

## WHAT WAS PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANITY?

(1875.)

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It is easy to lay hands on half-a-dozen tracts which essay to answer the question, What *is* Christianity? One, also, of last year declares the question to be unanswerable. But, when certain persons of note entitle themselves Old Catholics, in contrast to the novelty of Papal Infallibility, this may remind us that Protestantism itself arose as an effort to go back to the *early* Church; yet when presently among Protestants some endeavoured to return to the *earliest* doctrine, forthwith they were treated as heretics by the very men who were claiming their won freedom of judgment. Thus Calvin burned Servetus, when Servetus was but studying the same problem as Calvin—that of recovering the ‘primitive’ faith. To ask, What *is* Christianity?—the religion being, avowedly, historical and transmitted—apparently ought to mean asking what it *was* at first. If the reply were wholly obscure, no pretension of authority would be tenable. By the hypothesis itself, the religion came pure out of the fountain: hence the first effort must be, to learn what was its primitive state. Unless our trusted documents are deplorably deficient, the problem, being historical, must be soluble to moderate learning, if there be no bias in the enquirer. That the documents, called the New Testament, are both trustworthy and adequate, is an axiom with all the Protestant Churches.

It does not belong to the present writer to affect novelty or to claim discovery; for the research has, in all principal points, been made long since by competent and thoroughly honest talent. Yet, strange as it may seem, very few whose minds move in the Anglican or in the Evangelical Nonconformist circles have heard the argument at all; namely, because all the books which contain it have been sealed against them—have been vilified and frowned down as heretical. Nay, until 1813 it was actually a penal offence to deny the Trinity. Though every man of moderate erudition knows that the creed called Athanasian is much later in time than Athanasius, and different in doctrine; moreover, arose in the Latin, not in the Greek Church; yet the clergy in Con-

30 vocation sedulously sustain this creed, of which Archbishop Tillotson said  
 the Church would be well rid. The clerical zeal for so extreme, so bigoted, and  
 so late a development is, of course, highly influential in deterring the pious  
 laity from reading any Unitarian treatises, however wise and learned. On the  
 other hand, the modern assailants of Christianity generally add their force to  
 35 nail down upon it whatever they regard as most offensive to reason and to  
 sound morals. Some will have it that Romanism alone is perfect Christianity.  
 One tract in my hands, by an energetic lady, lays down that the very essence  
 of the religion is atonement for sin by the shedding of a prophet's blood, or  
 the blood of one greater than a prophet; and that without this the religion  
 never had reason to exist: thereupon she confutes and tramples down this  
 40 doctrine with great force of reasoning, believing that she hereby annihilates  
 the religion fundamentally. Such attacks confirm numbers in the belief that  
 this was indeed the primitive faith.

On the present occasion it is not intended to defend, nor yet to attack  
 Christianity: a purely historical exposition is aimed at. All ought to be able,  
 45 with the New Testament in their hands, to appreciate the argument, and assign  
 to it the due weight—if only they are calm and desirous of historical truth.  
 Those disputants who plunge into an indefinite number of Greek and Latin  
 works, called 'Fathers,' of course get into depths where the unlearned laity  
 cannot follow. But the earliest of the 'Fathers' is confessedly later than the  
 50 New Testament; perhaps indeed most of the learned clergy will insist, later than  
 the latest book. Hence it is needless and just now useless to appeal to any  
 volume but that of which Chillingworth said, 'The Bible, and the Bible only'  
 (meaning, we suppose, the *New Testament*), 'is the religion of Protestants.'  
 The sixth article of the Anglican Church virtually assents to this in forbidding  
 55 the imposition of tenets which cannot be proved from Holy Scripture.

That volume contains five books which profess to be historical, viz. four  
 Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles. Important historical matter is contained  
 also in the Epistles of Paul, of which all that bear his name are by most of  
 us esteemed genuine. Indeed, some learned Germans throw doubt on all but  
 60 four epistles; but these four are just those which supply cardinal facts. The  
 Epistle of James is equally important. That Paul came suddenly in as a new  
 teacher, and was regarded with the utmost jealousy by the Jerusalem Church,  
 is distinctly shown in Acts xxi. 21; in fact, Paul himself, in his Epistle to the  
 Galatians, states his contrast of doctrine far more vividly. He narrates his  
 65 vehement attack on Peter, face to face, and the great hostility of the Jerusalem  
 Christians to himself. Indeed, their molestation of his converts even carried  
 him into the wish 'that they were cut *off*'—whether that is to mean removed  
 from this world by a Divine judgment, or excommunicated. The two Epistles

to the Corinthians, from end to end, allude to the violent opposition made to him by Christians from Jerusalem—‘false apostles, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ.’ To the Galatians he describes them as ‘certain who came from James,’ and there takes occasion to speak slightly of the three chief apostles, James, Peter, and John. Such being the early relation of Paul to the actual disciples of Jesus and primary leaders of the Church, it is against all good sense to confuse his doctrine with theirs, and call the mixed mass the ‘primitive’ doctrine. It is evident that there was a Christianity earlier than Paul’s; and we ought to try to find what it was. Indeed, Paul claims independence for his gospel, and entitles it *his own*; and by reiterating a deliberate curse (Galat. i. 8, 9) on those who preach another gospel (by whom he confessedly means Christians from Jerusalem) he sets forth that in his mind the two doctrines were fundamentally different. If the converts adopt the gospel taught them from Jerusalem, Jesus Christ (he says) shall profit them nothing.

