

**THE VIEWS OF PRAXEAS
ON THE CHRISTIAN FAITH**

An Inquiry,

BASED ON SCRIPTURE,
INTO THE VIEWS HELD BY PRAXEAS,
WHO LIVED IN THE SECOND CENTURY,
RESPECTING THE CHRISTIAN FAITH.

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INTRODUCTION.

I RESPECTFULLY dedicate this essay to every thoughtful and intelligent, impartial and unprejudiced mind, and would desire he may read and consider it as to whether it supports or confirms the views which Praxeas, who lived in the second century, held and taught respecting the Christian Faith as it revealed to us in the New Testament.

To believe in a God, ruling and presiding over the unknown and unseen Universe, Omnipresent, Omniscient, and Omnipotent, is a mystery of the intensest kind. The question is put before us in the book of Job (ii. 7) "Canst thou by searching find out God?" and the reply is, No one. But when we add to the Mystery, as it is revealed to us under the Law, the revelation of the New Testament, the Mystery of the former becomes infinitely magnified, and hence arises such a variety of religious opinions.

These all revolve around and centre in a God.

The three most conspicuous and important of them are, I may say, those embodied in the "Athanasian Creed," those held by Praxeas, and those belonging to the Arians, or Unitarians.

An examination into these forms the contents of this essay, and I will here, therefore, only remark that the views of Praxeas seem to remove many of the difficulties which present themselves in the other two cases, and to place the Christian Faith in the simplest and easiest way for us to receive that we might say is possible.

*An Inquiry into the Views
Held by Praxeas*

WERE the views of Praxeas, who lived in the second century (and of Noetus and Sabellius who followed in his steps and held similar ones) respecting the Christian Faith Scriptural?

The views of Praxeas were these:

- I. That there is the Unity only one God—only and absolutely and essentially one.
2. That He revealed Himself to Israel under the titles of “I AM” of “Jehovah” and of “Father.” See Jeremiah xxxi. 9; Mal. i.6 and ii. 10; Psalms lxviii. 5 and ciii.13.
3. That when the “Spirit of God” is spoken Of in the Old Testament it simply means God Himself, and that this is the right Interpretation of all the passages in the New, where the “Spirit of God” or “Holy Spirit” or Holy Ghost” is mentioned, and that these are simply expressions to denote Jehovah.
4. That God, in the fullness of time, caused the virgin to conceive and bear the “Man—Christ Jesus”—the “Seed of the Woman” (as promised at the Creation—Genesis iii. 15) —in whom Jehovah dwelt, and that therefore although Jesus was “Man” in the humanity He was God Himself in the Divinity.

Such were the views of Praxeas. They present to us one God and one God alone—manifested to us under the titles of Father, Son, and Spirit, and they reduce to the greatest possible simplicity the intense and incomprehensible mystery of a Divine Being, who we term God, presiding and ruling over the Universe.

In considering, then, the doctrine of the Christian Faith, which Praxeas taught, it will be necessary first to dwell on the New Testament testimony concerning the Godhead of Jesus Christ. To me this testimony shines clear and convincing throughout its pages, and I proceed therefore to give what seem the leading and strongest passages in proof of it.

The first four verses in St. John's Gospel refer to Jesus Christ, and emphatically affirm His Godhead, but one of the most important affirmations in the Scriptures—and which I consider the strongest and most absolute of all—is when our Lord said to the Pharisees (John viii. 58), "Before Abraham was I am." Christ, in these significant words, declares Himself to be Jehovah—the God of Israel—Who revealed himself by the title to Moses (Ex. iii. 14), and this expression of Christ therefore shows that He claimed to be no less than God Himself—the God of Israel—that it was He Himself who spoke to Moses, led forth Israel out of Egypt, and brought them into the promised land, which He had promised their fathers.

The whole of Christ's discourse in this chapter, from the 16th verse to the end, is a declaration from Himself of His Divinity, which finds its climax in the 58th verse, "Before Abraham was I am."

We then learn that the Jews took up stones to cast at Him, but vainly, for in a mysterious supernatural manner, and unaccountable if He were only mortal like ourselves, He went through the midst of them, and so passed by.

