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# THE ORIGIN OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY

A POPULAR EXPOSITION

BY

RENDEL HARRIS

MANCHESTER: AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS

LONGMANS, GREEN & COMPANY

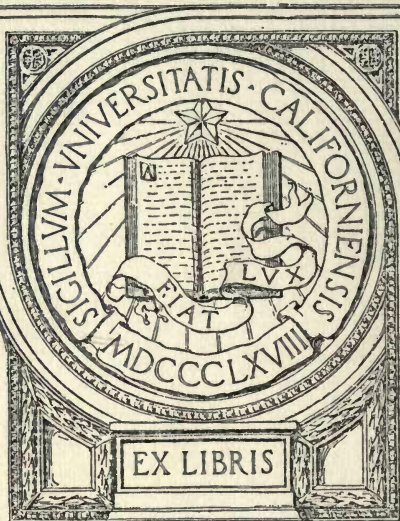
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*Benjamin Ide Wheeler*



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THE TRINITY

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## PREFACE.

I HAVE been asked more than once why I do not attempt to present in popular language the results which we claim to have reached in Christian Literature and in Christian Doctrine, according to which we establish the existence of a lost book of the first age of Christianity, made up out of quotations from the Old Testament, and also the existence of a lost Christian doctrine of the first century, according to which Jesus was defined as the "Wisdom of God".

It seems that there are Christian people who cannot follow an inquiry, such as that in the book called *Testimonies* (which is in course of production by my friend Vacher Burch and myself), because the argument frequently requires a close acquaintance with ecclesiastical writers in Greek, Latin and Syriac ; and the same thing is true of the little book on the *Origin of the Prologue to St John's Gospel*, which I recently published.

For some reasons I should have preferred to postpone any such popular treatment, until we had completed the discussion of *Testimonies* by publishing the second part of that work. But as I know the interest that is being provoked by these investigations is not limited to the erudite, I have consented to try and explain what is going on in the world of Christian thought, without any reference to Greek or Latin. Hence this little tract or lecture in the English speech.

## *PREFACE*

It is a bold flight to remove the centre of gravity of Christian thought from its normal position in the fourth century to the first century, but perhaps it may turn out that the change of position will help us all to a better understanding of the one whose nature is the object of our enquiry, and to a more intimate fellowship with him, as a result of that better understanding.



## THE ORIGIN OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY

It has been suggested to me that I should say something to you on the subject of a discovery in Christian literature which lies chronologically behind those books which make up our New Testament. I suppose that we were many of us brought up in the belief that the New Testament is the beginning of the Christian literature, and if at any time the belief was shaken by the attachment of dates to any particular books of the New Testament, we were usually able to find an explanation for the fact that the New Testament did not begin quite as early as we had at first supposed it to do. I do not forget that there are still some people who are anxious to prove that the Gospels were written in part in the lifetime of our Lord. But these are usually belated examples of an unscientific spirit, and we do not need to pay attention to them until they come into the fold by the door, that is to say, by the correct scientific method. In the New Testament itself, we had our old-time ideas rudely shaken because we started from the natural idea that the books were produced in the order in which they are commonly printed and edited. And we did not naturally take to the thought that the Pauline Epistles were written before the Gospels, nor that the Gospel of Mark, which stands second amongst the four, was really the first in the order of production. But when we had made a preliminary reconstruction of the times when the books were written, and the order in



## THE ORIGIN OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY

which they stood, we found ourselves with an immense literary lacuna at the beginning of the Christian history. I am going to show you that it is unscientific to believe in the existence of such a lacuna, just as unscientific as it would be to make a map of the world with America undiscovered. The first attempt to fill the void was made by those people who spoke of the first Christian period as the period of oral tradition—which is very much like making an early map of America and labelling it *terra incognita*. I shall endeavour, without turning aside to minutiae, to recover for you one lost book and one lost doctrine of the time to which we refer. We will begin with a brief statement of the Christian belief in the Trinity.

### I.

In the following pages, then, I am proposing to myself a task which I have never undertaken before, which might perhaps have been deemed unnecessary, and which may be productive of serious misunderstanding between Christian people. The task is the determination of the origin of the doctrine of the Trinity. The doctrine of the Trinity has been from almost the earliest days of the Christian Church a settled affair with a settled formula. Catholic Christianity expresses itself in the terms of this doctrine, and when we say "Catholic Christianity" we include Evangelical organisations as well as Anglican or Roman. Even if they do not all recite the Creeds—especially the Nicene Creed, and the Creeds of later Councils which amplify and explain the Nicene Creed—these Creeds are for the most part accepted by evangelical believers everywhere as an exact expression of the Christian conscience with regard to the most stupendous of Christian doctrines—the discovery

## *THE ORIGIN OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY*

that God exists in three persons, and is, nevertheless, one God.

The reason for this general acceptance lies in the fact that the doctrine is found in the New Testament itself, sometimes clearly stated in personal confessions, and in the doxologies of the visible or invisible Church (for it must be remembered that the Church doxologised before it defined, and that even the most rigid of dogmatic statements on the subject have been evolved out of the praises of the Church), and sometimes adumbrated by terms which, while they do not compel, may at least be said to invite the Trinitarian definition.

If, on the other hand, there are passages in the New Testament which seem to teach an opposite doctrine, and to express the relation of the Son to the Father in lower terms than co-existence from eternity, and consubstantiality, the ancient doctors of the Church have found ways to explain these inconsistencies, and the modern doctors, by calling for the aid of that magic word Evolution, have been able to express themselves without a shadow of a doubt as to the revelation which has been made, with regard to the Divine nature and the Divine attributes. What the modern exegetes do not appear to realise is, that when one appeals to evolution for the explanation of the history of a doctrine, one must go to evolution consistently, and not merely invoke the principle as an occasional witness to explain how the terms of the Trinitarian belief have been arrived at from the premises of the primitive confession.

However, something has been gained by the admission that evolution is really a factor in Christian belief, and we owe it to John Henry Newman that he liberated the Catholic mind for further investigation into Christian origins, and that, while requiring the belief that



## *THE ORIGIN OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY*

all the Christian faith is potentially involved in the primitive confessions, he left it open to the Catholic, who believes that things have always been the same from the first, to study carefully how they come to be so different from what they were at the beginning. If evolution had been applied a little more courageously, and if Newman had had a few more facts to which to apply his incisive, logical mind, he might easily have been what some persons have thought him to be, the Darwin of religion in general and of Christianity in particular.

