

# Notes for the Ekklēsia Meeting

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## Myth, Metaphor or Majestic Glory?

by Dan Trygg

“Many have undertaken to compile an account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, <sup>2</sup> just as the original eyewitnesses and servants of the word handed them down to us. <sup>3</sup> It also seemed good to me, since I have carefully investigated everything from the very first, to write to you in orderly sequence, most honorable Theophilus, <sup>4</sup> so that you may know the certainty of the things about which you have been instructed.”

Luke 1:1-4

“For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. <sup>17</sup> For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to Him by the Majestic Glory, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,’ <sup>18</sup> we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with Him on the holy mountain. <sup>19</sup> And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, ... <sup>20</sup> knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes to be from one's own interpretation. <sup>21</sup> For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of human beings, instead, moved by the Holy Spirit, people spoke from God.”

II Peter 1:16-21

People gasped, as the young man tore a page out of his Bible and threw it over the podium! He was describing how some theologians did not believe in miracles. “If Jesus did not heal the man born blind, then we might as well tear that chapter out of our Bibles,” he said, ripping another page out, and tossing it over the wooden preacher's desk. **If you take all the miracles and supernatural events out of the Bible, what do you have? Just some moral teachings, from a quaint group of wanderers in the Middle East!** “The best of the Old Testament teachings can be boiled down to the 10 commandments.” He ripped them out, and tore the Bible in half and heaved the remainder of the Old Testament onto the floor, in full view of the open-mouthed congregation. After a few more examples, and flying sheets of paper, he declared, **“If miracles *didn't* happen, ...if they *couldn't* happen, because they were violations of natural law, as defined and observed by natural science..., then, not even Jesus' resurrection was real!** The whole resurrection was either faked, or it didn't happen at all!” Then, quoting from I Corinthians 15:13-17, “If the dead *cannot* be raised, then Christ *was not* raised. **If He was not raised, then our preaching is in vain, and your faith is empty. You are still in your sins.**” He went on, “If *that* is what *you* believe, ...if that is the result of your removing the miraculous from the Scriptures..., you can *have it!*” he declared, throwing the remainder of the Book over the podium. **“But, know this, ...that truncated, dissected, disemboweled version of religious philosophy is NOT historic Christianity.** It is NOT the faith of the early church, or the church throughout the ages.”

It was Easter Sunday, 1975. That young man was *me*. From this bold and radical introduction, I went on to make a case FOR the supernatural, FOR the miraculous, FOR the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

This was the very first sermon I had ever preached in a church. I had been teaching a youth Bible study in a theologically liberal church. The youth group asked me if I would deliver the sermon for the Easter Sunrise Service. By this time, I had met several of the leaders. The main pastor was a classic liberal. He believed in the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. He really did not believe that the Bible was inspired by God, or authoritative in any way. It represented the general historical roots of the Christian movement, but was “old fashioned”. He was a good politician. He was careful to use religious talk, and he avoided conflict. The associate pastor, however, was much more radical. He openly told me that *he did not believe that Jesus was God, at all!* I asked him, “Why are you a pastor, then?” He told me that being a pastor gave him influence over people. He did not look to the Bible as the source for his thoughts. Instead, he trusted in his *own* moral judgment. His *own reason*, and his *own morality*, were what he went by. While the older pastor seemed to be humble and compassionate, this younger associate was more of a rebel. He was full of himself, and seemed to enjoy ruffling feathers and challenging “traditional beliefs”.

Both of these men had rejected the supernatural. Like the philosopher, David Hume, **they presumed that “miracles” did not happen.** They were thoroughgoing “naturalists” and “empiricists”. They believed the world was a closed system of natural laws, and therefore a “super-natural event” *could* not happen. In any case, they were only going to trust what they themselves had seen and experienced with their physical senses. This is typical of theological liberalism. **Because they are skeptical of the supernatural, liberals cannot believe that God could reveal the future to people, so they tend to “late date” the books of the Bible.** This neatly avoids the problem of predictive prophecy, but it means that they have to **routinely argue that the traditional authors could not have written these books, even though the earliest traditions attribute these writings to them.** For example, Moses did not write the Pentateuch. It was assembled from at least four other sources, compiled and edited during the time of Solomon, some 500 years later. Isaiah did not write the book associated with his name. According to these liberal scholars, it was written by at least two, three or even four people, most of it centuries after Isaiah's lifetime. The gospels were not

