

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 Being of God (continued).

We come now to the Epistles. If S^t John represents Jesus Christ as declaring that God is Spirit, S^t Paul makes the same statement no less definitely. *πνεῦμα ὁ Θεός*, says our Lord, as reported by S^t John, *ὁ δὲ κύριος τὸ πνεῦμά ἐστιν*, says S^t Paul. And the context seems to imply that by *ὁ κύριος* he means the Jehovah or Jahveh of the Old Testament, of Whose Name *ὁ κύριος* is the usual Greek translation. The Spirit of which he speaks is that Divine Power which gives life to man's soul. I will not take up my readers' time by demonstration that this doctrine that God is Spirit is the foundation of Christian system, because it is not, I apprehend, denied that this is the case. I will only, therefore, add that the position of the Holy Spirit in New Testament theology postulates a source of His Being who is Himself Spirit. That the Father, from Whom all Being flows is immaterial and invisible—essential characteristics of Spirit—is also very clearly stated. Accordingly, if S^t John²⁾ lays down the principle that "no man hath seen God at any time", and puts this declaration into the Mouth of Christ³⁾, so S^t Paul, in one of his most eloquent descriptions of the Majesty of God, reaches his climax in the words "Whom no man hath seen, or can see"⁴⁾. And the anonymous author of the Epistle

¹⁾ See the International Theological Review, n. 54, p. 275-284. ²⁾ I, 18.
³⁾ V, 37; VI, 46. ⁴⁾ I Tim. VI, 16. Cf. I, 17. Also Rom. I, 20.

to the Hebrews speaks of God as “the unseen”¹⁾. Next, if St John represents our Lord as proclaiming Truth to be an attribute of God, St Paul is in no way behind him. God is ἀψευδής²⁾. The fact that He is worthy of trust is appealed to as undeniable³⁾. His judgement is according to truth⁴⁾. His Revelation is the Truth, the Word of Truth, the Truth of God⁵⁾. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews tells us that it is “impossible for God to lie”⁶⁾. St James has imbibed the same doctrine. God hath “begotten us by the Word of Truth”⁷⁾, whether the Apostle means the Logos of St John, Who is, as He tells us, essentially “the Truth”, or the Word spoken by Him, which is no less true than He Himself is. Still more emphatically do the Epistles bear witness to the fact that God is Light. Every one of them testifies to this truth. St James calls God “the Father of the Lights”⁸⁾, i. e. the source from Whom all light proceeds. St Peter calls the Light (φῶς) which streams from Him “marvellous”⁹⁾ and notes that this Light is “His own”. St Paul describes Him as “having His abode in the unapproachable Light”¹⁰⁾. And all those who are His derive this Light from Him by virtue of their union with Him by faith¹¹⁾. With Light, as in St John, Life is once more closely associated. Eternal Life is the Gift of God¹²⁾. He cannot give what He does not Himself possess. St James and St Peter associate themselves with this doctrine¹³⁾. The latter tells us that we are “begotten by the Word” (again it is by no means certain that he does not mean the Personal and not the spoken Word) “of the Living and Abiding God”. The term “Father”, so continually given to Him under the New, so seldom under the Old Covenant is also a witness to this fact. If God is not explicitly described as “Love”, still Love, with the Epistle writers, is the most prominent of His attributes. It is scarcely necessary to cite passages to prove this fact. It is summed up in the word “Grace”, which is everywhere described as the Divine attitude

¹⁾ Ch. XI, 27. If this be denied, at least it must be admitted that he holds the invisible to be the sphere in which the Deity dwells. Cf. 1 Pet. I, 8. ²⁾ Tit. I, 2. ³⁾ 2 Cor. I, 18. ⁴⁾ Rom. II, 2. ⁵⁾ Rom. I, 25; 2 Thess. II, 13; Eph. I, 13; Rom. II, 8; 2 Cor. IV, 2. ⁶⁾ VI, 18. ⁷⁾ James I, 18. Cf. John XIV, 6. ⁸⁾ James I, 17. ⁹⁾ 1 Pet. II, 9. ¹⁰⁾ φῶς οὐκ ὁρατὸν ἀπρόσιτον, 1 Tim. VI, 16. ¹¹⁾ Rom. XIII, 12; Eph. V, 8; Col. I, 12; 1 Thess. V, 5 &c. &c. ¹²⁾ Rom. VI, 23. Cf. Tit. I, 2; III, 5—7. ¹³⁾ James I, 18; 1 Pet. I, 23.

to His redeemed ones. One of the results of being “strengthened with might by His Breath within (*εἰς*) the inner man is that we are thereby rooted and grounded in love”¹⁾. Christ came to manifest His kindness and love to man²⁾. His love is shed abroad in our hearts, and no power is able to separate us from it³⁾. And yet His Justice and severity is as strongly proclaimed as His Love. No one who has read the first two chapters of the Epistle to the Romans, the second Epistle to the Thessalonians, or the Epistle of St^t Jude, or the second of St^t Peter, could doubt this. Nor does the Epistle to the Hebrews come short of any of the others in maintaining this truth, though its twelfth chapter displays the mercy of God to penitent sinners in no less moving terms. Lastly, the Unity of God is everywhere declared, and especially in that striking passage in the Epistle to the Ephesians where the One God and Father of all, who dwells within all His creatures, is described as the power which makes His Church to be “one body and spirit” in Him⁴⁾.

