



IS JESUS GOD?

A SERMON

PREACHED AT THE FREE CHRISTIAN CHURCH,
CROYDON.



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A SERMON

PREACHED ON TRINITY SUNDAY,

AT THE

FREE CHRISTIAN CHURCH,
CROYDON, NEAR LONDON.

BY

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PUBLISHED BY THOMAS SCOTT,
NO. 11 THE TERRACE, FARQUHAR ROAD, UPPER NORWOOD,
LONDON, S.E.

1873.

Price Threepence.

LONDON:

PRINTED BY C. W. REYNELL, LITTLE FULTENEY STREET,
HAYMARKET, W.

IS JESUS GOD?

“The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth : for the Father seeketh such to worship Him.”—*John* iv. 23.

AN increasing number of thoughtful men deem the doctrine of the Deity of Jesus to be against God, against reason, against progress, against results, against history, against Jesus Christ, against the scriptures. Let us briefly examine this doctrine.

In the Gospel of Luke, ch. ii., Mary, when chiding Jesus, speaks of Joseph and herself as his parents: “Thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.” The question we consider this morning is whether, in spite of her statement, he was in reality God, and not the son of Joseph and Mary. This is not a question of theological subtleties, as when people discuss the incomprehensible nature and essence of the Supreme Being; it is a question of fact; it is also a question of great practical importance. If Jesus is God, we lose his example as man; but, what is more important, we distance God, worshipping Him, as Jesus, in a remote Heaven. Moreover, we obtain a very peculiar and somewhat hopeless idea of God, namely, as acting a part, as feeble, or appearing as if feeble, as capable of being flogged by His creatures, as needing food, as being educated like a young boy; the Omnipotent in a cradle, the Eternal

dying, the author of life in a grave. God, so utterly defeated, perhaps may be defeated again. God, once a baby, once a corpse, may hereafter thus relapse.

If the universe was once guided from a cradle, presided over from a grave, guided by one obedient to a Jewish married couple, we ought to know it. If such statements are false, we ought to be disabused of them as injurious and superstitious.

Is Jesus God? I do not consider this morning whether he was a specially appointed and miraculous Messiah, whether he was supernaturally born, or whether his soul had in some way pre-existed, but, was he God? is he God? not in some fanciful, poetical, unreal way, but according to the belief of the Churches of Rome, of England, of Scotland, as expressed in formularies, articles, and creeds: "God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, of one substance with the Father;" as expressed in the collect for Christmas Day, "Our Lord Jesus Christ who liveth and reigneth with Thee, ever one God, world without end," and in the last prayer of the Morning and Evening service (prayer of St Chrysostom), where Jesus is addressed as "Almighty God"—or, as in the Litany, where he is addressed as "God the Son," and then, throughout the whole Litany, invoked, to the neglect of God the Father—for, excepting a few sentences, all the Litany is addressed to Jesus. It is not the God of the Universe we find addressed—but a God who had an incarnation, a nativity, a circumcision, a baptism, a temptation, and a death—such as, "the Good Lord" is asked to deliver us from all the interior sins of the soul; from murder, heresy,* and sudden death; and as supreme over the earth and skies, is asked to preserve to our use the kindly fruits and the due seasons. Watts, in one of his hymns, speaks of "This infant is the Mighty God, Come to be

* How shocking to associate with crimes the honourable variations of opinion upon difficult questions.

suckled and adored ;” and in another hymn he speaks of Jesus as the “*Infant Deity*,” the “*Bleeding God*.”

The great Church of England divine, South, in his defence of the Deity of Jesus, condemns “the men who cannot (as he says) persuade themselves that Deity and Infinity could lie in the contemptible dimensions of a human body ;” “that omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence should be wrapped in swaddling clothes ; that the glorious Artificer of the Universe who spread out the Heavens like a curtain, and laid the foundations of the earth, turned carpenter, and exercised his trade in a small shop,” &c. &c. The celebrated defence of the Church of England, entitled the ‘*Characters of a Believing Christian*,’ and commended by Convocation, thus presents a summary of Christian belief : “He believes a virgin to be the mother of a son, and that very son of hers to be her Maker. He believes Him whom Heaven and Earth could not contain to have been shut up in a narrow womb ; to have been born in time ; who was and is from everlasting ; to have been a weak child carried in arms, who is the Almighty, and Him once to have died who only hath in Himself life and immortality.” Such is the faith which, according to all the so-called orthodox Churches, is necessary to everlasting salvation.

