

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

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THE BEARING
OF THE
DOCTRINAL SYSTEM OF THE FOURTH GOSPEL
ON THE QUESTION OF ITS GENUINENESS.¹⁾

II. The Doctrine of the Being of God.

I. The first point in the argument from the doctrine of the Being of God as laid down in the Fourth Gospel is its freedom from any of the corruptions which gathered around the conceptions of God in the later ages of the Christian Church. Its leading idea is unquestionably the Loving Fatherhood of God. In later days, in the East as in the West, God came for centuries to be regarded as a God of Wrath, rather than of Love. Even in the latter part of the second century these fiercer conceptions of the Deity began to manifest themselves in the teaching of divines. The stern view of His Nature which produced Novatianism and Donatism presented itself in the Montanism of Tertullian. The language of Irenæus concerning heretics is severer by far than that of S^t Paul and other Apostles, who only denounce heresy strongly when it results in moral

¹⁾ In p. 78 of my last paper I state that *πίστις* "does not occur in S^t John". By this I obviously meant his *Gospel*. *πίστις* occurs in 1 John V, 4. *σωτηρία* occurs in the Gospel (ch. IV, 22), but hardly in the sense in which it is used in the Epistles, but rather in that in which it is used in the Hebrew Scriptures. *χάρις* is applied to Christ in S^t John I, 14, to His disciples in *vv.* 16, 17. But here it is S^t John who is speaking, and not his Master. He may fairly be supposed to be using the word in its later applied sense. I might have said on p. 78 that *πιστεύω* occurs 95 times in a Gospel of twenty one chapters, and only 45 times in the eighty seven chapters of S^t Paul's Epistles.

pollution. The tenderness towards error displayed by the martyrs of Vienne and Lyons stands out in clear relief when contrasted with that of the martyrs a little further down the stream of history. Not the least shadow of these harsher tendencies appears in the Fourth Gospel. On the contrary, the idea of God which it contains is even tenderer and more touching than that presented to us in the Synoptists. If the Gospel of S^t John is free from the slightest tendency to substitute for the All-Father the deification of human qualities and passions which the Christians of later ages imbibed from the heathenism around them, the inference is a strong one that in this Gospel we have the genuine teaching of Jesus Christ.

(1) What, then, are the leading features of its doctrine of God? It places in its forefront the great principle that *God is Spirit*, or *Breath*¹⁾. This fundamental principle is Jewish in its origin. It comes straight from Gen. I, where the Divine Spirit is said from the beginning to have been fluttering over the abyss, that is, stirring it to its depths²⁾. The word *πνεῦμα* is not in use among the Greek philosophers. The idea of an ultimate source of the being which is eternally breathed forth from that source is originally found, so far as I am aware, in the Hebrew Scriptures alone. There is nothing anthropopathical in that conception. It takes us away from any comparison of God with man, and transports our ideas to the Eternal Fount of all Being, and to the Life and influence which eternally flows from that fount³⁾. In the discourse in which this great declaration is made, Jesus rejects the idea that God is to be worshipped in any particular spot, as though He were nearer or more accessible there than elsewhere,—an idea which might seem to have been favoured by the appearance of the Shekinah in the Tabernacle and in the Temple. But all important as the

¹⁾ S^t John IV, 14.

²⁾ In spite of the considerable amount of consent with which Professor Driver's theory of the origin of the Pentateuch have been received in England, I must continue to regard Gen. I as the manifesto of the founder of a new religion.

³⁾ Cremer, in his *Lexicon*, correctly distinguishes between *πνεῦμα*, *ψυχή*, and *σῶμα*. The first is "the Divine Life-principle", the second "the individual life in which it is manifested", the third "the material organization vivified by the second".

declaration is, it is encumbered with no dialectical or metaphysical subtleties. It stands alone in its majestic simplicity, as comprehensible to the meanest intellect as to the mightiest, yet warning us against the corrupting materialism which misleads men of degraded and carnal minds. The idea of God taught by Jesus Christ appeals, not to the senses, but to man's inner moral Being. Who but the Divine Word Himself could have made this the starting point of His doctrinal system?

(2) The second idea on which St John's Gospel insists is that God is Truth¹). Once more we have the assertion, in another form, that the God of the New Testament is the Eternally Self-existent one, the Jehovah or Jahveh of the Old Testament. He is the Truth, because the Truth is that which is. The opposite of truth is the lie, which is that which is not²). God is Himself the idea of all that is and ought to be. And from this fact alone we might draw the inference which is so often drawn in the Scriptures, that all that is not in or from Him must in the end be eternally destroyed.

