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THE ESCHATOLOGY OF THE FOURTH GOSPEL

THE question of primary importance in considering the eschatology of the Fourth Gospel and of the three Epistles commonly associated with it, is whether it is fundamentally of a piece with the Christian-Hebraic tradition, whose traits are to be seen with tolerable clarity in the rest of the New Testament, or whether the characteristic elements of this tradition have been transmuted into a wholly new product. The latter conclusion has been adopted by perhaps a majority of scholars in recent years; Canon Streeter stressed the mysticism of the Elder as the main cause for this development; Professor Dodd has contended that the old Jewish notion of the two ages has been replaced by the Platonic conception of the phenomenal order as the shadow of the ideal and eternal order; this eternal order is the Kingdom of God and into it the Christian enters by means of the new birth. The position maintained in this paper is at variance with both these tenets; it is that the eschatology of the literature in question, though receiving a different emphasis, is harmonious with the doctrine of the rest of the New Testament writers.

Before coming to particulars, certain general principles call for consideration. First, it has not been adequately recognised that *eschatological ideas may be expressed in highly diversified ways, and yet remain unchanged*. The inevitable use of symbolism in speaking of matters which lie outside our sphere of experience partly accounts for this. But these differences have been increased through the widespread use of apocalyptic terminology in the primitive Church. The distinguishing characteristic of apocalyptic literature, indeed, is not its eschatology, for that was inherited from the prophets, but its abundant use of luxuriant imagery; angels and demons and hybrid beasts and terrifying judgment scenes are commonplace to express what more prosaic minds would state in plain language. The description of any particular feature of the end time would depend on to what extent apocalyptic scenery was used. It is instructive to compare in this respect related passages in the Synoptic Gospels, the Fourth

Gospel and the Apocalypse of John; e.g. Mark xiii. 26-27 speaks of the Son of Man coming on clouds with power and great glory, and His angels gather together the elect from the ends of heaven and earth; Rev. xix. 11 gives a vision of Faithful and True seated on a white horse and followed by the armies of heaven, and He treads the winepress of God's wrath; John xiv. 3 says, "If I go away, I come again". All these are expressions of the one concept of the Parousia; it seems sheer perversity to imagine that this truth means any less to the Fourth Evangelist because he records it non-figuratively. We shall have more to say about this in dealing with the relationship of the Apocalypse to the Fourth Gospel, but this one illustration will suffice to show how fallacious it is to argue that, because the Evangelist does not use the traditional symbolism of Jewish apocalyptic, he has discarded the eschatology of the primitive Church.

A second matter of importance is *John's replacement of the Eschatological Discourse of the Synoptists by the Last Discourses of our Lord as the prelude to the Passion*. Not only is this usually thought to be clear proof of the Evangelist's abandonment of the earlier doctrine, but it also is held to show that the Parousia is now interpreted to be the coming of the Holy Spirit. It is, however, assuming the very thing to be proved, that the reason for the absence of the Eschatological Discourse is that the Evangelist disagreed with it. Such thinking proceeds on the assumption that the Fourth Gospel was intended to be a restatement of Christianity for the purpose of ousting out the former Gospels. Whether or not the Fourth Gospel presupposes a knowledge of the Three is a debatable point; to me, Zahn's discussion of the matter makes it most likely that at least it presupposes a knowledge of *the traditions* contained in the Three and that the teaching of the Fourth Gospel is supplementary to that of the others. In which case, what is known by all need not be again repeated. Moreover, although the situation for which John wrote did not particularly require the repetition of the Eschatological Discourse, the elucidation of the teaching concerning the Holy Spirit was of first importance. The moot point, however, is not *why* these discourses are given, but *what* they teach. Do they contain eschatological teaching? It is being increasingly recognised that they do and that they are shot through with the authentic, primitive expectations of the earliest