Without some new facts, it would seem to be a very serious task to examine into the origins of the Christian Trinity. Some of the greatest minds in the world have been engaged throughout the centuries in the discussion of the matter without adding anything sensibly to the conclusions which resulted from the first application of Greek thought to Palestinian belief. It is precisely because there are fresh facts to be considered in the area which was supposed to be incapable of them that I am writing, in popular language, some fresh considerations on the subject of the Christian Trinity.

Now first of all let us state, in the language of the Creeds as far as possible, what the Christian doctrine is. In its simplest form it amounts to this: that God exists in three persons, which are the same in being and in honour and in eternity of existence. And these three persons constitute one God. No one has succeeded in making it quite clear what is meant by "persons" in the Trinity; but at least they mean that there is a multiplicity in the Godhead, as well as a unity. The Father is not the Son, and the Son is not the Spirit. The first great conflict in the world of Christian belief arose out of the affirmation that the Second Person of the Trinity had taken human flesh of the Virgin Mary.



and had thus ineffably united humanity to Deity in His own person. From this incarnation of God in human flesh the Greek theologians taught that there resulted a corresponding elevation of man into the Divine Nature. So that man became immortal, and sometimes, they said, deified, in consequence of the Incarnation of the Son of God. The Triune Deity has now attached to it a Divine humanity which has been carried to Heaven in the form of the glorified body of Jesus, who is said, in another obscure phrase, to be seated at the right hand of the Father.

All of this is very difficult to understand. It constitutes the chief of the Christian mysteries. What is important to remember is that Christ, the Incarnated one, has been defined to be one with the Father from all eternity, equal with Him in glory, the instrumental cause by which all created things were made, and at the same time, in no degree inferior to the primal cause of Creation in consequence of the Second Person being the instrument of the First. And we are especially warned in the formulæ of the Church never to think of the Father as having a prior existence to the Son, nor the Son as having an inferior rank to the Father. And when these points had been decided for the Second Person of the Trinity, they were practically conceded for the Holy Spirit also, who, with the Father and Son, is glorified and worshipped.

If anyone has any doubt about the fact of the evolution of Christian doctrine, he should compare what we call the Apostles' Creed—which is very nearly the same as the early Roman Creed of the second century—with the Creed of Nicæa, established by the 318 Holy Fathers, who met there in A.D. 325 under the presidency of Constantine; or with the final definitions of the

*THE ORIGIN OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY*

Council of Chalcedon in the year 431. For instance, it is a very simple thing to say :—

“ I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived of the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, etc.”

And a much more highly evolved thing to say :—

“ I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible, and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of<sup>1</sup> God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made. Who for us men and for our salvation came down from Heaven, and was incarnated by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary.”

which is the form used in the Anglican Communion Service, and is itself somewhat modified from the Creed of the Council of Nicæa. And the question naturally arises : How did the one form give birth to the other ? And why were the explanations made ? For even if we admit that the explanations made by the extended matter were implicit in the first confession, there must be some order of mental procedure by which the shorter statements gave place to the longer, and the simpler to the more complex.

What we propose to do is to show that by the discovery of two fresh facts the whole matter of the evolution of the Trinity is put in a new light. To these two facts we shall now address ourselves. In the beginning, the investigation appears to take us away from the sub-

<sup>1</sup> i.e. *from*.



ject. None of the statements that we make will at first sight be recognised as having anything to do with the matter in hand. But as soon as we have established our two new facts it will be easy to proceed in the application of them to the evolution of Christian doctrine : for these two facts are chronologically prior to the whole of the Christian literature as it exists up to the present.

## II.

The first fact to which we draw attention is that the Christian Church was in possession of an Apostolic document, involving Apostolic doctrine, some time before any of the documents of the New Testament that are known to us were in existence. The period before the Gospels and Epistles has commonly been spoken of as the period of the Church's oral tradition, on the assumption that all Christian doctrine was transmitted by word of mouth from those who had been with Jesus to those who were, or might become, His followers in the days after His removal from earth. And that there must have been such oral tradition lies in the very nature of the case. It was not necessary to take a pen in hand in order to say that "what things our hands have handled of the Word of Life we declare unto you". The declaration could be made, and no doubt was made at the first, without any transcription at all. And there are some traces of a preference amongst sub-Apostolic people for the voices of Apostolic men over their actual written compositions. Papias, who wrote in the early part of the second century, says positively that he preferred the living voice ; by which it is supposed he means the testimony of those who had themselves seen the Lord, or who had seen and conversed with persons who had seen the Lord.



## *THE ORIGIN OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY*

When, however, we reflect that the period which elapses between the death of Christ and the first known Christian document covers a whole human generation, it must be clear to any thoughtful person that such a generation could not have passed away without written records of the history which they were relating, and the truths that they were emphasising. We see this, perhaps, more clearly to-day than formerly, because we are the less disposed to regard the primitive Christians as being unlearned and ignorant to the extent of not being able to read or write. Recent excavations in Egypt, at any rate, have shown us how much more liberal was the education of the people under Roman rule, in the first Christian centuries, than we might otherwise have imagined. And in a community where most people could read and write, it is not to be thought that the Christian tradition was propagated without the aid that is furnished by reading and writing. We ought, therefore, to be certain that the first Christian period, and perhaps even the time when our Lord Himself was teaching, had its own written memorials of Christian history and Christian doctrine.

The next thing that we may be reasonably certain about is that the first documents of the faith, prior to the New Testament, must have arisen out of the exigencies of the first Christian propaganda. They were composed, indeed, in order to express in an intelligible form what the new doctrine was, and what the new Jewish sect stood for. The first statement of Christian doctrine would, therefore, in all probability be its difference from Judaism, rather than its agreement with the same. A document became necessary when the Church and the Synagogue stood at the parting of the ways. For this reason we should expect that, apart from cer-

tain definite historical statements as to the existence, miraculous life, and ignominious death of Jesus, the first official statements which the Christians made, would, of necessity, be anti-Judaic in character. Christianity is made up out of Judaism and anti-Judaism. In so far as it is Judaism, its documents, both historical and doctrinal, were already written. It is when it becomes anti-Judaic, either by boldly claiming the right of abandoning Jewish ceremonies, or of rewriting and expanding Jewish doctrines, that the Christian literature, properly so-called, will arise. It will be controversial in character, and it will undertake to prove its New Testament, which it wishes to affirm, by the use of the Old Testament, which it wishes to contradict.

