

THE HISTORY OF EARLY CHRISTIANITY

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The History of Early Christianity by Leighton Pullan

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LEIGHTON PULLAN

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EARLY
CHRISTIANITY**

THE
HISTORY OF EARLY CHRISTIANITY

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The History of Early Christianity

BY

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LECTURER IN THEOLOGY AT ORIEL COLLEGE AND QUEEN'S COLLEGE

"I enquired into the sayings of the ancients."

—PAPYRUS, *bishop of Hierapolis*, A.D. 125

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P R E F A C E

THIS volume is intended as a defence of orthodox Christianity : with this object in view the period from A.D. 29 to 190 has been selected. It has for many years been conceded by intelligent opponents of orthodox Christianity that by A.D. 180 or 190 orthodoxy was in possession of the field. The Divinity of Christ, the unique value of our four Gospels, a creed resembling our Apostles' Creed, were then only disputed by men who were in open antagonism with the Church (*see* Renan, *Marc-Aurèle*, p. 503).

But the opponents of orthodoxy have begun to admit that it is impossible to regard orthodoxy as a mere product of the controversies which were rife between A.D. 120 and 160. Nothing can be more striking than the recent admission of Prof. Harnack in his *Chronologie der Altchristlichen Litteratur*, B. i. pp. viii., xi.

“The oldest literature of the Church is, in the main points and in most of its details, from the point of view of literary history, veracious and trustworthy. . . . He who attentively studies these letters (*sc.* of Clement and Ignatius) cannot fail to see what a fulness of traditions, topics of preaching, doctrines, and forms of organisation already existed in the time of Trajan, and in particular Churches had attained to fixity.”

I believe that this concession will prove fatal to any but an orthodox account of the belief of the primitive Church. For if Catholic orthodoxy is as old as the time of Trajan (A.D. 98-117) there can be no absurdity in believing that it is as old as the time of the apostles. The great learning which has placed Prof. Harnack at the head of the so-called "liberal" school of theology has not restrained him from making statements which are obviously intended to save the position of his own school of thought. In this book I have frequently criticised these statements. If my criticisms are just, they will serve to demonstrate that orthodox Christianity is original Christianity.

Prof. Harnack's *Dogmengeschichte* is appearing in an English translation with his special commendation. I have, therefore, in quoting that work, first made a reference to the third German edition of 1889 and immediately added the volume and page of the authorised English translation.

It is a pleasure to me to express my great obligations to Dr Sanday's *Gospels in the Second Century* and his lectures on *Inspiration*.

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THE HISTORY OF EARLY CHRISTIANITY.

CHAPTER I.

ROME AND HER RELIGION.

§ 1. *The Roman Empire.*

ST LUKE, in speaking of the birth of Jesus Christ, and of the preaching of St John the Baptist, throws that birth and preaching into high relief by mentioning the names of the contemporary Roman emperors, men who had little in common with the new-born King. And when we contemplate the way in which God fulfilled in time His eternal plans for our salvation, we see with what fitness it was that the Saviour was born when and where He was born. The world had ripened for His coming. One great empire was imposing with some roughness, but with no little justice, a rule of peace on many nations. Intercourse between one people and another was no longer by necessity an intercourse of war and hatred. One delicate and expressive language—the Greek—was becoming the language of this intercourse, and was the medium of a great commerce of ideas. Old creeds were wearing out, and new philosophies were weaving webs of thought which suggested a protection against the chills of life, but could not really clothe the human soul with righteousness. And a hope had come that the mysterious East might offer consolation to the tired, and pardon to the sinful.