tradition. Dr. W. F. Howard has done us a service in drawing attention to Windisch's treatment of the Paraclete sayings. He separates the five passages which deal with the Lord's teaching on the Paraclete and maintains that they together form a unity, and that their excision leaves a smoothly running context. The effect is startling, for it leaves the thrice repeated "I come to you" of John xiv (vv. 3, 18, 28) as bare statements of the Parousia, without the possibility of interpreting them with reference to the Holy Spirit. Whether Windisch is justified in separating the Paraclete passages from the context or not, it is at least of importance to consider them by themselves. The Spirit is to be another Paraclete, continuing the Ministry of the Incarnate Christ among His disciples. One cannot fail to recall Paul's teaching on the Spirit as the "pledge" or "first instalment" of the blessings of the Kingdom of God, and the similar teaching in the early chapters of Acts. But Dr. Howard points out another feature of these sayings; the Spirit's ministry of revelation and of recalling the truth that Jesus taught is constantly stressed; this links the whole group of Paraclete sayings with the logion contained both in Mark and Q concerning the help which the Spirit will give to the disciples in the hour of their distress: "When they bring you before the synagogues, and the rulers, and the authorities, be not anxious how or what ye shall say, for the Holy Spirit shall teach you in that very hour what ye ought to say" (Luke xii. 11-12; Matt. x. 19, and Mark xiii. 11). It will be seen that both Luke and Matthew place this saying in an eschatological setting; in Mark it occurs in the Eschatological Discourse. It seems apparent that Jesus did give teaching on the Holy Spirit to His disciples before His departure, even though the Synoptists have preserved so little of it; and further, that this teaching has an eschatological significance. If we add to this the stress that Jesus places on the tribulation the disciples are to suffer, and the repeated assertion that "the hour" had at last struck, the hour of Judgment, of the exaltation of the Son of Man, and of the liberation of the Kingdom for all mankind, we see at least something of the eschatological tone of these sublime chapters.

A third point to be noted is that *the Fourth Evangelist appears to hold a realised and futurist eschatology without any sense of contradiction*. It has been the custom of many theologians to stress the "realised" element at the expense of the "futurist",

as though the two strains of teaching are mutually exclusive. Hence, either a blind eye is turned to those statements in the Gospel which anticipate a future consummation, as Streeter in his *Four Gospels* appears to do, or they are explained as survivals of the old system not yet assimilated to the new categories, or they are regarded as interpolations by a dull-witted editor. Charles is so entranced by the Evangelist's doctrine of the believer's present possession of eternal life through the experience of resurrection in this life, that he must perforce regard v. 28-29, which speaks of a future resurrection of righteous and wicked, as an interpolation; the words "at the last day" in vi. 39, 40, 44, 54, and xii. 48, are similarly viewed. These, and other such examples, seem unnecessary when it is seen that every element of eschatological doctrine receives a like presentation from John. Judgment is both a constant process and a prospect in view; so is the experience of salvation, so is the Kingdom of God. The same phenomenon appears in the Synoptic Gospels, in the letters of Paul, in Hebrews, and even in the Revelation to a certain extent. If the Fourth Evangelist gives a greater insistence than the others as to the reality of the manifestation of the Eschatological Kingdom in the ministry of Christ and the bestowal of the Holy Spirit, that perhaps may be regarded as one of the many peculiar contributions of his Gospel. But it should not be forgotten that the First Epistle of John is the one authentic commentary we possess on this Gospel, even if it appeared before the latter; in that Epistle we are made to understand that the writer in no wise regards his realised eschatology as cancelling out his hopes for a future consummation. That this fact should cause Professor Dodd to refuse the same authorship to the Epistle as to the Gospel, is a demonstration as clear as could be desired of the weakness of his position. It is but an extension of that delightfully simple expedient that commentators have of dubbing all passages inimical to their interpretations as "interpolations"; this practice does not commend the theories in question to the discriminating reader, but rather usually makes him more wary.

As we turn to a more detailed consideration of the Johannine eschatology, the first factor calling for our attention is the frequent occurrence in the Gospel of the term "*Son of Man*". According to Moulton and Geden's concordance, this title appears as a designation of Christ in this Gospel thirteen times; in Mark

the term is used fourteen times. This is remarkable in view of the fact that every occurrence in the Fourth Gospel is one in which the Messianic work of Christ is in view, whereas there are several occasions in Mark where a community reference is possible, or even a general one. We note in passing i. 51, "Ye shall see the heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man"; v. 26-27, "As the Father hath life in Himself, even so gave He to the Son also to have life in Himself, and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is Son of Man"; xii. 31-34, "Now is the Judgment of the World; now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Myself. . . . The multitude, therefore, answered Him . . . How sayest thou the Son of Man must be lifted up?" These passages show the centrality of Christ in the Kingdom of God, in judgment and in salvation. Hence, since the eschatology of John, as of the New Testament generally, is centred in Christ's activity (or as Otto Borchert would put it, since Christian Eschatology is Christology), we may divide our material under headings which designate Christ's functions as Son of Man.

First, as Son of Man, *Christ is Judge of men*. John v. 19-30 sets forth this truth clearly and concisely. The Father judges no man but has given all judgment to the Son; this authority has been granted, "because He is Son of Man". It is not, however, a right which Christ exercises independently: "I can of Myself do nothing; as I hear I judge and my judgment is righteous, because I seek not my own will, but the will of Him that sent Me." This passage is of importance as enabling us to link up those sayings which appear to represent God as Judge and those representing Christ as Judge; such varied representations are common both in the Gospels and the Epistles (cf. Matt. x. 32-33 with Matt. xxv. 31, Rom. xiv. 10 and 2 Cor. v. 10).

