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# THE BEARING

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# DOCTRINAL SYSTEM OF THE FOURTH GOSPEL

### ON THE QUESTION OF ITS GENUINENESS.

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For a considerable time past attacks have been made on the genuineness and authenticity of S<sup>t</sup> John's Gospel, based on the evident and remarkable difference between its style and contents and those of the three other Gospels. It is not my intention to deal directly with these attacks. The assaults have assumed various shapes, according to the temperament or the necessities of their authors. One reason for their Protean character has been the success with which they have hitherto been repelled. Yet the attacks still continue. As soon as one school of destructive criticism has been overthrown, another has sprung up. The naturalistic school of Paulus was succeeded by the mythic school of Strauss, and when the tendency theory of Baur and its followers, which was the next form the attacks assumed, was found wanting, its place was supplied by the theory of "idealized" history and biography which now holds the field. One fact, however, in support of the authenticity of the Fourth Gospel must receive a passing mention. It was supposed some fifty years ago to have been "conclusively proved", to use the phrase which was then quite common, that the Gospel was a forgery of the second half of the second century A. D. Now it is generally admitted that it first saw the light during the life-time of the Apostle whose name it bears.

When I proposed to deal with the question of the authenticity of the Fourth Gospel in the pages of this Review, I was reminded that it was somewhat outside the province to which

its promoters have usually confined it. The old Latin author makes one of his characters say: "Homo sum; nihil humanum a me alienum puto." I might, in a similar spirit, reply: "I am a Catholic; nothing which concerns the credit of the Scriptures which for nearly twenty centuries have been handed down in the Catholic Church can fail to be of consequence to me". But I will add some reasons of a less general nature, which may serve to explain the connection between a belief in the authenticity of the Gospels and the attempt to substitute a true for a spurious catholicism. The abandonment of the traditional view of Holy Scripture has of late been very general in the Protestant Churches of the Continent. Recent events have shown that divines of the Roman Church are becoming inclined to acquiesce in that abandonment. The Editor of this *Review* has, in its last number, pointed out with great clearness and force the results which Newman's Theory of Development if accepted must bring in its train. It will enable the Roman Church, on the plea of "developing" the faith, to transform it altogether. "What need have we henceforth", the authorities at Rome may say, "of Scriptures, or Creeds, or any other musty documents hitherto supposed to enshrine the Faith? We have an authority at head-quarters which has the sole right to tell us what to believe. And if heretics complain that we are contradicting Jesus Christ and His Apostles, what matters it? The faith must adapt itself to the needs of the age. If in many essential particulars it has been changed, the change has been development, not destruction, and that development has been effected by a right inherent in the Head of the Church." It is obvious that if this new departure, which seems imminent, because it was in truth implicitly contained in the decree of Infallibility, be accepted by authority at Rome, the conditions of the conflict between Rome and the other Churches which take their stand on Catholic tradition will be materially altered. Up to the decrees of 1870 Rome has steadily claimed to be the inheritress of Catholic tradition. Since that time, Cardinal Manning has declared her to have shaken herself free from the trammels of history. And now Cardinal Newman's theory of development is being employed to emancipate her from the trammels of tradition also. Now among the traditions of the Catholic Church there is not one which is more ancient, more universal, more

fundamental than that which holds the Scriptures of the Old and New Covenant to be worthy of reverence, and to be the ultimate criterion of the doctrines which the Catholic Church is bound to teach. No doctrine, it is true, has ever been authoritatively laid down on the nature and limits of inspiration, and it has been well that this has been the case. But the doctrine that Scripture is the final authority in all matters which concern the Divine Revelation to mankind is one which, until quite recently by the Church of Rome, has never been called in question, except so far as Tradition has by her been associated with Scripture as the ultimate authority. If the Roman and Protestant Churches apostatize from the Catholic Faith on this vital question, the Old Catholic, Greek and Anglican Churches will become the sole guardians and repositories of primitive and universal doctrine in regard to it, and they must ultimately reap the reward of having been faithful to their trust. I make no apology, therefore, for asking permission, in a review devoted to the interests of Catholicism, to maintain the authenticity of one of the most necessary books in the whole Bible. And I trust that, now that there is everywhere so wide a defection from the primitive principles of our religion, the Old Catholic Churches will retain unimpaired their reverence and affection for the Sacred Volumes which contain, and have for ages handed down the Divine deposit of Revealed Truth.

