

In investigating any abstruse and difficult subject, it is often best to proceed from the known to the unknown, even although the unknown itself may happen to come first in the order of nature and of logical development. For this reason, it may be advisable to begin here with a brief preliminary examination of Christianity, which is not only the most familiar of all religions to us Christian nations, but also the best known in its origins : and then to show how far we may safely use it as a Standard of Reference in explaining the less obvious and certain features of earlier or collateral cults.

Christianity, then, viewed as a religious standard, has this clear and undeniable advantage over almost every other known form of faith—that it quite frankly and confessedly sets out in its development with the worship of a particular Deified Man.

This point in its history cannot, I think, be overrated in importance, because in that single indubitable central fact it gives us the key to much that is cardinal in all other religions ; every one of which, as I hope hereafter to show, equally springs, directly or indirectly, from the worship of a single Deified Man, or of many Deified Men, more or less etherealised.

Whatever else may be said about the origin of Christianity, it is at least fairly agreed on either side, both by friends and foes, that this great religion took its rise around the personality of a certain particular Galilean teacher, by name Jesus, concerning whom, if we know anything at all with any approach to certainty, we know at least that he was a man of the people, hung on a cross in Jerusalem under the procuratorship of Caius Pontius Pilatus. That kernel of fact—a man, and his death—Jesus Christ and him crucified—is the one almost undoubted historical nucleus round which all the rest of a vast European and Asiatic system of thought and belief has slowly crystallised.

Let us figure clearly to ourselves the full import of these