Christ is exercising His judgment now: "He that believeth on Him is not judged; he that believeth not hath been judged already; because he hath not believed on the name of the only begotten Son of God" (iii. 18). The judgment is already passed because the Kingdom is now here; and men either receive it with penitence and faith or they refuse it; this process is, therefore, inevitable and inescapable. "Everyone that doeth ill hateth the light and *cometh not* to the light. . . . But

he that doeth the truth *cometh* to the light" (iii. 20-21). As has been often pointed out, the same truth is here expressed as that set forth pictorially in the Judgment scene of Matt. xxv. 31, where the sheep and goats separate themselves before the King. It is erroneous to infer that since this is so, the scene in Matt. xxv represents a judgment supervening on this age. The Matthaean picture is concerned with the day "when the Son of Man shall come in His glory and all the angels with Him", and is intended to reverse the popular notions as to what will be the kind of question asked on that Day; not "Are you of Abraham's stock?" but "Did you love?" The Fourth Evangelist also speaks of a coming Day, when the silent process of this age will become a public demonstration. "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my sayings, hath one that judgeth him; the word that I spake, the same shall judge him in the last day" (xii. 48). So also in the First Epistle we read, "He that abideth in love abideth in God and God abideth in him. Herein is love made perfect with us, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as he is, even so are we in this world" (iv. 16-17). Because of the clear import of these sayings, it seems unwarranted to refuse John v. 28-29, which follows the statement of Christ's authority to exercise judgment, "The hour cometh in which all that are in the tombs shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done ill, unto the resurrection of judgment". This Evangelist, therefore, teaches a final dénouement as do the other Gospel writers. But it is important to note that it has already been anticipated and its nature revealed in the enthronement of Christ on the Cross (xii. 31); of this fact the Spirit now seeks to convince the world (xvi. 11).

Since Christ is Son of Man He is also *the Messianic Deliverer*, effecting His deliverance through the sacrifice of Himself. "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth may in Him have eternal life" (iii. 14-15). He delivers from the wrath of God, that is even now directed against the sinner: "He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life; but he that obeyeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him" (iii. 36). We are reminded by these sayings that the Christian idea of salvation is essentially an eschatological conception.

The last quotation also shows that the Evangelist regards eternal life as both a present possession and one to be entered upon later: "he that believeth hath eternal life . . . he that obeyeth not shall not see life." This is more dwelt on in the First Epistle; see especially v. 11, "The witness is this, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in His Son", and iii. 2, "Now are we the children of God, and *it is not yet made manifest what we shall be*. We know that if He shall be manifested, *we shall be like Him*; for we shall see Him even as He is".

The condition of receiving eternal life is resurrection. Here again this is a gift enjoyed in the present life and is yet to be more fully experienced. Notice v. 25-29: "The hour *is coming* and *now is* when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live." That the one resurrection is the pledge of the other is seen in vi. 39-40: "This is the will of Him that sent me, that of all which He hath given me, I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that every one that beholdeth the Son, and believeth on Him, should have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."

We are thus led to the question, "What will occasion the appearance of this last day of resurrection?" The only possible answer is, "The Parousia of the Son of Man". This event is referred to unmistakably in the Appendix to the Gospel, "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" (xxi. 22-23) and again twice in the First Epistle (ii. 28 and iii. 2). It seems, therefore, by far the most natural interpretation of xiv. 3 to regard it as referring to the Parousia: "If I go and prepare a place for you, I come again and will receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." We have already noted Dr. Howard's interpretation of xiv. 18 and 28 as of the Parousia and not of a "spiritual" and present experience, and he may well be right. But it is possible that the same phenomenon appears here as with regard to the other elements of John's eschatology, viz., that there is implied both a present and a future experience. The Coming of Christ is certainly thus regarded in the Letters to the Churches of Revelation, and perhaps in this chapter in v. 21; Jesus says, "He that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, *and will manifest myself unto him*". When Judas asks what has happened that this can be, Jesus replies, "If a man love me, he will keep

my word, and my Father will love him, and *we will come unto Him*, and make our abode (*μονή*) with Him". The use of *μονή* inevitably recalls xiv. 3, and seems to imply a "Parousia" of the Father and of the Son to the heart of the believer. John's treatment of his themes of eternal life and resurrection forbids us to cancel the futurist interpretation of xiv. 3 on this account, but rather shows the consistency of his teaching on the last things (perhaps we may be allowed to say "the consistency of our Lord's teaching"!).