So long, then, as nascent Christianity is making its way in a Jewish environment, it does so as a sect of Judaism, accepting the whole of the inspired Jewish documents, and re-interpreting them in the light of what it holds to be a larger revelation. It will not appeal, that is, to the light of nature, nor to the teachings of philosophy, nor to great names in other religions, Eastern or Western, but it will do as the Jews did; it will say "Moses said in the Law," "David says in the Psalms," or "Isaiah prophesies thus". And upon the use of such quotations, with appropriate interpretations attached, it will base its propaganda of the new religion.

Thus the kind of book that would be required would be a book of Anti-Judaic quotations. And since quotations in Greek are known by the name of "Martyr words," or "Testimonies" (the original martyr being a witness or a testifier), they called their first issued book by the name of *Testimonies* [*Martyriæ*] *Against the Jews*; an alternative title appears to have been *Extracts Against the Jews*. And it is one of the discoveries of



modern times that some such book underlies practically the whole of the early Christian literature.

This result may be arrived at in a number of ways. First of all it may be shown that there are traces of the use of such a compilation in the New Testament itself. Next, such a document will by its transcriptional errors explain curious readings in the earliest copies of the New Testament ; third, traces of the use of such a book may be observed over practically the whole of the early Patristic literature, in which, as in the New Testament, the mistakes of the transcribers of the original document are often conserved, and the prefaces and the headlines of the primitive book are, often, still extant. Fourth, actual collections of Testimonies, obviously derived from a common lost original, occur in the literature of the Church from the early years of the third century down to the invention of printing.

We may illustrate briefly the points in question in order that the argument may be as lucid as possible, without actually quoting Greek or Latin documents.

1. The comparison of the second chapter of the 1st Epistle of Peter with the ninth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, will show a common argument underlying the two writers. Both of them affirm that Christ is the Stone spoken of by the prophets. Each of them illustrates the statement from Isaiah xxviii. 16, and Isaiah, viii. 14. These passages are taken to show that Christ is the Foundation Stone laid in Zion, and at the same time the Stone at which the Jews, those unwise builders, have stumbled. So striking is the coincidence here, in the treatment of the subject, between St. Paul and St. Peter, that it has been taken as a final proof of the dependence of Peter upon Paul, and as a conclusive argument for the reconciliation of the two great



early Christian teachers. The difficulty is that we find similar arguments in early Patristic literature in writers who are not dependent upon the Epistle to the Romans ; and that we also find the fundamental position that "Christ is the Stone," sometimes in the form that "Christ is the Stone and the Rock," in the early collections of Testimonies which are extant. For instance, in the collection of Testimonies made by Cyprian against the Jews, one of the leading sections is devoted to the establishment of the doctrine that "Christ is the Stone," and the Old Testament is ransacked for possible illustrations of the Christ-Stone or Christ-Rock.<sup>1</sup> It is therefore reasonable to affirm that it was from such a collection that Peter and Paul took their doctrine and the quotations in proof of it, and not that either of them was borrowing from the other. Each of them is anti-Judaic, as may be seen by studying chapters ix.-xi. of the Epistle to the Romans (the most anti-Judaic section, in spite of a number of sympathetic terms, in the New Testament), or the context of the quoted words in the Epistle of Peter.

2. The assumption of such a primitive collection of proof texts against the Jews helps us to understand certain mistaken references to the Prophets which are made in the New Testament itself, and which have caused much perplexity to its interpreters.

For example, in the opening of the Gospel of Mark, where the mission of John the Baptist is described, we are told in the oldest copies that it is written *in Isaiah*

<sup>1</sup> Another such identification may be seen in 1 Cor. x. 4, where St. Paul says that the Rock in the wilderness of which the Israelites drank, was Christ. He then betrays the anti-Judaic feeling of a *Book of Testimonies* by the remark that "with many of them God was not well-pleased !"

that the Lord will send His messenger before His face, and that there is the voice of one crying in the wilderness. Strictly speaking, it is only the second of these quotations that belongs to Isaiah, the first of them should have been referred to Malachi. Consequently, later transcribers have judiciously altered the words, "In Isaiah the prophet," to "In the prophets". It is easy to see that such mistakes in reference were almost inevitable in the use of the primitive Bible text-book, especially if the authorities were marked in the margin instead of in the text. Where a quotation, on the other hand, was composite, it was very easy to refer to a single prophet what should have been divided between two. In such a case as that in which the Gospel of Matthew, chapter xxvii. v. 9, refers to Jeremiah the prediction of Judas and the thirty pieces of silver, the quotation is really made up out of Zechariah and Jeremiah, and it would have been better, if a single reference was made, to refer it to Zechariah only. The reference to Jeremiah has caused much searching of heart and not a little dishonest exegesis. The trouble arose when Matthew took the quotation out of his text-book, and we need not assume that an evangelist was inspired to the extent that he could not make a mistake in a Biblical or quasi-Biblical reference.

3. We will now give a specimen of the way in which the prophetic Testimonies were employed by the early Fathers, so as to betray the use of a common lost document. Here is a simple instance. In Justin's *First Apology*, chapter xxxii., he makes the following statement: "Moses, who was the first of the prophets, says expressly as follows: 'A ruler shall not fail from Judah, nor a leader from his loins, until he shall come for whom it is reserved. And he shall be the expectation of the



Gentiles, binding his colt to a vine, washing his robe in the blood of the grape.' It is yours, then, to make an accurate investigation, and to learn until whose day there was among the Jews a Ruler and King of their own."

Half a century later, we find in Irenæus a similar line of argument, as follows :—

"Moses had manifested the advent of Christ by saying : 'A Ruler shall not fail in Judah, nor a Leader from his loins until he was come for whom it was reserved, And he is the hope of the Gentiles, binding to the vine his colt, and to the ivy the colt of an ass. He was washing his robe in wine, and his coat in the blood of the grape. His eyes are more joyful than wine, and his teeth more white than milk.' Now let those inquire who are set to investigate everything, the time in which the Chief and the Ruler failed from the tribe of Judah."

