

We shall see hereafter that these two points—the gradual growth of a myth or legend, and affiliation upon earlier local religious ideas—are common features in the evolution of gods in general, and of the God of monotheism in particular. In almost every case where we can definitely track him to his rise, the deity thus begins with a Deified Man, elevated by his worshippers to divine rank, and provided with a history of miraculous incident, often connected with the personality of preexistent deities.

In the earlier stages, it seems pretty clear that the relations of nascent Christianity to Judaism were vague and undefined : the Christians regarded themselves as a mere sect of the Jews, who paid special reverence to a particular dead teacher, now raised to heaven by a special apotheosis of a kind with which everyone was then familiar. But as the Christian church spread to other lands, by the great seaports, it became on the one hand more distinct and exclusive, while on the other hand it became more definitely dogmatic and theological. It was in Egypt, it would seem, that the Christian Pantheon (if I may be allowed the expression in the case of a religion nominally monotheistic) first took its definite Trinitarian shape. Under the influence of the old Egyptian love for Triads or Trinities of gods, a sort of mystical triune deity was at last erected out of the Hebrew Jahweh and the man Jesus, with the aid of the Holy Spirit or Wisdom of Jahweh, which had come to be regarded by early Christian minds (under the influence of direct divine inspiration or otherwise) as a separate and coordinate person of this composite godhead. How far the familiar Egyptian Trinity of Osiris, Isis, and Horus may have influenced the conception of the Christian Trinity, thus finally made up of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, we shall discuss at a later stage of our enquiry ; for the present, it may suffice to point out that the Græco-Egyptian Athanasius was the great upholder of the definite dogma of the Trinity against opposing (heretical) Christian thinkers ;