

The bearing of the doctrinal system of the fourth gospel on the question of its genuineness [continued]

Autor(en): **Lias, J.J.**

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THE BEARING

OF THE

DOCTRINAL SYSTEM OF THE FOURTH GOSPEL

ON THE QUESTION OF ITS GENUINENESS.¹⁾

III. The Doctrine of the Logos and the Person of Christ.

(Continued.)

My last paper was nothing more than a brief introduction to the evidence contained in the New Testament concerning the doctrine of the Person of Christ originally proclaimed to the world by the first founders of His Church. It gave reasons for the belief that the idea of the Personal Logos was by no means peculiar to St John, but that it was not obscurely intimated in the Scriptures of the Old Covenant, while *all* the New Testament writers were perfectly familiar with it. As we have already seen, the fact that the Synoptist Gospels make no mention of the Logos is in no sense a proof that the appellation, as applied to Christ, was unknown to them. Their object was to lead men up to the conception of Christ's Divinity by a simple biography of his life on earth. No impartial student of the Synoptic Gospels can deny that the Christ of those Gospels was altogether superhuman in His utterances, attributes, and general character. Thus, then, there is evidence that Christ was known as the Logos to *all* members of the Christian Church in the first century, though that evidence will undoubtedly appear more conclusive to some minds than to others.

¹⁾ See the International Theological Review, n. 56, p. 706—711.

We proceed to investigate the attributes of the Logos, as described in the Fourth Gospel. It will be found hereafter that these precise attributes are ascribed to Him in all the letters and books which assume the first principles of the Christian religion as their basis. We have already seen what the word Logos itself teaches concerning Him to Whom it is applied¹⁾. The Logos, as the word implies, is the unfolding of the true nature of that which it represents. And it must in a sense become incarnate, take the form of a *word*, in order to communicate its essence from one mind to another. And so St John describes the nature and functions of the Logos. Originally Divine²⁾, existing beside (or *alongside of*) God³⁾, dwelling within His Bosom⁴⁾, directing His gaze eternally on the Father from Whom He derives His Being⁵⁾, it is His office to reveal the Father to mankind⁶⁾. Though co-existent with the Father⁷⁾, he yet speaks of Himself as distinct from the Father. In some sense, then, though human language, here as elsewhere, is unable to define quite clearly in *what* sense, He is to be distinguished from the Father, even though He must necessarily have the same essence, Mind, and Will. The sense in which He is to be distinguished from His Father is to be found in the fact that He is not Himself the original source of all existence, but has a *derived* Life. He is the Only-begotten Son⁸⁾. He continually speaks of God as His Father, that is as the source from which His Divine Life proceeds. He says also that He “came forth” from the Fountain of all Being⁹⁾. He even describes Himself as sent by, or from the Father¹⁰⁾. His “Name” which in St John, as in the Hebrew Scriptures *passim*, is used as the symbol of the Nature of God, was given Him by the Father¹¹⁾. The difficult passage “My Father is greater than I”¹²⁾ can hardly be explained in any other way than as signifying that His Divine Life is His by derivation from the

¹⁾ Int. Theol. Rev. for July 1906, p. 708.

²⁾ Θεός ἦν ὁ Λόγος. The absence of the article indicates, as most scholars now admit, that the Logos is substantially Divine.

³⁾ ὁ ὢν παρὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ. ⁴⁾ ὁ ὢν εἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ πατρὸς. I, 18.

⁵⁾ πρὸς τὸν Θεόν. So Liddon, Bampton Lectures (1st Ed.) V, p. 342.

⁶⁾ I, 18. The word ἐξηγέομαι means to *lead out*; hence to *reveal* or *explain* anything. ⁷⁾ I, 1, 18, Cf. VIII, 58; XVII, 5, 24. ⁸⁾ I, 14, 18; III, 16, 18.