When we compare these two passages, we find that both writers have agreed in ascribing the prophecy of Jacob to Moses, and that each of them concludes his quotation with an appeal to the Jews to make an investigation of the time of the cessation of the Jewish monarchy. The natural explanation is that the text-book had referred the passage to Moses, and had accompanied it by an *argumentum ad hominem* for the Jews whose kingdom had passed from them. And the curious thing is that when Justin came to write the *Dialogue Against Trypho the Jew*, he makes the same quotation, but recognising that the prophecy was not really due to Moses, he says, "It was Jacob who prophesied it, but Moses who wrote it down".

When we come down to the fourth century, we find no less a person than Athanasius making the very same mistake, for he tells us that Moses prophesies that the



kingdom of the Jews should last until Christ's time. And here the scribes of Athanasius' MSS. have for the most part erased Moses and written in Jacob!

These illustrations will serve to show how widespread was the use of the text-book, and how firmly fixed even its errors were in its traditional use by the Church.

4. The lost original document has been preserved for us in a number of what we may call Recensions, or editions, both in Greek and Latin. Of these, the most famous is one that is due to Cyprian the Martyr, the Bishop of Carthage in the third century. Cyprian writes three books of quotations against the Jews, and of these, the first two are evidently derived, although written in Latin, from a lost Greek original. These books of Cyprian's are of the highest importance for our study. It is clear they are not Cyprian's own work except for a few trifling variants. The argument of the book and the proofs are certainly pre-Cyprianic, and can be paralleled in the writings of Justin Martyr, Irenæus, and others. They are the common property, indeed, of the Church. Cyprian's First Book is concerned to prove that the Jews have fallen out of the Divine favour, and have been replaced by the Christians; that a new covenant has been introduced with new sacrifices, a new priesthood, and so on.

In the Second Book Cyprian comes more directly to the question of Christology. The arrangement of the matter surprises us. He does not begin to prove Jesus to be the Messiah; he is not concerned, in the first instance, to show that He is the Son of God; his Christology is of an earlier type which has almost disappeared from the New Testament. His first heading is that *Christ is the First-born, the Wisdom of God, by*

## THE ORIGIN OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY

*whom all things were made.* And this is followed by a second section to prove that *Christ is the Word of God.* And then He proves that *Christ is the Hand and Arm of God*, that *He is called Angel, and God*, and so on, until he comes to the proof that *Christ is the Stone*, which we find mentioned in 1st Peter, and in Romans.

Now this is just what we should not have expected. We should have said that the first emphasis would be Messianic in character. It is something quite different. And we begin now to see the traces of an earlier theology than that which lies on the surface of the New Testament. Behind the doctrine that Christ is the Word of God, we see looking out at us from the pages of the Testimony Book the statement that Christ is the Divine Wisdom. But of this more presently. The point we have reached is that the lost book of Christian Testimonies against the Jews has come down to us in a variety of forms, and that its first structure can be defined by a careful study of Books of Testimony which are still extant, assisted by a study of Patristic references made in confutation of the Jews.

Do we know anything more about the book in question? The answer is in the affirmative. In the early part of the second century, Papias tells us definitely that Matthew wrote the Oracles in the Hebrew dialect, and that everybody translated them to the best of his ability. And the same Papias is said to have written five books of Commentaries upon the *Dominical Oracles*, which must mean either Oracles of the Lord, or about the Lord, and can hardly be separated from the Matthew Book which he says was written in Hebrew. Around this supposed Matthew Book, and Papias' comment upon it, there has been a long continued controversy. Papias' writings have perished, except for a few



fragments. If we had his Book of Commentaries, we could easily see what he was commenting upon. But as the books are lost, it is not surprising that various explanations were made as to the underlying text. It has been the fashion for all Christian Apologists, down to quite modern times, to assume that Papias was referring to our Gospel of Matthew when he talked about *Dominical Oracles*, and that this Gospel of Matthew in our canon was originally written in Hebrew or some related dialect. The evidential value of such a statement is very great, if the interpretation of the Oracles be rightly made. For if Papias was commenting upon the Gospel of Matthew, say in the Greek form, in the early years of the second century, the book itself upon which he commented, and which he or someone else had translated out of Hebrew, must have been one of the very early products of the Christian literature. Christian tradition, as judged by the writings of the early Fathers, is unanimously on the side of those who, misunderstanding Papias, say that our Gospel of Matthew was written in Hebrew. No doubt the Fathers copy statements thoughtlessly from one another, and they are almost entirely destitute of a critical faculty in the modern sense. And what the Fathers have said on the subject, the modern Apologists have repeated. Almost universally it was laid down that Matthew wrote in Hebrew, and that Papias wrote on Matthew.

Some, however, hesitated to identify the *Dominical Oracles* with Matthew, and said that the title rather described a collection of our Lord's sayings, known as *Logia* or Oracles, of which Matthew may have made use in his Gospel. And it is only in modern times that these opinions have been challenged and successfully contradicted.

In illustration of these points a few quotations may be of use. For instance, Lardner, in the *Credibility of the Gospel History* (vol. ii. 117), translates the passage in Eusebius, where Papias is spoken about, as follows: "Papias says this Gospel was written in Hebrew". Of course Papias never said anything of the kind. What Papias said was that the *Logia* were written in Hebrew. Again, in his *History of the Gospels and the Evangelists*, book v. chapter v., Lardner says, "In his five books entitled 'Explications of the Oracles of the Lord,' which seemed to have been collections of ancient stories and traditions, Papias makes express mention of Matthew's Gospel, and says that he wrote the Divine Oracles in the Hebrew tongue". Here there is the same illicit equation between Matthew's Gospel, and the Matthæan Logia. And it is in the same strain that Westcott, in his *Canon of the New Testament* (7th edition, 1896, p. 73), says: "It was an exposition of Oracles of the Lord; not of *the* Oracles of *the* Lord—such a summary as, for instance, St. Matthew composed". Here we have the same attempt to equate St. Matthew and his Gospel with the Matthæan Oracles, without saying exactly that the *Dominical Oracles* or *Logia* are the Gospel itself.

Others went further, and from the use of the word Oracles, which might properly be thought to belong to the Old Testament, attempted to prove that the word was used of the Matthæan Gospel, in order to show the authoritative position which that Gospel had attained in the Church by the time when Papias was writing.