(3) Then, thirdly, God is Life. He is the "Living Father"³). His prerogative it is to "have life in Himself"⁴)—a prerogative which he communicates to His Eternal Son. There are no metaphysical abstractions here. God is not spoken of in this Gospel as modern philosophies love to speak of Him, as "the Infinite", "the Absolute", "the Unconditioned", terms which rob Him of many of His most necessary attributes. He is not "the Infinite", for "the Infinite" is that which contains all, and He has no room within His Being for what is Evil. He is not "the Absolute", for the Absolute is that which can enter into no relations, and our finite minds cannot conceive of Him save through the relation He bears to His creatures. He is not "the Unconditioned", for even He exists under conditions, for

¹) St John V, 32, VII, 28, VIII, 26. We may note in passing that Jesus asserts His essential unity with the Father in XIV, 6, and the Apostle, in the Prologue to his Gospel, claims this unity for Him (I, 14).

²) St John II, 21, 27. Cf. the precisely identical teaching of Rev. XXI, 27, and XXII, 15, where the lie is regarded as the eternal opposition to the Will of God.

³) VI, 57.

⁴) V, 26. Cf. I, 4, 18.

He is and must be, perfect Justice, Mercy, and Love¹). But He is the Force or Power which exists behind all other things. He is not merely the means by which Life is produced. He is Life itself. One essential condition of His Being is that He is ever-living Himself, and the source of all life in others. If life is a mystery to us, when we try to investigate its laws, it is because it comes down from the Father and Lord of all, the conditions of Whose Existence must ever remain a mystery to us.

(4) Once more, God is Light²). Light and Life are often regarded as closely allied in Scripture³). Certainly light is to vision what life is to action. And as there can be no action without vision, it may be said that life would be valueless without light. The pulsations by which light is conveyed through the ubiquitous ether must in some way resemble those by which life is conveyed to all the beings which possess it. Moral and spiritual death were in the world by reason of its alienation from God. The Light which enlightened our spiritual vision, was inseparable from the Life which restored life to man's decayed and slumbering energies. It is inconceivable that such magnificent ideas as these, so completely in harmony with the latest scientific discoveries in the world of matter, could have originated with any but the Eternal Word, Who came to breathe Life into those who received Him, and to pour Light into their blinded eyes⁴). The criticism which would deprive this Gospel of all its close connection with the author of Christianity is a criticism which confines itself to trivialities and *minutiae*. It requires a larger and more comprehensive view of a great question to "rise to the height of the great argument" of the Revelation of God in Christ.

(5) God is Love. This statement is, it is true, made categorically only in St John's Epistle. But it is no more than an

¹) I prefer "perfect" to "infinite" when speaking of attributes of God which are necessarily conditioned by other attributes. God's mercy is not "infinite", because it is conditioned by His justice. Similarly His justice is not infinite, for it is tempered by His mercy. But neither His justice nor His mercy could be "perfect", unless each were conditioned by the other.

²) St John I, 5, II, 8, III, 19. Cf. ch. I, 4, 5, VIII, 12, IX, 5. Here again the essential unity between the Father and the Son is asserted.

³) See John I, 4, VIII, 12, &c. See also Ps. XXXVI, 9.

⁴) John VIII, 12.

epitome of the teaching of Jesus Christ on that head, recorded in the Fourth Gospel. The Mission of the Son to save the world is explicitly based on the love of God for all the world¹). The love of the Father for all who believe on the Son is proclaimed with equal explicitness. The whole seventeenth chapter of the Gospel breathes the spirit of love with which mankind are regarded by the Father and the Son, and the climax of the argument is reached when Jesus prays that the love with which the Father loved the Son may flow through the Son into the hearts of those who believe on the Father through the Son, and may knit them together in a community by means of that Love²). A comparison of St John's Epistle with his Gospel appears to tell us that God's Love is not a mere feeling of affection, such as human beings are wont to feel for one another, but an energizing principle which, when implanted in the soul, produces moral results attainable in no other way³). As elsewhere so here the essential unity between Father and Son is indicated by the Apostle, who predicates the same qualities of the One as he does of the Other. But the consideration of this point must be deferred till we come to deal with the teaching of Christ concerning His Sonship. Neander has observed that St Paul "never says that God, being hostile to men, became reconciled to them through Christ, but that they, being enemies to God, became reconciled to Him"⁴). This deep distinction is equally found in the Gospel of St John. There is no difference in the words of Jesus, as reported in that Gospel, between the Mind of the Father and that of the Son in regard to sinners. The Son is moved by love to come into the world to save them, and to save them by reconciling them to God. But it is the "Father's work" which He came to perform⁵), the Father's Love which He came to manifest⁶).

(6) He is a God of justice. His Love is no mere human amiability. It is compatible with an unchanging hatred to sin and, in the last resort, even to sinners. Nowhere else will

¹) John III, 16, 17.

