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Arthur Carr

Excerpt

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## THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST JOHN.

### PART I. The Nativity and Early Years.

I 1-34.

- (a) The Prologue or Preface containing the revelation of the Eternal Word and of the Incarnation, 1-14.

**I**N the beginning was the Word, and the Word was **1** with God, and the Word was God. The same was in **2** the beginning with God. All things were made by him; **3**

**I. 1. In the beginning.** The opening words recall, and are intended to recall, the first words of Genesis. This Gospel is the story of the new Creation. The **beginning** is the infinite past, inconceivable to human thought, and yet a necessary condition of thought, comp. 1 John ii. 13, 'ye know him which is from the beginning,' and Eph. i. 4, 'He chose us in him before the foundation of the world.'

**the Word.** See Introd., p. xxi. *fol.* St John's definition of this expression excludes the current philosophical meaning of it. Briefly stated, the meaning of 'the Word' is, God as revealed and revealing Himself to man. In the Liturgy of Sarapion God is addressed, 'Who through the Son was uttered and interpreted and made known to created nature.'

**with God,** the preposition 'with' (*παρά*), implies more than co-existence; it conveys the thought of intercommunion. See also 1 John i. 2.

**3. All things were made by him.** Revelation begins where science admits limitation. Sir O. Lodge says, 'Let us admit, as scientific men, that of real origin, even of the simplest thing, we know nothing, not even of a pebble.' And H. Spencer, 'The last conclusion of science is, a single unknown Cause, Power or Force manifested through all phenomena.' But Lord Kelvin notes that 'scientific thought is compelled to accept the idea of Creative Power.' With this comp. Hebr. xi. 3, 'By *faith* we understand that the worlds have been framed by the word (*λόγω*) of God.'

C.

I

and without him was not anything made that hath been  
 4 made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men.  
 5 And the light shineth in the darkness; and the darkness  
 6 apprehended it not. There came a man, sent from God,  
 7 whose name was John. The same came for witness, that  
 he might bear witness of the light, that all might believe  
 8 through him. He was not the light, but *came* that he

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**without him was not anything made.** The Greek is even stronger, 'not even one thing was made that hath been made.' Comp. Heb. i. 2, 'His Son...through whom also he made the worlds,' and Col. i. 16, 'In him were all things created.' See the important marginal reading for the words which follow: 'That which hath been made was life in him; and the life' &c., which gives a true and profound meaning.

**4. the life was the light of men.** Light was the first manifestation of the creative power of God, Gen. i. 3. 'It is the indispensable condition of all order, all distinction, all life, and all further progress' (Driver). This symbolism of God as an O.T. thought is beautifully expressed in Ps. xxxvi. 9, 'With thee is the fountain of life: and in thy light shall we see light.' Comp. also Isaiah lx. 1, both passages regarded as Messianic in Rabbinical writings. In the N.T. the figure is very frequent with St Paul as with St John. The disciples of Christ are 'children of the Light' (1 Thess. v. 5); their Master and Lord 'dwells in light unapproachable' (1 Tim. vi. 16); and brought 'life and incorruption to light' (2 Tim. i. 10). Scientifically too the connexion between light and life is very close. 'The sun is the source of all motion and force manifested in life on the earth' (Asa Gray).

**was the light.** Note the tense. The light was obscured or lost. It is a thing to be recovered through Christ, who is our life.

**5. apprehended it not,** or overcame it not, *marg.* Either rendering gives good sense. Either, (1) the world failed to understand the Divine revelation, or, (2) in the conflict of light and darkness, light was victorious.

**6. There came,** lit. was made. The use of the same verb as in v. 3 marks a connexion between the creation of the world and the coming of John. He too 'was made' and took his place in the order of creation and in the Divine plan.

**7. for witness.** John, in whom the prophetic office was revived, bore witness, (1) by prediction, and (2) by interpreting Christ as the light and life of the world.

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I 9-14

ST JOHN

3

might bear witness of the light. There was the true light, 9  
*even the light* which lighteth every man, coming into the  
 world. He was in the world, and the world was made by 10  
 him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his 11  
 own, and they that were his own received him not. But 12  
 as many as received him, to them gave he the right to  
 become children of God, *even* to them that believe on his  
 name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of 13  
 the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the 14  
 Word became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld  
 his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father),  
 full of grace and truth.