As extreme a statement in this direction as is possible may be found in Dr. Salmon's *Historical Introduction to the New Testament* (8th edition, 1897, pp. 89-90), as



## THE ORIGIN OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY

follows : " In the New Testament *Logia* has its classical meaning, *Oracles*. I consider a true conclusion to be that, as we find from Justin, the Gospels were put on a level with the Old Testament in the public reading of the Church, so we find from Papias that the name *Logia*, the *Oracles*, given to the Old Testament Scriptures, was also given to the Gospels, which were called the *Dominical Oracles*. The titles of Papias' own work I take as simply meaning an exposition of the Gospels ; and his statement about Matthew I take as meaning that Matthew composed his Gospel in Hebrew, the word 'Oracles' implying its Scriptural authority."

The only thing that appears to be correct in this statement is a recognition of the fact that the term "Oracles" belongs in the first instance to the Old Testament. Its identification of the Gospel of Matthew with the Matthæan Oracles was rendered even more difficult by the consensus of modern scholars against the belief in a Hebrew origin for the first Gospel. It is certain that this Gospel is a Greek Gospel, and that it is to a large extent based upon another Greek Gospel coinciding closely with the Gospel of Mark. The "Oracles," of which Papias speaks, cannot possibly be equated with the first of the four Gospels. The ancient view, however, continued to be upheld. Lightfoot came to the assistance of Westcott, and in his controversy with Mr. W. R. Cassels, the author of *Supernatural Religion*, did his best and strongest in the defence of the ancient views. It is not necessary to show in detail that Lightfoot was altogether wrong, and in the main, Mr. Cassels, his antagonist, was very nearly right. Had it not been for Lightfoot's defence of the ancient position, we should long ago have reached a clearer understanding on the subject. An anonymous

## THE ORIGIN OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY

writer, indeed, now known to be a certain Dr. Gregory,<sup>1</sup> stated the case correctly in a work which he published on the *Oracles of Papias*, wherein he showed that the right explanation of these Oracles was that they were a collection of Old Testament prophecies used in the Christian propaganda. For various reasons the book was never properly appreciated, although we can see now that it was a contribution of very great critical value.

I have talked of recovering the lost book of the Oracles of Matthew upon which Papias commented. But there is a sense in which the book was never lost at all, it was simply re-edited and re-written. Cyprian's *Testimonies* is one form of it, but I think that I have, perhaps, discovered the book itself in a later edition, a MS. on Mount Athos, which certainly contains a great deal of the primitive matter which looks out at us all over the pages of Justin, Irenæus, Tertullian, and Cyprian. It is early yet to say whether we have actually got the Matthew book; it is certainly headed by the name of Matthew, but then the editor Lambros says this is Matthew the Monk, and there may be such a person writing in the fifteenth century against Judaism. But the book also has at its head Greek verses describing the Matthew book. These verses run as follows:—

Here Matthew curbs the boldness of the Jews,  
With five-fold bridle of his five-fold book,  
And whoso knows their error to confute,  
By the same curb convicts all heresies,  
For Jewish strife is mother of them all.

These Greek verses are very well written, and I shall be slow indeed to believe that they are the work of a

<sup>1</sup>Not to be confused with Dr. Caspar R. Gregory of Leipsic, whose death in the German ranks at Arras has recently been reported.



monk of the fifteenth century. I am inclined to believe, though here again I am not in a position to prove the hypothesis, that they are the work of Pothinus, the Bishop of Lyons, who had prefixed them to his copy of the *Testimony Book*: but of course, if they are the work of Pothinus, or anybody of an early date, then Matthew is the real Matthew, and the fivefold division of the MSS. corresponds to the five books on which Papias commented. In any case, the discovery of the *Testimony Book* stands sure. And since it antedates the New Testament, it is the true foundation of Christian doctrine. What that book says about Jesus Christ is our real Creed; and if I had time, I could show you that all the existing Creeds flow from it.

### III.

Assuming, then, that we have arrived at a correct conclusion with regard to the nature of the *Dominical Oracles* upon which Papias commented, and have shown that they were the primitive collection of *Testimonies* implied in the Christian propaganda of the first period, let us now pass on to the dogmatic discovery, which was indeed involved in the former, although it can be, and actually was, arrived at quite independently.

We pointed out that the *Book of Testimonies*, where it could be successfully restored, is our first authority for Christian doctrine, its Christology being of necessity at an earlier stage of evolution than what we find in the New Testament or the sub-Apostolic Fathers. It has been the fashion for those who suspected the existence of the *Book of Testimonies* to argue that its foundation in doctrine was the belief that Jesus is the Messiah, and that the whole book might be regarded as a collection of Messianic Prophecies. Now it is not to be disputed

that there are some things in the primitive Testimony Book which may properly be described as Messianic. Such things, for example, as the time and place of the coming of Christ, His miraculous works, and the details of His death and resurrection.

\* But it is equally clear that Messianism is not the starting point for the collector of the quotations from the Old Testament. His point of departure is the doctrine that Jesus is the Wisdom of God. Perhaps it may be urged that this is not the exact form in which the *Testimony Book* presents matters. It says that *Christ* is the Wisdom of God; and if this is taken to be a translation from an Aramaic or Hebrew original, since Christ stands for Messiah, then in that sense the book may be called Messianic. But it is not Messianic in a way that we are ordinarily accustomed to recognise. We should certainly have never dreamed that a Christian propaganda with regard to the Founder of the Faith would have started from the statement that Christ was the Wisdom of God. Still less should we have expected that such a statement could have been carried back into the Apostolic circle, and have on it, perhaps, the official seal of Matthew the Publican.

Now it is possible for us to arrive at this result more or less completely without reference to the *Testimony Book* at all.