Such is the orthodox dogma of the Deity of Jesus. Is not the very statement of it enough to prove the first two heads of my argument—that it is against God, his greatness and unchangeableness, against reason, and all the apprehensions of our mind ?

But some, who in recent days have embraced a new dogmatic position, and who teach that Jesus was not God in the orthodox sense, but only as a kind of manifestation of God, argue against us, and say, “By denying such a divinity in the nature of Jesus you lower humanity—it is good to admit that in one human body and one human soul the divine soul of the Universe was breathing, inspiring, dwelling.” We reply : “Un-

doubtedly; but such dogma, thus explained, is a heresy according to the decision of all the Churches; you have borrowed the idea from us, and limited to Jesus what we declare to be in various degrees the appanage of all; we recognise the Divine Soul of the Universe, breathing through all souls, and according to the great word of Jesus, making all men "one with him, and one with his father." The dogma of the Deity of Jesus deprives us of the greatest idea of God, violates the reason and consciousness of mankind, and, if explained mystically, limits to one what belongs to all." It may be said, "What matter,—it pleases some,—others could not part with the idea without pain." We reply: "It impedes progress, it involves the perpetuation of all abuses; to protect this dogma of the deity of Jesus we must have creeds, articles, complicated theologies, anathemas, persecutions, and priesthoods; we must discourage astronomy because it reminds of God's immensity, and reject geology because it proclaims this world's antiquity. The doctrine cannot be proved out of the Scripture, therefore, sooner or later, its advocates must fall back upon the Church. The orthodox divines argue that the doctrine of the deity of Jesus is very consoling and beneficial because it brings God nearer to us. The Roman Catholic replies: "Not at all so, unless you admit that he still dwells amongst us in the Host on the altar." The orthodox Protestants say: "We cannot believe that God is contained in a little gilt box, or carried about in a clergyman's waistcoat pocket." The Roman Catholic replies, "How inconsistent, since you already believe that He was once contained in a manger in a stable and seated on Mary's lap, The orthodox say, "There are some isolated passages of Scripture which imply the Deity of Jesus." The Roman Catholic replies, "There are as many passages which insinuate the supremacy of the Pope, the Deity of the Host, and the everlasting damnation of unbelievers." The Roman Catholic says, "We hold

with you the Athanasian dogma; our Church is the chief upholder of the Deity of Jesus; in the Church of England you have bishops, priests, and very many people who deny it; the Dissenters are not always clearly and persistently orthodox on the subject, all the advocates of free thought reject it, the German successors of Luther either deny it or explain it away; in this Church of the Pope it is guarded with a vigilance and anxiety nowhere else to be found." But the Roman Church is also the avowed enemy of all progress, of all liberty, of all science, of all mental and moral independence. Thus the dogma of the Deity of Jesus stands as a barrier against all the progress, the liberties and the education of mankind.

4thly,—Results prove the falsity of the dogma. The God of the Universe, 1,800 years ago, was born into a Jewish family, lived amongst people who did not find out that he was God, his mother ordered him about and reproved him, his friends and disciples argued with him, contradicted him, invited him, and went out to dinner with him—but they knew not that he was their Creator. In distress we fly to God; the disciples were in distress, but they fled away from Jesus.

And the results at the present time, what are they? The Jews are supposed to have possessed prophecies to enable them to discern Jesus as their God. The 8,000,000 Jews still reject him as even a Messiah, and as to the supposed prophecy of him in Isaiah as God, they say that the English translation is so maliciously distorted that an educated Hebrew boy scorns such dishonest perversions of the sacred books of his nation.

In the East, when after six centuries the dogma of the deity of Jesus got established, a new religion arose to denounce it as an idolatry, and 120,000,000 of Mahomedans as a protest against such an idolatry, invoke the one universal, all-pervading God, when, day by day, His name is proclaimed from the minaret of a hundred thousand mosques. One million Parsees still, as in the

days of old, proclaim the One God. This God-Jesus, created by Greek and Roman Bishops, has never won belief amidst the 120,000,000 of the Brahminical religion, or amongst the 189,000,000 of Pagans, or amongst the 483,000,000 of Buddhists, His deity is only partially admitted amidst the 171,000,000 of Protestants, though strenuously maintained by the 182,000,000 of those who declare that, through the Pope, this modern God alone commands. What a success for a Deity!