9. **coming into the world.** The participle might agree either with 'the true light,' or with 'every man.' The first is preferable. There is a continuous infusion of the light of the world. To each soul there is a possibility of enlightenment, i.e. of life, see above v. 4.

With the thought of the continuous incoming of the Light of the world we may connect the description of the baptized as 'enlightened,' and 'enlightenment' as a name for baptism.

10, 11. Neither the world which He created, nor the home and the people whom He chose, recognised or welcomed the Christ: 'They gave the Cross, when they owed the Throne' (Browning).

12. **as many as received him.** The new Israel. Those who through faith recognised and welcomed the Christ have the privilege of sonship in Him. To become children of God is more than to be children of Abraham.

13. The new life cannot be traced to any material cause, or human impulse. It comes from God; and the condition of it is faith in Him. In 1 John v. 18, 'Whosoever is begotten of God sinneth not, but he that was begotten of God keepeth him.'

14. **the Word became flesh,** i.e. became man, was incarnate, and so infused Divine life into human nature.

**dwelt among us.** Lit. tabernacled among us, i.e. either (1) sojourned, or (2) dwelt among us in the tabernacle of His flesh. Comp. 2 Cor. v. 4. Some have seen here an allusion to the *Shekinah*, or manifestation of Jehovah's presence under the Old Covenant, the Greek word for tent (*skene*) being similar in sound to *Shekinah*.

**his glory,** the manifestation of Himself as God. There may be a special reference to the Transfiguration.

**grace and truth.** Grace in a special Christian sense is the

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ST JOHN

I 15-19

(b) John the Baptist testifies to Jesus as the Christ, 15-34, (a) in his preaching, 15-18; (b) in answer to the priests and Levites, 19-28; (c) in the presence of Jesus, 29-34.

15 John beareth witness of him, and crieth, saying, This was he of whom I said, He that cometh after me is become  
16 before me: for he was before me. For of his fulness we  
17 all received, and grace for grace. For the law was given  
18 by Moses; grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared *him*.

19 And this is the witness of John, when the Jews sent

revelation of the Gospel as contrasted with the Law (see *v.* 16); the gift of redemption in Christ, see Eph. i. 6, 'His grace which he freely bestowed upon us in the Beloved.' As a trait of character 'grace' is lovingkindness in imparting gifts, graciousness in word and act. Comp. Ps. xxxvii. 21, R.V., and Ps. xlv. 2; Is. lxi. 1-3. As a Greek word grace also signified beauty and charm in speech and manner, see Pind. *Ol.* i. 30.

**truth** is conformity to reality in word and act, and to an ideal perfection. Comp. 'truth as in Jesus,' as the norma and test of all truth.

15. Comp. Matt. iii. 11.

16. **of his fulness**, with reference to 'full of grace and truth,' *v.* 14. Comp. Eph. i. 23, 'the fulness of him that filleth all in all,' and Eph. iii. 19, iv. 13; Col. i. 19, ii. 9. In these passages 'fulness' signifies the plenitude or sum total of Divine attributes concentrated in God and in Christ.

**we**, the Apostles.

**grace for grace**, grace succeeding grace, lit. one grace taking the place of another. Perhaps here the grace of the Gospel in exchange for the grace of the Law.

17. **grace and truth**, see *v.* 14. Jesus Christ is here named for the first time. The mystic and eternal Word is at last revealed as Jesus Christ.

18. **No man hath seen God**. The connexion seems to be that the unseen God is revealed in Christ as Father.

**the only begotten Son**. For this the remarkable reading, 'God only begotten,' is found in some leading mss., and is accepted by Westcott and Hort.

19. **the witness of John**. Here the Evangelist speaks from his own experience as a disciple of the Baptist. **The Jews**. St John always associates with this term hostility to Jesus. He

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I 20-25

ST JOHN

5

unto him from Jerusalem priests and Levites to ask him, Who art thou? And he confessed, and denied not; and <sup>20</sup> he confessed, I am not the Christ. And they asked him, <sup>21</sup> What then? Art thou Elijah? And he saith, I am not. Art thou the prophet? And he answered, No. They <sup>22</sup> said therefore unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself? He said, I am the voice of one crying in the <sup>23</sup> wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said Isaiah the prophet. And they had been sent from the <sup>24</sup> Pharisees. And they asked him, and said unto him, Why <sup>25</sup> then baptizest thou, if thou art not the Christ, neither

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had lived to witness a national rejection of the Messiah by the Jews. From *v.* 24 we learn that this mission consisted of Pharisees.

