

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



**PATREON**

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

**PayPal**

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_churchman\\_os.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php)

we learn anything about the Divine education of the world, and inasmuch as it has been handed down in the Jewish and Christian Church as written by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, our faith in the first principles of the Christian religion will be seriously weakened if we admit that writings so revered and so handed down are tinctured with serious error on the very points on which they have been supposed from the first to give us trustworthy information. In accordance with his theory, Principal Green regards the genealogies, which I have just suggested may have been inserted by a later hand, as being an integral part of the author's scheme.

J. J. LIAS.



### ART. III.—UNITARIAN DEDUCTIONS FROM THE "LOGIA."

A UNITARIAN writer of repute, in a recent publication on "The New Sayings of Jesus," commiserates the believer in the Divinity of Our Lord on the "extraordinary position" in which he must find himself owing to this discovery, and on the "painful perplexity" by which he is thereby beset. "If Jesus is God," he writes, "if the Gospels are an infallible record of His words and acts, how shall we find room even to entertain the question whether any discovery can be made of new sayings?" And again, "Believers in the Deity of Jesus may any day be called upon to revere and obey, as God's own word, sayings that sixteen hundred years ago passed out of human memory; or, still more probably, may find themselves left in suspense as to whether this or that is rightly attributed to Jesus, which for them is the same as whether it is to be considered Divine and obligatory or the word of some man, and of no more account than yours or mine." And he then concludes with the extraordinary assertion that "though the old documents were all proved fictitious, though new finds upset all that we had hitherto believed, yet would our faith be unmoved, for it is faith not in man, not even in the best of men, but in the Eternal God." The writer alluded to we believe to be an earnest and eloquent advocate of the Unitarian position, but the question irresistibly suggests itself as to whether he has at all adequately grasped the fundamentals of historical Christianity, or is acquainted with the essential principles of New Testament criticism. No more certain nor more powerful method is to be found, we are convinced, of combating Unitarianism than the persistent and detailed insistence upon the historical basis of the Faith and

the great Catholic dogmas, as opposed to individual opinions. The vague theories and declamations of German critics, taken at second hand by popular preachers, and asserted with confidence as though they were established facts, are to be met by appeal to the approved testimony of friend and foe alike in the early Christian centuries. The attempt, *e.g.*, to eliminate the supernatural element from the Gospel histories never stood so discredited as it stands to-day. Mr. Hargrove, whose words we have quoted above from *The Mill Hill Pulpit*, considers that by the recent discovery of the "Logia" the orthodox Christian is confronted by the following dilemma: "If these be really the sayings of Jesus, how is it possible to imagine that they can have been lost for sixteen hundred years? On the other hand, if their authorship be uncertain, you are left in suspense as to whether they should be considered Divine and obligatory, or merely the words of some man, perhaps not as good and wise as ourselves." In other words, all the sayings of our Lord must, according to this writer, have been recorded and preserved, and it is also inconceivable that there ever could be even a possibility of doubt as to the genuineness of such. This, which we take to be Mr. Hargrove's position, labours under the disadvantage of being completely at variance with the distinct and intentional assertions of the Evangelists themselves; and the history of the gradual *growth* of the New Testament Canon is the record of that very testing and weighing process of doubtful documents which he regards as inconceivable. In such matters it is well to be guided by established facts, rather than to support our arguments by preconceived opinions. Has Mr. Hargrove forgotten St. Luke's preamble, or the closing words of the epilogue to the Gospel of St. John? St. Luke explicitly refers to the numerous fragments of our Lord's teaching which were floating about in Christian circles, possible examples of which are these "Logia," while others are imbedded probably in Codex D. St. John—or the writer of the epilogue to his Gospel—plainly declares that "There are also many other things which Jesus did, the which if they should be written, I suppose that even the world would not contain the books which should be written." As Canon Mason points out, there is no reason to think that other writings of the Apostles, now lost, were less inspired than those still extant, any more than unrecorded words and acts of our Lord were less Divine than the recorded ones. But by the Divine Will they passed quickly out of sight, and the Church acquiesced in their disappearance. Moreover, that our Lord Himself left behind Him no writings of His own is in strict keeping with His entire methods. His revelation is not so direct that men are