But, 5thly,—What says History? The orthodox teachers tell us now, that the deity of Jesus is the one great feature of Christianity, that on it rests the essential dogmas of the atonement and of a vicarious redemption from an eternal hell.

We turn to the first sermons of the first propagators of Christianity. St Paul propounds Christianity at Lystra, amidst a multitude prepared to offer sacrifice to him, and he does not even name Jesus; but he warned them to turn from such like vanities (man-worship), “to turn to the living God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all things that are therein.” Such was the teaching necessary for the salvation of Asia Minor—nothing about the deity of Jesus. Paul went to Athens, and on the Hill of Mars, from the very throne of the Greek philosophy, surrounded by the temples of the deified men who had become gods of war, of beauty, of love, of art, and of wisdom, he proclaimed the Christianity deemed sufficient for the salvation of Greece—but not one word about the deity of Jesus—but, inviting them to turn from such superstitions, he says: “Whom ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you—God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that He is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands, neither is worshipped with men’s hands; as though He needed anything, seeing He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; and hath made of one blood (life) all nations of men for to dwell on

all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek the Lord if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him, though He be not far from every one of us: for in Him we live and move and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also His offspring. Forasmuch, then, as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device. He now commandeth all men everywhere to repent (reform), because He hath appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom He hath ordained."

What was the first sermon ever preached by a disciple of Jesus? On the day we now call Whit Sunday, Peter lifted up his voice, and for the first time proclaimed Christianity (Acts ii.) He therein announced that all Christians would have the power of working miracles, and proclaimed other portents and prodigies, but uttered not one word as to the deity of Jesus; but he solemnly exclaims: "Ye men of Israel, hear these words, Jesus of Nazareth, a *man* approved of God, by wicked hands crucified and slain," &c., and he ends by proclaiming Jesus to be the Master and the Messiah, that is "Lord and Christ." Thus Christianity could be first solemnly announced to the world without one word about the deity of Jesus or his atonement. Any one now preaching that sermon of Peter would be declared by all to be a Unitarian of the school of Channing, and Priestley, and Belsham. Look at the address of the first martyr, Stephen (Acts vii.), not one word about the deity of Jesus. In Acts ix. read the account of the supposed miraculous conversion of St Paul. Jesus is described as appearing to him, but he does not announce himself as God. The converted Saul preached to prove that Jesus is the Messiah, or to use the current Jewish expression, the Son of God, or the Christ—*e.g.*, ix. 22—"Saul increased the more in strength, and

confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is the Christ." Why he ought to have proved that Jesus is the Creator and Supreme God. On the pages of history we can trace the gradual growth of this dogma. Platonists, like Philo, had introduced the idea of a Logos (*i.e.*, Power, or Reason, or Word) dwelling in the Supreme Being and emanating from Him. That Platonic notion engrafted itself into Christianity, and gradually produced the Nicene and Athanasian creeds. How gradual was the corruption of Christianity we can perceive by examining the works of Origen, that man of profound and varied learning, who, after writing many commentaries on the sacred Scriptures, died A.D. 254. The Pagan superstition of praying to Jesus had already spread amongst the ignorant multitude, for Origen, in his treatise on prayer, says: "Prayer is never to be offered to any originated being, not to Christ himself, but only to the God and Father of all." For when his disciples asked him, "Teach us to pray," he did not teach them to pray to himself, but to the Father—conformably to what he said: "Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, God the Father." How could he say otherwise than, "Why dost thou pray to me? Prayer, as you learn from the Scriptures, is to be offered to the Father only, to whom I myself pray." It is not consistent with reason for those to pray to a brother who are esteemed worthy of one Father with him. "You with me, and through me, are to address your prayer to the Father alone." Let us, then, attending to what was said by Jesus, pray to God without any division as to the mode of prayer. But are we not divided if some pray to the Father and some to the Son. Those who pray to the Son fall into a gross error through want of judgment and examination." Such was the teaching of a man unrivalled among Christians for his virtues and his wisdom, whose death was the result of the tortures he endured for his faith. As Christians deteriorated morally they became addicted to

sophistry, superstition, and Pagan imitations; the dogma of the deity of Jesus gained ground till it was, at length, formally established by Bishops who deemed their deliberations inspired; once established with the help of numerous cruel persecutions, and in defiance of innumerable protests, it was received by the Gothic converts, and afterwards by the first Protestants on authority; but, whenever Protestants carry out their principles, and inquire, we find the most illustrious rejecting the deity of Jesus, witness, amongst so many others, Milton,* John Locke, Sir Isaac Newton, and, at the present time, almost all the leaders in science, in philosophy, in criticism, and in literature.