The last point we have to discuss is the source or sources of St^t John’s doctrine of God. And this will be seen beyond all doubt to be the Hebrew Scriptures, and them alone. His conception of God agrees with that of the Old Testament in every particular. If St^t John is a monotheist of the most uncompromising character, his monotheism has no points of contact with any other religious system, but only with that which the Jewish Scriptures, with one consent, hand down to us. Whether we regard monotheism as evolved from polytheism, or whether we take the view that the latter was a corruption of the former, the religions of the world, or at least of that part of the world with which Jews came into contact, were almost universally polytheistic. Egypt, Phœnicia, Babylonia, Greece, Rome—all these races worshipped a plurality of gods. Whatever the religion of India may originally have been, it had become polytheistic long before the Old Testament Canon was complete. There is no evidence that Judaism and Buddhism had ever come into contact, and even if they had, Buddhist conceptions of God differed very widely from those of the Jews. Persian

¹⁾ Eph. III, 16—18. ²⁾ Tit. III, 5. ³⁾ Rom. V, 5; VIII, 35. Cf. Jude 21.
⁴⁾ Eph. IV, 4—6. Cf. 1 Cor. VIII, 6; XII, 6, 12, 13.

religion approached nearer to the monotheistic type. But a marked Dualism was one of its characteristics. And, as has already been remarked, the blending of Jewish religious ideas with those of the Platonic philosophy, which, already distinctly visible in the utterances of the author of the Book of the Wisdom of Solomon, found their fullest representation in the writings of Philo, differs fundamentally from the leading conceptions found in the Gospel of S^t John. Not only is the latter, in common with the Jewish Scriptures, entirely out of sympathy with the view which makes out matter to be essentially evil, but, as will be seen, it rejects all abstract conceptions of God. It does not attempt to define what He is in Himself, but views Him from the practical point of view of His relations with his creatures.

(1) First of all then, S^t John accepts the Hebrew doctrine of the Unity of God. The emphatic declaration, "Hear, O Israel, Jahveh thy God is one Jahveh"¹⁾, coupled with the warning given in the First Commandment to substitute no other being in His stead, is the foundation of his theological system. The Christian doctrine of the Trinity, contained implicitly in this Gospel, is of course not incompatible with the fundamental principle of the Unity of God. For (1) this principle is distinctly and repeatedly laid down, and (2) the Son and the Spirit are each regarded as deriving their being from the Source of all, and as having no other Mind or Will but His.

(2) Next, S^t John, in teaching that God is the "living Father", possessing Life in Himself, and imparting it to His creatures, is once more following in the steps of the Hebrew Scriptures. Repeatedly, in the Old Testament, from the Pentateuch downwards, is God recognized as the Living God²⁾. "In His favour is Life."³⁾ "With Thee is the fountain of Life."⁴⁾

(3) If S^t John teaches that God is Light, and blends Light and Life together, so does the O. T. Instances of the latter

¹⁾ Deut. VI, 4. Cf. Is. XLII, 8; XLVIII, 11.

²⁾ Deut. V, 26. Cf. Josh. III, 10; 1 Sam. XVII, 26; 2 K. XIX, 4; Is. XXXVII, 4, 17; Jer. X, 10; XXIII, 36; Dan. VI, 26; Hos. I, 10; Ps. XLII, 2; LXXXIV, 2.

³⁾ Ps. XXX, 5.

⁴⁾ Ps. XXXVI, 9. As in Prov. VI, 23, Light and Life are here associated together. See also Prov. XII, 28; XIV, 27, &c. &c.

have already been given. Of the former we may take one instance which embraces a large number of S^t John's most characteristic terms. "Righteousness and judgement are the habitation of Thy throne, mercy and truth go before Thy Face. How blessed are the people who know the joyous cry; in the Light of Thy countenance, O Lord, shall they walk." ¹⁾ It seems almost needless to cite passages shewing that the doctrine that God is a God of Truth and Righteousness, so emphatically taught by S^t John, is the Old Testament doctrine. Every one who knows the Old Testament will recognize the fact ²⁾. So the numberless passages in the Old Testament which describe God as merciful, compassionate, gracious, which speak of His grace and loving-kindness, are all adumbrations of the doctrine that He is Love. "Peace" too, which is so frequently connected with God in the Fourth Gospel and the Epistles, is another strong feature of Jewish teaching. The coming Deliverer is described by Isaiah in ch. IX as the "Prince of Peace". Ps. LXXII speaks repeatedly of the "peace" He is destined, by His "righteousness", to diffuse abroad. "Righteousness and peace have kissed each other", we read in Ps. LXXXV, where also we read of "Truth", and "salvation" and "mercy". Where in Plato do we find these ideas? And if they are found in Philo, from whence did he derive them? For very shame the critics ought to recognize that the Fourth Gospel is absolutely overflowing with Jewish ideas ³⁾.