⁹⁾ XVI, 27. ¹⁰⁾ IV, 34; V, 23 ff.; VI, 39, 44 &c, &c. ¹¹⁾ XVII, 11, according to the best MSS. ¹²⁾ XIV, 28.

Father, unless we are to contradict what He says of Himself elsewhere. In accordance with this, He ascribes His Life Itself, His Authority, the superhuman powers He displays, to God as their giver¹⁾. But there is no contradiction whatever to this when He, as the Jews complain, makes Himself equal with God²⁾; when He declares that He is in the Father and the Father in Him³⁾, obviously in a sense altogether unique; when He speaks of Himself as existing in heaven⁴⁾ while yet appearing in human shape on earth. He claims self-existence⁵⁾. He cannot therefore be annihilated by the Father. And yet He admits that this fundamental prerogative of all is derived by Him from His Father⁶⁾. Other specially Divine prerogatives He derives from Him Who sent Him. The Life inherent in Himself, a Life which He is able to transmit to others, according to their capacity for receiving It, comes from the Father⁷⁾. He is the Truth, even as His Father is the Truth⁸⁾. All power is His⁹⁾. Even the Life He is authorized to give, is given to Whom He wills to give It¹⁰⁾. And so He is able to propose Himself as a pattern for all men to imitate, and to challenge His critics to find a single blemish in His character¹¹⁾.

It is needless to dwell with any fulness of detail on the evidences with which St John furnishes us that this Divine Being was also truly Man. But no more convincing proof can be given of the genuineness of his Gospel than the fact that he insists as strongly upon the true Humanity as upon the true Divinity of Jesus Christ. Had he been inventing his facts; had he been the author of a Gospel which seeks to convert a remarkable man into a Divinity, as some would have us believe, he would have betrayed his object by isolating it. That is to say, he would have kept the humanity of the man whose apotheosis he designed to effect in the back-ground. But he does nothing of the kind. Nowhere are the tokens of Christ's Humanity, in its weakness as well as its strength, more evident than in this Gospel of the Eternal Word. He is tired with a journey. He weeps, not tears of pity over Jerusalem, which rejects His Mission, but at the grave of a friend. The Agony is not related,

¹⁾ V, 19, 20, 22, 26, 27, &c. ²⁾ V, 18; X, 33. See also *ὁ ὢν παρὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ*. VI, 46. ³⁾ X, 38; XIV, 9, 10, 20; XVII, 21, 22. ⁴⁾ III, 13. ⁵⁾ V, 26, Cf. I, 4. ⁶⁾ V, 26. ⁷⁾ XVII, 2; Cf. XV, 1—7, and V, 21. ⁸⁾ XIV, 6; Cf. I, 14. ⁹⁾ III, 35; XIII, 3, XVII, 2; Cf. Matt. XXVIII, 18. ¹⁰⁾ V, 21. ¹¹⁾ VIII, 46.

but yet He is “described as troubled in spirit”. He maintains special human relations of friendships with the “disciple whom He loved”, and with the household of Lazarus of Bethany. And even after His Resurrection, His true humanity is still represented as conjoined with His true Divinity. His disciples “did eat and drink with Him after He was raised from the dead”. Nor should we forget that the writer of the Fourth Gospel is not so far carried away by his doctrine of the mystical, Sacramental, and Atoning character of Christ’s Death as to forget to record, as he alone of the Evangelists does, the cry of human weakness on the cross, “I thirst”. Neither does he neglect the fact, that as a dutiful son, the world’s Redeemer remembers the claims of humanity, and sanctifies the family relation by providing for the earthly wants of His Mother at the moment when He was at once bearing and taking away ¹⁾ the sins of the world. The Fourth Gospel, in fact, tells precisely the same story as that promulgated in all the other writings of the New Testament. The Synoptists imply it; all other writings in the New Testament directly assert it. Jesus Christ is “God manifest in the Flesh”.