If now, laying aside all prepossessions, we read the Acts of the Apostles, we presently find clearly enough, if not the primitive gospel, yet certainly a doctrine earlier than Paul’s. Readers will probably allow one to take for granted that Paul preached a superhuman Messiah. Indeed, the older school of Unitarians were unwilling to admit this, and strained hard to get rid of it; but in this matter the Trinitarian school certainly have the advantage over them. Not that they can establish the ecclesiastical Trinity from his writings; but they victoriously prove that he placed Christ on a pinnacle far above the human, and believed His pre-existence. To the Corinthians he says: ‘Though the heathen have gods many and lords many, yet unto us there is but *one God*—the Father, *of whom* are all things; and *one Lord*—Jesus Christ, *by whom* are all things.’ This is the keynote of the first transcendental doctrine concerning the person of Christ; ‘*by Him* the Father created the worlds;’ which of course implies Christ’s pre-existence. He was ‘the first-born of all creation.’ Paul invokes Him and prays to Him, and makes Him virtually a second Divine Spirit, even while reserving for the Father exclusively the title of THE ONE GOD—‘the Blessed and only Potentate, whom no man hath seen, nor can see.’

In contrast to Paul’s tenet of a superhuman Jesus, whose death and resurrection set men free from the works of the law, let us gather up the doctrines advanced as Christianity in the Acts of the Apostles. To be accurate, it is safest to proceed from chapter to chapter.

Ch. I. opens by announcing the bodily and visible ascension of Jesus to heaven, and the prophecy by two angels that He shall come back *in like manner*. It also implies that Jesus will ‘restore the kingdom to Israel’ at a time

not yet distinctly revealed. Ch. II. declares from the prophet Joel that a great and notable day of the Lord is to come, with vast physical convulsion; but before it comes, God is to pour out His Spirit on all flesh. The outpouring (it says) is commenced; and whoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved [in that day]. Jesus is now exalted by God, and *is made* both Lord and Christ. Let them therefore repent and be baptised in the name of Jesus the Christ, and they shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Peter therefore exhorts each 'to save himself from this untoward generation.' Ch. III. entitles Jesus 'the Prince of Life,' murdered by the Jews, but raised from the dead by God. Peter insists that this calamitous event was a fulfilment of the prophecy that Messiah must suffer. He exhorts them to repent, that their sins may be blotted out when the time of refreshing shall come from the face of the Lord [God], who will send Jesus Christ, whom the heaven must keep until the time of restitution. The hearers (says he) are the children of the prophets: to them therefore first God sent His servant (παῦδα) Jesus, to bless them by turning them away from their iniquities. [Nothing about bloody sacrifice and atonement.] Ch. IV. represents the Apostles as 'preaching *through Jesus* the resurrection from the dead,' and avowing that there is no salvation except *through Him*. Ch. V. declares that God hath exalted Jesus to be a Prince and *a Saviour*, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. [Again no hint of bloody atonement or sacrifice.] In spite of the rulers, the Apostles 'spread the glad tidings that Jesus is the Messiah.' Ch. VI. makes *false* witnesses impute to Stephen the deacon the blasphemy of saying that Jesus will overthrow Mosaism. Ch. VII. represents Stephen as preaching (we are to suppose) the Gospel. But he does nothing but recite Jewish history, and bitterly accuse his hearers as treading in the murderous steps of their forefathers. No word of Christianity is put into his mouth, unless the last be such, in which he sees *the Son of Man* on the right hand of God. The writer evidently understands him to mean Jesus, and supposes the multitude so to have understood him. Ch. VIII. makes Philip the deacon baptise a man, on the confession, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.' [So stands our version; but the whole verse is absent in the Sinaitic Codex of Tischendorf.] Ch. IX. tells us that Paul, when converted, preached that Christ was the Son of God. In Ch. X. Peter announces to Cornelius that in every nation God accepts pious hearts and righteous deeds; that Jesus was anointed by God with the Holy Spirit and power, and *is Lord of all*. He is ordained of God to be Judge of living and dead. Through the *name* of Jesus [not by his *blood*] every believer will receive remission of sins. Ch. XI. and XII. have no doctrine in them. So ends the former part of the Acts. The rest is concerned with Paul, and nearly drops Peter and the Jerusalem Apostles. It begins from Antioch as the new centre.

Ch. XIII. represents Paul preaching. He declares that God raised from the dead Jesus, of the seed of David, and made Him *a Saviour* to Israel: therefore through *Him* is preached unto them forgiveness of sins. In Ch. XIV. no definite doctrine is named. In Ch. XV. the controversy about Mosaism opens. Ch. XVI. is mere narrative. In Ch. XVII. Paul avows that Messiah needed to suffer and rise, and Jesus was this Messiah. Further, he preaches at Athens good sound theism, adding that God has raised a *man* from the dead to give to us assurance of resurrection, and has appointed a day in which that man will judge the world in righteousness. Ch. XIX. tells nothing of doctrine. Ch. XX. contains a much contested text, in which Paul is made to say to the elders of Ephesus, 'the Church of *God*, which He has purchased with His own blood.' Paul does not speak in such phraseology elsewhere, nor does any preacher in this book of Acts. It would seem, therefore, that the Unitarians must be right, who insist that the true reading is 'the Church of *the Lord*.' It is more to the purpose here to remark that from the mouth of Paul the statement 'Christ purchased (περιεποιήσατο, acquired) His Church by His own *blood*' is fitly interpreted, 'Christ *earned*, or *won*, the Church to be His own by suffering death;' which was a condition of Messiahship with Paul. The rest of the book hardly adds to our knowledge of Paul's doctrines. When asked by Felix to preach to him, he reasoned 'of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come.' To Agrippa he declares that the celestial Jesus sent him to the Gentiles, to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they might receive forgiveness of sins and inheritance among them that are *sanctified* by faith in Jesus; 'therefore,' says Paul, 'I preach that men should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.'