The only other expression in connection with the idea of God to which I shall make reference is that of *fulness*. We

¹⁾ Ps. LXXXIX, 13, 14. Cf. Ps. IV, 6; XLIV, 3; XC, 8. Also Job, V. 30, XXXIII, 28. Also Isaiah IX, 2; LI, 4; LX, *passim*. Hos. VI, 5; Mic. VII, 9. Also cf. Is. LX, 21, with John XV, 2—6; VI, 29; V, 17; VII, 21; X, 25; XVII, 1, 4, 10, &c. &c. &c. It is only by careful study of the Fourth Gospel (which is not always given by critics) that we can discover how thoroughly it is permeated by Jewish ideas.

²⁾ See for instance Ps. XLIII, 3 (in which Light and Truth are united), Gen. XXIV, 27; Ex. XXXIV, 6; Ps. XXXI, 5, &c. &c. Deut. XXXII, 4; Ps. XI, 7, &c. &c. &c. Cf. John XVI, 8; XVII, 25.

³⁾ See also John IV, 10; VII, 38, compared with Numb. XXIV, 5—7; Ps. XLII, 1; LXIII, 2; CVII, 35; CXIV, 8; Is. XXXV, 6, 7; Jer. II, 13; and for "living" in the sense of *running*, water see Gen. XXVI, 19; Lev. XIV, 5, 6, 50—52. It would be wearisome to accumulate testimony of this kind, but to any one who takes the trouble to search for it, the task will not fail to bring conviction.

have been told repeatedly that S^t John derived this word from the Gnostics. But not only does S^t Paul use it, but its use is most frequent in the Hebrew Scriptures. It is found in Deuteronomy, repeatedly in the Psalms, in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos and Micah. It is generally, but not invariably used of the earth; also of the sea¹). The word is rendered *πλήρωμα* by the Septuagint translators of the Psalms, and S^t John has clearly taken it from thence. The Hebrew word means all that is comprised or embraced within anything. The Greek word has both this meaning and that of *filling up, completing*. In the New Testament it is used in *both* senses, in the latter by S^t Matthew²), in the former, not only by S^t John, but by S^t Paul³). If the word then be a Gnostic invention, we must relegate some of the most universally acknowledged Epistles of S^t Paul to the second century. Moreover S^t John only uses it once, S^t Paul ten times. And the Apostles use it in its strict Hebrew sense, whereas, as Neander reminds us, the Gnostics, “who certainly did not scrupulously adhere to the strict grammatical meaning of terms”, used it in *both* senses⁴). In other words they made use of a word they found in their authorities, but altered its meaning to suit their speculations. It must, however, be admitted, though the admission in no way invalidates the argument, that the word is not applied to God until S^t Paul ventured to apply it to Him.

It may not be out of place to remark here—though subsequent inquiry will be found further to substantiate the proposition—that a great deal of modern critical research, though wonderfully painstaking and minute, fails altogether to take into account any other side of a question but that which it desires to enforce. It is like the counsel for the plaintiff in an action at law—it entirely ignores the defendant’s case. Thus the facts which are already before us are sufficient to shew that, if we are compelled to acknowledge a fundamental difference between the Synoptists and S^t John, and therefore to reject one or other of this class of documents, it is not the

¹) 1 Chr. XVI, 32; Ps. XCVI, 11.

²) IX, 16.

³) Rom. XI, 12, 25; XIII, 10; XV, 29; Eph. I, 10, 23; III, 19; IV, 13; Col. I, 19; II, 9.

⁴) Church History, Sec. IV, I (Vol. II).

Gospel of S^t John, but *the Synoptist narratives that must, on that principle, be abandoned*. The evidence from the Epistles—all of them—shews that the Epistle-writers with one consent took as their starting-point the doctrinal system which S^t John ascribed to Jesus. If the Synoptists rejected this system—though we have already shown that there is no sufficient evidence that they did so—it is they who were the first to adopt a humanistic view of the Person of Jesus, and who intentionally set aside the evidence of writings many of which existed before they undertook their biographies. This conclusion, which may not unfairly be drawn from what has already been said on the doctrine of the Being of God, becomes irresistible when we come to perceive the entire agreement of the Epistle-writers and S^t John on the other fundamental points of Christian theology. The contention on which so many critics insist that, if there be any apparent dissimilarity between the doctrine of the Synoptists and that of S^t John, it is the latter narrative which must be given up, entirely ignores the evidence contained in the Epistles on behalf of the genuineness and authenticity of the Fourth Gospel. So one-sided a way of treating evidence must therefore be attributed to the invincible inability of some minds to acknowledge the possibility of Divine interferences with the ordinary course of events, in other words, to allow that a Revelation could possibly have taken place. Whether such presuppositions as these are permissible in an argument, or defensible in an historical investigation such as this is, I must leave to my readers to determine.

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