

The Eschatology of the Fourth Gospel.

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MUCH attention has been directed of late to the Eschatology of the Synoptic Gospels, but considerably less, so far as I can discover, to that of the Fourth.¹ This appears to me a matter for regret; for it is conceivable that the latter may afford important help for interpreting the former. This may be so none the less if the Fourth Gospel be in the main a doctrinal rather than a strictly historical treatise. To prevent misconception, I may say that to me it appears to be an idealized picture of Jesus as the Incarnate Logos, worked out on a basis of historic facts, and intended to bring out what the author believed to be their inner and spiritual significance. My purpose is to call attention to what this writer, representing the most enlightened section of Christian thought at the close of the first century, made of the Apocalyptic teaching; in the hope that it may incite some scholars, who are far better equipped than I am, to do the work more thoroughly.

It is sometimes said that from the Fourth Gospel, apart from two passages which are hardly in line with its main ideas (Jn 5^{28, 29} 21^{22, 23}), the Apocalyptic and Eschatological element disappears. It would be truer, I think, to say that it is *transmuted* by fusion with the great conceptions of the writer: that Jesus is the manifestation in time of the eternal Divine Logos, who has come from the Father to bring Life to men, and whose return to the Father yet leaves Him with them in spiritual presence as that Life. Broadly speaking, in this Gospel the inward and spiritual replaces the outward and spectacular. Eschatology is transfigured, and its terms revalued. The Kingdom of God becomes a condition of the soul, which a man must 'enter' by being 'born of the Spirit' (3⁵). It is identified with the 'eternal life' which is made possible for men by the 'lifting up' of the Son of man (3¹⁴).²

¹ There is a valuable chapter on 'The Johannine Interpretation' in Dr. E. W. Winstanley's book, *Jesus and the Future*, to which I am indebted for some of the thoughts that follow, but I do not remember to have met with anything else on the subject in English. My knowledge of German is small.

² The identification of the Kingdom of God with eternal life also appears in the Synoptics (cf. Mk 10¹⁷ with 10²³). Dr. E. F. Scott shows that it had also been made by some of the Apocalyptic writers (*The Kingdom and the Messiah*, p. 27).

The conception of the 'Son of man' in this Gospel has affinities with that in Enoch, where He pre-exists with the 'Head of Days,' who has 'chosen' Him and 'committed unto him the sum of judgment' (cf. Jn 5²⁷); but it differs in that He has become truly man, and can perfect His 'glory' only through obedience and suffering. That the phrase is used with a Messianic meaning is clear from 1⁵¹, which is perhaps the most definitely Apocalyptic passage in the Fourth Gospel: 'Ye shall see the heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of man.' The author does not (like Philo) divorce his Logos doctrine from Jewish Messianic conceptions: he retains but transcends them; he makes the recognition of Jesus as Messiah a stage towards belief in Him as Logos or Son of God. Jesus declares Himself to be the Messiah (e.g. in 4²⁶), and is hailed by Nathanael and by the multitude as the 'King of Israel' (1⁴⁹ 12¹³). But His 'Kingdom' is 'not of this world'; its essence is 'the truth'—the bringing of the mind and will of man into conformity with the mind of God (18³⁶⁻³⁸). The thought of the Kingdom as *future* is preserved in the many passages where Jesus declares, or the author remarks, that His 'hour' is not yet come, or is just at hand (2⁴ 7^{6, 30} 8²⁰ 17¹); but that it is also *present* is indicated by the double use of the saying, 'The hour cometh, *and now is*': first, when 'the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth' (4²³); and second, when 'the [spiritually] dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live' (5²⁵). The two thoughts are beautifully blended in the simile of the fields 'white already unto the harvest,' in which the disciples shall reap the fruit of which their Master has sown the seed (4³⁵⁻³⁸).

The transformation of Synoptic ideas which results from their being taken up into the great conceptions of the Fourth Evangelist may be brought out by a brief study of his use of the two terms 'Judgment' and 'Glory.'