6thly,—The dogma is opposed to Jesus Christ; it is a libel upon his moral character. If he was God, he ought not to have said “The Father is greater than I;” “I go to my God and your God.” He ought not to have prayed and to have said in his agony, “Remove from me this cup, nevertheless not what I will but what Thou wilt;” and, with his last breath, “Father into thy hands I commit my spirit;” “My doctrine is not mine but His that sent me;” “As my Father hath taught me I speak these things;” “I seek not my own glory, but I honour my Father;” “To sit on my right hand and on my left is not mine to give;” “I come not to do my own will but the will of Him that sent me—I do nothing of myself.” He was tempted, he prayed to God, he gave thanks to God: “Father, I thank Thee that Thou hast heard me.” He declared his ignorance of important matters—“Of that day knoweth no man, not the angels, neither the son, but my Father only;” “My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?” “In that day ye shall ask me nothing.” The life, the conduct, the language of Jesus combine in showing him to be man. The advocates of his deity adduce expressions which on other occasions he applies equally to all his brethren.

* Milton's last work is a scriptural argument to disprove the Trinity, and the Deity of Jesus.

The Jesuits argue that it is lawful to conceal the greatest truths and the gravest matters, and to act as if they were not—for, they say,—“Jesus was God, he concealed his Deity, and by that concealment deceived everybody—and we ought to imitate him.” Their argument is logical; the immorality can only be censured by those who deny the deity of Jesus. If it is replied he was both God and man, whatever does not suit for one nature must be applied to the other, we say “Where is that evasive doctrine of contradiction ever stated,” when by Jesus? by what apostle? Nowhere; it was the sophistical invention of subtle Greek bishops when they had determined on the deification of Jesus, and had to reconcile their superstition with the life and words of Jesus.

7thly,—The dogma, if admitted, is destructive of the character of all the New Testament writers. Even were we to admit as genuine the passages now universally admitted to be spurious, such as the three witnesses in St John, even accepting the mistranslations of King James’s version as if correct, accepting as of apostolic age what is falsely entitled the Gospel of St John,—all that can then be said in defence of the deity of Jesus is that a few passages here and there exalt Jesus very much, and are considered by many to point to his divinity. But as such passages are deemed by others no proof at all, and as the entire tenor and drift of each writer is quite opposed to the deity, it would have been most dishonest of a writer to have introduced so transcendently important a dogma only in a casual incidental way, and never accompanied with statements calculated, if not to convince of the truth of the dogma, at least to show that it was held. The adorers of the God-Jesus now do not thus convey their teaching, they do not incidentally insinuate the dogma amidst entire pages of an opposite tenor; but they insist on it as the one essential feature of Christianity; they propound it in the minutest mode; they anathematise all who cannot

believe it; they address prayers and litanies to Jesus as God; they supplement the scriptures with explanations and history with false statements; and by complicated controversies they deem it possible to prove what is declared to be essential to the salvation of all.