Then in the 10th chapter of St. John, 36th verse, we read an affirmation by Christ of His Godhead—"I and the Father are One"—Which may stand side by side with that of "I am." This, like the preceding affirmation, declared to the Jews that He, Who was addressing them, was Jehovah, and so we learn that immediately after He had said "I and the Father are One," they took up stones again to stone Him, but a further discourse ensued—(see verses 32 to 38).

His last words to them were a re-assertion of His Oneness and identity with the father, which caused them again to try to take Him, but it was equally fruitless as before.

These are, I should say, the two clearest and strongest assertions by Jesus Christ of His Godhead during His earthly ministry.

Let us now proceed to consider other passages of Scriptures which, in a greater or less degree, corroborate them, and which I take in Scriptural order.

I. St. Matthews ix. 5 (along with Mark ii. 5-7 and Luke v. 18). “For whether is easier to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk.”

In this miracle our Lord expressly asserts His power to forgive sins, and have as the Scribes could not but admit, a proof of Divinity.

2. St. John v. This chapter narrates a lengthened discourse which Christ had with the Jews who “sought the more to kill Him, because He not only had broken the Sabbath, but said also that God was His Father, making himself equal with God.” And throughout this chapter there runs such an affirmation by Christ of His Humanity as “Son of Man” (His Virgin-birth) and of His Divinity, as possessing all and doing all that God Himself hath done or doeth that it seems impossible to explain or reconcile them, except according to Praxeas’s views.

3. St. Johns xii. 44 to end. The same reasoning applies to these verses as to the foregoing, for they proceed on the same lines.

4. St. John xiv. 9-11. “Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast not thou known Me, Philip? he that hath seen Me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of Myself: but the Father that dwelleth in Me, He doeth the works.” Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the very works’ sake. I doubt. Whether Praxeas would have chosen any other passage in the New Testament to illustrate his meaning or corroborate his views. Our Lord’s words, in their plain literal sense, seem emphatically to declare that He and the Father were One and the Same God; that the Godhead of the Father produced and dwelt in the

Humanity of the Son, and that therefore, so to speak, regarded from this point of view, Jesus Christ alone is God over all, blessed for ever. Amen.

5. Epistle to the Philippians ii. 6-11. St. Paul commences these verses by saying that Christ during His Ministry declared His Equality with God, or (as Praxeas would have said) taking the form of Man through the Virgin Birth and of His Crucifixion as Man.

6. Hebrews i. This chapter so blends the Godhead of Christ with His action in the Humanity that it seems impossible to reconcile them, except on the ground that the Father and the Son are precisely and identically the Same One and Supreme God, by Whom all worlds were created and from Whom proceeded the Virgin-Birth, Who then, and not till then, became the “Only-begotten Son of God” as St. John says in chapter i. 18, “No man hath seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the father, He hath declared Him.”

“The spirit of a man” is simply another form of expression to denote the man himself. So in the Old Testament whenever the “Spirit of God” is spoken of it is simply another mode of expression for God Himself. In the Gospels when our Lord speaks to the Apostles of the Holy Spirit, He says that He, equally with the Father, will send Him to them. Compare St. xiv. 26 with xv. 26, and throughout the New Testament wherever the Spirit of God or the Spirit of Christ is mentioned, there is no inequality or difference between them, but both are spoken of as being one and the same Spirit whether proceeding from the Father or the Son.

For two centuries there was never any thought or idea in the Church of the Holy spirit having a distinct and separate Being (essence) from Jehovah and from Christ, but the Holy Spirit was considered as an emanation from them. The doctrine that the “Holy Spirit” had an Essence, or Being, entirely distinct and separate from Jehovah and from Christ originated in the third and fourth centuries.

A difficulty to the reception of Praxeas's views seems to arise from our Lord's words which apparently make Himself and Jehovah two separate and distinct Beings. For, on Praxeas's views, when Christ was offering up prayer to Jehovah He would, in reality, be praying to Himself, but this difficulty may yield to the consideration that Christ in His Humanity was offering up prayer. As the time for the Crucifixion was drawing nigh an incident occurred, related by St. John (xii. 30), which seems to have a special bearing on the point we are now discussing. Our Lord shows the reality and acuteness of His Humanity by saying, "Now is My soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour." The divine then rises above the human, and Christ continues, "Father, glorify Thy Name. Then came there a voice from Heaven, saying I have both glorified it and will glorify it again. The people therefore, that stood by, said that it thundered; others said, An angel spake to him. Jesus answered and said, This voice came not because of Me, but for your sakes." "For your sakes." We seem thus to be required to understand that the cloud-voice was absolutely meaningless with regard to Christ but altogether intended for us—in other words, to lead us to believe in Christ. If, then, we are to consider that this utterance was in no way connected with the Lord, but was spoken to the world through the people who stood by, is it not thereby intended to show to us the Divinity and Humanity united in Christ at this time of our Saviour's ministry?