The recognition of a doctrine of the Parousia in this Gospel prepares us to find that it is pictured as being preceded by certain well-known happenings. Much of the closing discourses of Christ is concerned with *tribulations* which the disciples will suffer. The opening verses of chapter xvi are especially significant: "These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be made to stumble. They shall put you out of the synagogues; yea, the hour cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he offereth service unto God. And these things will they do, because they have not known the Father, nor me. But these things have I spoken unto you, that *when their hour is come*, ye may remember them how that I told you." We should compare with these statements the warning in the Eschatological Discourse, "Take heed to yourselves; for they shall deliver you up to councils; and in synagogues shall ye be beaten; and before Governors and Kings shall ye stand for my sake, for a testimony unto them" (Mark xiii. 9). There does not seem to be room for doubt that they refer to the same times. The parallel is the more impressive when we note that in Mark there immediately follows the assurance that the Holy Spirit will teach the disciples in that hour what they should speak; in John xvi there follows the teaching as to the Paraclete's work of convicting the world of sin, of righteousness and of judgment, and of His guiding the disciples into all the truth, declaring the things that are to come. A. E. Brooke, in Peake's Commentary, even interprets the ensuing words of the Parousia, "A little while, and ye shall behold me no more; and again a little while and ye shall see me". This would fit the standpoint of 1 John ii. 18, that it is "the last hour"; but that apart, the passages previously mentioned seem to show how truly John reproduced the essential thought of the primitive tradition as we have it in the Synoptics and in Paul. At the risk of appearing

burdensome, I would again point out that this expectation of John as to a coming tribulation is presented alongside assertions that tribulations are to be experienced by the Christian now; xvi. 32 records, "The hour cometh, yea is come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me. These things have I spoken unto you, that in me ye may have peace. In the world ye have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world". In this context the last saying must refer to the Christian's present experience. We are reminded of the words of the seer of Revelation, "I John, your brother and partaker with you in the tribulation and Kingdom and patience which are in Jesus" (Rev. i. 9); yet he also expected a great tribulation at the soon approaching end-time (Rev. vii. 14).

In accordance with this teaching as to coming tribulations, we find that, in the Epistles at least, John heralds the appearance of Antichrist as the precursor of the Second Coming of Christ. He sees the spirit of Antichrist as inspiring the current Gnosticism; because such doctrine was actually being spread at the time of writing, he saw the Parousia fast approaching. "It is the last hour; as ye heard that Antichrist cometh, even now have there arisen many antichrists, whereby we know that it is the last hour" (1 John ii. 18). John goes on to urge that the Antichrist is he that denies that Jesus is the Christ. It is usually asserted that in so interpreting the signs of his times, John has completely transformed the "Antichrist Legend". Such features as, for example, appear in 2 Thess. ii are dropped and the bare notion of hostility to the truth is retained. This is going beyond what the evidence warrants. John states that the heresy that was then going the rounds was a manifestation of the spirit of Antichrist; he does not say that there are no other devilish wiles that can be similarly labelled. Moreover, John is not completely original in regarding false teaching of this order as the precursor of the End; Matthew's version of the Eschatological Discourse contains the following, "Many false prophets shall arise, and shall lead many astray. And because iniquity shall be multiplied, the love of the many shall wax cold. But he that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved" (xxiv. 11-13). Compare with this 1 John iv. 14: "Believe not every spirit, but prove the spirits, whether they are of God; because *many false prophets are gone out into the world*. Hereby

know ye the Spirit of God; every spirit which confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God; and every spirit which confesseth not Jesus is not of God; and this is the spirit of the Antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it cometh; and now it is in the world already. Ye are of God, my little children, and have overcome them." The genuineness of the Matthaean logion is attested by Paul, for his description of the Antichrist in 2 Thess. ii is undoubtedly dependent on the Eschatological Discourse; he describes the advent of Antichrist as "according to the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceit of unrighteousness for them that are perishing; because they receive not the love of the truth that they might be saved. *And for this cause God sendeth them a working of error that they should believe a lie*" (2 Thess. ii. 9-11). It would, therefore, seem that John has used one part only of the tradition concerning Antichrist, for the very good reason that it appeared to be relevant to his situation. We can infer nothing as to what else he did or did not believe about Antichrist from his lack of saying more.