On this recital what are we to say? Did Paul, in addressing the unconverted, propound to them only first elements of faith, reserving his harder doctrines for more advanced disciples? or did these doctrines exclusively aim to argue down the Mosaic ceremonial? or have we here (as some tell us) a fraudulent attempt by the compiler of the Acts to pare down Paul's doctrine into harmony with Peter and James? Whichever way this controversy may be decided, the fact must remain that the faith by which men were to be saved, according to the documents of this compiler, was not faith in bloody atonement, nor in a Trinity, nor in an incarnate God, nor in a pre-existing supernatural man; but only in a holy man, elevated and glorified by God. Indeed, Acts xiii. 39 attributes to Paul, when he preaches in the synagogue, the characteristically Pauline sentiment, 'By Jesus all that believe are *justified* from all things from which ye could not be justified *by the law of Moses*.' This gives the key to his harsh metaphors or enigmas. In his Epistle to the

Galatians, who had been seduced by Jerusalem Christians to believe that  
 190 Mosaism was essential to salvation, Paul urges vehemently that the death of  
 Christ has removed the curse of the *Mosaic* law. So to the Ephesians he  
 insists that Gentiles, once far off, are brought nigh and united to Jews by the  
 blood (i.e. death) of Christ, who in His flesh abolished the enmity, even the  
 law of commandments *contained in ordinances*. This union of Jew and  
 195 Gentile is the great 'mystery,' says he, now first revealed. It would seem that in  
 this way *alone* he supposed the blood or death of Christ to save and recon-  
 cile the Gentiles. Indeed, as for the Jews, it delivered them also from the  
 ceremonial law and its curse. His Epistle to the Romans was written to a  
 Church consisting mainly of converted Jews. All its topics are directed to  
 200 Hebrews born. Undoubtedly it is hard to discern when his phrases are merely  
 harsh figure and strained analogy, and when they convey as plain prose his  
 deliberate and permanent doctrine. When he tells the Corinthians that the  
 ancient Hebrews were baptised to Moses in the Red Sea; that a spiritual  
 Rock *followed* (!) them, of which they drank, and that Rock was Christ; when he  
 205 gravely informs the Galatians that Abraham's concubine Hagar means  
 Mount Sinai, and Mount Sinai means Jerusalem which is in bondage; we are  
 warned how hasty he was, how fanciful, how extravagant, in the midst of his  
 noble sentiments. When to the Corinthians he says, 'Christ our Passover is  
 sacrificed (ἐτύθη) for us,' eagerness to snatch at a metaphor makes him  
 210 overlook that the Paschal Lamb was only a food, not a sacrificial victim. After-  
 ages, ruminating on every word of his as a Divine revelation, converted his  
 casual errors into germs of pestilence, and adopted him as an inspired master  
 of bad reasoning. Unhappily he gave much occasion for mistake, so as to  
 scandalise James and elicit a grave warning from the author of what is called  
 215 Peter's Second Epistle. Moreover, his doctrine concerning the efficacy of  
 Christ's death was pushed further by another theorist of his school, a  
 splendid rhetorician. According to Luther's happy conjecture this was  
 Apollos, a Jew of Alexandria; who, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, seems to  
 have invented the idea that Christ was at once *High Priest* and *Victim*; and  
 220 by a preposterous and almost unpardonable confusion from the double  
 meaning of the Greek word διαθήκη (covenant and testament) has involved  
 the argument in an inextricable tangle. Still, however fanciful and illogical  
 Paul and Apollos may have been, neither of them confounds ὑπὲρ (on behalf  
 of) with ἄντλ (instead)—a grand blunder into which Englishmen fall, simply  
 225 because the English preposition *for* bears either sense. Those who maintain  
 that Paul and Apollos teach a substitution of Christ for the sinner, and that  
 His suffering was vicarious, have to convert 'Christ gave Himself for our sins'  
 into 'gave Himself instead of our sins.' This being absurd, they are clearly

wrong in their translations also when *sinner*s is put for *sins*. There are passages in Paul which perhaps cannot be cleared up, as Rom. iii. 25, obscure through the vague word *propitiation* (Dr. Lant Carpenter translates it *mercy-seat*), also Ephes. v. 2, where he wonderfully calls Christ's death 'an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour,' alluding perhaps to Noah's sacrifice, Gen. viii. 21, but painfully reminding us of the smell of burning fat, so acceptable to the nostrils of Homer's gods. So hot a genius must not be criticised to the letter of his words, as if they were always deliberate.

