

Zeitschrift: Revue internationale de théologie = Internationale theologische Zeitschrift = International theological review

Band: 14 (1906)

Heft: 56

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

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-403662>

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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 Person of Christ.

Those of us English folk whose recollection of matters theological goes back about half-a-century will remember the opinions entertained by "Liberal" thinkers in England at that time about the genesis of the "Fourth Gospel". I say "in England" because it has been a peculiarity of English "Liberal" theology, which it still largely retains, that it takes up German theories just when they are beginning to lose their hold in the land of their birth. I may be permitted one further word of explanation. I put the word "Liberal" in inverted commas because, in theology as well as in politics, there are Liberals *and* Liberals. There are Liberals who wish to allow opinion to be as free as is compatible with the welfare of their kind, and there are Liberals who wish to say and do what they please, not reflecting whether their freedoms do good or harm to their fellow creatures. There are Liberals who desire as much freedom to speculate upon theological questions as is compatible with the respect due to the authority of the Incarnate Word, and of those to whom He gave the special commission to "go and teach all nations", and there are Liberals who desire to be free from all such restrictions, and to teach in the Name of Jesus Christ, and as members of His Church, whatever they may individually be pleased to believe. Whether

¹⁾ See the International Theological Review, n. 55, p. 485—491.

truth can ever be reached by the removal of all restraints from the inquirer is a question. Railway trains are sometimes seized by an impulse to transgress the restraints imposed upon them by the rails. The results of such independence are not such as should encourage us to make use of it in matters where its results are likely to be more disastrous still. The widespread anarchy which now exists in regard to the foundations of the faith may ultimately lead, if it be not repressed, to as much disaster to human life, to as much distress and misery, as the most destructive war has ever done. If there be no authority in the world but individual opinion, religious dogma will no doubt be the first to perish, but public morals will speedily and irretrievably be involved in the crash which must follow the abandonment of revealed truth. And when morality is undermined, human life must ultimately pay the forfeit. It is for this reason that I am asking for so much space for the endeavour to shew that the Gospel so long attributed to S^t John is an accurate record of the teaching of Jesus Christ.

Fifty years ago, Liberal theologians of the second of the two classes I have just described were saying, to use their favourite phrase, that it was “now conclusively demonstrated” that the Fourth Gospel was no such record, but was “poor stuff”¹⁾ which could be manufactured by the yard from the writings of Philo. Its publication they put down to the second half of the second century. Instead of Valentinus, Basilides, and other early Gnostics having, as had hitherto been supposed, incorporated genuine Christian ideas into their systems, it was the Christians of the second century who seized on Gnostic ideas, and incorporated them into the theology of the Christian Church. Of course all these absurd notions have been driven ignominiously off the field long ago. All but the most extravagant and unreasonable of Biblical critics now admit that the Fourth Gospel must be ascribed to a period not more than ten years later than the death of the Apostle S^t John. It would therefore be slaying the slain to enter upon the refutation of these now discredited theories. The only reason for referring to them at all is by way of caution against accepting theories

¹⁾ So said the famous John Stuart Mill, in one of his Posthumous Essays. Mathew Arnold was just as confident.

just as confidently put forward now, yet resting on no sounder foundation, and not improbably doomed to a similar fate.

It is quite true that the doctrinal writers of the New Testament seized upon words which were in use in the current Jewish theology of their day—words which they found convenient, and on which they placed an interpretation suited to their purpose. If St John found the word *λόγος* in Philo, St Paul also found *εἰκὼν Θεοῦ*, and he also replaced Philo's *πρωτόγονος Θεοῦ* by the similar expression *πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως*. But Philo's Logos was in no sense a Person, not even in the restricted sense in which we apply the word to the three Persons in the Blessed Trinity. His Logos was but a phase of the Godhead, an aspect of the Divine working, not an eternal and ineffaceable distinction in the Godhead Itself. And we must not forget that in the Book of Wisdom the words *εἰκὼν Θεοῦ*¹⁾ are applied to the Divine Wisdom in a passage which supplies language applied to the Divine Son in the opening words of the Epistle to the Hebrews²⁾. One can hardly fail to recognize here the adumbration of the doctrine of the Divine Logos, as expounded with one consent by the first preachers of the Christian Revelation.

I cannot express that doctrine better than I have done in the book of mine to which I have already referred, on which these papers are founded. "Jesus Christ claimed to be the revelation of the Father³⁾. No expression could so thoroughly imply at once His functions as a Revealer" of the Father "and His identity of essence" with Him than the word Logos. For "the word is the revelation of the thought, and yet at the same time is identical with the thought. It allies itself with material substance, is incarnate, as it were, in order to convey its essence unchanged into the inner being of another⁴⁾. And the Greek word has yet another, and equally applicable meaning. *Λόγος* is the reason to be rendered of anything which requires explanation, the unfolding of its true nature and meaning to him who knows it not. It was in all respects, therefore, the

¹⁾ Strictly speaking the "Image of His Goodness". But see the whole passage.

²⁾ Cf. Wisdom VII, 25, 26, with Heb. I, 3.

³⁾ Matt. XI, 27; Luke X, 22; John I, 18; XIV, 9.

⁴⁾ Aug. De Doctr. Christ. I, 13.

most suitable word which could be found in the Greek language to express Christ's Nature and mission. Consecrated as it had been to such purposes by its use in the Old Testament¹⁾, familiar as it had become to more modern thought by the learned and acute exegesis of Philo, and by the impersonation of the word which is found in the Targums²⁾, it was no wonder that St John, writing at a time when the learned world at large was beginning to inquire curiously about Christianity, should adopt it as the expression best adapted to convey his doctrine concerning Christ."