The Praxean views will thus refer such passages in the Gospels which seem to speak of Christ as less than God to His Humanity, such as St. John xiv. 28, "My Father is greater than I"; St. Mark xiii. 32, "But of that day knoweth no man, neither the Son, but the Father." I admit that these present a Difficulty which can only be removed by considering that Christ is here contrasting His Humanity as Son of Man with His Divinity as God.

To give another instance, and a forcible one. At the time of the approaching Crucifixion, Christ seems as though He were Man only—a Man like ourselves, with all the feelings of our human nature—when He offers up prayer to the Father, which followed on that we have been discussing, "That this cup might pass from Him." But is not this

simply a manifestation of the reality of His Virgin-birth? For, on the other hand, to manifest His Divinity, and that He could, if He Himself so willed, cause the “cup to pass from Him,” He had previously said, “I lay down my life that I may take it again. No man taketh it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself” (St. John x. 17, 18). And, in accordance with this, we find that Christ claims the same absolute power to prevent the Crucifixion by simply offering up a prayer in the opposite direction when He said to Peter (St. Matt. xxvi. 53, 54) “Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He shall presently give Me more than twelve legions of angles? But how then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?”

The Jews went as far as they could possible go by charging Christ that He claimed an equality with God, and on that ground sought to slay Him. Neither the Jews nor the Apostles could have accepted His words or believed in Him had He stated that He was Jehovah—their God—however true it might have been, because He then, and throughout His earthly ministry shewed Himself to them as a human being, in all respects like themselves in flesh and blood. His Godhead, Oneness with the Father, His identity (on Praxeas’s views) with Jehovah was a Truth that could only be unfolded in the future, and until He had been crucified, had risen from the dead, been seen of the Apostles during forty days and ascended into Heaven in their sight, in word and action, save only in His miracles, He was to exercise His human nature and feelings, exhibiting and proving thereby that in Him was the fulfillment of the Promise given at the Creation, “The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent’s head,” as well as of the words of St. Paul, “The first man is of the earth, earthy; the second man is the Lord from Heaven.”

In the Virgin-born therefore we behold the Humanity which fulfils the Creation prophecy and also the Divinity, for He is “The Lord from Heaven.”

An extract from Dr. Augustus Neander's "General History of the Christian Religion and Church," translated by Joseph Torrey.

"When Noetus was cited before an assembly of Presbyters at Smyrna about A.D. 230 to answer for erroneous doctrine, he alleged in his defence that his doctrine tended only to honor Christ. What evil do I, he asked, when I glorify Christ? The unity of God and Christ—this only God—was his motto. In proof, he appealed to Romans ix. 5, where Christ is called "God over all," and to the words of Christ (St. John x. 30), "I and the Father are one."

An extract from "Sketches of the Denominations of the Christian World," by John Evans, LL.D.

"Baron Emanuel Swedenberg, a Swedish nobleman, who died in 1772, founder of the Swedenbergian sect, denied a Trinity of *Persons* in the Godhead, but contended for a Divine Trinity in the Single Person of Jesus Christ alone of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, just like the human trinity in every individual man of soul, body, and proceeding operation, and he asserts that as the latter trinity constitutes man, so the former Trinity constitutes one Jehovah God, Who is at once the Creator, Redeemer, and Regenerator,"

About fifty years after Praxeas had disseminated his views on the Christian Faith, Arius, a Presbyter of Alexandria, arose and taught the exact contrary.

An extract from Mosheim's Ecclesiastical History."

"The doctrine of Arius was that the Son was essentially distinct from the Father; that He was the First and noblest of those Beings Whom God the Father had created out of nothing, the instrument by Whose subordinate operation the Almighty Father formed the universe, and therefore inferior to the Father both in nature and dignity."

An extract from “Sketches of the Denominations of the Christian World,” by John Evans, LL.D.