The last function of Christ as Son of Man that we must mention is His position as *Messianic King*. When Pilate asked Jesus if He were a King, the reply came, "Thou sayest that I am a King. To this end have I been born, and to this end am I come into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth" (xviii. 37). The reply at the same time showed what Jesus meant by His utterance, "My Kingdom is not of this world"; it is a Kingdom whose origin is of heaven and whose nature is of the truth of God; Jesus certainly did not intend to say that His Kingdom was not to be established in the world; it was already there!

The principle adumbrated to Nicodemus, "Except a man be born anew, he cannot see (or enter into) the Kingdom of God", seems to imply it is possible to see and enter into the Kingdom now if one is born anew. The subsequent teaching of the Gospel confirms this. Jesus tells the woman of Sychar, "The hour cometh, when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, shall ye worship the Father". The reference is undoubtedly to the hour of the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom. Jesus then proceeds to say, "The hour cometh, *and now is*, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth" (iv. 21-23). Clearly, this latter saying implies that

the Kingdom, in which man has communion with God, is present at the time of speaking, and is later to come more fully. When is it so to come? The hour when every man should be scattered to his own, and forsake Jesus; the hour that Jesus kept saying had not yet come; the hour concerning which Jesus, on the brink of His betrayal, confessed to His Father that at last it had come, and He was to be glorified through it; that hour when Jesus would be so exalted that because of it all men should come to Him. Professor Dodd explains the position of the death of Christ in the Kingdom as an indication of its function of judgment; the coming of the Kingdom involves the condemnation of sin. This explanation is not adequate to account for the evidence either of the Gospels or of Paul. It is true that the ministry of Jesus brought with it the Kingdom, but the death emancipated it for the world by making it possible for all men to enter it. It is important to notice here the significance of the teaching on the Bread of Life. The Jews had a tradition about the heavenly manna being given to men again in the Kingdom age (Apoc. Bar. xxix. 8). Jesus offered to the Jews before Him the true bread out of heaven: "I am the bread of life; he that cometh to me shall not hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst" (vi. 35). Surely these words presuppose that Jesus there and then was prepared to give the heavenly sustenance of the Kingdom of God to all who would put their trust in Him. But He later explained, "The bread which I will give is my flesh, for the life of the world", and by this we presume He spoke of the benefits of His death to the man of faith. He who eats His flesh and drinks His blood has eternal life and will be raised up at the last day. The same thought is contained in the idea of Jesus giving water of life. He told the woman of Sychar it could be had. He cried to the Jews, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and let him that believeth on me drink; as the scripture hath said, Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water" (vii. 37-38). It is an allusion to the living waters of the new age proceeding from the temple of God, as prophesied by Ezekiel (xlvi. 1). The evangelist proceeds to add, "This spake he of the Spirit, which they that believed on him were to receive: for the Spirit was not yet given, *because Jesus was not yet glorified*" (vii. 39). The living waters of the age of the blessed are thus especially to be made available after the death of Jesus. The whole matter is analogous to the

time of the founding of the Church; it is difficult to deny that it existed in the nucleus of the disciples of Jesus during the days of His ministry, but its liberation for the world dates from Pentecost.

Does this mean that there is no expectation in the Fourth Gospel of a yet fuller stage of development of the Kingdom of God? It does not. When Jesus declared that in His Father's house were many *μοναί* and that He was going to prepare a place for them and return, He implied what is described by a different metaphor in the Synoptists, viz., the eating and drinking in the Kingdom of God, with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and the rest of the prophets. It is the Kingdom consummated at the Parousia. John exhorts the elect lady and her children, "Look to yourselves, that ye lose not the things which we have wrought, but that ye receive a full reward" (2 John 8). This is the time when John wishes to have boldness and not be ashamed before Him at His Parousia (1 John ii. 28). It is the day of the resurrection unto life, when the righteous shall enter upon their heritage of eternal life to the full (v. 28-29). If John does not often use the term "Kingdom of God", and perhaps not at all in connection with its final manifestation, the idea is fully comprised in his teaching on eternal life. This *ζωή αἰώνιος* is the life of the blessed in the *αἰώνιος βασιλεία* (2 Peter i. 11). The two terms are not identical but correlative, for the *βασιλεία* is made up of those possessing the *ζωή*. The former describes for the community the privileges and qualities which the latter holds for the individual, and is therefore the larger conception. It does not correspond to the Platonic eternal idea which stands over against the phenomenal world of time, but is the outcome of a Redemption wrought in time and has a real relation to the time process. The Kingdom came with the King; His life was shared by His loyal subjects; it shall come in fullness when He appears in His glory, and His subjects shall be like Him. This is the hope of John, of Paul, of the Synoptists, of the primitive Church, and of the historic Church. We hold it still.

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