compelled to accept it. There is room left for the exercise of the human faculties of criticism and judgment. Free play is given to our minds in dealing with the materials brought before them, and the very discharge of this duty constitutes as well the trial as the discipline of our intellectual life. Theories of verbal inspiration have endeavoured to invest the records of the Evangelists with that infallibility which only the actual writings of our Lord could have had, and in so far as they have succeeded, the result has been disastrous to the Faith. The last verses of the epilogue to St. John's Gospel furnish an instance of how a reputed saying of Christ's had obtained circulation in Apostolic days, and how St. John himself thought it necessary to show that this was not an utterance of his Master, but a popular gloss upon His words. Light is thereby thrown upon the method of the Evangelists in the compilation of their records and their critical anxiety to preserve a *correct* rather than a *complete* account of our Lord's deeds and sayings. These self-same "Logia" to which Mr. Hargrove refers quite possibly at that date were floating about, perhaps forming and colouring the religious atmosphere of the early Christian Church. Could they be indisputably proved genuine utterances of our Lord, nevertheless their omission from the sacred narrative would argue no carelessness, or forgetfulness, or actual ignorance, as St. John xxi. 25 goes to prove. Papias, as we know, wrote five books—not yet discovered—styled "Expositions of the Lord's Logia," in which he mentions that St. Matthew wrote the Logia in the Hebrew tongue. These lately discovered Logia were probably of the same class, though as twice they follow the tradition of St. Luke rather than that of St. Matthew, they are not likely to be identical.

Mr. Hargrove's charge must, therefore, be directed against the Evangelists themselves, because they did not do the very thing which they explicitly disclaim. As Professor Swete points out, the answer to the question why no such collection of Logia as this one in question found its way into the Canon of the New Testament, or has survived as a whole to our time, may well be, that the Church needed above all things, *histories* of the Lord's Life and Passion and Resurrection, the great facts upon which her Faith was built, to which even His personal teaching was subsidiary. The "sayings" detached from the history were useful for the meditation of the faithful to whom the facts were known, but for ecclesiastical purposes the complete records were essential. It comes to this, therefore, that the "painful perplexity" in which our Unitarian critic fancies that modern Christians must find themselves, on account of such discoveries as this of "The Sayings of Our

Lord," is built upon a total misconception of the set purpose of the Gospel narrators, against which they themselves plainly endeavoured to put us on our guard.

Can it be, however, that when Mr. Hargrove refers to this "painful perplexity," he rather has in his mind the possibility of some new teaching of Jesus being brought to light, or some fresh fact opposed to or contradictory of the received Christian Faith? This, I confess, seems to me to be the only valid foundation for the Unitarian position. "We do not—to assume their standpoint—know the whole truth as to the life of Jesus, and those records which have come down to us are not only imperfect, but also unhistorical. Could the simple story of His life be read to-day, in the clear light of history, undistorted by ecclesiastical prejudice or natural human hero-worship, the Church would be Unitarian not Christian." Such an assumption, however, is entirely opposed to the historical basis of Christianity. We do not profess to have an account of our Lord's life complete in every detail, but we do most emphatically maintain that, judging merely by the ordinary and received canons of history, what we do not know cannot contradict, however it may amplify, what we do know. The Catholic faith does, indeed, exhibit traces of development in the course of centuries, and there is evidence that it is for us being filled with a larger meaning than was apparent in Apostolic days. While, however, we hold that the Church of the living God has no voice so authoritative that it deprives us of our personal responsibility in forming a "right judgment in all things," yet she is the "pillar and ground of truth." She has a Divine deposit to guard, and, under the guidance of a Divine comforter, a Divine message to deliver; and he will be bold indeed who will count her rule of faith antiquated or obsolete, because with fuller knowledge and larger experience she has been enabled to read with more clearness between the lines of her charter. As Professor Bernard shows in "From Faith to Faith," "If we are challenged to explain where the permanent elements of Christianity are to be sought, we point to those truths which all Christians as a matter of fact hold in common, and have always held, or those doctrines to which Christendom is authoritatively committed by conciliar decrees. Of these the doctrine of the Incarnation stands pre-eminent." Here is a truth which is not an inference, but the expression of a fact; here is a truth which Christian devotion has ever guarded with jealousy, and which Christian theology has embodied in the Creed of the Catholic Church. It is both a literary and an historical absurdity to assume, as Mr. Hargrove seems to do, that the Evangelical biographers SS. Matthew and John, who lived with our Lord continuously