The word 'Judgment' in this Gospel rarely carries with it the thought of a mighty event in the future; usually it is an ever-present (and therefore eternal) function of the Logos as such. The Logos is the 'light' of men; and as light reveals the

contrast between black and white, which darkness obscures, so the Light of God is always separating good from evil, drawing to itself the good and repelling the evil (3¹⁹⁻²¹). Most of all is this the case when the Light shines forth in a personal and sinless Character; hence the very presence of Jesus in the world is itself the judgment, the separation (3¹⁸ 5²⁵). He judges 'righteously,' because He perfectly expresses, not His own will, but the mind and will of God (5³⁰).

There is, on the surface at least, a good deal of contradiction in the expressions used in regard to Judgment. In 5²² it is said that God as Father judges no man, but has given all judgment to the Son; yet in 5⁴⁵ God is the Judge before whom men are accused; and in 8¹⁵ Jesus declares that He judges no man. This assertion is repeated in 12^{47, 48}, where it is implied that Judgment is (so to say) not a personal decision but an automatic process, wrought out by the chances a man has had and rejected. Nevertheless, the Apocalyptic conception of a 'Judgment Day,' when the righteous should be vindicated and their enemies finally overthrown, is retained, not only in Martha's reference to the 'resurrection at the last day' (11²⁴), but in many sayings attributed to Jesus Himself, where the same expression 'the last day' is used (6^{39, 40, 44, 54} 12⁴⁸). This expression does not agree very well with the thought of Judgment as a present and eternal fact. I am not prepared to suggest with confidence any theory that will resolve these apparent contradictions. Possibly different strains of thought were present in the mind of the author (or in the minds of the authors) of the Gospel, and were imperfectly fused.¹

But this seems clear: the teaching about Judgment is (on the whole) far more deep and spiritual than that which we find in the Synoptics. It is

¹ It has often been pointed out that some of the comments on sayings of Jesus made by the author, or by someone concerned in the composition of the Fourth Gospel, show a lack of insight, e.g. the explanation of 'Destroy this temple' in 2²¹, and of 'lifting up' in 12³². It is in this way that I should be inclined to explain the apparently crude eschatology of 5^{28, 29}, where there is no suggestion (as there is in 5²⁵) that 'all that are in the tombs' means the *spiritually* dead, or that the judgment is present and not only to come. There are, it is true, grave difficulties in working out any theory of composite authorship; but it seems clear that the final author has retained a few expressions which are at a lower level of spiritual insight than his own—perhaps because he had received them from one who was known as a companion of Jesus, and whose authority therefore carried weight.

presented (at times) as a present and perennial experience, as something inherent in the very fact that new moral truth is revealed, and as irrevocably bound up with the way a man uses the revelation that (if he will surrender himself to it) may be his:

Thou judgest us; Thy purity
Does all our lusts condemn;
The love that draws us nearer Thee
Is hot with wrath to them.

Further, Judgment is not presented as the ultimate Divine purpose. Jesus has come, not for the judgment of the world (the final overthrow of the wicked, which was regarded as the Messiah's main work), but for its salvation (3¹⁷ 12^{47b}). Yet this salvation is no soft or easy task; it can only be wrought out through a mighty conflict with the powers of evil—a victorious conflict, which itself is judgment. 'Now is the judgment of this world; now shall the prince of this world be cast out' (12³¹; cf. 16¹¹). The 'world' is not to be destroyed, but 'overcome' (16³³).

The 'Glory' passages are even more pregnant with freshness of meaning. The glory of the Son of Man is not merely something He is about to win when manifested as the Messiah; it is something He has temporarily abandoned by 'descending out of heaven,' but which He is to regain (3¹³ 6⁶² 17^{5, 24}). Yet even in His humiliation the 'glory' was not absent; it was manifested not alone in His miraculous 'signs' (2¹¹ 11^{4, 40}), but in the 'grace and truth' that shone in His earthly career (1¹⁴). It is not an exaltation or an honour that He seeks to gain for Himself (8^{50, 54} 5⁴¹); it is the manifestation through Him of the glory, the 'name,' the character, of His Father (7¹⁸ 12²⁸ 17^{5, 6}). And this manifestation He can give only by stooping to the lowest depth (as the world would say) of humiliation, in utter obedience to God, and self-abandoning love to men. He glorifies His Father on the earth, by accomplishing the work that has been given Him to do (17⁴). It was when 'his hour was come that he should depart unto the Father,' when He 'knew that the Father had given all things into his hands,' that He showed His love 'unto the end' by washing the disciples' feet (13¹⁻⁵). His 'glory,' therefore, is the precise opposite of what the world counts as glory. It is to be found in the entire refusal of all self-seeking, in perfect self-consecration to the will of God and the service of men, even unto death (17¹⁹). It is just when He sees His death for men close before

