

# 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 *Journal of the Transactions of the Victoria Institute* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_jtvi-01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_jtvi-01.php)

JOURNAL OF  
THE TRANSACTIONS  
OF  
The Victoria Institute,  
OR,  
Philosophical Society of Great Britain.

---

SECRETARY: E. WALTER MAUNDER, F.R.A.S.

---

VOL. XLVIII.



LONDON:

(Published by the Institute, 1, Central Buildings, Westminster, S.W.)

---

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

1916.

## 578TH ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING,

HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOM B, THE CENTRAL HALL,  
WESTMINSTER, ON MONDAY, MARCH 20TH, 1916,  
AT 4.30 P.M.

E. J. SEWELL, ESQ., IN THE CHAIR.

The Minutes of the preceding Meeting were read and confirmed.

The SECRETARY announced the election of the Rev. J. W. Hayes, Miss M. K. Purcell, and Mrs. Katherine Tod as Associates of the Institute.

The CHAIRMAN invited the Rev. Prebendary H. E. Fox, M.A., to deliver his lecture descriptive of "Inscriptions and Drawings from Roman Catacombs."

The lecture was illustrated throughout by lantern slides.

---

### *INSCRIPTIONS AND DRAWINGS FROM ROMAN CATACOMBS.* By the Rev. Prebendary H. E. Fox, M.A.

THE value of the Inscriptions in the Catacombs, especially those around and near Rome, has long been recognized as illustrating the religious and social life of Early Christianity. Though a large number were probably destroyed before the discovery of these burying places in the sixteenth century, sufficient remain and are preserved in various galleries to enable students to gain a good general idea of the conditions of the first four or five centuries. So many visitors to Rome have at least looked into the old burial places that it is hardly necessary to describe the branching galleries with their chapels, sometimes in two or three stories below ground, where, cut in the soft rock and closed with large earthenware tablets, were the resting places of countless bodies.

For the Christians followed the example of the Jews in burying their dead. The pagans disposed of theirs by cremation, placing the ashes in urns which were deposited in chambers just below the level of the soil, known as columbaria from the resemblance of the rows of niches to pigeon holes. Two of these ancient places close to one another are still in excellent condition. They are on the Appian Way and are believed, on authorities given by Bishop Lightfoot, to have belonged to the

“household of Cæsar.” In his Commentary on the Epistle to the Philippians the Bishop gives twelve names found there which are those of persons mentioned in the Pauline Epistles. Though it is impossible to prove the identity, the appearance of such names together, in connection with the place where they would naturally be found, creates at least a strong probability. The Bishop quotes one to Tryphena, erected by her daughter and Valerius Futianus her son-in-law. The lecturer had the great satisfaction immediately after copying the inscription *in situ* to come across one in the adjoining Columbarium where Tryphosa is mentioned. He believes that it has never been published in England. It is as follows:

D.M.  
 VARIA TRYPHOSAE  
 PATRONA ET  
 M. EPIIUS CLEMENS  
 CONJUGI BENE  
 MERENTI · FEC  
 VARIAE PRIMAE  
 VIXIT ANN XXX

The introduction of Tryphosa's name beside that of her mistress in the inscription to the elder sister, suggests that she was a long trusted servant in the family, perhaps the nurse of the two girls, and had remained with the younger when the elder sister married. It is all the more interesting, as the first two letters D.M. (Dis Manibus) imply that the family by whom Tryphosa was so valued was heathen, or at least obliged to conform to heathen usage.

Inscriptions bearing two other Pauline names were also copied by the lecturer in the same Columbaria.

\* AMPLIATVS RESTITVTO FRATRI SVO FECIT  
 MERENTI  
 DOMITIAE L FAVSTILLAE PETRONIO ARISTONIS L  
 EPAPHRAS

In contrast with the scanty material of the Columbaria the mass of inscriptions from the Catacombs is so great that in the limits of a single paper only a few prominent features can be referred to.

---

\* Ampliatius has placed this for his own brother Restitutus who was worthy—Epaphras to Faustilla freed woman of Domitia (and) Petronius freed man of Ariston. *Cp.* Romans xvi, 8; Colossians i, 7; iv, 12.

I. In the variety of religions which it tolerated, provided they acknowledged the divine supremacy of Cæsar, Rome was perhaps the most polytheistic city that has ever existed. Into this "sentina gentium" came the strict monotheism which the Christians fearlessly acknowledged and the purity of life which they practised. An early inscription in the Catacomb of Domatilla runs, "May the only God guard thy soul." The Pagan letters D.M. were used with a new interpretation, "Deo Maximo," and this was applied to Christ. Another inscription refers to the "Divine Kingdom of Jesus Christ." He is frequently represented as the Good Shepherd watching sheep and goats. The familiar symbol of the Fish spoke of Him as "Son of God, Saviour." In several cases He is figured in the act of calling Lazarus from the grave. And the Johannine emblem of Alpha and Omega is common. Though references to the Holy Spirit are rare, a beautiful Greek inscription in the National Museum speaks of one who "lies here in the Holy Spirit of God."