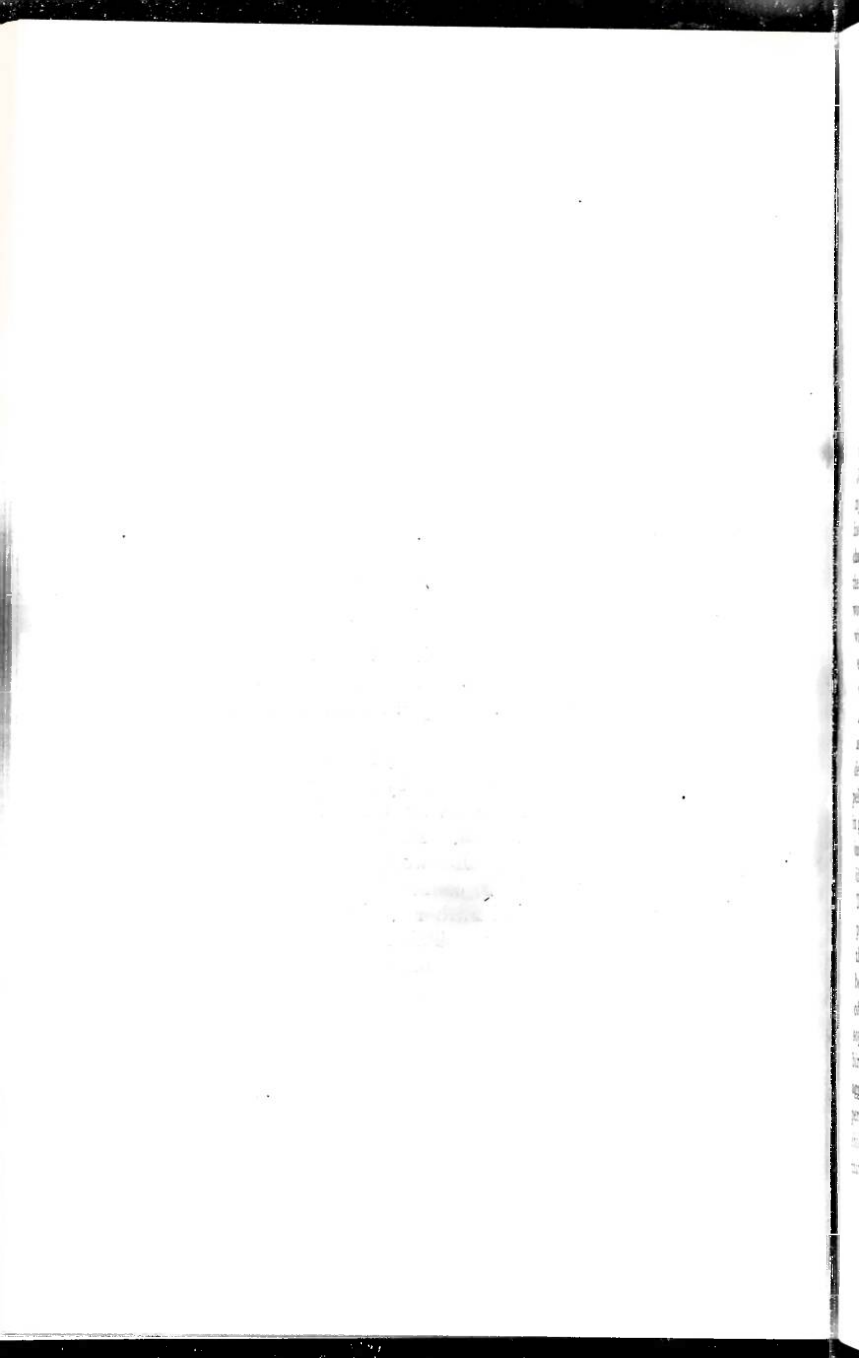
My brethren, the deifier and adorer of Jesus, the deifier and adorer of Buddha, is doubtless, if sincere and good, as pleasing to the Supreme Being as the adorer of God. Salvation consists in truthfulness of speech and act, in goodness, in earnestness, in self-devotion to the highest thoughts we know.

The adorers of a deified Jew are doubtless as pleasing to God as those who adore their Creator, so long as their adoration is the truthful expression of their thought; when it ceases to be such, their adoration is an immorality.

But strive to hasten on the time when the poor souls of our brethren shall no longer be lacerated with the conscientious endeavour to accept as essential what they cannot prove.

True religion needs no critical and learned arguments, no gods who have to be proved by texts and supported by arduous apologies; the living truth is in the conscience and the soul of man. Be true to yourself and you will be true to God. Let worthy ecclesiastics prove out their gods; we will be content if we can love somewhat better the God and Father of all, and in Him love and serve all our brethren. This short life will soon be over: 'ere it has passed away may we have helped forward some we love to thoughts more holy, more truthful, more happy, more grand, more beautiful than superstition.—AMEN. SO BE IT.





N O T E S.

(1). THE aggregations which cluster around the memory of a great character vary with the traditions and characteristics of the people who are the grateful recipients of his benefits. If Jesus had been born in Athens, Rome, Mexico, or India, the mythological legends created by credulous affection to enshrine his life, and embellish his teaching, would have taken their character from some superstition or philosophy pervading in the locality. Early biographies published in other countries would, in all probability, combine their national conceptions with those of the country of his birth. Thus in the three earliest Gospels we find Jewish actions and teaching attributed to Jesus, and genealogies tracing his descent from David and Abraham. He is a Jew of Jewish origin, a miraculous Messiah, a Theist teaching the pure monotheism which was the highest development of Jewish religious thought. Those three Gospels, although varying in many important details, are similar in general tone and scope. The Fourth Gospel not only introduces special variations and contradictions, but is essentially different in its conception of the teaching and spirit of Jesus. That Gospel, first named by Irenæus, who died A.D. 203, was probably compiled by a Christian of Ephesus, perhaps John the Presbyter, with the help of traditions, and perhaps MSS., bearing the name of John the Evangelist. Ephesus was one of the towns in which dominated the mystical Platonic Philosophy, as modified by Philo the Jew, about the time of the birth of Jesus; therefore the writer surrounds Jesus with two aggregations, the Judaic and the Platonic. Our Poets personify "Fear," "Hope," "Charity," "Envy," "Melancholy." The Platonists not only personified, but considered that all existing things had an original idea substantially