“The Arians acknowledged that the son was the ‘Word,’ though they denied it being eternal, contending that it had only been created prior to all other Beings. The Arians, though they deny that Christ is the eternal God, yet contend against others for His pre-existence. His preexistence they founded mainly on the two scriptural passages, ‘Before Abraham was I am,’ and Jesus’ prayer, ‘Glorify Thou Me with Thine own Self, with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was.’ These and other texts are, in their opinion, an irrefragable proof that Christ existed in another state before He was born of the Virgin Mary.”

An extract from “The Christian Religion of every Sect,” by R.R.

“Unitarians affirm that the Holy Spirit has no personal existence distinct from the Father. The son is a derived and dependent Being—either (as some believe) created in some remote period of time or (as others believe) beginning to live when He appeared on earth.”

A letter appeared in an influential London daily paper in December, 1904, which ran thus: The writer quotes the sixth chapter of St. John, the the sixth and four following verses of his fourteenth chapter, the third and fourth verses of his first chapter together with the opening verses of the Epistle to the Hebrews, and then says, “Having regard to these and other passages I submit that there can be no doubt that the New Testament teaches not only that Christ is One with God in Spirit but also in Personality.”

This, Praxeas surely would have said, is my doctrine.

The “Athanasian” Creed was undoubtedly composed to refute the doctrine of Arius—that Christ was a created being, in no essential respect different to ourselves—affirms emphatically over and over again His Godhead and lays it down in the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are one God and One alone.

The Creed commences by affirming that there is one Person of the father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost—and then, dwelling of the Godhead of each of these in various direction, it winds up by the closing affirmation that the whole three Persons are co-eternal together and co-equal.

It is difficult to reconcile these passages, for while the fifth stanza of the Creed makes them absolutely distinct and separate from each other, and then proceeds to declare each Person by Himself to be God and Lord, and yet but one God and Lord, the 26th stanza does not alter in any way the words of the fifth, but retains the distinct and separate personality of each, and apparently even adds to the complexity by saying, “But the three Persons are co-eternal together and co-equal.”

In conclusion, I may say that the reception of the views which Praxeas (followed by Noetus and Sabellius) held and taught would not, in my judgment, require any alteration of the mode in which, either in our own houses or in Church, we offer up our devotions. We should still pray to and praise the Father through the Son—for we simply address God in the Divinity, through Jesus Christ in the Humanity. We should still pray to God to give us the Holy Ghost, His Spirit, to guide, comport, and sanctify us or could invoke and pray to the Holy Ghost direct.

To sum up then, the tenets of Praxeas appear to me to rest on the foundation of the Scripture, to reduce the mystery of God to the lowest point of man’s capability to receive it, and, whilst we believe in but One Supreme and Everlasting God over all, yet that from Him is the Incarnate Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, born of the Virgin Mary, and that in the same Supreme and Everlasting God is the Holy Spirit which in times past spake unto the Fathers by the Prophets but after Christ’s ascension spake unto the Apostles and to all who have believed in Jesus Christ.

Let me close with a hymn in which, I doubt not, Praxeas would have heartily joined.

“Give glory unto God on High,
To Him Who arched the vaulted sky;
Who mighty earth’s circumference spanned,
And weighed the waters in His hand;
Gave life unto each living thing,
Created man their earthly king;
Then gave His Son for man to die,
Give glory unto God on High.

Give glory to the Son, Who came,
Clothed with our fleshly mortal frame;
Who bare our sins, vouchsafed to give
Himself to die that we might live;
Was holy, harmless, undefiled,
Patient when spurned, dumb when reviled;
Who, in the agony of death,
Poured for His foes His parting breath;
Was perfect God and Man in One,
Give glory to the Incarnate Son.

Give glory to the Holy Ghost,
Who, on the day of Pentecost,
From Heaven to earth devouring came,
Descending as in tongues of flame;
The promised Comforter and Guide,
By Whom the soul is sanctified;
Who still is manifest within
To prompt to good, convict of sin,
Ye saints on earth, ye heavenly host,
Give glory to the Holy Ghost.

Join all on earth with Heaven above
In honour, blessing, glory, love;
Sing praises to the great I Am,
Sing praises to the spotless Lamb,
Sing praises to that Power Divine
Which sanctifies the inner shrine,
That so the Father’s glorious Name,
All creatures “Hallowed” may proclaim,
And, through the spirit shed abroad,
“Confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.”

