

The Alexandrian Gospel.

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THE question whether the Fourth Gospel is Alexandrian confronts us at the very beginning, and should be answered as a preliminary to all other questions. Certainly the prologue is Alexandrian. The use of the term Logos; the objective, instead of the merely personified sense, given to it; the careful grouping of the two statements that the Logos is both subject and object to God; and, finally, the discussion of his office in the work of creation, which is exactly the place where Alexandrianism brings him into the Divine economy, — are conclusive on this point.

Not the prologue only is Alexandrian; the statement which connects this with the Gospel, that the Logos became flesh, that is, man, leads us to anticipate also an Alexandrian Gospel. If it is not, if the rest of the Gospel is written from another standpoint, it is the most curious piece of disjuncture in the Biblical literature. One reservation has to be made, however, at the outset. It is not the Logos pure and simple who is introduced to us in this statement, but the Logos humanized. The relation of the Word to God is not in any case that of exact identity, and even this modified divinity of the Word is still further qualified by this humanization. Jesus attributes whatever supernatural element appears in him, not to the Logos incarnate in him, but to the Father, the same as any prophet (5¹⁹⁻³⁷ 7¹⁶⁻¹⁸). There are passages however in which Jesus speaks of himself as preëxistent, antedating even creation (3¹¹⁻¹³ 17⁵). But not even this consciousness of a preëxistent state comes to him directly, but is mediated, like his other knowledge, by the Spirit (3³⁴). The meaning is, apparently, that this knowledge of heavenly things came to him through the Spirit, and that he recognized it as something belonging to a previous state. This twofold consciousness is characteristic of Jesus all through the book, and it is also an exact statement of the Alexandrian conception of him as the humanized Logos.

The statement that Jesus is the only-begotten Son of God is also to be understood in this light. It is true that he never ascribes to himself oneness with the Father, except as a unity of interest, or as something shared by him with others (10³⁰ 17¹¹⁻²²). And he explains the use of the expression *πατήρ ἰδιος*, which the Jews accuse him of applying to God, by showing that the Old Testament has like expressions, which put his language on a level with the language of other men claiming special relations to God, and so remove its blasphemy. But these modifications of the title, only-begotten Son, again are due to the humanization of the Logos, and on the other hand, this title brings out the other side, a sonship not like that of men holding special external relations to God, or of those who are on intimate terms of communion with him, but a peculiar relation, due to an original connection not shared by other men. It is the Alexandrian setting which gives this term its true sense (3^{16, 13}; cf. 1^{14, 13}). It is an instance of the same duality, that everything supernatural about Jesus is ascribed to the Father and yet the gift is in his case an unrestricted one. The Father has given everything into his hand, and whatever the Father does, this also the Son does likewise (3³⁵ 5²⁰). The fact that there is here a gift shows the humanity, but the greatness of the gift is explained by the peculiarity of this One Man that he is an incarnation of the Logos.

But the proof that we have in Jesus an incarnation of that Divine Word through whom the world was made, is that his offices as Saviour of men are due to the existence in him of the same primal life-giving elements as explain the agency of the Logos in creation. He is the life and light of men (1⁴⁻⁹ 8¹² 9⁵ 12⁴⁶ 5²⁶ 11²⁵ 14⁶). This is nothing merely accidental; it is the source of Jesus' spiritual power in this Gospel. Everything is explained in terms of light and life.

There are other slighter things which confirm the Alexandrianism of the Fourth Gospel. The reference of Jesus' words, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up," to the temple of his body, would be quite unintelligible to an ordinary Jew, but to one accustomed to the allegorical interpretation by which Alexandrian philosophy was able to bring together Judaism and Hellenism, and to derive Greek philosophy from Moses, it would have a familiar sound. There is another curious fact which this Alexandrian connection would help to explain. Several times John the Baptist deems it necessary to affirm that he is not the Christ. The peculiar form of statement is, that he "confessed and denied not." The emphasis of this denial, as if it were a matter of importance, or as if some one

had made the claim for the Baptist, does not seem justified by anything that we have from contemporary sources. But we do find in Acts 18²⁴-19⁷ something which throws light on it. There is in this passage an equally unexplained story of some nondescript disciples, who knew about Jesus, but had received only the baptism of John, and had not received the Holy Spirit. That is, there was here a sort of John the Baptist cult, which for some reason had outlived its allotted time. Among these disciples was Apollos, who was an Alexandrian, and the whole event took place in Ephesus, which was the headquarters of Christian Alexandrianism. This cult then was traceable to Alexandria, and was due to the fact that these men had become separated at a very early period by long distances from the scene of the Gospel history, and had carried along with them this mixed belief in a way which was impossible to any others. The two phenomena, a retention of John's baptism and a recognition of him as the Messiah, are quite different, but they show the common feature of a John the Baptist cult in the headquarters of Alexandrianism.