Of course we find the same doctrine of the Logos in St John’s first Epistle. The most reasonable theory of the relation of that Epistle to the Gospel is that it is a kind of Preface, or Introduction. Just as people in these days, in order to recommend their books to a public among which books are somewhat too plentiful, get an introduction or preface from some well known person, so St John sends this Epistle round with his Gospel, as a kind of *résumé* calling attention to the principles which he desires to lay down in it. Some hyper-critical writers ²⁾ have objected that there are doctrines in the Gospel which are not found in the Epistle. But that is only to say that a book of twenty-two Chapters, and many of them long ones, contains a good deal which could not be readily embodied in a short *résumé*, written chiefly with a practical aim, of the main features of the larger book. The subject of this Epistle, as is stated in its opening words, is “the Word of Life”. The close resemblance of this phrase to “the Word of Truth” of St James strengthens the argument in my last paper. The Light in which God

¹⁾ *αἰών*. ²⁾ Among them Dr Davidson, an English critic.

dwelleth is revealed to man through Him¹). It was His task to manifest to us the Life which is with the Father²). He is the Only-begotten of the Father, and to deny Him is to deny the Father³). The Epistle marks at once the identity of Essence and the distinction of Person between Him and the Father⁴). Sinlessness is one of His attributes⁵). The words "which of you convicteth Me of sin" have evidently sunk deep into the heart of him who reported them. On the other hand the humanity of Christ is not for a moment forgotten. He is not only "sent by God", but "come in flesh"⁶). "Our hands" the Apostle says "have handled Him"⁷). Those who have not investigated the matter have no idea how close is the similarity, not only in teaching, but in the results of that teaching, between the Epistle and Gospel on the question of the *results* of the Incarnation.

The Apocalypse presents to us the same Divine and Human Figure as the Gospel and Epistle, though the form of the representation is different. Without attempting to prejudge the question whether the former is the work of the Apostle John or not, we may at least remark that the difference in style may be explained by the fact that the Apostle in the former is relating visions of his own, in the latter he is either repeating the words of his Master, or writing an introduction to the book which contains them. But the doctrine of all three books is precisely identical. Jesus Christ is the Word of God. He is King of kings and Lord of lords⁸). He is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last, the Living one Who holds the keys of Hades and of Death⁹). Blessing comes down to us, not only from the Father, but from His Son Jesus Christ. And it is further remarkable that in this gift of blessing the Father and the Son are both associated and distinguished¹⁰). Worship is paid to the Son which inferior beings most scrupulously decline¹¹). Nor is this all. He is repeatedly and carefully associated with the Author of all

¹) I, 5; II, 8. ²) I, 2. ³) IV, 9; II, 22, 23. ⁴) V, 20. There is an ambiguity in the word Person which misleads many. When used of the Three Persons in the Trinity it does not, of course mean that each is an independent source of Will and Thought. ⁵) III, 5, 7. ⁶) IV, 2, 14. ⁷) I, 1. ⁸) XVII, 14; XIX, 13, 16. ⁹) I, 11, 18. ¹⁰) I, 4. ¹¹) I, 17; V, 8, 13; VII, 10. Cf. XIX, 10; XXII, 9.

being, as One to Whom worship may fitly be paid¹). To Him belongs the right to give or to withhold the gifts of which he speaks in His message to the Churches²). Yet His humanity is no less clearly affirmed. When He appears in the visions, it is in human shape, though the humanity which belongs to him is infinitely superior in glory to that in which He appeared in the days of His humiliation³). Then, again, He is the Lamb which had been slain, but Who now receives the tribute of adoration from the highest of created beings⁴). He is the first begotten (*πρωτότοκος*) from the dead⁵). He is the "Lion of the tribe of Judah", the "root of David"⁶). He is the man-child of the woman who appears to represent at once the Church of the elder and the later Covenant. And after he has drawn upon Himself the utmost wrath of him who in the Gospel is called the Prince of this world. He is caught up to heaven and to the Throne of God⁷). Criticism of the destructive order has, as far as it was able to do so, wrought great havoc with the Apocalypse. Yet its doctrine corresponds in every particular to that of the rest of the New Testament.