I have already commented on the tendency of criticism continually to shift its ground. Its method is faulty in another respect. It approaches a great subject from too narrow a standpoint. It rests on *a priori* accusations of contradiction, of inconsistency, of improbability and the like; it invents its history and biography—this conspicuous tendency on the part of the “tendency” school still continues to exist—it squares, or perhaps I should say it appears to me to square, facts to the particular theory it has embraced, and above all it *ignores all arguments*, however wellknown and satisfactorily established, *which conflict with its conclusions*. This is a characteristic of every school which adopts the methods of investigation now largely adopted in Protestant Germany, and these methods are applied to every book in the Bible. In the investigation into the authenticity of the Gospel which goes by the name of S' John, the following facts and considerations are steadily

ignored by the critics of whom I have been speaking. First, the fact that the Christian Church was, from the first day of Pentecost which it observed, an organized—a *well* organized—Society with its rules, its principles, and *the closest possible intercourse between its members*<sup>1</sup>). It was therefore very unlikely that any book whatever should be accepted into the list of those received by the Society without careful scrutiny, and absolutely impossible that a biography of its founder should be admitted as authentic with insufficient credentials. Next, the argument from undesigned coincidences, one of the strongest which can be conceived, is entirely passed over. As an instance of this the remarkable harmony between the characters of Martha and Mary, as depicted in the Third and Fourth Gospels, may be mentioned. It is practically impossible that in an age such as that in which the Gospels appeared, the author of the later of the two Gospels could have designedly fashioned his narrative so as to be in psychological harmony with the former. Then the distinct statement of Clement of Alexandria<sup>2</sup>) concerning the reasons for which and the circumstances under which, the Fourth Gospel was composed, is much too lightly set aside, in spite of the high official position that great teacher occupied, and his excellent opportunities for obtaining information. These *a priori* theories are at variance with the historical method, and are based on a systematic determination to ignore the ordinary rules which govern human conduct. I might mention many other points of great significance which are ignored. But I will only refer to one more—the way in which Professor Sanday's argument, accepted by Bishop Westcott, is passed over, in which he proves from internal evidence that the author of the Fourth Gospel was (1) a Jew, (2) a Jew of Palestine, (3) an eye-witness of the events he records, (4) a disciple of Christ, (5) one of His Apostles, (6) the Apostle St John himself. It is in the highest degree improbable that a Gospel

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<sup>1</sup>) Professor Ramsay, in his recent treatise on the Apocalypse, has pointed out how great the means of intercommunication were in the first century.

<sup>2</sup>) Clement, as reported by Eusebius (Eccl. Hist. VI, 14), says that St John, seeing that the human life of our Lord had been fully recorded, but that none of his spiritual teaching had as yet been written down, determined, at the request of those around him, to write a Gospel on these portions of the Lord's teaching.

openly and yet falsely pretending to such high authority as this could have been accepted as genuine in a society so highly organized as we know the Christian Church from the first to have been, while the Apostle by whom it pretended to be written was then living. The fraud would certainly have been at once detected. There is, however, another line of argument quite as convincing which has not as yet received the attention it has deserved. Thirty years ago I wrote a book calling attention to this aspect of the question<sup>1</sup>). I was then an unknown man, and inexperienced in literature. The book attracted little attention, and is now out of print. Moreover German criticism of the kind now become usual, which I then considered, and still consider, much overrated, in spite of its industry and ingenuity, and the reputation of each contribution to which is certainly very short-lived, was then coming into fashion among my countrymen, and I was foolish enough to believe that a monograph dealing with the subject at first hand, without any reference to the more recent German authorities, might be supposed to be of some value in this country. The book is now forgotten. But I have asked, and have obtained, leave to present some of its leading arguments to the notice of the readers of the *International Theological Review*. The main drift of the argument was summarized on the title page. It consisted of a pregnant sentence from Tholuck's Introduction to his Commentary on St John's Gospel, and I may be permitted to remark in passing that it seems to me unfortunate that modern German criticism, somewhat too slavishly followed, I fear, by modern English critics, has so completely forgotten "the rock from which it was hewn, and the hole of the pit whence it was digged". One hears little of Tholuck now, or of any other of the band of intellectual giants produced by the Germany of his day. The sentence was as follows: "*For all the doctrinal matter characteristic of St John (and on this argument the greatest stress should be laid) some parallels at least can be found in the Synoptical Gospels and in the Epistles.*" The first class of doctrinal coincidences, those between St John and the Synoptists, proves that whatever distinction there may be