But after all, the great reason for speaking of this as an Alexandrian Gospel is its subject. It is not a story of our Lord's life, or ministry, but a discussion of his person. There are two facts which enter into this discussion which connect it with Alexandrianism. In the first place, such a discussion does not belong to Palestinian Judaism but to Alexandrianism. The line of demarcation is distinct. All the Alexandrian books, including the Johannean writings, Ephesians, Colossians, and Hebrews, not only contain this feature but emphasize it. In the other books it occurs only in Phil. 2⁶⁻¹¹, and there in a different form. The second fact is that the terms of this discussion are Alexandrian. The statement of the prologue, that creation was not by God directly, but through the mediation of the Logos, and that this was due to his possession of the creative life, is distinctly Alexandrian. Then the connection between the prologue and the rest of the Gospel is given in the fact that the Word became flesh, and that this humanized Logos was our Lord. And finally, his redemptive office is ascribed to his possession of the same creative powers of life and light that explain his creative agency. Only in the one they denote the agencies by which natural life is created ; in the other, the powers by which spiritual life is begotten. These titles, life and light, universally given to Jesus in the Fourth Gospel, are thus distinctly Alexandrian.

What is the place of an Alexandrian Gospel in the New Testament writings? In the first place, books of an Alexandrian type belong to

the New Testament period. The Judaism of the Dispersion was not Palestinian but Hellenistic. On the other hand, Christianity was planted in these cities by a Jew who was a representative of the Rabbinical school. But he interpreted Christianity in the terms of prophetism, of priestism (so far as he made sacrifice as well as repentance the condition of acceptance with God), and of the Rabbinical logic. And so long as he lived, his powerful personality served to keep out of these churches both Christianity of the Palestinian type, represented by the Jerusalem church, and of the Alexandrian type. There was an attempt to introduce the latter at Corinth, against which the apostle contended, but it did not succeed. With the death of the apostle, this state of things would come to a necessary end. Christianity was so far the successor of Judaism, that it would have to root itself in that religion, but the form of Judaism in which it was rooted would evidently be that of the region in which it was planted. In Palestine, it might be prophetism, priestism, or rabbinism; but among the Jews of the Dispersion, there would have to be added a fourth element which would dominate the whole. Contact with the Greeks had added speculation, or inquiry into the origin of things, to the other forms of religious thought. In order to do this the Hellenistic Jews had to make Moses the originator of the Platonic philosophy, but this was only a cover for the evident substitution of a philosophy which shut God out of his universe for the plain Jewish belief in God as the Creator of all things. The difference was a radical one, and it affected not only Judaism, but, in a far greater degree, the interpretation given to Judaism by Jesus. Jesus was distinctly a prophet, that is, a man who arrived at the knowledge of religious facts by vision. He employed his spiritual faculties on the heavenly world, as he used his senses on the outer world, and the result in both cases was vision. Philosophy is essentially different. It is an inquiry into the origin of things and into the nature of God, in which the faculties employed are not the spiritual senses but the reasoning part of man; and the result is never vision. Now the history of the New Testament literature shows that after the death of St. Paul there was an attempt on the part of the early apostles to enter these Gentile churches with Christianity of the prophetic type. The Greek language of the Synoptics shows that they were written for these churches. But, besides this attempt, there was the more locally adapted invasion of them by a type of thought originating in Alexandrianism and adapted to Christianity. The necessity for this arose from the fact that



neither the original Paulinism, nor the prophetism of the apostles in the period succeeding St. Paul, was indigenous. Only Alexandrianism possessed the ground.