In his Epistle to the Galatians he defines his doctrine to be that Christ gave Himself *for our sins*, to deliver us from the present evil world. No idea comes in, unless in Rom. iii., of *satisfying the justice of God* by a sacrifice, nor of anything vicarious. 'He died and rose again *for us*,' but He did neither 'instead of us.' Nor is it at all credible that John in the Apocalypse meant anything but *sanctification* where he speaks of washing or being washed in the blood of Jesus. In the Epistle to the Hebrews sanctification and purging of the *conscience* from dead works is distinctly defined as the effect. To us blood gives an idea of defilement; but a Hebrew regarded sacred blood sprinkled on a doorpost as making it pure. Moses thus sprinkled the people, in order to include them *in the covenant*: for the Hebrews, like Greeks and Romans, made covenants by means of a sacrifice. Hebrew law had no ceremonial atonement for moral offences, such as theft, murder, idolatry, Sabbath-breaking, blasphemy, adultery; only for ceremonial offences and defilements. So long as Hebrew culture was living and active in the Church, strong sacrificial metaphors might be rightly understood; as also by the more learned and discriminating of the Gentile converts. But coarse and prosaic minds, untrained in interpretation, verified Paul's words, 'The letter killeth;' and turned his noble epistles into a source of base superstition. Such is a tenable opinion; but let this pass. Suppose Paul to have been really what Augustine, Anselm, and Luther make him: it will not the less be historical fact that such was *not* the Church of Jerusalem, nor its first bishop James; and who has so good a right as James to set forth the true doctrine of Jesus? If Paul differed from James, no modern who calls himself a Christian has any plausible right to assert that Paul was right and James wrong; that Paul, the innovator and stranger and self-asserter, ought to be allowed to overrule James, the legitimate disciple and real personal witness who succeeded to his high place by the assent and consent of the original Church. Are any modern Christians so absurd as to say, 'I believe Paul rather than James, because I find James to be more rational and sober, and less enigmatic; because Paul utters an anathema on all who come from James and do not preach Paul's gospel, while James sternly forbids all cursing among Christian teachers; in short, because

Paul is hot and violent, while James is self-restrained and judicially calm'?  
 270 No one confesses this to himself; yet this is probably the truth. Modern  
 Christians have been intoxicated by the mediæval Circean potion, a cup of  
*hashish* or *absinthe*; hence they think the doctrine of James meagre in the  
 extreme. He seems to them not much more than a Jew. He does but add an  
 exalted Man to his Judaism. Though he was the earliest bishop, and after  
 275 Jesus the first head of the Church, he gives himself no airs of dogmatism, he  
 does not claim authority over men's faith, he unaffectedly and, so to say,  
 naturally follows the exhortation of Peter not to make himself lord over God's  
 heritage. He is not more zealous for right conduct than Paul; for no one could  
 be: but he is wholly guiltless of mistaking fanciful analogies for valuable and  
 280 sacred truth, and of imposing his own opinion as a law to his brethren. Can  
 anyone call himself a Protestant, and not see that alike the temperament, the  
 position, and the doctrine of James deserve from us a higher deference than  
 that of Paul? Who testified to the apostleship, to the inspiration, to the  
 authority of Paul? He himself, and he only. He boasts to the Galatians of his  
 285 standing up against Peter, of his little esteem for the great pillars of the Church,  
 James, John, and Peter; saying that 'what they are concerns him not,' and  
 that he had purposely kept aloof from them after his conversion: in other  
 words, he did not care to know anything concerning the precepts of Jesus,  
 which they alone could tell; they, his specially chosen witnesses.

290 Will it be said that Paul had by miraculous revelation a private knowledge  
 of these precepts? As if a special revelation could have been made for his sole  
 benefit! Of course his first duty then would have been to write them out for  
 us, and guarantee them as given to him by Divine revelation. But in his own  
 Epistles he never shows any real knowledge of either the deeds or the words  
 295 of Jesus; and in the Acts of the Apostles the words which he is represented  
 to quote as those of Jesus (xx. 35) are not reported to us in the Gospels, though  
 they deserved it for their beauty and truth. As a hot and vehement temper-  
 ament, whose enthusiasm obscured his reason yet nobly elevated his moral  
 aspirations, we may earnestly admire Paul: but it is not clear with what  
 300 ostensible right any Christian who tries to rest his faith on a sound basis can  
 account Paul so authentic a teacher of Christianity as James. The doctrine  
 of James, to every mind competent to weigh a historical argument, must be  
 accepted as primitive Christianity rather than Paul's.

305 No doubt it will be said, 'Peter's First Epistle is virtually Pauline.' It is so,  
 and is *therefore* rejected by many learned Germans as not genuine. We may  
 not think this an adequate reason for rejection; but if it be genuine, it merely  
 proves that (probably after much vacillation and vain endeavours to please  
 the two irreconcilable parties of the Church) Peter finally left the Judaical for

the Pauline doctrine. The difference of glorying perpetually in the death of Christ, as Paul did, and of saying as little as possible on the subject, as it would seem James must have done, was certainly very great. James so speaks of 'the Lord,' that it is most uncertain whether he meant the Lord God or the Lord Christ (the word Lord being the same as sir, and applied by Mary—John xx. 15—to 'a gardener'); otherwise James is reserved in his allusions to Jesus: but Paul sees all morality and all life, as it were, through Jesus as the medium. He is suffused and interfused (some will say intoxicated) with Christ; that is, not with 'Christ after the flesh,' not with the *historical* Jesus of modern Unitarians, about whom he declined to make enquiries, but with the risen, ascended, glorified Jesus, whom he had enshrined in his free-acting imagination and encircled with a Divine halo. 'With me,' says he, 'to live is Christ. I am crucified with Christ. I am buried with Christ. I have died and risen again with Christ. I glory in the cross of Christ,' and so on. There is nothing similar to this in James's Epistle. James does not even allude at all to the death or resurrection of Jesus; he has not a sentiment which suggests communion of heart with Christ, as with one who is virtually omnipresent, and can hear him or understand his secret thoughts. Not a word is dropped which indicates that he believed Jesus to be anything but the greatest of prophets, who was to return to judge and govern the world as Messiah, the Lord of men; a glorious Lord, yet still a man. And with this the entire book called the Acts of the Apostles is in general full agreement; in which style indeed it makes Paul himself preach to the Athenians.