Him that He speaks most constantly of 'glory.' When some Greeks come asking to see Him, He says, 'The hour is come that the Son of man should be glorified'; and goes on at once to speak of His imminent death, of the 'trouble' of His soul, and to pray for deliverance from the terrible 'hour' that is upon Him, which yet He knows He has been sent to face (12²⁰⁻²⁷). It is when Judas has gone out to betray Him that Jesus says, 'Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him' (13³¹). The 'glory' of Jesus is the same as His 'lifting up' (3¹⁴ 8²⁸ 12³²)—the exaltation and victory that comes through humiliation and death for men.¹

But further: He, as others are brought to share it, can only win His real glory: 'I am glorified *in them*' (17¹⁰): the Spirit of Truth is to glorify Him by taking His secret and declaring it to His followers (16¹⁴). It is only as they come to share His consecration that Jesus Himself can attain His glory.

The real glory of Jesus, then, is the manifestation in Him of the Divine character. His glory is God's glory; His nature is God's nature; His self-abandoning love is God's love; His enriching life is God's life. This is what He has come to impart to men, that they may have God's outflowing love and life reproduced in them, and so may be bound in mystic union to Him and to one another. 'The glory which thou hast given me I have given them; *that they all may be one, even as we are one*' (17^{22, 26}).

The coming of Christ by His living Spirit into the hearts of His true followers altogether replaces in the Fourth Gospel the crude millennial splendours of the Synoptics. It is into this that the Parousia has been transformed. Except for one passage in the Appendix (21²²), there is no allusion to a 'coming' or return of Christ except as the Spirit of Truth, the Comforter. This is the more remarkable inasmuch as we know well that the main body of the Christian Church during the early centuries continued to hold the millennial conceptions with

¹ The comments of the author (apart from 12³⁰) make it clear that so he himself understood the words he attributes to Jesus. The disciples did not understand His entry into Jerusalem till after He was 'glorified' (12¹⁶). 'The Spirit was not yet, because Jesus was not yet glorified' (7³⁹): He could not come to them in fulness of spiritual presence until He had first departed from them in the body (cf. 16⁷). Peter, in the Appendix, is to 'glorify God' by faithfulness unto death (21¹⁹).

which the disciples started out. The depth and power of the Johannine teaching would seem to have been imperfectly appreciated.

How far does the teaching of this Gospel faithfully present to us the underlying thoughts of Jesus Himself—or was it an improvement on His meaning, due to the non-fulfilment of His forecasts of 'coming on the clouds of heaven'? Even if the familiar terms of Apocalyptic imagery were those that He actually employed, it would be quite consistent with His methods of teaching if He used them in a deeper sense than His hearers for the most part understood; and it should not surprise us if they have in part reproduced the form without indicating the true meaning that lay behind it. 'Jesus over the heads of His reporters' was one of Matthew Arnold's canons of Gospel criticism; and it appears to be a sounder one than the assumption that any of His interpreters were more spiritually-minded than their Master. If St. Paul discovered that 'the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost' (Ro 14¹⁷), is it extravagant to suppose that it meant something at least as ethical and spiritual in the mind of Jesus Himself?