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<sup>1</sup>) *The Doctrinal System of St John, considered as evidence for the Date of his Gospel*. London 1875.



between the former narratives and that of St John, this distinction was not the result of divergence of opinion on the fundamentals of the faith, but was due to the objects the writers had in view in the construction of their narratives. The second class of coincidences shews that, although the Fourth Gospel was not composed till the latter end of the first century A. D., the doctrinal matter it contains, though absent from the Synoptic Gospels, was not only perfectly familiar to the members of the Church from the first, but *must have formed part of the original teaching of Christ*, since it is to be found in *all* the extant writings of His Apostles. A further principle which I laid down was that the form of the doctrine, as contained in St John's Gospel was more primitive and elementary than its form in the Epistles, and that this constituted an additional argument for the fact that the teaching it contained was not only the teaching of Christ Himself, but that the original form of that teaching had been wonderfully and almost miraculously preserved in the mind of the Apostle, through all the intervening years, until the time of its publication. What I meant by this was, that this doctrinal matter in the Gospel displays all the features of *origin*, while in the Epistles it displays all the features of *application*. Christ says "Believe on Me". The Apostles have crystallized this precept into the word "faith", which becomes a fundamental principle in their teaching<sup>1)</sup>. Christ further says: "I will save the world." This truth is expressed in the Apostolic writings by the technical word "salvation". Jesus says: "The Father Himself loveth you." This fundamental fact is embodied in the Apostolic writings in the word "grace". Jesus says: "I lay down My Life for the sheep." This fact appears in the Epistles under the name of "reconciliation" or "Atonement" (*καταλλαγή*). Jesus says that "He gives to His sheep Eternal Life, and they shall never perish, and no one is able to snatch them out of His Hand", and this condition of things is known to the Apostolic Church as Justification by Faith. Jesus says: "Except a man be born anew (or 'from above') he cannot see the Kingdom of God", a fact recognized in the Epistles under the terms "regenera-

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<sup>1)</sup> The word *πίστις* does not occur in St John; but *πιστεύω* is found often in St John as in the whole of the Epistles of St Paul.

tion", "adoption", "putting off the old man and putting on the new". Jesus says once more: "Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you", and consequently the Epistle-writers speak of "election", and address their converts as "elect". I pursued this train of thought through various essential doctrines of the Christian Faith, and found that, though, from the circumstances of the case, they are but vaguely hinted at in the Synoptic Gospels, there is never any thing in the least at variance with them, while in every Epistle, by whatever author, there is a close correspondence with what we learn from St John's Gospel to be the teaching of Christ. Nor is this all, but the teaching of Christ recorded in this Gospel is the foundation of the doctrinal system which the Apostles taught *ubique, semper, et ab omnibus*. When we add to this the fact that the conceptions of God in the Fourth Gospel are closely identical with those which we find in the "Law, the Prophets", and above all in "the Psalms", we are forced to the conclusion that this conception of God was that which was universally taught in the Old Testament—a fact which brings out the Hebrew origin of the Fourth Gospel, as well as the essential unity of the two dispensations. Thus this Gospel stamps Jesus Christ, yet more emphatically than even the Synoptic Gospels, to have been the Deliverer and Redeemer promised through Adam, through Abraham, through Moses, and through the Prophets, to the chosen people.

Perhaps I may be allowed to add a word about the distinction between the Synoptists and the Fourth Gospel, of which so much has been made in the attempt to throw discredit on the latter. We are not informed anywhere of the *reasons* which led the Synoptists, whether writing for Jewish or Gentile readers, to cast their narratives into the form in which they have come down to us. But there was no reason whatever that these narratives should not assume a form which appealed to the sense of natural religion common to every nation under heaven. On the contrary, the Synoptists evidently felt that before they endeavoured to instruct men in the deeper truths of religion, Regeneration, Atonement, Redemption, Justification, the vital union between the believer and his Lord, it would be best to put before them what must have an attraction alike for all mankind, the life of One Who