Considering that James is entitled by Paul 'the Lord's brother' (perhaps meaning that he was first cousin to Jesus),—that he was notoriously one of the original Apostles,—that in the Acts of the Apostles he appears as president of the first Christian council which met to deliberate on disputed doctrine,—that he there and then dictates the compromise, which was intended to settle the dispute,—and that 'the Apostles and elders' and the 'whole Church' accepted his solution to the very letter, sanctioning it by the words which were afterwards made a formula, 'It hath seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us;' further, observing that this post of James was not temporary and held in rotation, but that Paul treats him as the central person of the Christian body at Jerusalem, and that all antiquity reports him to have been the first bishop of the first Church—it may seem very remarkable that our Reformers have given so little proportionate weight to the Epistle of James. Whether Luther did or did not call it an Epistle of straw (*epistola straminea*), it appears unquestionable that the doctrines common to Luther and Calvin, but opposed by the Council of Trent, were based mainly on Paul; and that, finding no support in James, the Reformers undervalued him. James undoubtedly has

not the warmth and kindling glow of Paul, and it is easy to understand how  
 350 one who reads the Christian epistles without an idea of criticism finds Paul  
 ‘more edifying;’ but in a historical enquiry criticism is cardinal to success.

James writes as a chief pastor, conscious of great responsibility, and  
 above all things labours to keep down bigotry and strife among Christians.  
 The one idea pervading his Epistle is the superiority of right conduct to right  
 355 opinion. To deliver men ‘from their sins’ (and from him who had the power  
 of sin) was—indeed according to Paul equally—the object of Christ’s mis-  
 sion. A pure and loving life was the very end of religion. Hence for Christians  
 to curse one another about religious tenets was a frightful error with James.  
 Teachers might count it to be *wisdom*, but such wisdom came not from  
 360 above; it was earthly, sensual [or the wisdom of the natural, unregenerate  
 man], devilish. He implores them not to be ‘many teachers,’ i.e. not eager to  
 dictate, but to be ‘quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.’ That curses and  
 blessing should come out of the same Christian mouths shocked him un-  
 feignedly. Paul had cursed the Christian teachers ‘who came from James;’  
 365 James disapproved of both parties, but would not retaliate anathemas. He  
 deprecated the attempt to impose circumcision and other legal ordinances on  
 the Gentiles, for which an energetic minority of Jewish Christians hurtfully  
 struggled; but he also feared mischief from too much talk about faith, as if  
 right opinion, before it generated right conduct, could avail any man. It is  
 370 hard to doubt that he glances at Paul when he declares that Abraham was  
 justified by works; Paul holding, on the contrary, that Abraham was justified  
 by faith; and the fact suggests that James knew Paul only at a distance—  
 perhaps was too much repelled by his vehemence and arrogance of position  
 to get any true insight into so complex a mind. Moreover, when James wishes  
 375 to show what faith cannot save one, most of us moderns would expect him to  
 propound at least a belief in ‘Christ’s redemption’ as uppermost in his mind,  
 even if we are too well informed to expect from him an avowal of the Trinity  
 and atonement, or the powers of the Holy Church. But no; what is uppermost  
 with him is the doctrine that *there is one God*; to which he scornfully replies,  
 380 ‘The devils also believe and tremble.’ It would have suited his argument  
 quite as well to add specially Christian elements to this scanty creed. To Paul he  
 might have urged, ‘The devils also believe that Jesus is the Christ, and that  
 He has died to destroy the works of the Devil;’ but James made the Jewish  
 basis of theism so predominant that in his illustration he passes by Christ  
 385 altogether. Christ is, as it were, at His minimum of exaltation with James,  
 though he calls Him ‘a glorious Lord.’ And this seems to be quite a sufficient  
 reply to those who would now disparage the genuineness of James’s Epistle  
 because Eusebius, in the fourth century, calls it doubtful. Necessarily it could

not be a favourite with bishops who were discussing highflying tenets, and were very uncharitable to opponents; but it is hardly credible that such an epistle could have been forged in a later age, and quite incredible that, if so forged, it could have gained currency quietly among the Churches. It would at once have been exposed, denounced, and trampled on. Like the 'Acts of the Apostles,' the moderation and scantiness of its doctrine proves its antiquity.

