

EARLY CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649545209

Early Christian Doctrine by Leighton Pullan

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

LEIGHTON PULLAN

**EARLY CHRISTIAN
DOCTRINE**

Oxford Church Text Books

Early Christian Doctrine

BY

THE REV. LEIGHTON PULLAN, M.A.

FELLOW AND LECTURER OF ST. JOHN BAPTIST COLLEGE, OXFORD
LECTURER IN THEOLOGY AT ORIEL COLLEGE AND QUEEN'S COLLEGE

NEW EDITION

NEW YORK

EDWIN S. GORHAM

CHURCH MISSIONS HOUSE, FOURTH AVENUE, AND 22ND STREET

1901

PREFACE

THIS book contains a sketch of Christian doctrine from the earliest times until the Council of Chalcedon in A.D. 451. By that date the faith of the Church in Jesus Christ was expressed with such clearness that any serious misunderstanding on the subject of His Incarnation was rendered difficult. Some account is also given of the doctrines of the Trinity, the Atonement, and the Sacraments, which are so intimately connected with the doctrine of the Incarnation.

Brevity has made it necessary to omit many important references and quotations which the writer hopes to incorporate in a larger book on dogmatic theology.

CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
I. Christian Doctrine in its simplest form,	1
II. The Theology of St. Paul and St. John,	15
III. Christian Doctrine from A. D. 90 to A. D. 180,	31
IV. The Apologists—Montanism—Irenæus and Tertullian,	48
V. Early Alexandrine Theology—Controversy with Monarchians,	59
VI. Doctrine of the Sacraments before A. D. 325,	72
VII. Arianism and the Divine Nature of Christ,	87
VIII. The Union of the Divine and the Human Natures in Christ,	99
IX. St. Augustine and the Athanasian Creed,	113
CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE,	118
INDEX,	120

EARLY CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

CHAPTER I

CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE IN ITS SIMPLEST FORM

Introductory.—It is the distinctive feature of early Christian theology that it fastened upon the person of Christ as the centre of Christianity. We can conceive that a different line of thought might have been adopted. The Church might conceivably have made the moral precepts contained in the Sermon on the Mount, or a belief that God is the Father of all mankind, or the experience of conversion, the dominating principle of Christianity. But while these and other great religious truths were not forgotten, they were believed to depend upon the doctrine of the person of Christ. From the very nature of the case it followed that this doctrine had an enormous influence. Every other doctrine radiated from it, and it seems to have been assumed that any one who intelligently grasped the truth about Christ would be able to anticipate or approve the rest of the teaching of the Church.

Now this distinctive feature of ancient theology can be traced in the teaching of Christ himself. It is derived from an impression of a truth which was felt by the companions of Jesus. His words and His actions gradually convinced them that there was an unutterable difference between themselves and Him. At least two of our first three Gospels were probably written before A.D. 70, and not one of them can possibly be more than a very few years later than that date. St. John's Gospel can be shown by countless proofs to be the work of the beloved disciple of our Lord, and the opponents of Christianity, instead of maintaining their old theory that it was written

2 EARLY CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

about A.D. 160, now admit that it may have been written some years before A.D. 100, and that it contains large elements of the genuine teaching of Christ. All the four Gospels are united in recording that Christ appeared before men with a unique claim and a unique method.

The Claim of Christ.—There is a certain amount of reserve in our Lord's teaching about himself. It was not until His ministry was drawing to a close that He openly declared that He was the Christ, the Messiah expected by the Jews as their deliverer and king. But He had steadily prepared His disciples to believe this. He makes repeated claims upon the allegiance of mankind, which suggest that He has a supernatural authority. Even in the Sermon on the Mount He revises and abrogates not merely the traditional doctrines of the Jewish scribes, but even the law of Moses itself. He not only draws a contrast between the true literal meaning of the fifth commandment and the glosses which had obscured that meaning, but He also replaces a literal adherence to the commandments against murder and adultery by an obedience to laws of a far more stringent character. His commands run thus: 'It was said to them of old time, . . . but I say unto you' (*Matt.* v. 21, 28). He here preaches the highest moral truth without appealing to any higher sanction than himself.