abiding in the mind of God, in whom was moreover a faculty or power whereby He arranged the ideas after which He moulded all things. The "Logos" (*i.e.*, "Power," "Wisdom," or "Word") was this faculty existing in the Divine Soul, and in different degrees manifesting itself in great and good men. Thus Philo calls Moses "the Divine Logos," the "law-giving Logos," the "supplicating Logos (alluding to his intercession for the Jews)." Aaron he calls the "Sacred Logos." He repeatedly calls the Jewish High Priest the "Logos." He calls good men the "Logos." The attribute in God which fills, inspires, and manifests itself in men, he thus describes "The Logos is the eldest creation of God, the Eternal Father, eldest son, God's image, mediator between God and the world, the highest angel, the second God, the High Priest, the Reconciler, Intercessor for the world and men, *whose manifestation is especially visible in the history of the Jewish people.*" And Philo thus addresses his Jewish readers: "If you are not yet worthy to be denominated a Son of God, be earnest to put on the graces of His First Begotten Logos, the most ancient . . . for if we are not prepared to be esteemed children of God, we may, at all events, be thus related to the most Holy Logos . . . for the most ancient Logos is the image of God." Philo personifies "Wisdom and Goodness," but he does not seem to regard them as real Persons, but only as "Ideas" in the divine mind, which breathe forth into the soul of men. Thus a Platonic Jew writing a memoir of Jesus amongst the disciples of Philo in Ephesus, amongst people familiar with the language regarding wisdom in "Ecclesiasticus," "Wisdom," &c. Writing, moreover, with a controversial object, as he affirms (ch. xx. 31), instead of giving any genealogy or nativity of Jesus, commences his narrative with the verses we may perhaps best render thus: "In the beginning was the wisdom, and the wisdom was with God, and God was the wisdom. This was in the beginning with God. All things through it rose into being, and without it arose not even one thing which has arisen. In it is life, and the life was the light of men, and the light shines on in the darkness, and the darkness did not

apprehend it. The true light which enlightens every man, continued coming into the world. It came to its own peculiar [home] and its own peculiar [people] received it not. And the wisdom became flesh [was manifested in a man], and tabernacled amongst us. No one has ever seen God: the only begotten son [*i.e.*, Wisdom, the Logos], who is upon the bosom of the Father, declared Him."

How the language reminds us of Philo's apostrophe to wisdom or Logos, as "the assessor of God prior to all creatures, a needful companion of deity, joint originator with Him of all things." Origen, who died A.D. 253, and Eusebius, who died A.D. 340, notice that as there is no article in the Greek before the word God, the signification is "and the wisdom was a God," an epithet frequently applied in the Sacred writings to designate judges, authorised teachers, commissioned rulers, angels, and those Beings adored by Gentile nations. (*Ex. gr.*) "God judgeth amongst the gods," "I have said, ye are gods," "Thou shalt not revile the gods." Again, Origen, although maintaining the pre-existence of all souls, and that emanations from the deity, like the rays of light from the sun penetrate into the dark chambers of the human heart, to enlighten and to abide, and believing that Jesus must have received such divine in-dwelling light of wisdom, yet disclaims utterly the superstition which was then rapidly advancing, and which professed to limit such to Jesus as exceptional and exclusive of others. "The great body of those who are considered as believers, knowing nothing but Jesus Christ, thinking that the Logos appearing in a man is the whole of the Logos, are acquainted with Christ only according to the flesh."

The Platonic idea of the Logos moulding the souls of good men and dwelling in them, was often interwoven with the Pythagorean doctrine of the pre-existence of souls, and in that combination is attributed to Jesus in the Fourth Gospel (though never in the earlier Gospels) *ex. gr.* John viii. 58.