The last remark may suggest another consideration concerning the First Epistle of Peter. Morally and spiritually this epistle is among the very noblest and sweetest compositions of the New Testament; and since it has no new doctrine, nor any new arguments to support a disputed doctrine, it is difficult to imagine any motive (unless indeed the desire to give it currency) which should induce a composer to pass it off under a false name even in an age which regarded such frauds, when done with a pious intent, to be justifiable. But if it be not genuine, internal evidence proves it to be at least extremely ancient. The writer betrays no idea that Peter had any supremacy over the Church, or primacy among the Apostles and power of the keys. (Paul obviously was quite unaware of it, and so too John in Rev. i. 18? iii. 7.) Nothing can be more modest and unassuming than 'The *elders* who are among you I exhort, *who am also an elder*, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ. . . . Feed the flock of God, . . . not as being *lords* over God's heritage, but being *ensamples* to the flock.' The striking language, almost contemptuous, by which he forbids overvaluing the externalities of baptism, belongs to the first era, when ceremonies were kept in their proper place. 'The baptism which saves us' (he says), 'is not the putting away of the filth of the flesh (i.e. washing with water), but the answer of a good conscience' (made in baptism). Though the general doctrine is called Pauline, it contains no intimation of prayer to Christ or mental communion with Him. The glorified Jesus is regarded as purely a localised being, who was on earth, but is now 'gone into heaven, seated at the right hand of God, with angels subject to Him,' yet Christ is about to reappear, ready to be revealed in this last time. The writer implies that the Roman armies were gathering against Jerusalem. Hardly any other interpretation of the following words can commend itself (iv. 17): 'It is the crisis for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if first at *us*,' &c. It is more than possible that he addresses *Jewish* Christians by the phrase (i. 1) 'sojourners of the dispersion;' then (whether we read *us* or *you*, ἡμῶν or ὑμῶν) the Jewish nation is in either case intended. Thus we get a probable date, say A.D. 70, at which the epistle was either written or affected to be written. Compared to it the Christian compositions of the second century may almost be called trash. That it was actually written before the Acts of the Apostles, although that narrative is carried no lower than Paul's arrival

at Rome, appears almost certain from the words dropped concerning the  
 430 resurrection of Jesus, as not bodily, but only spiritual. In the Acts it is plain  
 that the doctrine current was that which appears in Matthew and the other  
 gospels; that the *body* of Jesus was resuscitated after death. Indeed, in the  
 Acts it is alleged that Jesus was seen by the Apostles after His death for  
 forty days, and conversed with them familiarly, in the midst of which He was  
 435 carried up into heaven in their sight. So Peter to Cornelius (x. 41) is made to  
 say, 'We did eat and drink with Him after He rose from the dead.' Neverthe-  
 less Peter's First Epistle asserts (iii. 18), 'Christ was put to death *in flesh*, but  
 made alive *in spirit*;' phraseology quite parallel to that of a passage otherwise  
 obscure (iv. 6). 'The Gospel was preached even to the dead, that humanly they  
 440 might receive their sentence *in flesh*, but divinely live [or be alive] *in spirit*.'  
 It seems undeniably here to peep out that the writer believed Christ's resur-  
 rection to have been merely the return of His spirit from Hades. Indeed, he  
 goes on to tell us that, when dead, he went 'in spirit' (or spiritually) to preach  
 to the disobedient spirits which had been kept in prison from a time earlier  
 445 than the flood of Noah. This notion apparently was borrowed from the  
 prophecy of Enoch, but to pursue that question would be away from the  
 purpose. Paul also, by naming his own sight of the risen Jesus (of course in  
 a vision) as co-ordinate with that of Peter, James, and all 'the twelve,' betrays  
 his belief that they only saw a spirit. On this account the verse in question (1  
 450 Peter iii. 18) affords a very valuable chronological mark, and aids to define  
 the primitive Gospel. For we now attain something earlier than the represen-  
 tations in the Acts of the Apostles and in the four gospels, viz. that Christ's  
 resurrection, as preached by the earliest disciples, meant the resurrection of  
 His spirit only, not of His body; and the tales of handling His body, and of  
 455 His eating with the Apostles after His death, were exaggerations which arose  
 when the Apostles were all removed from this earthly scene, and could no  
 longer set the Churches right. That the compiler of the Third Gospel and of  
 the Acts wrote at a time when the Church had already systematised the  
 teaching of converts in classes before baptism, seems to be proved by Luke  
 460 i. 4, which represents Theophilus as having been *catechised* (κατηχήθη).  
 But the documents used by the compiler are likely to have been somewhat  
 earlier.

It must be added that the second chapter of the Acts has been marked  
 out by the evangelical and highly esteemed professor Dr. Augustus Neander  
 465 as signally misrepresenting the miracle of strange tongues. Nowhere else did it  
 consist in speaking with foreign human language. Paul (1 Cor. xiv. 1-23)  
 distinctly manifests that the sounds were wild babbling. Nowhere but in Acts  
 ii. are they naturally understood by anyone. Paul regards a divine interpreter

to be obviously needful. This grave misrepresentation indicates that the  
 tongues had vanished when the 'Acts' were compiled; and that the interval  
 of time was sufficient to allow a *mythus* to arise, for the glorification of the  
 first occasion on which the excitement of the disciples exploded into these  
 startling utterances. Thus, if anyone fix the compilation of the Acts and of  
 the Third Gospel at about half a century after the death of Paul, he will have  
 reasonable probability on his side.