II. References to the character which Christian faith produced are very frequent, and making all allowances for the exaggeration of love, are very suggestive.

In the Cemetery of Callistus a Greek inscription represents one Septimius using the Pauline phrase "Servant of God," and saying "Having lived worthily (also Pauline) I do not regret that I have served Thee, and I shall give thanks to Thy Name."

Another in Latin from the same place, with a date in the 4th century, runs: "To Secunda, well deserving, of wondrous goodness, who lived chastely in the pure faith twenty years. She died in peace, a faithful maiden, on the Ides of July. She will be at rest. A dove without gall."

Another about the same date is described as "of wondrous innocence and of the old faith, as God wills."

Sometimes the stone bears an inscribed figure with uplifted hands in the attitude of prayer.

III. Invariably the thought of the after life is that of peace, rest, and refreshment, and such brief inscriptions as the following are very common:—

"Agape, thou shalt live for ever."  
 "God shall refresh thy spirit."  
 "Gemella sleeps in peace."  
 "Arethusa is in God."

Other instances are characteristic of many—

“In Jesus Christ (is) Carpus the servant of God.”

“Athenodorus my son thy spirit (has entered) into rest ” (the word used in St. Matt. xi, 29).

Some give evidence of belief in the Communion of Saints still uniting dead and living. One, for instance, in the Vatican Gallery, ends with the request: “And in thy prayers do thou ask for us, for we know that thou art in Christ.”

Another, in Greek to a “blameless babe,” who “lies here with the Saints,” has the words: “Remember us in thy holy prayers,” to which a postscript is added in smaller letters “Yea and the sculptor and scribe also.”

IV. Inscriptions to martyrs are few, but the following have special interest. The first two are in Latin. Under a cross with equal limbs (the earliest which the Lecturer could discover) are the words “Lannus, Christ’s Martyr, rests here, having suffered under Diocletian.” There were two persecutions in this reign, one at the close of the third century, another at the beginning of the fourth.

“Primitius is in peace, who after many tortures (died) a most brave martyr. He lived thirty-eight years more or less. To (her) very dearest husband well deserving—placed (this).” With exquisite pathos the poor widow omits her own name as if unworthy to stand beside her brave man.

The next is unique. The letters are somewhat rudely Greek, but the words are Latin. It runs as follows: “Here lies Gordian, an envoy from Gaul, slain for his faith with all his family, they rest in peace. Theophila a handmaid placed (this).”

This inscription was discovered in A.D. 1659 by Aringhi in the Catacomb of Sta. Agnese. Maitland (page 134) quotes a statement by Julius Cæsar (*De Bello Gallico*, lib. vi) to the effect that the Gallic Druids were accustomed to use Greek letters in secular transactions and that they had charge of the education of the young. It is probable, therefore, that though Theophila, who had come from Gaul, had learned Latin by ear, she had only learned to write in Greek. The stone cutter, ignorant of letters, required a written inscription. The poor servant did her best, but could only express Latin words in Druidical Greek letters, naturally very irregular.

V. Inscriptions to Church officers show that ecclesiastical order was highly developed: though there is no evidence that an Apostle was ever Bishop of Rome. A well-known tablet in the Lateran Gallery bears what are perhaps the portraits of Peter and Paul, and the names of various bishops from the

second to the fourth century have been recorded. Inscriptions to Presbyters and their wives and children, to deacons, readers, and exorcists are frequent. A large stone in the Lateran Gallery marked the tomb of "Dionysius physician Presbyter."

The grave-diggers seem to have formed a sort of guild, and several inscriptions record the bargains made with them in the life-time of those who were to occupy the tombs.

VI. Professor Orr has lately pointed out, as others have done before, that it is a mistake to suppose that Christianity attracted only the lowest classes of the city. It is well known that members of the Imperial Household and even Family were among the converts. The inscriptions confirm the fact that the new religion reached all classes.

An officer of the Pretorian Guard places a tablet to his wife.

A lady, who adds the letters C. F. ("Clarissima femina") to her name, describes her "most dear" husband by the letters V. E., which mean that he was of Equestrian rank. Another, C. F., who calls her husband "incomparable," adds that he was V. P. ("Vir Patricius").

Tradesmen and artisans are well represented in the inscriptions, and trusted servants have their virtues recorded. A master, for example, places the inscription in Latin: "Here lies Notatus, a most faithful slave." Another in Greek runs: "To my sweetest and faithful servant" (the word describes one born of slave parents and brought up in the house) "her mistress, Artonia has placed this." Another, using the same word, speaks of "Our sweetest Peter."

VII. It is in the allusions to family life that naturally the influence of Christianity is most fully shown. Inscriptions of parents to their children, and children to fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters to each other, all breathe tenderness, affection and hope. Thus a husband and son describe the "incomparable wife, a woman of genuine purity, who lived twenty-five years two months four days two hours." The pathetic exactness in recording the age occurs again in several cases. "To a holy and most honoured wife," "To his revered and sweetest consort," "To a most excellent sister," "Bonosa to Bonosus her son. We are sleeping in our Lord," are typical instances out of many. In every case they speak of deep affection, unbroken by death, and the comforting consciousness that the loved ones are in peace and rest.