Secondly, besides this certainty that there would be an Alexandrian, as well as some form of the Palestinian, interpretation of the Gospel, there is in the other forms of Christian thought an emphasis of the redemptive element in the Divine economy, and a corresponding lack of a theory of the universe. These two elements, man's moral need and the intellectual call for a theory that shall account for the world, divide the ground of religious thought between them. Both are to be found in the two systems which we are examining, Judaism and Hellenism, but they exist in varying degrees. The Jew sees in God not only the author of the moral law but also the creator of the universe ; but he does not get beyond the fact of creation to a theory of the creative process and a philosophy of the Divine nature which shall make creation possible. Nor does he start with creation and go on to the moral government of the world ; but, approaching God through his moral sense, he comes to find in him the source of all things. The Greek, on the other hand, while he includes the moral order in the scheme of the universe, does not start with it ; nor does he approach the thought of God through his moral sense, which is really the source of revelation ; but he starts off with the purely intellectual question of the order and the origin of the universe. Give the Greek, therefore, a religious system which dwells on the redemptive thought, man's moral need and the Divine provision for it, and includes only an incidental allusion to the whole of things of which that forms a part ; and if the moral stress and power of it lead to its acceptance, he will, nevertheless, reconstruct it in accordance with what seems to him a more reasoned and proportioned scheme of thought. Now, no Jews are Greeks ; the Hellenistic Jews, however, are Greek in this intellectual demand.

We have not yet, however, treated the essential reason for Alexandrianism in the Christian literature. It furnished the answer, so far, to the question which came to be the essential one in Christian thought. Jesus, who came to answer the human problem, became himself that problem. Set up in this world, which is not even yet half-grown, a full-grown man, one so conversant with its moral order that he can not only expound it, but actually find in it the secret of an absolutely wise and right life for himself ; and you have set men to guessing more than ever. This we must never forget, that, whatever be the problem started by that life, or the answer to the problem,

the starting-point is the life itself, a human life containing in itself the harmony of the universal moral order. Nor is there any doubt of the use to which Jesus meant that life should be put. The consciousness of an immense moral force, coming from the action of the higher moral order upon himself, did not create questions within him, but rather a surety of just one thing, that in that way lay the salvation of a world sorely bestead. God, interpreted to men through such a life, could restore things and set them straight. It was this moral power that seemed to him useful in this world and not the questions as to himself started by it. But already the question had been started, and it loomed up, not only as a question, but as a means of honoring the Teacher himself. Men must call him Lord, Lord, whether they did the things that he commanded them or not.

St. Paul had already given an answer to the question, ascribing to Jesus not only humanity but divinity, but his answer was drawn from Palestinian Judaism. Jesus was to him an incarnation of the only Divine emanation known to Judaism of this type. An incarnation of God himself was an impossibility. But the Spirit of God, an emanation from the Divine Being to whom was due the special enlightenment of prophets and of other men gifted to do the various work of the world, might through incarnation in a man insert into humanity a moral power of a sort superior to the mere enlightenment which was his ordinary method of imparting his gifts. Jesus was to him an incarnation of this Divine emanation, the only one known to Jews of his type. The answer was the easier to him, because Jesus was in his consciousness much more associated with the higher powers than with the life of man. He had known him in his heavenly life rather than his earthly career. But St. Paul spoke as one unfamiliar with the idea of incarnation, whereas the Hellenistic Jew was familiar with it as containing within itself the secret of the creation. The universe was to him a series of incarnations, and the Logos was the Divine emanation containing within himself the principle of incarnation. For he was the embodiment of the thought of God, which is incarnate in the universe, as the thought of any artist is embodied in his work. Only in the case of God it did not remain a thought simply, but became a *quasi*-personality, both subject and object to God, and endowed with a creative life.

Christian Alexandrianism was inspired to see that the secret of moral power in this incarnation must be the humanizing of the Logos. He must be a man in such a sense that any supernatural access of knowledge and power in him must be due, not to the

incarnate Logos, but to the indwelling Spirit. This is especially emphasized in both the epistle to the Hebrews and the Johannean writings. And while this incarnation of the Logos, which is the secret of creation, involves immanence and so overcomes the difficulty in the way of creation involved in the Divine transcendence, the real principle of immanence in God is the Spirit. The way in which the Fourth Gospel dwells upon the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is due to this, that the writer, who is familiar with the emphasis which Jesus put upon the work of the Holy Spirit, wishes to find in his scheme a place not only for the incarnate Logos but also for the immanent Spirit.

This, then, is the distinction of Alexandrianism, that its intellectual genius kept alive, if it did not start, the question as to the nature of our Lord, and with it the question sure to follow of the processes of the Divine nature; and that it furnished the answer to these questions which, with some important modifications, has lived, and has become the centre of gravity of historic Christianity.