Everyone knows that one of the greatest Christian buildings in the world is the Mosque of the Holy Wisdom, the *Aya Sophia* at Constantinople—the building in which the Emperor Justinian thought he had rivalled and out-distanced the glory of Solomon himself. How did the Christians of Justinian's time come to erect this superb building in honour of the Holy Wisdom? The answer appears to be that it was built upon the founda-



tion of an earlier structure, bearing the same name, and going back to the days of Constantine ; and that at the time it was built the Holy Wisdom was an alternative term for Christ Himself. Alongside of this basilica of Constantine, Eusebius tells us that there stood another dedicated to *Dynamis* or Power : the conjunction shows that the builders were honouring Christ as the Wisdom of God and the Power of God. It was the architectural equivalent of 1 Cor. i. 24. It would be easy to show that this identification was widespread in the Eastern Church, and that it affected the literature as well as the architecture of Christianity. To take a single illustration almost at random ; in a passage in which Cæsarius, the brother of Gregory of Nazianzum, discourses upon the darkening of the sun and moon at the time of the Crucifixion, he says that the moon was the sister of the sun, and sprung from the same mother as the sun, namely, from Wisdom, who is Christ. And she, the moon, could not bear the insults that were being wrought against Christ by the godless. Now here we have two curious statements : (1) that *Sophia* is the mother of the sun and moon, and (2) that she is Christ. The connection is not evident at first sight in either case. But look a little closer at the words. The first statement means that created things, to which the sun and moon belong, owe their origin to the Divine Wisdom. This takes us back at once to the Old Testament, to the passage in which God is said to have made all things in or by Wisdom ; and more especially to the great hymn in honour of Wisdom in the 8th chapter of Proverbs, where Wisdom is represented as being with God as a master workman, engaged in the artifice and ordering of all created things. It is clearly to such creative Wisdom that Cæsarius is referring. And we may

## THE ORIGIN OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY

therefore infer that in equating Wisdom with Christ, his fundamental thought was that Christ was the Wisdom of God, because all things had been made by Him, or conversely, that all things had been made by Him, because He was the Wisdom of God. This is not a new statement belonging to the fourth century. It is the opening chapter in the Christology of the Matthew Book, that *Christ is the First-born of God, and that He is the Wisdom by whom all things were made.* And the proof that is given in the *Testimony Book* is precisely the passage in Proverbs to which we were just referring.

There are innumerable instances of a similar equation between Christ and Wisdom, but they have been generally misunderstood by those who have written on the subject. They noted the parallel between the Wisdom by whom all things were made, and the Logos by whom all things were made, of whom St. John writes in the opening verses of his Gospel, and drew the conclusion that Sophia was an after-thought of Logos, and that the Old Testament had been brought in to reinforce the New, and the Sapiential Books to back up the Gospel. It does not seem to have occurred to anyone to ask whether this was the right order of things, and we shall see presently that so far from the Sophia-doctrine being a pendant to the Logos-doctrine, it is the Logos-doctrine that is derived from Sophia. And everything that is said in the New Testament of the Logos has been arrived at from a series of previous statements which had been made of the Divine Wisdom.

Now this is of the highest importance. It helps us at once to understand why, in the New Testament, we have in the Pauline Epistles a doctrine so closely coinciding with that of the Fourth Gospel, without the



language of the Fourth Gospel. How was it possible, for instance, that St. Paul, in the 1st chapter to the Colossians, should make the series of statements with regard to Christ's pre-eminence, pre-existence, authority, and creative work, and yet never use the term "Word of God" in the Johannine sense? The answer is that St. Paul preached the *Wisdom* of God, and not the *Word* of God. And whatever he says in Colossians, in the great Christological passage referred to, is a deduction from a previous identification which has been made between Christ and Sophia. Anyone who studies the writings of the Fathers carefully, or the rituals of the Early Church, will see that where Logos and Sophia come in together, it is Logos that is the afterthought and the intruder.

\* To take a single illustration which came recently under my notice. The Serbian church, when celebrating their Easter Festival, according to their ancient rite, conclude their Paschal Canon in the following words: "O the greatest, the most Holy Passover, Thou who art Christ the Wisdom and the Word of God, and the Power!" Comparison with the 1st chapter of the Epistle to the Corinthians, where Paul speaks of Christ as the Wisdom of God and the Power of God, will show that the Logos, or Word, has here been introduced into the Pauline formula. And this simple instance can be paralleled, as we have said, all over Patristic literature.

The same thing is evident when we notice that in the *Book of Testimonies*, as Cyprian presents it to us, we pass from the statement that Christ is the Wisdom of God to another statement that Christ is the Word of God. The *Testimony Book* shows that Sophia, Wisdom, had priority over Logos, Word. We may therefore

replace those statements in which Christ is affirmed to be the Word of God, by an earlier series of statements in which He is equated with the Divine Wisdom. And it is not difficult to see why the change was made. For Sophia is the Hebrew way of expressing what the Greeks describe by Logos, and the substitution of one term for the other is due to the supremacy of Greek influence in the early Church, accompanied by a sense of difficulty which was felt in giving to Christ a feminine title.

This supremacy of Greek influence, however, did not obliterate the Divine Wisdom from the dogmatic statements of the Church. It had, as we stated, a literary validity as well as an architectural representation. The Greek Church did not forget their origin; they built in, and built up, the Holy Wisdom. There is not a single controversy with regard to the Nature of the Trinity, as far as we know, which does not involve the doctrine that Christ is the Wisdom of God as its starting point, and the Old Testament definitions of that Wisdom as its proof-text. Indeed, we may say boldly that Christianity as a dogmatic system is founded upon two things: first, the identification of Jesus with the Wisdom of God, and second, the description of Christ so identified with Wisdom, in terms that are borrowed from the Sapiential literature. One passage more than any other has contributed to the development of Christian thought, and that is the passage in which Wisdom praises herself in the 8th chapter of the Book of Proverbs. And in that description the principal statement for the production of dogma is the verse which runs in the Hebrew in the form, "The Lord possessed me [in the] beginning of His way, and before His works of old," and which, in the Greek of the LXX,



appears as "The Lord created me the beginning of His way, for His works".

The importance of these passages may be seen from the consideration that in every controversy of the Church with regard to the Person of Christ—whether against the Arians, who denied the Consubstantiality and Co-eternity with the Father, or the Sabellians, who merged Jesus Christ's personality, including His sufferings, into the personality of God the Father—the proof texts on either side are the same, and it is only a question of what is the lawful or possible interpretation to be placed upon them. Athanasius and Arius are at one, not only in quoting Proverbs viii. 22, but in quoting it in the incorrect translation of the LXX. They dispute over the words "The Lord created me" (that is, Wisdom), as to whether Christ is a creature, and if so, whether He is like one of the other creatures. The text had so great an authority that they did not go back to the Hebrew to see what stood there as the original of the Word over which they are disputing, until Eusebius of Cæsarea with his book learning (largely derived from Origen) comes on the scene, to tell them that none of the great translators who have revised the LXX will approve of the word "created," and that if they insist on that word, the Jews will have none of it. This allusion to the Jews is very significant, for it intimates to us that the text over which they were arguing came to both sides of the different controversies out of a hand-book of Testimonies against the Jews. But it was only Eusebius who had the cunning to look into his copy of Origen's Hexapla and see how the verse was rendered by Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion.