VIII. Besides Christian cemeteries, another, discovered by Bosio, has been with good reason assigned to Jews. No signs of Christian terms have been found, but several features point to

Hebrew use, such as the seven-branched lamp and oil jar, the word "synagogue" and occasionally Hebrew characters.

A very fine stone, now in the Lateran Museum, has the lamp, oil jar, and ivy leaf in duplicate, with an inscription which might be either Jewish or Christian. The words are in Greek: "Here lies Primitiva with her child Euphrainon, their sleep is in peace." Another, also in Greek, has the touch of a pagan spirit, "Here lies Nicodemus the ruler of the Suburrans and beloved by all, aged thirty years and forty-two days. Be of good cheer, blameless youth, no one is deathless."

The Suburra might be described as the Whitechapel of Rome, and Nicodemus held the same office there that his famous namesake held in Jerusalem.

Another is interesting as combining the same three languages as those in the inscription on the Cross of our Lord:

"Here lies Faustina. Peace."

The first words are in Greek, including Faustina, which is a Latin name. The last is in illiterate Hebrew script. There are also rude figures of the branching lamp and oil jar.

IX The Lapidarian Gallery in the Vatican makes no attempt at any arrangement of inscriptions indicating date or locality, but places the Christian on one side and the pagan on the other. The contrast is very striking; the Christian all bearing witness to the peace and hope of the after life; the other breathing bitterness and remorse, or selfishly agnostic. A few taken at random illustrate the soil into which the seeds of Christianity fell and from which so marvellous a harvest sprung.

"To a most sweet babe whom the angry gods have committed to eternal sleep."

"What I ate and drank I have with me, what I left I lost."

"No animal is more ungrateful than man."

"I, Procope, lift up my hands against the angry gods who carried me off in my innocence."

"While I lived I lived well. Now my play is over, soon yours will be acted. Farewell and applaud me."

This is not an occasion for moralizing, but the earnest wish may be expressed that the Antiqua Fides of the first centuries may be the Perpetua Fides of our later days, and bear the same noble fruits of character and service.

## DISCUSSION.

The CHAIRMAN said that they had listened to a most delightful lecture and one of absorbing interest. Those who had not had the good fortune to visit Rome owed an especial debt of gratitude to the Lecturer, for he had shown them many things that afternoon, things of the utmost interest, that in probability they would miss if they themselves were to visit that city. He felt sure that all there present would unite in returning their cordial thanks to the Lecturer.

It would be noticed from what the Lecturer had told them that the favourite representation of our Lord in the Catacombs was as the Good Shepherd. But in the literary remains which had come down to us from the second and third centuries, our Lord was hardly ever mentioned under this figure. He was spoken of as the Son of God, as the future Judge, and in many other relations and offices, but not as the Good Shepherd. For those who wrote books and treatises were the theologians, the literary men, but the inscriptions in the Catacombs gave us the thoughts of the parents, the children, the slaves. The theologian spoke of the Trinity and of the Incarnation; the child thought of Jesus as the Good Shepherd, Who carried the lambs in His arms.

It should be further borne in mind that no representation of our Lord found in the Catacombs pretended to be a portrait of Him. They were merely symbolical representations. The Roman Christians had been too recently converted from idolatry to attempt to represent our Lord's Person.

Mr. MAURICE GREGORY said that he should like to emphasize the remark of the Chairman as to the symbols in the little chapels in the Catacombs. They were all of a deeply spiritual character, the very frequent "fish," for instance, as a type of feeding on Christ, as the central object of a supper scene, the common food of the slaves who formed such a large proportion of many of the early congregations, with its anagrammatic signification in the Greek "Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour," a simple and most inclusive creed. Then there was the frequent symbol of Jonah and the whale, reminding them of the Resurrection, and many others. Few of these early worshippers could read, but they heard the Scriptures continuously read from one end of the year to the other, as

the hundreds of Church Lectionaries, belonging to practically all the Churches, Eastern and Western, bear eloquent witness. The little pictures were memory signs of great significance of the great spiritual truths by which they lived and died.

The Lecture had been listened to throughout with the greatest attention and interest, and at its close, after the remarks of the Chairman and of Mr. Gregory, there was no disposition on the part of the audience to enter into any critical discussion, but a somewhat informal conversation ensued. In its course, Professor LANGHORNE ORCHARD pointed out that the symbol of the Cross did not appear in the inscriptions until after the second century. Archdeacon BERESFORD POTTER made the comment that it seemed to him natural that the early Roman Christians should avoid the mention of the Cross. To them, it was the symbol of heathen cruelty and of the loss of life of One Who, to them, was above all other.

The thanks of the Meeting were returned to the Lecturer by acclamation, and the Meeting adjourned at 6.0 p.m.