Nor is it in the least degree certain, as so many writers have supposed it to be, that the use of the word in the sense in which St John uses it, is confined to him. This must be admitted, at least by those who ascribe the Apocalypse to another author. For the word occurs in a remarkable passage, Rev. XIX, 11—16, in which a Being described in words of unsurpassable grandeur and mystery, is called "the Word of God". But I do not wish to lay much stress on this fact. I believe that there is very clear internal evidence that the Apocalypse was the work of the Evangelist. It is said by those who dispute this view that the Apocalypse is "unphilosophical", whereas there can be little doubt that, unusual in philosophy as its form is, the Fourth Gospel contains, in a number of oracular utterances, a philosophy of Christianity. But one does not expect philosophy in a series of visions. The Apocalypse is further said to be the work of a "Judæo-Christian". The same might, even to a greater degree, be said of the Gospel which bears St John's name. I have already touched upon the essentially Hebrew cast of the thought of the Fourth Gospel, and the fact is worthy of illustration in a separate paper. I will content myself now with saying that there is no other writing in the New Testament, not even the Epistle to the Hebrews, which is so thoroughly permeated with the spirit of the Old Testament as the Gospel we are considering. If therefore the word Logos appears in St John's Epistle and in the Apocalypse, it cannot, I freely

¹⁾ Ps. XXXIII, 6; CVII, 10, 14, 17, 20; CXIX, 25, 105, 160. Bishop Peronne detects in Ps. CVII "the first glimmering of St John's doctrine of the agency of the Personal Word". See also Is. LV, I, 11.

²⁾ See Liddon, Bampton Lectures, Pearson, *On the Creed*, and many other authorities. Unfortunately I have not the Targums at hand.

admit, be assumed that it is used by any other New Testament writer than St John. But the defenders of the New Testament have, I think, been somewhat too precipitate in their abandonment of passages in the other New Testament writers which seem to indicate that St John's use of the word Logos was known to them. The custom, very prevalent among Christian apologists, of surrendering every doubtful position to the enemy has of late been carried, I must think, to an extreme. At least one may venture to note that in some cases the position *is* a doubtful one. And among the very considerable number of positions which have been thus evacuated, but which might have been defended, is that which maintains that the word Logos, as applied to Christ, was known to, and approved by, the writers of all the Epistles. First among these comes St James. He tells us¹⁾ that God, of His own "determinate counsel"²⁾, begat us by the Logos of Truth. This expression, most certainly, has a strong flavour of the Fourth Gospel. It is not uncommon to render a Greek word followed by a genitive of the attribute, into English with the definite article. Truth, as we know, was claimed as an attribute by the Logos Himself³⁾. The word ἀπεκύησεν has been rendered "brought forth" as well as "begat". But then so has the ἐγεννήθησαν of John I, 13. Every candid person must admit that the two passages have a very close remembrance, and that it is at least by no means an impossible position that the dominant word Logos has the same sense in each of them. But this is not all. In one pregnant passage St James⁴⁾ sums up the whole teaching of the Fourth Gospel. He bids those whom he is addressing "receive the implanted", or as some would prefer to translate it the "con-substantial Logos, Who is able to save their souls". The fact that this passage sums up the whole teaching of the Fourth Gospel concerning the manner of salvation by Jesus Christ will appear more clearly when we come to discuss its doctrine of the Incarnation. But it must be admitted that the Prologue of the Gospel strikes the same key-note as this fundamental declaration of St James, and the connection becomes even closer if we render ἐσκήσωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν, as we are fully entitled to do, "*tabernacled in us*". The same feature of Apos-

¹⁾ I, 18. ²⁾ βουλευθείς. ³⁾ John XIV, 10. ⁴⁾ I, 21.

tolie teaching meets us in St Peter's First Epistle. Christians, he declares, "have been begotten again (*ἀναγεννημένοι*), not of corruptible but of incorruptible seed—the Word (*λόγος*) of the Living and Abiding God" ¹⁾. He also ²⁾ attributes this work of regeneration to "the Resurrection of Jesus Christ". This last feature in Apostolic teaching is found in St Paul ³⁾, but not, explicitly at least, in the Fourth Gospel. Yet a student who endeavours to penetrate the deeper meaning of that Gospel will see that the interpenetration of the life of the believer by the Risen Life of his Redeemer, is not altogether absent from the mind of the writer ⁴⁾. Nor do these two passages exhaust the number of those which suggest use of the word Logos in a personal sense. The Word (and why not the Personal Word?), we are told in 2 Pet. III, 5, 6, made the world and continues to sustain it—precisely the doctrine of the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel ⁵⁾. We have in addition a most striking passage in the Epistle to the Hebrews ⁶⁾ in which the Logos is represented as "living and energizing", and as penetrating to the inmost depths of the human heart. Nor ought we to forget that St Luke, in the brief preface to his Gospel, speaks of the early disciples of Christ as "eye-witnesses" (*αὐτόπται*) as well as "ministers" of the Logos.

I will not pursue the subject further this time. I have made other demands this quarter on the readers of the *International Review*. When I next take up the pen it will be to compare in detail the doctrine of the Logos as taught by St John, the Synoptists, and the writers of the various Epistles.

J. J. LIAS.

¹⁾ I, 2, 3. ²⁾ I, 3. ³⁾ Rom. VI, 3, 4; Col. II, 12, 13. ⁴⁾ John XIV, 1—6. ⁵⁾ The Second Epistle of St Peter is one of the defensible positions which the modern critic is inclined to surrender to the adversary. But the fact is forgotten that *the writer himself* claims to be St Peter. It would have been difficult to palm off a deliberate forgery on such a society as the early Church. ⁶⁾ IV, 12.