²) John XVII, 26.

³) John V, 42, cf. 1 John II, 5, III, 16, 17, IV, 9.

⁴) Planting and Training I, 450 (Bohn's Translation).

⁵) John IV, 34, V, 17, 20, 36, IX, 4, XVII, 4.

⁶) V, 20, XII, 49, 50, XV, 15, XVII, 6, 26.

more startling denunciations of His wrath against impenitent sinners be found than in this Gospel, which has ever been regarded as the emphatic proclamation of His Love¹).

(7) He is beyond the range of mortal vision. If S^t John tells us that “no man hath seen God at any time”, it is because he learned it from his Master. Only He Who exists beside (*παρά*) God, hath seen the Father²). Other men have neither heard His Voice nor seen His shape³).

(8) He is the Father; the originator of all being, created or uncreated. From Him the Being even of the Eternal Son is derived⁴). If the Spirit is sent by Christ, that Spirit nevertheless comes forth originally, not from the Son, but from (*παρά*) the Father⁵). And though S^t John, in saying that all “things were made by (*διά*)” the Divine Word, is not quoting the exact words of Jesus Christ, yet he derives his authority for what he says from the words “Whatsoever things the Father doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise”, and also “the Father which dwelleth in Him, He doeth the works”⁶).

(9) Again, God is a Person. It is necessary carefully to define this word, for the sense in which it is applied to God is not the same as that in which it is applied to the Three Persons in the Blessed Trinity, and the failure to observe the distinction has been the source of much mischief. When we speak of God as a “Person”, we mean One who is capable of exercising a Mind and Will of His own. He is not a mere abstract principle or Force. He is capable of what are called personal relations with His creatures. He regards them with love and tenderness or wrath and alienation. He gives honour to the Son⁷). He commits His prerogatives into the Son’s Hands⁸). The Son speaks of His Will, His pleasure, the work He has

¹) V, 20—29, IX, 39, XII, 48.

²) VI, 46. The preposition seems to indicate His having a place of equality beside the Father.

³) V, 37.

⁴) V, 26.

⁵) XV, 26. Here again the preposition appears to indicate unity of essence.

⁶) V, 19, XIV, 10, 11. Cf. X, 38, XVII, 8, 21, 22.

⁷) John VIII, 32.

⁸) John V, 22.

given His Son to do¹). He bears witness to and sends the Son²). He sends the Holy Spirit³). He can be addressed in prayer, and can both hear and answer it⁴). He is neither the abstraction of the metaphysician, nor simple existence—the *τὸ ὄν* of Plato and of Philo. He is the source of all activity and energy, the “Persistent Force” of modern physical science. Every work which goes on in the world for good proceeds originally from Him. And though S^t John does not speak explicitly of a Trinity, as other Apostles do, Its Existence may be very readily inferred from what, according to his Gospel, Christ tells us. But the Persons in that Trinity, as we have just seen, are no independent Essences. Within the bosom of the Godhead there is but one Will, one Mind, one Activity, one Energy. Eternal distinctions exist between Father, Son and Holy Ghost. But between Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, as there is no inequality, so there is no possibility of essential difference or antagonism.

(10) And so, lastly, God is One. The Unity of Father and Son is distinctly declared by Jesus Christ⁵). This unity is further described as one which consists in the possession of one Life, manifesting itself in the exercise of one Mind and Will. The Son does what the Father does, and the Spirit carries that Mind and Will out in His action on phenomena and intelligent beings, the object of this mysterious Trinity being to gather all together, without destroying the individuality of any, into a complete union of wills and affections, hopes and desires, by the impartation to each of the Being of the Infinite Author of all.

II. Our next task is to inquire how far this doctrine concerning God is reconcilable with the teaching of the Synoptists on the same subject. We have already seen that to lay down propositions concerning the Being of God and that of the Redeemer and Saviour does not come within the province of the Synoptists. They deal simply with the incidents of His Life on earth. But no doubt they intended inferences to be drawn

¹) VI, 38, VIII, 29, XVII, 4.

²) John VIII, 18, V, 37.

³) John XIV, 26.

⁴) John XI, 41, 42, XII, 27, 28, XIV, 16, XVII throughout.