Our next task is a review of the teaching of the Synoptic Gospels in regard to the Person of Christ. As we have already established the fact that they designedly avoided any explicit statements of His Divinity, we can only expect to find that their general tendency leads their readers in that direction. One remarkable fact must not be left unnoticed. The special human traits in the character of our Lord, His capacity for personal and filial affection, His liability to the weaknesses as distinguished from the corruption of humanity, even His giving way to tears on occasion, are more marked in the Gospel which boldly asserts His Divinity than in those which confine themselves to the incidents of His earthly life. This corroborates the conclusion we have already drawn, that the Synoptic Gospels were intended to lead their readers insensibly to the conclusion which, if stated at first, and without circumlocution, would probably have deterred unbelievers from reading them.

¹) Cf. in V, 13; VII, 9—17; XI, 15; XII, 11; XIV, 1—4; XX, 6; XXI, 22; XXII, 3.

²) See ch. II, III. ³) I, 13; XIX, 11—16. He appears, it is true, as the Mystic Lamb. But the Lamb is obviously the Figure of His Humanity.

⁴) V, 8. ⁵) I, 5. ⁶) V, 5. ⁷) XII, 4, 5.

The Synoptic Gospels, in fact, to whomsoever they were originally addressed, had unbelievers mainly in view. The Fourth Gospel was addressed to members of the Christian Church, and could therefore venture to put in the forefront the fundamental truth of the Christian religion. The fact that the readers of that Gospel had been fully instructed in that fundamental truth would enable the writer to speak more fully of the indications of the true Humanity in Christ's earthly life than would be desirable in narratives which made no direct allusion to His Divinity. Of *indirect* allusions to it the Synoptic narratives are full. St Matthew and St Luke begin by narrating the miracle of His Virgin Birth. To them He was what he was to the Epistle writers and to the Christian Church, the *καὶνὴ κτίσις* — the Second Adam. St Luke, in his first two chapters, the style of which distinctly betrays a Hebrew origin, incorporates into his Gospel a memorandum full of the portents attending the Saviour's birth, including the message of the angel who was Divinely commissioned to announce it. The attitude of Elisabeth, the birth of whose son was miraculous in its character, and miraculously announced, towards the Virgin Mother, as well as the incident of the babe leaping in her womb at the Virgin's arrival, indicate that Jesus was far more than an ordinary man. Every thing that follows tends to strengthen that impression. Professor Seeley, although himself not a professed believer in Christ's Divinity, remarks on the fact that, whereas other great teachers have directed the attention of their hearers to their doctrine rather than their person, Jesus directed the attention of His disciples to His Person more than to His doctrine¹).

He further remarks on the extraordinary, and, on the part of a mere man, exorbitant claim to authority that Jesus puts forth. Many persons who are enraptured with the morality of the Sermon on the Mount, utterly fail to see the pretensions to infallible authority put forth in that first proclamation of His Message. "Moses", He said, addressing those who firmly believed that great Law-giver to have been entrusted with a

¹) *Ecce Homo*, ch. IX, p. 94 (1st Ed.). This testimony of a sceptic to the conclusions to which the Synoptic Gospels lead, though written some forty years back, can never be altogether out of date.