for three years, either were ignorant of important facts and utterances of their Master, or wilfully suppressed them. Such a state of affairs, I need scarcely add, is not likely to have escaped notice and exposure on the part of the vigilant and bitter foes who watched their every movement, so anxious were they to crush the infant Church. Let us take as an historical parallel, *e.g.*, the life of the late Cardinal Newman. His biographer, Mr. Purcell, was honest, and gave the complete record of Newman's career. He allowed the man in the different stages of his history to speak for himself. He exaggerates nothing, while at the same time he conceals nothing. The record, therefore, is the representation of what the life itself was, full of unexplained and inexplicable contradictions, and the assertion often of diametrically opposed propositions. Mr. Purcell had no ulterior purpose to serve, and so he records the real facts of the case. Suppose it had been otherwise, and that the Jesuit party had first published a biography expurgated to suit their own views, and that then, afterwards, Mr. Purcell and other creditable authorities had disclosed the true history of Newman's life in all its particulars, would not the volume of the Jesuits have at once been discredited? So assuredly it would have been had the last verse of St. John's Gospel been open to the implication that the Evangelists wilfully and designedly suppressed facts of our Lord's life damaging, as they conceived, to the progress of His cause. Any other supposition, *e.g.*, that the material facts as to our Lord's words and actions only came to light after the Apostle John had written, towards the close of the first century, is possibly conceivable by the brain of a lunatic or an ignoramus, but by none else.

If, therefore, I am correct in my account of the method and motive of the Evangelists in drawing up the four received Gospels, we cannot even imagine the possibility—*pace* the *Spectator*—of any such document as this newly-discovered Logia being valid to establish fresh articles of the Christian faith, or rules of Christian conduct. The fundamentals of Christianity are not chiefly to be discovered in the Sermon on the Mount, but rather in the Incarnation, the Passion, the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. By these acts Jesus revealed the nature of God and the possibilities of a sinless humanity. The Gospel record is mainly taken up with the narration of these great facts, which are then cast as seed into the waiting furrows of the world. May it not be that the controversies which have gathered round the *explanation* of these facts, and the different *deductions* drawn from them, have too frequently withdrawn attention from the facts themselves? We venture to suggest with all reverence that the teaching of Jesus would

never have been compressed into such a comparatively small space had it been deemed by the Spirit-taught biographers of such essential importance as the reiteration in divers forms of the facts of His life, which for the most part are allowed to speak for themselves. Our Lord chose to found His Church upon a revelation of the real nature of God, and His attitude towards men as manifested in Himself. Then, having given to us, as it were, a new point of view, and laid down a very few *principles* for our guidance, He bestowed upon the Church His Holy Spirit to guide it into all truth. This is the true, the necessary, the reasonable doctrine of development, according to which the meaning of these foundation verities grows clearer and more luminous with the passing of the years. The experience of our own necessities, and of the deep-seated cravings of humanity, is teaching us to see depths of meaning in the life of Jesus Christ uncomprehended by Augustine, or Jerome, or Pascal—may we not add of John or Peter or Paul? In short, the Christ has chosen, in His Divine wisdom, to teach men, not chiefly by Logia, few or many, but by "the things which He did and suffered," of which the widening, deepening consciousness of Christendom is furnishing an ever more complete elucidation as the centuries roll on.

R. W. SEAVER, B.D.



#### ART. IV.—AN EAST END FREE LIBRARY, AND WHAT IT HAS ACCOMPLISHED.

CLOSE by Bethnal Green Station there stands a unique institution which is a veritable lighthouse to the dense population around. No one who knows the conditions of life can fail to be interested in the Bethnal Green Free Library.

Many years ago now the late Rev. W. Tyler, D.D., initiated a humble effort to provide the working masses of the locality with opportunities for reading. At first the space in London Street prevented much progress, but gradually work rallied until to-day immediate extension is called for. It is always a great problem how best to permanently benefit the huge populations that dwell in the congested centres of East London. A humane administration of the Poor Law may do much to alleviate the distress—physical and otherwise. Settlements may do more to Christianize the masses, but pure literature is needed to supplement all efforts to improve the body. The Legislature has compelled the children to go to school, even though they go breakfastless, as thousands do in Spitalfields and Bethnal Green. At the earliest possible age