written by the apostles but by churchmen of a generation later. None of the gospels was written by an eyewitness. Nor did Paul write most of the letters ascribed to him. Again, they were penned by a later generation, and attributed to Paul, because his name added some recognized authority to what they wrote. **You would think there would have to be some real archaeological basis for these wild theories, ...or some definitive, objective linguistic evidence for them. There really is not.** There are *assumptions, arguments and opinions*, but *no solid verification* to justify their position. In fact, **archaeology has repeatedly dispelled these theories, and continues to support the early dates and historical settings that correspond to the lives of the traditional authors.** In spite of this hard evidence, liberal colleges and seminaries continue to teach erroneous theories *as fact*, when the *actual facts* of archaeology and textual criticism have obliterated these teachings. What you find is that **there are communities of unbelief, as well as communities of belief.** Each group has their schools and their “scholars” that claim to have evidence that supports their position. **When you examine the arguments and evidence, however, it becomes clear that there is nothing solid or substantial that would compel us to doubt the traditional authorship and dates of Biblical writings.**

**These anti-supernatural presuppositions compel liberal scholars to doubt, or question the validity of, miracle accounts.** If they do not out-and-out deny them, **they cast them as “myth”**, saying that they are “expanded accounts” that were based upon some historical event, but the account we have does not accurately describe actual happenings. Instead of interpreting these stories as actual events, we are to see them as “metaphors” from which to draw valuable lessons. **They argue that even the original authors (of a later generation) did not present these as actual facts, but as stories to help us relate to God.** For example, Jesus never really healed a blind man. What is meant is that He can open the eyes of people who are *spiritually* blind. He never really healed a lame man. Instead, we are to understand that He can help us get “unstuck”, and “fix us, where we are emotionally or spiritually crippled”. **These teachers state that whether the events happened or not is irrelevant; it is the metaphorical ideas we can draw from these “myths” that are meant to encourage us.** Of course, to these scholars *not even the resurrection necessarily actually happened.* **It was the rise of faith in the disciples, the hope that overcame the fear of selfish living and death, that enabled them to live fearless, authentic lives. This was the power of the resurrection myth.**

**Wow! That is an incredible amount of mental gymnastics to attempt to hold on to something you really don't believe in!** These people are often perceived as prestigious scholars or great churchmen, but *their* interpretation of Jesus and Christianity does not *at all* resemble the Christ of the Bible, or the faith of the apostles and martyrs of the early church. Jude, the Lord's brother, found it necessary to “wrestle-earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.” **We are warned of false teachers, men without true devotion, who will creep in among us to pervert God's grace into a license to sin, and will deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus the Anointed-King** (Jude 1:3,4). Paul warned that people will turn away from sound teaching, and accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires. He even tells us that *they* will turn away from the truth, and will turn aside to myths (II Tim. 4:3,4). That's right, **“myth” as a style of literature was well known to the apostles. They knew what myths were, and they clearly claim that what they were preaching had nothing to do with myth, speculations or questionable sources.** As we read from the passages at the top of this study, **NT accounts were based upon eyewitness testimony.** Luke was an educated man, and he made a claim to have “investigated everything carefully” so that he *could* produce an account that would provide “certainty” to his friend, Theophilus. He was in Palestine during the time of Paul's imprisonment. He would have had ample time and opportunity to search out and interview eyewitnesses of the events he records in his gospel. He had also travelled with Paul during some of his missionary endeavors. We know from the scrupulous detail and accuracy of his writing in the book of Acts, confirmed by archaeology, that he was a very careful and skilled historian. **With regard to the resurrection of Jesus alone, the NT records 13 different incidents where He appeared to people, and mentions some 522 individuals who claimed to have seen Him!** It is easy for armchair theorists to pontificate about the *impossibility* of miracles from the “enlightened” environment of a philosopher's or theologian's office, but *what about those who were there, ...who saw Him, who touched and handled Him, who ate with Him, who carried on extensive conversations with Him, and walked miles down the road with Him in the full light of day? Were they all daft? Were they liars? What did their belief in the resurrection do to them? It propelled them to proclaim the glad tidings far and wide!* They brought the good news to the nations. **They sacrificed everything, ...homes, businesses, family, possessions, liberty and even their lives..., to bring this message of what did happen.** What of the armchair theorists? They accumulate the accolades and praises of those who want their ears tickled, their lifestyles justified, and their consciences quieted. They sell books, collect fat paychecks in esteemed positions of power within the educational or religious institutions to which they belong. **Those who “reinterpret the myth of Jesus” to our modern world, ...who “preach scripture as metaphor”, not fact..., will finally be silenced by the return of the real Jesus on the clouds with majestic glory.** He *lives!* He will *come!* He will *reign!* “...*their end* will be according to *their deeds*” (II Cor. 11:15).