mission from God—"Moses gave you this or that command¹⁾. But I tell you something different". He bids men come, not to God, but to Him. He declares that though "heaven and earth shall pass away, His Words shall not pass away"²⁾, and the bold declaration is supported by nearly 2000 years of subsequent history. The authority with which He spake was acknowledged by all who heard Him³⁾. Nor is this all. He appears, even in the Synoptic narratives to be One to Whom sin is an impossibility. Neither sin nor error are once predicated of Him. He is a Master, who demands implicit obedience from His disciples⁴⁾. It is their paramount duty to confess Him before men⁵⁾. No earthly tie must stand for a moment between Him and those whose submission He demands⁶⁾. He is the Lord of the Sabbath, and greater than the Temple⁷⁾. He claims to forgive sins, and enforces that claim by miracle⁸⁾. He accepts homage which is not only declined by His disciple St Peter, but by the angel in the Apocalypse⁹⁾. These high, and in a mere man blasphemous claims are supported by the possession of vast and superhuman powers. Cures unnumbered display His command over the laws of health and disease. He anticipates or accelerates the working of the natural laws by which mankind are fed¹⁰⁾. The spirits of the unseen world, evil as well as good, own His power¹¹⁾. And He even restores the dead to life¹²⁾, not, as in every other instance recorded in Scripture, in dependence on Divine power, but by an authority inherent in Himself. In fact, as St John puts it, He "quickens whom He will".

¹⁾ "What prophet ever set himself above the great Legislator, above the law written by the finger of God on Sinai? What prophet ever undertook to ratify the Pentateuch as a whole, to contrast his own higher morality with some of its precepts in detail, to imply even remotely that he was competent to revise that which every Israelite knew to be the handiwork of God? What prophet ever thus implicitly placed himself on a line of equality, not with Moses, not with Abraham, but with the Lord God Himself?" Liddon, *Bampton Lectures*, p. 252. ²⁾ Matt. XXIV, 35. ³⁾ Matt. VII, 29. ⁴⁾ Matt. XXIII, 8. ⁵⁾ Matt. X, 32; Luke XII, 18. ⁶⁾ Matt. X, 37; Luke XIV, 26. ⁷⁾ Mark II, 28; Luke VI, 5; Matt. XII, 6. ⁸⁾ Mark II, 5-10. ⁹⁾ This follows from the acceptance of *προδύνησις* by Him, while Apostles and Angels refuse it. ¹⁰⁾ Matt. XIV, 21; XV, 28, &c. ¹¹⁾ In the miracle at Gadara, and elsewhere, as well as the continual ministry of angels. ¹²⁾ The daughter of Jairus and the son of the widow at Nain.

Two other points, and only two, will be mentioned on this head. The first is that, incidentally, yet quite distinctly, the Divine title is given to Jesus by S^t Matthew and S^t Mark. The first declares that He is “Immanuel”, that is “God with us”. The second applies to Him the words of Malachi, in which the prophet speaks of a Messenger who should come in God’s good time to “prepare the Way of Jehovah”. In other words, S^t Mark identifies Him of Whom he writes with the Eternal, Self-existent God. The other point is the similarity in form between a passage occurring in S^t Matthew and S^t Luke with the language of S^t John throughout his Gospel. The words are these: “All things are delivered to Me by My Father, and no man knoweth the Son but the Father, neither knoweth any man the Father but the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal Him.”¹⁾ A great deal of ingenuity has been displayed in evacuating this declaration of its force, and many a modern critic has, here as elsewhere, resorted to the simple but arbitrary expedient of declaring it an interpolation. But the fact remains that in two of the Synoptists we have a plain declaration, the more forcible from being found only once in the pages of each, that Jesus Christ was in the habit of teaching in the form in which S^t John represents Him as teaching, and that his representation of the unique relation between the Father and the Son is also theirs²⁾.

I must reserve an examination of the rest of the New Testament on the doctrine of Christ’s Person for a future paper.

J. J. LIAS.

¹⁾ Matth. XI, 27; Luke X, 22.

²⁾ “If we try to regard the objective facts from a subjective point of view, we find in S^t John only the completion of the Synoptic narratives. Extraordinary and gifted individuals are frequently susceptible of this treatment and seem different individuals when regarded from different points of view. The Synoptists present the external and national side of the life of Jesus, rather than its deeper side—that in which it must have presented itself to the consciousness of original Christianity.” Grimm, on the “Trustworthiness of the Evangelic narratives”, p. 66. The author of *Ecce Homo* illustrates this remark by a reference to the portrait of Socrates drawn by Plato and Xenophon respectively.
