, indem er den wirklichen Atheismus, die Unkenntnis des wahren Gottes, den Nichtchristen zuschreibt.\textsuperscript{32)}

Dies sind, soviel ich sehe, die Einwände gegen das Christentum, die, weil sie besonders nahelagen, gewiß schon frühe vorgebracht wurden und die daher auch schon in den neutestamentlichen Schriften Berücksichtigung finden konnten.

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**MIRACLE AND MYTHOLOGY**  
**ROBERT M. GRANT**

I

The student of the Bible today can easily recognize that the biblical history is *Heilsgeschichte*, told by various authors from a religious point of view. These authors are not concerned so much with secular history as with the sacred story which is the core of all events. For a Christian, the biblical story begins with God’s act of creation, continues with the fall and recall of God’s people, and reaches its climax in the incarnation and the creation of a new community, the church in which God’s Spirit dwells.

What is not so easy to recognize is the precise relation between the sacred and the secular. We are not Hebrews or early Christians; we are not men of antiquity; and between the ancients and us there lies not only the natural science of the renaissance and later but also the modern analysis of the sources of historical knowledge. We can recognize, as earlier generations could not so easily do, the elements in the biblical narratives which reflect primitive and, in fact, outmoded conceptions of the universe and its workings. For us, as for Hellenistic science, the world is not flat or supported on pillars. Our picture of the universe resembles only faintly the description in the first chapter of Genesis, which the church fathers of Antioch regarded as literally inspired. We therefore tend to distinguish between the religious message of the Bible as perhaps a „kernel“ and the „shell“ of the unscientific information possessed by its writers. The same result was reached in antiquity by allegorists such as Basil of Caesarea, Ambrose, and Augustine, although by another means. We can also recognize the difference between authentic „history“ written by an eye-witness or based on his reports, such as the court memoirs in 2 Samuel, and legendary accounts such as the cycle of stories concerning Elijah and Elisha, not to mention Moses. This distinction inevitably colors our attitude toward the *Heilsgeschichte*, for we are not only Christians but men

who live in a world where facts are (at least sometimes) highly regarded. Finally, the relevance of the structure of the Heilschichte can be questioned, since in so many respects it is closely related to the general world-view of the ancient authors. The effort of Bultmann to "demythologize" the gospel is only one symptom of a very common uneasiness concerning the "mythological" elements in the Bible.

This difficulty is especially crucial when we consider the element of the miraculous, especially in the New Testament. There can be no question that those who handed down the gospel tradition believed in the possibility, indeed the actuality of miracles. At the heart of the tradition lie stories of the healing wonders of Jesus. To try to read these stories out of the tradition is as foolish as the similar attempt to remove the divine apparitions and actions from Homer. But when we accept these stories as true, we accept them not because they are strange and inexplicable, but because the study of psychology and psychiatry and of psycho-somatic medicine has made them credible. Such things can happen, we believe, for they do happen today. Our criterion is primarily modern experience. We accept the miraculous in these instances because it is not contrary to our experience. We want to treat it under the heading of fact.

On the other hand, there are stories in the tradition which are much more difficult to accept as factual, stories of events which run counter to our experience and to the recorded experience of mankind. Such stories describe virginal conception, changing water into wine, multiplication of bread, walking on water, resurrection, and ascension. And it is obvious that some of these events have been regarded as central to the Christian tradition. The apostolic symbol includes the clauses, "born of the virgin Mary, ... risen on the third day, ... ascended into heaven." The question for us is not whether to accept them or not, but in what way to accept them. This question leads us directly to the basic problem of their original meaning.

To determine the way in which such stories were understood in antiquity is very difficult, because this understanding varies not only from period to period but also from person to person. What seems possible or impossible to a person will depend not only on his experience and his education but even on his temperament. Some people have an enormous capacity for credulity. One would think, for example, after magicians had repeated their claim to be able to draw down the moon from the time of the Hippocratic writings to the second century of our era, that it (and they) would have been thoroughly discredited; but such is not the case. Nevertheless we can, I think, distinguish between the Hellenistic age and the period of the Roman empire. In the earlier period there was considerable scientific progress, some diffusion of the results of science, and