⁵) S^t John X, 20.

as to the Nature of God, and of His Son. Our business then is to inquire how far these inferences agree with the teaching of the Fourth Gospel, and whether there is any contrariety between them. As we have already seen, any definite dogmatic statement in regard to the Being of God cannot be expected of the Synoptists. Such statements form no part of their plan. Yet as the Gospels of S^t Mark and S^t Luke were written by close companions of S^t Peter and S^t Paul, the Synoptists, as has already been hinted, are not necessarily antagonistic to dogmatic statements on such points in their proper place. That proper place, they clearly believed, was not in narratives which were intended to induce men to enter upon the consideration of the truths which Jesus laid down. We do not therefore find any categorical assertion that God is Spirit. But we do find in a writing by one of the Synoptists that God "giveth to all life, and breath, and all things" ¹⁾. And if we find no such protest against the localization of God as is found in the discourse of Jesus to the woman of Samaria, we find considerable emphasis laid on the truth that "God dwelleth not in temples made with hands" ²⁾. This statement, when made by S^t Stephen, seems to have enraged his hearers. Although he supported it by a passage from Isaiah, it appears to have been regarded as a denial of the first principle of the Jewish religion, which was supposed to be that God's Throne was at Jerusalem. S^t Paul, we may well believe, was as transported with fury as any of the rest, though he made amends for it afterwards by an open confession of his sin, and by quoting S^t Stephen's very words in his address at Athens. Thus, then, the doctrine that God is Spirit, if not expressed, is implied in the writings of one at least of the Synoptists. That God is truth will not be found directly stated in the Synoptists. But that Jesus must have indirectly implied it is clear from the words of the Pharisees, "we know that Thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth" ³⁾. Jesus had at least come from God to teach men about God, and He had done so in a way which had convinced his hearers that truth was an essential feature in His

¹⁾ Acts XVII, 24.

²⁾ Acts VII, 48.

³⁾ Matt. XXII, 16; Mark XII, 14. Cf. Luke XX, 21.

teaching. From this it may not unfairly be inferred that Truth was one of the attributes of Him, Whom Jesus came to reveal. The representation of God as Life is in agreement with the words of S^t Paul, recorded by a Synoptist, that God gives life. He could not give what He did not possess. If God is not expressly spoken of as Light by the Synoptists, yet they represent Jesus, Who came to reveal Him, as giving light to mankind. S^t Matthew regards the Mission of Christ to the people of Galilee as fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah which speaks of a great "light" having "sprung up" in those parts of Palestine ¹). Zachariah is reported by S^t Luke as speaking of his son John the Baptist as destined to "go before the face of the Lord", and proclaim Him as the Day-Spring (*ἀνατολή*) which should "give light to them that are in darkness and the Shadow of Death" ²), and Simeon speaks of the Holy Child he bare in his arms as "a light to lighten the Gentiles" ³). If God is not spoken of as Love, it is nevertheless needless to prove that throughout the Synoptist narratives Love is regarded as one of His chief attributes. He is constantly spoken of as a loving Father, Whose Will it is to "give good gifts to them who ask Him", and it would be simple waste of time to prove a fact so obvious to the most careless reader of the Gospels ⁴). That his Love is qualified by His attributes of Justice and even Severity is equally clear, and it is equally needless to prove the fact at length ⁵). That He is represented as a Father, the originator of all things, is a proposition it is also unnecessary to prove. And His Personality, in the sense in which it has already been defined, is as distinctly asserted in the Synoptists as by Jesus, as stated by S^t John. It can also be deduced from what has just been stated. The Unity of God is not left to be inferred. Our Lord sets His seal on the teaching of the books of Moses on this point. "Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God is One Lord" ⁶), and He approves the answer of the scribe that "there is One God, and there is no other but He" ⁷). Nor can we fail to infer the

¹) Matt. IV, 16.

²) Luke I, 79,

³) Luke II, 32. See also Acts XIII, 47, XXVI, 23.

⁴) Matt. VII, 11.

⁵) Matt. XXIV, XXV; Luke XII, 46, XVI, 19—31, &c.

⁶) Mark XII, 29. Cf. Deut. VI, 4.

⁷) Verse 32.

unity of God from the passage in which the Trinity is expressly asserted. If Christians are commanded to baptize “into (*εἰς*) the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit”, we do not fail to remark that though we are commanded to baptize into Three Persons, their name is nevertheless declared to be but One Name.

I must leave the consideration of the identity of the doctrine of the Epistle-writers on this head with that of Jesus as recorded in S^t John, for another paper; as also the establishment of the fact that this doctrine is no new thing, nor derived from any Gentile source, but is emphatically that taught in the Hebrew Scriptures, of which Jesus said “He came, not to destroy, but to fulfil” them. It will be needless to shew that S^t John’s report was not manufactured out of Philo, because I apprehend that this assertion, though once very confidently made, is no longer persevered in. But it needs no very minute examination of Philo’s writings to shew that his able and original attempt to blend an allegorical interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures with the Platonic philosophy is as far as the poles are asunder from the still more majestic originality of the teaching of Jesus as reported by S^t John.

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