was pure, holy, loving, devoted, self-sacrificing, devout, clear and unerring in his perceptions of duty, wise above all who had come before him, and who displayed unmistakeable signs in the wonders he worked that God was with him. It must needs be on a foundation such as this, calculated to appeal to every human conscience, whatever its previous religious training, that the deeper spiritual truths of the Gospel must rest. Except to those who recognized the former truths, the latter must seem impossible or absurd—"to the Jews a stumbling block, to the Greeks foolishness". The supposed contradiction, therefore, so far from being such, was a moral necessity. Man being what he is, it was the only reasonable mode of recommending the doctrine to any one, be he Jew or Gentile. "First the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear." First the human Person of Christ in all its attractiveness. Then the Hypostatic Union between the Godhead and the Manhood in Him. Then all the graces and blessings which are derived for humanity from that conjunction of the Human with the Divine. "As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be." First the picture of Christ as a Man among men; then a recognition of Him as the Eternal Word of the Eternal Father, then the Christian Church, composed of men and women in whom that twofold Life is energizing, and producing all the gifts and graces which befit men who enjoy, through faith, the blessing of union with their Lord.

Further considerations will strengthen this view. Thus St Luke, who wrote one of the Gospels which do not present the deeper spiritual view to their readers, was in the closest relation to St Paul, who made the spiritual teaching which the Gospel of St John alone records, the foundation of his religious system. If the Synoptists are contradicted by the Fourth Gospel, and if that Gospel be the work of the leader of a new school of "idealists", or whatever the modern critic be pleased to call them—one whose teaching was altogether at variance with that of the earlier humanist disciples, how comes it that we find a decided humanist a most affectionate fellow-worker with one of the new school of "idealists"? Of course that answer may be met by a bold denial of the fact that St Luke was the author of the Gospel and of the Acts. And these bold denials, throwing upon the holders of the traditional view the *onus probandi*

which properly falls on the innovator, are a favourite device of the later Germanizing school of criticism, and traditionalists are somewhat too prone to fall into the trap thus laid for them, and endeavour to disprove the denials in question, instead of calling upon the objector to prove his case. But reason and common sense alike demand that if assertions of this kind are made against positions which have been held for nearly 2000 years by men who must not be supposed to be utterly destitute of these qualities, those assertions on the part of critics should be fully proved before they are made the basis of an argument. The idea of a radical difference between the humanist and idealist schools from the very first is no doubt plausible in itself and has been very ingeniously supported. Yet in an historical inquiry it is not altogether unnecessary to ask for historical evidence on behalf of the statements made. No such evidence is forthcoming in support of the theory in question. Discussions there were in the infant Church, and they are not concealed. But they did not relate to fundamental points. They arose over such question as the obligation of Gentile converts to observe the Law of Moses. The Gnostic<sup>1)</sup> and Ebionite sects were outside, not inside the Church. This is evident not only because these sects made no appeal to the authority of the first teachers of Christianity, but because they also set aside the authority of the writings which were universally recognized in the Christian Church. Had the differences between humanists and idealists, the idea of which we owe to the ingenuity of critics, really existed in the Apostolic age, and especially if the Synoptic Gospels and the rest of the Christian Scriptures are the evidences of the fact of the existence of such differences, we should have expected the later humanists to have claimed the Synoptic Gospels in support of their views, and the other party to have rejected those Gospels, and to have relied on the authority of the Fourth Gospel and the Epistles. As every one knows, this was not the case. So the idea of such a fundamental divergence in the views of Christians in the Apostolic age must take its place among those

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<sup>1)</sup> This remark refers only to the humanistic section of the Gnostic teachers. As every one knows, Basilides and Valentinus appealed to the authority of S<sup>t</sup> John.

pleasant fictions which the imagination rather than the logic of the critic has conjured up to beguile the tedium of his task.

If the opportunity be afforded me, I hope to follow up this paper from time to time by others, in which the teaching of the Lord, as recorded in the Gospel of S<sup>t</sup> John, in relation to the various doctrines of the faith is shown to be identical with that which forms the substratum of the Epistles, and that in every case the teaching ascribed to the Lord in that Gospel is the more elementary in form, so that it is reasonable to suppose that the Gospel contains an authentic record of the teaching of Christ, on which the doctrinal system of the Christian Church always has been, and always ought to be, based.

J. J. LIAS.

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