(2). There are many passages adduced from the Old Testament to confirm the popular idea of the deification of Jesus; some-

times by adaptation, sometimes by referring to Jesus, passages wherein the Jewish nation is personified and individualised. Thus, in Isaiah, all the words applied by Trinitarian commentators to a suffering Messiah, regard the sufferings of "God's servant Israel," the Jewish nation's sufferings "expiating" the national sins, "moving God to compassion," and prelude an immediate and triumphant restoration. In such sense those passages were understood by the Jews at the time and since, and it is only by artifices of mistranslation that the meaning is perverted, *ex. gr.*, "a virgin shall conceive and bear a son," should be "the young woman" (probably Isaiah's wife) "will conceive and bear a son." The birth of his other sons, and the names imparted to them, had signified events just to occur, the birth of this one, named Emanuel, was to signify the speedy deliverance of the Jews from the invading kings.

(3). A few detached and casual texts are relied on by Trinitarians as the basis of their belief in the deity of Jesus, *ex. gr.* Thomas the Apostle, who did not believe in the bodily resurrection, is described as seeing Jesus alive, and, just as we exclaim in surprise "Good God," so Thomas exclaimed "My Master! my God." The Apostle who had, up to that moment, supposed the statement of the resurrection to be a mere "idle woman's tale," cannot, by feeling the mangled side of Jesus, have all at once arrived at a belief heretofore unexpected and unasked, namely, that Jesus was not only the Messiah but the God of the Universe. People acquainted with ecclesiastical history do not attach much importance to the "traditions" of the first six centuries, whereby the deity of Jesus was established—but Keble, in his Oxford Sermons, says most truly: "I need hardly remind you of the unquestioned historical fact that the very Nicene Creed itself, to which, perhaps, of all formulæ we are most indebted for our sound belief in the proper divinity of the Son of God—even this creed had its origin, not from the Scriptures, but from tradition."

We now derive our conceptions of God from the human soul. God is to the universe what our soul is to our body; therefore the higher our idea of man the higher our idea of God. But nations in

their infancy worshipped God piecemeal, or portions of nature or a human form. Hence Paganism, Brahmahism, and Buddhism had their incarnations, Judaism had no incarnation, but Jehovah was regarded as a man who could talk, eat, walk about, be angry and pleased, and take sides like a man.

When the Greek and Latin Bishops had, after some centuries, got the dogma into a definite form, the Scriptures provided a few questionable passages which were useful for the defence of a foregone conclusion. If we include amongst such the passages interpolated, corrupted, and mistranslated, the only subject for wonder is that so tremendous a dogma should have so little to appeal to. Amongst the corrupted texts, we would allude to 1 Tim. iii. 16, wherein the word "God" is spurious. In Acts xx. 28, where the true reading is "Church of the Master" and not Church of "God."

Amongst mistranslations, we might advert to Phil. ii. 5, "thought it not robbery to be equal with God." This is deemed by Trinitarians one of their very few decisive passages, though even as it stands it is not worth much, for it would be absurd to speak of "God thinking it not robbery to be equal with God." The expression that Christ was "in the form of God," or "as God," or the "image of God," does not seem to imply anything more than when it is said to a child, "You must look on your parents as representing God to you."

On the dogma of the deity of Jesus rests the Papacy, the sacramental system, ecclesiastical exclusiveness, the denunciations of "Heresy," the atonement, and all the numerous doctrines which form one or other of the forms of orthodoxy; and yet that stupendous dogma rests upon only a few incidental texts.

(4) Prayer to Jesus is nowhere enjoined in the New Testament; and yet it could not, according to the orthodox theory, be a matter of indifference. It was either to be done, or it was not to be done. The introduction of a new object for prayer was a vast change; it demanded special directions, so that the two objects of prayer might retain what were proper for each: no such explanations exist; no precept for its

observance. There are allusions to those blessings of which Jesus Christ was deemed the minister to men—*ex gr.* “Grace through Jesus Christ,” “the Grace of Jesus Christ.” There are allusions to the interest which Jesus was supposed to exhibit towards his disciples on earth, but nothing implying prayer to him as God. There is no evidence that the last words of Stephen, in which he prayed for his murderers, were addressed to Christ.

But one portion of his speech was spoken to Jesus, who (according to the narrative) was standing before him, and as his friend and master could be asked therefore to receive his dying breath.