Perhaps a little illustration in detail will help us to see the importance of this great passage in Proverbs, one

## THE ORIGIN OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY

of the highest flights of all Hebrew poetry, for the determination of Christian doctrine. And before doing so, it is as well to remind ourselves not to put in caveats and objections against the method, nor to say that we do not see what the 8th chapter of Proverbs has to do with the matter at all, for we have shown, from the tradition of the Church, that all branches of the Church, orthodox, semi-orthodox, and heretics if we please to include them, are agreed in the use of a common method. And it is therefore not in order for us to object to the method when we are engaged in a problem of historical theology. In order to understand this more clearly, as I have said, we take a specimen.

The treatise of Eusebius on the *Ecclesiastical Theology* was written against Marcellus of Ancyra. Marcellus was what we may call a hyper-orthodox person. He was terrified at the thought of introducing multiplicity into the conception of the Deity. And in his reaction from Arianism, he identified Christ so closely with the flesh of Christ, by a straining of the statement that "the Word became flesh," and similar expressions, as to render it doubtful whether he really did hold that Christ as the Word was consubstantial and co-eternal with the Father. Now let us make a little summary of one of the chapters of Eusebius' third book, in order that we may see how the matter was presented by Eusebius in his reply to Marcellus. He begins by introducing Sophia, the Divine Wisdom. She speaks in her own person in the Book of Proverbs. He recites Proverbs viii. 12, etc., from the words, "I, Wisdom, inhabit Counsel". He then shows that the whole of this passage is spoken as from one person, and that no change of speaker is to be assumed as we read from point to point. It is Sophia who is speaking, and



Sophia is the same thing as God, the Word. She is not used in an indefinite sense, as in such passages where we say "Blessed is the man that findeth Wisdom," nor even in the passage that "God, by Wisdom, founded the earth." That is, she is not a quality of God. When we are told in another Scripture to say to Wisdom "Thou art my sister," that does not mean that there is an equation between God over all and human thoughts when thinking wisely. One must not say of God "Thou art my brother," such language would be inharmonious to our ears; but we might say it to the Son of God, for He was the Wisdom, and everything will move smoothly if we remember what St. Paul says, that "Christ is the Wisdom of God and the Power of God". And it follows that it is in Christ's Person that the words are spoken, "The Lord created me the beginning of His ways for His works". It is not, however, of Christ's flesh that the words are uttered. We will not, moreover, says Eusebius, assume that He is a creature like the rest of the Creation, nor say with the Arians that He has come into being from non-being: but we will say that He subsists and lives, that He antedates the whole of the order of the world, and that He has been said to rule over all things by the Lord who is His Father. That is to say, we are to understand the word "created me the beginning" as "God set me to rule over His creation".

Perhaps because Eusebius did not think this would be finally convincing to Marcellus, he turns the tables on him by saying: "If anyone were to inquire accurately of the true meaning of the inspired Scripture, he would find that the words 'created me' are not there at all. There is no sign of it in any of the great translators of the LXX. Aquila says, 'The Lord possesses me, the

Headpiece of His way'; Symmachus says, 'The Lord possesses me, the beginning of His ways,' and so does Theodotion almost exactly." And Eusebius then proceeds to play upon the words "Head" and "beginning," and quotes Ephesians i. 10, to show that all things were "brought to a head" in Christ, that He is the Word and the Wisdom and the Life, and the Pleroma of everything good and fair. And so he continues in various ways to prove that the Son of God and not the Flesh of the Son of God, was before all things, and that by Him all things were made. The new rendering, says Eusebius, with "possessed" instead of "created," is a better text for proving Divine Sonship, for what fairer possession could a Father have than a Son? This kind of reasoning can, as we have said, be paralleled in almost every theological discussion of the first five centuries. { We notice that it is only incidentally that the doctrine of the Trinity is proved from the *New* Testament. In every case, or in almost every case, the appeal is to the Old Testament. And the reason for this proceeding is clear. The proof was made, in the first instance, for the Jews, with whom an appeal to the New Testament was not valid, and it was made before the New Testament was written. So that to prove the doctrine of the Trinity, or to establish the Deity of Jesus Christ, which is the central point of the Trinity, from such passages as the prologue to John, the 1st chapter of the Epistle to the Colossians, and the 1st chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, would be to prove it from passages which had already drawn their proof from the Old Testament. Historically, then, the Old Testament is the real court of appeal. And whatever is said about Jesus Christ in the Christian creeds, which are the outcome of the Christian controversies, is a deduction from the great



passage in the Book of Proverbs, and from certain other related passages in the later Sapiential Books which form part of the Old Testament Apocrypha.

It will not do for us to say that this is not the way in which they ought to have done it. What we have to notice is that this is the way in which it was done. We work upstream, as we have suggested, until we find ourselves behind the Logos of the Fourth Gospel and in the Sophia of Palestinian believers and of the Book of Proverbs.

But if we do not like this way of study, we may proceed in the opposite direction, viz. by the method of hypothesis, and this, indeed, was the way at which we first arrived at the truth. We made a hypothesis that one of Christ's titles was His description as "The Wisdom of God"; and using that hypothesis we tested it to see what it would explain. It was easy to see that it at once explained the major part of the titles given to Jesus Christ in the New Testament, and nearly all the dogmatic statements that were made concerning Him in the Creeds. And since the value of a hypothesis consists in the explanations which it offers, we are entitled to claim that under this single assumption we have found the basis of the doctrine of the Trinity; and that from it there flows at once a whole series of proof-texts from the Old Testament, many of which are incorporated in the New Testament itself, and are the backbone of its theology.