At the same time we know the date of the Apocalypse with great accuracy.  
 The seventeenth chapter informs us that five emperors of Rome have already  
 passed away: these are Augustus Octavianus, Tiberius Cæsar, Caius Caligula,  
 Claudius, and Nero, specially so called. A sixth emperor existed, and a  
 seventh was yet to come, and to continue for a little while, until expelled by  
 the eighth, who was also the fifth. This enigma is perfectly explained by the  
 historically attested belief, especially in the eastern part of the empire, that  
 Nero was not dead, but had escaped to the Parthians beyond Euphrates, and  
 would be restored by their armies. Since this was not fulfilled (though several  
 false Neros distressed the empire), we see that the prophecy cannot have been  
 later. It was written then in the tumultuous time when Galba, Otho, Vitellius,  
 Vespasian, quickly followed one another, and the East was slow to learn  
 who was in power at Rome. In the conflict between the armies of Vitellius and  
 of Vespasian the Capitol of Rome was burnt down; on which Tacitus (*Hist.*  
*iii. 72*) bitterly moralises: 'Facinus post conditam urbem luctuosissimum  
 fœdissimumque.' The same thing had happened in the civil war of Marius  
 and Sulla. To the provincials it naturally seemed like an omen of the falling  
 empire; and in the Apocalypse it appears to be alluded to, by saying that the  
 ten horns, 'ten kings who have no kingdom as yet' (i.e. provincial generals),  
 'shall hate the whore and burn her with fire.' Thus about A.D. 70, or at latest  
 A.D. 71, the Apocalypse was written, the persecution by Nero still boiling in  
 the writer's mind. In it we already find the doctrine of the Λόγος proclaimed  
 —a theory borrowed by the Jews of Alexandria, and among them by Philo, from  
 the Neo-Platonists there settled. It is remarkable that we have not this word in  
 the Epistle to the Hebrews, strongly as it is imbued with Alexandrian culture  
 and rhetoric. On the whole, we seem to know pretty closely what doctrines  
 were taught by Paul, James, Peter, and John, from twenty to forty years after  
 the death of Jesus.

Before trying to define what they separately believed, let us note down  
 what they did *not* believe. First, they certainly had no idea of an ecclesiastical,  
 that is, a sacerdotal system, in which either priests and bishops, or bishops  
 and Pope, or Pope alone, should act as lords over faith and conscience. Nor  
 had they belief in any efficacy of sacraments (so called) as separate from the

510 faith of the recipient. Nor was either ‘ministration’ of the sacraments, or  
 preaching, confined to the officers called pastors (shepherds) or bishops  
 (overseers). The deacons, though appointed *to serve tables*, preached when  
 occasion suggested. Paul very seldom baptised, and distinctly avows, ‘Christ  
 sent me not to baptise, but to preach the Gospel.’ The deacon Philip baptises  
 515 the eunuch in the Acts. In later times freedom of baptism was continued to  
 the laity, lest anyone (especially an infant) should die unbaptised; but a  
 superstitious value of the ordinance alone here saved the primitive freedom.  
 So much of ecclesiasticism.

Secondly, these Apostles had no such faith concerning the Trinity or the  
 Person of Christ as could for a moment alarm Jewish monotheism. At present it  
 520 is confessed by missionaries that no Christian teacher who addresses a  
 Mussulman can for a single half-hour evade a sharp controversy on this  
 subject and the imputation of polytheism. No breath of such objection is  
 heard in the Acts of the Apostles nor in any Epistle, though Jews were  
 sensitive as Mohammedans. Even in the Fourth Gospel, which, like Paul,  
 525 attributes pre-existence to Jesus, Jesus himself is made to shrink at once  
 before an imputation of ‘making Himself equal to God,’ and to take refuge in  
 the evasive plea that—‘I said, ye are *gods*’—was addressed by a psalmist to  
 some great men. The Eternal, Unapproachable, Invisible Father and Creator  
 is entitled ‘the only true God’ by Jesus, and in express contrast to Himself as  
 530 Christ, in that Gospel; which entirely thus agrees with Paul and with the  
 writer to the Hebrews. The one true God did not *include* Messiah. No Tri-  
 unity was preached. Two views of Christ’s person appear, an earlier and a  
 later. In the *earlier*, he was a man chosen by God, exalted and glorified, to  
 restore the kingdom to Israel, sit in judgment on Jew and Gentile, and  
 535 establish over the whole earth a Divine, blessed rule under which only saints  
 would bear sway. Evidently nothing of this could He do, save by the mission  
 and power of God; therefore all angels were put at His disposal, to execute  
 His commands, and, no doubt, to arrest and imprison all the evil angels,  
 principalities, and powers of darkness who were believed to uphold the pagan  
 540 kingdoms. Thus even in the lower interpretation Messiah was *the highest of*  
*created beings*, angels and dominions and powers being made subject to  
 Him. This, we may presume, was the creed of James; and in such a representa-  
 tion of Messiah’s character no Jew found anything to repel him, though he  
 ever so vehemently declined to identify Jesus with Messiah. In the Acts of  
 545 the Apostles nothing *more* than this can be detected or reasonably surmised.  
 Indeed, no so full avowal of Christ’s greatness is there made. This then must  
 have been the doctrine current in the earliest Jewish Church. We cannot  
 know, but we may reasonably suspect, that the *second* view was first brought

in by Paul, who held Jesus to have pre-existed, and to have been the *earliest* of created beings, as well as the greatest. In the Epistle to the Colossians he entitles him 'the first-born of all creation,' with many other magnificent words which no subtlety can explain away. They prove that Paul agreed neither with Athanasius nor with Dr. Priestley, but was what later times called an Arian. A passage already quoted demonstrates that Paul excluded Christ from the unity of the Godhead. 'Though the heathen have gods many and lords many, yet unto us there is but *one God*—the Father, *of whom* are all things; and *one Lord*—Jesus Christ, *by whom* are all things.' The Father with him was the source; the Son the agent, minister, or instrument.