(5) Suppose Jesus to have been miraculously born, to have healed the sick, raised the dead, ascended into heaven, and helped his followers from his heavenly abode—such miracles would not prove him to be any greater than those men to whom similar powers are attributed in the Old Testament.

(6) All Religions surround their Infant Gods with similar legends. Thus, in the sacred books of the Buddhists, we read that, when Buddha, the God-man was born, “the Holy King, the Grand Being, turning His eyes towards the East, regarded the vast host of the angels, Brahmas and Devas, Asuras, Granharvas, Repamas, and Garudas, and they rained flowers and offerings upon him, and bowed in adoration, praising him and crying, “Behold the excellent Lord, to whom none can be compared, to whom there is no superior; and the ten thousand worlds quaked, and the Universe was illumined with an exceeding bright light.” Of Confucius it is written, “He may be compared to heaven and earth in their supporting and containing all things; he may be compared to the four seasons in their alternating progress, to the sun and moon in their successive shining. He is the Equal of Heaven. Call him an Ideal man, how earnest is he! Call him an abyss, how deep! Call him Heaven, how vast!” When Mohammed was born, we are told in the sacred legends of the Moslems “that a bright light issued from the breast of his mother, illumined all Arabia, and then, penetrating into Paradise, caused 70,000 palaces of

pearls and rubies to spring into being; that, when he was three years of age, two angels opened his side, took out his heart, pressed from it the black drops of sin, replacing them with the light of prophecy." When Jesus was born, we are told, in the sacred legends of the Christians, that "a star left its station in the heavens to indicate his birthplace, kings of unknown lands travelled, with miraculous speed, to lay gifts at his feet, angels filled the air with their songs, making the mountain sides radiant with light. That child of Nazareth is described, in the theological legends of later followers, as eternal, omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent, sinless, as Creator and Preserver of the Universe, as the head of the Spiritual World, forgiver of sins, final Judge and Rewarder, in all things equal with God." Thus does superstition compress God into a man, and elevate a man into a God.

(7) Since men have learned the vastness of the Creation, and the antiquity of the world, the dogma of the deity of Jesus has become more incredible. Scholars admit that it cannot be proved out of the Scriptures in any way calculated to satisfy those who know the ignorance existing as to the authorship of those Scriptures, their authority, originals, and translations. Roman Catholics admit that it is impossible to prove anything certain out of the Scriptures, therefore they assert that the deity of Jesus, like all other dogmas, can be only accepted on the authority of the Church; but the authority of the Church has declared that infallibility rests in the mind of the Pope whenever he intends to use his infallibility. But how is the infallibility of the Pope proved? By the words of Jesus Christ. And yet those very words can be accepted by Greeks, Protestants, and Theists, who cannot see in them any assertion of the modern Roman doctrine. Thus infallibility rests upon disputed texts in books of uncertain date and uncertain origin; therefore it can never become, to any individual, anything more than a probable opinion liable to error—an opinion which, only three years ago, was deemed by all the most cultured Roman Catholics to be absurd, unproved, dangerous, unhistoric, uncatholic.

(8) From the intuitions of the human mind ; from its reasonings, feelings, and aspirations ; from its sense of right and wrong ; from all these combined in the experiences of mankind, and presented to us in the history of humanity, we can obtain a Religion of Life and of Hope, of discipline and trustful repose ; such, held with diffidence, with earnestness, with reverence, with fortitude, and with tenderness, revealing itself in harmony with science, and with our highest moral and spiritual aspirations, gathering into itself from all Churches, Sects, and Scriptures, whatever is of universal application, will keep evolving itself to the soul of man, and presenting to us as much of certainty as is obtainable in the ordinary affairs of life, why demand for the future a certainty of a *kind* essentially differing from what is adequate for our daily actions and our daily hopes.

The only theory of God's moral government which conforms to our sense of justice in presence of the various opposing beliefs held by men equally good, truth loving, and anxious, is that what is really important is attainable by all—namely, to be truthful in word and act to whatever we think, to strive to think as correctly as we can, and to practise according to our light and means, the best to which we see our way. Such is the best and the happiest religion.

The Author of this sermon will be glad to communicate to inquirers, books adapted to aid their researches into matters which could only be glanced at in these pages.

The reader is earnestly advised to study the works of James Martineau, Francis Newman, Theodore Parker, Hennell, Frances Power Cobbe, Dr Vance Smith, and those catalogued on the following pages, which can be procured from the Publisher.

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