At this point we have to stop and ask ourselves whether it is at all likely that such a title was assumed by our Lord, or given him by His disciples. We have always been taught that the two main titles given to Him in the beginning were, first, that He was the Messiah, and second, that He was the Son of God. For these

THE ORIGIN OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY

statements we have His own affirmations, and the confessions of His leading disciples. It would be quite wrong to obscure these points in the history of Christian doctrine, but it would be equally wrong to assume that they exhausted the primitive confession. How Jesus came to be called either "Christ" or "The Son of God," involves inquiry in two other directions. What is certain is, that along with these two recognitions, there was a third. Historically, the first impression He made upon His disciples and His compatriots was that of an abnormal, supernatural Wisdom.

(*Proverbs*, viii. 22-31 (Hebrew).)

{Wisdom speaks}.

*The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way,*  
Before his works of old.

I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning,  
Or ever the earth was.

When there were no depths I was brought forth ;  
When there were no fountains abounding with water.

Before the mountains were settled,  
Before the hills was I brought forth : (LXX. he begat me) :  
While as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields,  
Nor the beginning of the dust of the world.

When he established the heavens I was there :

When he set a circle upon the face of the deep :

When he made firm the skies above :

When the fountains of the deep became strong.

When he gave to the sea its bound,

That the waters should not transgress his command-  
ment :



THE ORIGIN OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY

When he marked out the foundations of the earth :  
Then I was by him, as a master workman :  
And I was daily his delight,  
Rejoicing always before him :  
Rejoicing in his habitable earth ;  
And my delight was with the sons of men.

THE DESCRIPTION OF WISDOM.

(*Wisdom of Solomon*, vii. 22-27.)

There is in her a spirit, quick of understanding, holy,  
*Only-Begotten*, manifold, subtle, freely-moving,  
Clear in utterance, unpolluted, distinct, unharmed,  
Loving what is good, keen, unhindered,  
Beneficent, loving towards men,  
Stedfast, sure, free from care,  
All-powerful, all-surveying,  
And penetrating through all spirits  
That are quick of understanding, pure, most subtle :  
For Wisdom is more mobile than any motion ;  
Yea, she pervadeth and penetrateth all things by reason  
of her pureness.

*For she is a breath of the power of God  
And a clear effluence of the glory of the Almighty ;  
Therefore can nothing defiled find entrance into her.*

*For she is an effulgence from everlasting light,  
And an unspotted mirror of the working of God ;  
And an image of his goodness.*

And she, being one, hath power to do all things,  
And remaining in herself reneweth all things ;  
And from generation to generation passing into holy  
souls,

She maketh men friends of God and prophets.

THE ORIGIN OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY

WISDOM'S PRAISE OF HERSELF.

(*Ecclesiasticus*, xxiv. 3-9.)

I came forth from the mouth of the Most High,  
And covered the earth as a mist.  
I dwelt in high places,  
And my throne is in the pillar of the cloud.  
Alone I compassed the circuit of heaven  
And walked in the depth of the abyss.  
In the waves of the sea and in all the earth,  
And in every people and nation I got a possession.  
With all these I sought rest,  
And in whose inheritance shall I lodge?  
Then the Creator of all things gave me a commandment ;  
And he that created me made my tabernacle to rest,  
And said, Let thy tabernacle be in Jacob,  
And thine inheritance in Israel!  
*He created me before the beginning of the world,*  
And to the end I shall not fail.

CYPRIAN.

(*Testimonies against the Jews*, Bk. ii. c. 1.)

That Christ is the First-born and that he is the Wisdom  
of God, by whom all things were made.

Solomon says in the Proverbs :—

*The Lord created me* the beginning of his ways for  
his works ; before eternity he established me : in the  
beginning before he made the earth and before he con-  
structed the depths, before the fountains of water issued  
forth, before the mountains were placed, before all the  
hills *the Lord begat me*. He made the countries and  
the uninhabitable lands and the habitable borders under  
the heaven. When he was preparing the heaven, I was



THE ORIGIN OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY

with him, and when he was setting apart his seat : when he was making the clouds above strong over the winds, and when he was laying the fountains established under heaven, when he was making strong the foundations of the earth, *then was I with him*, setting things in order. I was the one in whom he took delight. Daily was I joying before his face continually, when he was gladdened over the finished world.

Also the same Solomon says in Ecclesiasticus :—

I came forth from the mouth of the Most High, *the first-born before any creature*. I made the never failing light to arise in the skies, and like a cloud I covered the whole earth. I dwelt in the heights and my throne was in the pillar of the cloud. I encircled the ring of the heaven, and I penetrated the depths of the abyss, and I walked amongst the waves of the sea, and I stood in every land, and in every people and every race I had the pre-eminence, and by my power I trod on all hearts, lofty and lowly. All hope of life and power is in me. Pass over to me all ye who desire me, etc.

THE MARGENT OF THE GENEVA VERSION OF THE  
BIBLE AT PROV. VIII.

V. 22. He declareth hereby the diuinitie and eternitie of this wisdome, which he magnifieth and prayseth through this booke : meaning thereby the eternall Sonne of God, Jesus Christ our Saviour, whom St. John calleth the Word which was in the beginning.

V. 27. He declareth the eternitie of the Sonne of God, which is meant by this word Wisdome, who was before all time, and euer present with the Father.

V. 30. Some reade a chief worke : signifying that the Wisdome, euen Christ Jesus was equall with God his

Father, and created, preserueth and still worketh with him, as John v. 17.

V. 31. By earth he meaneth man, which is the worke of God, in whom wisdom tooke pleasure; in so much that for man's sake the Divine Wisdom took man's nature, and dwelt among us, and filled us with unspeakable treasures, and this is that solace and pastime whereof is here spoken.

SPENSER.

(*An Hymne of Heavenly Beautie*, ll. 186-206.)

There in his bosome *Sapience* doth sit,  
The soueraine dearling of the *Deity*,  
Clad like a Queene in royal robes, most fit  
For so great powre and peerelesse maiesty.  
And all with gemmes and iewels gorgeously  
Adorned, that brighter than the starres appeare,  
And make her natue brightnes seem more cleare.

And on her head a crowne of purest gold  
Is set, in signe of highest soueraignty,  
And in her hand a scepter she doth hold,  
With which she rules the house of God on hy,  
And manageth the euer-moving sky,  
And in the same these lower creatures all,  
Subjected to her power imperiall.

Both heaven and earth obey unto her will,  
And all the creatures which they both containe :  
For of her fulness which the world doth fill,  
They all partake, and do in state remaine,  
As their great Maker did at first ordaine,  
Through observation of her high behest,  
By which they first were made, and still increast.



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