There are indications scattered in the Synoptics that the earlier evangelists reported sayings whose depth they had not fully fathomed. Notably this is so in Luke, who reports the sayings that 'the kingdom of God cometh not with observation . . . for lo, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you,' and that 'the days will come when ye shall desire to see one of the *days* of the Son of man and shall not see it' (Lk 17²⁰⁻²²). This suggests that it will not be a spectacular event *in time*; and the suggestion is confirmed by the use of the word 'henceforth' (*ἀπ' ἄρτι*, Mt 26⁶⁴; *ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν*, Lk 22⁶⁹) in the words of Jesus before the High Priest: 'Henceforth ye shall see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of power and coming in the clouds of heaven.' Further, both Matthew and Luke record (in slightly different words) the saying that 'as the lightning cometh forth from the east, and is seen even unto the west, so shall be the coming of the Son of man' (Mt 24²⁷, Lk 17²⁴)—indicating that the Parousia will not be an event *in space*, any more than an event in time.

If, as the fourth Evangelist suggests, the root thought in the mind of Jesus, when He spoke of His 'coming,' was His victory over the 'power of darkness' (Lk 22⁵³), to be achieved through His

death and resurrection, this would afford a simple and natural explanation of one at least of the most difficult passages in the Synoptics: 'Verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone through the cities of Israel till the Son of man be come' (Mt 10²³). That this 'coming' refers primarily to His death I cannot doubt, though He may not at that time have foreseen the circumstances in which it would occur. If His thoughts were already centred in His coming death, but He felt it impossible to speak of this 'openly' (Mk 8³²) till He had won from the disciples such an understanding confession as that of Peter at Cæsarea Philippi, what more likely than that He should have hinted at it in veiled language of this character? ¹

I suggest that we can trust the Johannine interpretation, as giving a real clue to what lay behind

¹ So also I should venture to explain the similar statement in the parallels Mk 9¹, Mt 16²⁸, Lk 9²⁷.

the imagery in which Jesus clothed His thoughts of the glory He was to win through death, of the victory He was to achieve by perfect obedience, though that should lead Him through depths of shame. If so, then the Apocalyptic sayings take their place as no excrescence, no mistake of a deluded enthusiast, but as the crown of all His teaching. They give us the assurance—which in these days of darkness and horror we need as much as the disciples needed it—that His Kingdom will come in glory and power; that He will yet be the Lord of all our life, if only He can find once more the men and women in whom He can be 'glorified,' who will strive for His Kingdom even when the cause seems hopeless, will believe in Him even when 'the world' seems to have conquered, and be willing to follow Him even unto death. 'If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be.'

In the Study.

The Seven Words.

VII.

The Surrendered Life.

'Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.'—Lk 23⁴⁶.

THE darkness had lasted from noon till three o'clock, and it was after this that Jesus took the vinegar, and cried with a loud voice, and died.

The evening was closing in. The mysterious darkness had passed away, the sun again shone over Calvary and the mountains of Judæa and the Holy City. The sun was drawing to its setting, and its level rays gilded the cross, and cast a long shadow eastward over those who stood behind. The darkness was perhaps rolling eastward, and so the cross would stand out brilliantly against the purple bank of gloom behind. The day—this dreadful day—was drawing to an end, and soon the Sabbath would have begun. Already the crowds were leaving the hill and turning back to Jerusalem, and the scribes and Pharisees had left, for the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice in the temple approached.

Then Jesus 'cried with a loud voice, and said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost.'

It is the last of the Seven Words, and it is a word of rest and trust. The conflict is past, the darkness is past, the suffering is past. All is finished. There is no reason why our Lord should remain longer on the cross. So He commits His soul to His Heavenly Father's keeping, and bows His head, and gives up the ghost.

1. What was the cry that preceded these words? Was it a cry of relief at the touch of death? Was it a cry of victory? Was it a cry of gladness that He had endured to the end? Or did the Father look out upon Him in answer to His *My God*, and the blessedness of it make Him cry aloud because He could not smile? Was such His condition now that the greatest gladness of the universe could express itself only in a loud cry? Or was it but the last wrench of pain ere the final repose began? It may have been all in one. But never surely in all books, in all words of thinking men, can there be so much expressed as lay unarticulated in that cry of the Son of God.

2. The words that He spoke are a quotation from the 31st Psalm, as the Fourth Word from the cross is a quotation from the 22nd. A suggestion not to be forgotten lies in the fact that our dying Redeemer thus drew on the Psalms for comfort in those last hours of life. We may securely argue