Similarly, He teaches that He has a right over each individual soul. An ancient legend tells us that the founder of Buddhism said to his followers, 'Be yourselves your lamp, yourselves your refuge.' The Buddha assumed that it was quite possible for men to value his precepts without paying any particular veneration to his person. Our Lord speaks quite otherwise. He preaches himself as being 'a greater than Solomon' (*Matt.* xii. 42). He offers himself as the greatest comfort of the human soul—'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest' (*Matt.* xi. 28). He requires that unlimited devotion which a man may not lawfully require of his fellow-man—'Whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's shall save it' (*Mark* viii. 35). 'Every one that hath left houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or children, or

lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit eternal life' (*Matt.* xix. 29). It was inevitable, therefore, that our Lord's person should have been a problem to His hearers, and so He asks, 'Who do men say that I am?' and then tests His disciples by asking, 'Who say ye that I am?' (*Mark* viii. 27, 29).

Christ as Judge.—Before He asked the above decisive question of His disciples, Jesus had expressly asserted that He would judge men after their death, and reward them according to the works which they had done in this life. He gave a vivid picture of the manner in which He would make a separation between those who had served Him and those who had rejected Him—'Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy by thy name, and by thy name cast out devils, and by thy name do many mighty works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity' (*Matt.* vii. 22, 23). And again He said, 'Every one therefore who shall confess me before men, him will I also confess before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven' (*Matt.* x. 32, 33). This stupendous assertion on the part of Christ corresponds with the forgiveness which He grants here and now to the repentant. To the woman who anointed His feet He says, 'Thy sins are forgiven,' and He rouses the indignation of the scribes by saying to the man sick of the palsy, 'Son, be of good cheer; thy sins are forgiven' (*Matt.* ix. 2).

Christ as Son of Man.—Christ very frequently calls himself 'the Son of Man.' This phrase is a Hebraism which denotes the possession of a truly human nature, true experience of human life and sorrow, and true dependence upon God. It is used in *Psa.* viii. 4 as a poetical name for mankind in general, and it is also employed by the prophet Ezekiel to describe himself. In *Dan.* vii. 13 Israel is symbolically personified under the name of 'Son of Man,' and from signifying Israel as a whole the phrase came to signify the Messiah who was to be the perfect Israelite. In part of the Jewish *Book of Enoch*, written in the century before our Lord's coming, this use of the

4 EARLY CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

title is common, and it has therefore been supposed that our Lord took the title from that book in consequence of the Messianic character which He had previously assumed. But our Lord expands the meaning of the title in such a way as to make it doubtful whether He had any intention of recalling to the minds of His hearers the somewhat fanciful descriptions of the *Book of Enoch*.

It is true that in that book the Son of Man is represented as sharing with God in the judgment of the world, and that Christ speaks of himself under this title when He prophesies His glorious return and His judgment of all mankind (*Mark* viii. 38). But there are other passages in which our Lord uses the title without introducing any of the apocalyptic scenes of judgment and splendour with which it had become associated. The title still implies sovereignty, but it is a sovereignty of an entirely new order, it is the rule of the ideal Man who represents all that is best in human character and is in perfect sympathy with every rank and every nation. The *Book of Enoch* contains no suggestion that the Son of Man was expected to live a life of service and die to redeem the world. But this is the peculiar function of the Son of Man described by Jesus Christ himself (*Mark* x. 42-45).

Christ as Son of God.—Near Cæsarea Philippi our Lord asked of His disciples, 'Who say ye that I am?' It is plain from the context (*Mark* viii. 27-30) that He was not satisfied to be numbered simply among the great prophets, and that He accepted the answer given by St. Peter, 'Thou art the Christ.' Immediately afterwards it is added that 'He charged them that they should tell no man of him.' He did not desire that His Messiahship should be taught hastily. To have done this would have been to raise the hopes of His hearers not towards a moral renovation but towards material prosperity. Jesus would not permit men to believe that He was such a Messiah as the Jews ordinarily expected. At the same time He knew that He was the true Messiah, and declared it in the most solemn manner at the supreme moment when the high priest asked Him, 'Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?' (*Mark* xiv. 61).