The composer of the Fourth Gospel chimes in to the letter (John xvii. 1-3): 'Father! . . . it is life eternal to know *Thee, the only true God*, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.' The doctrine of Paul to the Colossians is adopted by the writer to the Hebrews. With him, the Son is the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of His person—far higher than the angels, inasmuch as *by Him* the Father created the worlds, and has appointed Him *heir* of all things. According to Paul (1 Cor. xv. 23-28) the times of universal restitution talked of in Acts iii. will be brought about by Christ putting down all rule, authority, and power (opposed to God), and, after thus subduing all enemies, He will Himself resign His regal position, and restore the kingdom to God. Had not the whole of this theory sharply contrasted God and Christ, and exhibited Christ as a mere creature, existing and ruling by the supreme will and power of God, it must necessarily have encountered direct, implacable attack from the Jews as impious idolatry; but we know that it did not. Even in the middle of the second century Justin represents his worst objections from Typho the Jew to turn on such matters as the Sabbath and circumcision, and has no dread of a formidable attack for polytheism. Hence, on the whole, it becomes historically certain that if John or anyone else announced the Λόγος, as God's Wisdom, to be co-eternal with God, and herewith denied that that which pre-existed of Jesus had a beginning in time as a creature, he must have evaded the imputation of polytheism by a well-known 'heresy,' viz. by denying that the Λόγος and Jesus were one Person. To hold that God's Wisdom *dwelt in* the man Jesus was to drop prodigiously lower than the Arian doctrine, while affecting to rise above it. Who can wonder that none of the Ante-Nicene Fathers are esteemed orthodox concerning the Trinity?

Thirdly, these Apostles did not teach that *because* Christ sustained the punishment of sin Himself, therefore God's justice was satisfied without punishing sinners. As said above, there are a few startling texts (one, indeed, in Peter's First Epistle) which to those who, unhappily, judge by isolated phrases,

and “turn rhetoric into philosophy” (as Coleridge sagaciously describes it),  
 590 will always be misleading; but to judge of a writer’s doctrine by single expres-  
 sions is against good sense, and is eminently unfair to him. We cheat our-  
 selves by it. Two considerations are here decisive. (1) Neither Gentile nor  
 Jew believed a sacrifice to take away moral sin. An uproar of amazement  
 595 an idea as the vicarious punishment of guilt. A sacrifice which gave a dinner  
 to the priest’s family or a banquet to a multitude was popular on numerous  
 occurrences; but it is easily misunderstood by the moderns. In the Epistle to  
 the Hebrews the writer clearly defines that the High Priest atoned with blood  
 for the *errors* (ἄγνοήματα) of the people, i.e. for defilements occasioned by  
 600 inadvertence, or for neglect of ceremonies. So the Romans propitiated evil  
 omens. (2) Close examination shows that, in the New Testament, the *blood*  
 so often alluded to was regarded as only *sanctifying* the Christian and *purging*  
 away sin. So Hebrews ix. 13, 14; 1 Peter i. 18, 19; Apoc. vii. 14.

At the same time neither in the Epistle of James nor in the Acts of the  
 605 Apostles is a single text that can for a moment create difficulty, or even sug-  
 gest that Christ’s death has any tendency to *purge the conscience*. Indeed,  
 James continued to observe the Mosaic law, and therefore cannot have seen  
 any weight in Paul’s arguments against the law *as such*, or have believed that  
 it was introduced that ‘sin might abound,’ and heap only ‘curses’ on the  
 610 worshippers. It therefore seems clear that, previous to Paul’s teaching, the  
 removal of the Mosaic law and its curse by Christ’s polluted death, the doc-  
 trine (of James) was current that Christ simply suffered *by man’s sin for the*  
*benefit* of man, this being the mode chosen by God’s wisdom to inaugurate  
 His new dispensation, and exhibit the highest saintship through the highest  
 615 suffering. Such appears the reasonable exposition of the primitive doctrine  
 of ‘the Cross.’

These topics lead on to comment on the extreme coldness, unkindness,  
 and even injustice of powerful laymen towards the collective body of the  
 clergy. It avails not to blame the clergy; they are what the laity and powerful  
 620 law have made them. Every man moderately well informed is aware that the  
 English Reformation was interrupted by the accession of Queen Mary to the  
 throne, and stopped by the crooked policy of Elizabeth; even then, but for  
 royal violences, it would have gone much further. But the criticism of anti-  
 quity was in its infancy, even with Milton and Locke. After Vico and Bentley,  
 625 Eichhorn and Michaelis, a great advance took place. With the cultivation of  
 astronomy and physiology new worlds of thought have been opened, and all  
 research has become more accurate. Vast erudition has accumulated. New  
 and larger reforms of religion would have followed within the Anglican Church,

had it not been artificially hindered by the laity, who uphold by law for the clergy a stereotyped creed, from which they keep themselves free. The clergy are entrapped into their position in early youth, and then subjected to the severest penalty—that of losing their whole life's prospect, for which they may have sacrificed all worldly ambitions—if, in their full manhood, they dare to become wiser than the comparatively ill-taught reformers of three and a half centuries ago. If the educated laity had dealt fairly with the clergy a hundred years back, and relaxed the subscriptions, a gradual change of opinion would have grown up, with an ever-increasing national cohesion, without convulsions and with a minimum of unseemly strife. By locking up the Church in an iron shell, the laity who rule Parliament have prepared for us an ill-omened disruption. Moreover, they have brought back Romanism into their own families, by keeping fast in the liturgies and rubrics the germs out of which Romanism has at all times grown. They have degraded the clergy (for who can care for the opinion of enslaved minds?) and have most gravely damaged us morally, filling the land with hypocrisy and cowardice, and postponing the era of religious stability. And now, as our reward, a weak old priest, who calls himself infallible, is become a terror to our statesmen.