**20. the Christ**, the expectation of the Messiah (Christ) had grown in intensity as the political prospects of the nation darkened. Vivid interest was excited by each claim to the Messiahship.

**21. Art thou Elijah?** See Malachi iv. 5, and Matt. xvii. 11, Mark ix. 13. The Baptist here shews that he was ignorant of our Lord's interpretation of Malachi's prophecy (see Matt. *loc. cit.*).

**the prophet**, see Deut. xviii. 15, 'The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me, unto him shall ye hearken.' The expectation was of some great lawgiver of a new Covenant; comp. Jer. xxxi. 31 f., see also *v.* 25 below and chs. vi. 14, vii. 40. The Christians referred the prophecy to Christ Himself, Acts iii. 22.

**23. the voice of one crying in the wilderness**, &c., cited from Isaiah xl. 3, there the voice of the herald announcing the 'gospel' or good tidings of deliverance from Babylon. This was no unheeded voice as 'preaching in the wilderness' is often interpreted to mean. 'There went out unto him Jerusalem and all Judæa, and all the region round about Jordan,' Matt. iii. 5.

**25. Why then baptizest thou?** Although lustrations were usual among the Jews, and baptism of the proselytes was practised (Schürer, II. 11, 19), baptism of repentance for remission of sins (Mark i. 4) was an innovation. As a sign or seal of discipleship (Acts xix. 3) the Messiah (Ezek. xxxvi. 25; Zech. xiii. 1) or Elijah or the Prophet might have enjoined it; but what right had John to do this?

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ST JOHN

I 26-31

26 Elijah, neither the prophet? John answered them, saying, I baptize with water: in the midst of you standeth  
 27 one whom ye know not, *even* he that cometh after me, the latchet of whose shoe I am not worthy to unloose.  
 28 These things were done in Bethany beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing.  
 29 On the morrow he seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the  
 30 sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is become before me: for he was  
 31 before me. And I knew him not; but that he should

26. The answer of John is an assertion of his right to baptize as a prophet of the greater One, still unrecognised, who was coming after him. It was a preparatory rite.

27. **the latchet of whose shoe**, &c., the work of the meanest slave. Comp. Acts xiii. 25.

28. **Bethany**, for Bethabara, A.V. The site of this Bethany beyond Jordan is quite uncertain. It may be the Aramaic form of the Hebrew Bashan, and denote that district. Bethabara of the A.V., meaning 'crossing' or 'ferry,' has been identified with the modern Abârah, a ford 14 miles S. of the Sea of Galilee. But such a name may have occurred more than once down the river. See G. A. Smith, *Hist. Geog. of the Holy Land*, p. 496.

29. **the Lamb of God**. The first reference is probably to the lamb of the paschal sacrifice 'without blemish and without spot' (1 Peter i. 19, 20—a passage which throws great light on this). But the thought of 'the servant of the Lord,' led as a sheep to the slaughter, must not be excluded, Is. liii. 7; comp. Acts viii. 32-36. More generally the lamb is a symbol of innocence and gentleness. 'A lamb is a sort of personified innocence by reason of its whiteness, its meek expression, its pathetic voice.' (C. Rossetti, *The Face of the Deep*, pp. 176, 177.)

The frequent use of this symbol of Christ in the Revelation is to be noted (see chs. v. 5, xiii. 8, and elsewhere)—a sign of the deep impression this word of the Baptist made on his disciple, the Evangelist.

**which taketh away the sin of the world**, see 1 Peter i. 19.

30. See v. 15.

31. **I knew him not**, i.e. either (a) knew Him not as the Messiah, or (b) literally; John brought up in the desert had never seen Jesus. He had no personal knowledge of Him. And yet even so the 'Holy Families' of the great medieval painters

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I 32-34

ST JOHN

7

be made manifest to Israel, for this cause came I baptizing with water. And John bare witness, saying, I have beheld <sup>32</sup> the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven; and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that <sup>33</sup> sent me to baptize with water, he said unto me, Upon whomsoever thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and abiding upon him, the same is he that baptizeth with the Holy Spirit. And I have seen, and have borne witness <sup>34</sup> that this is the Son of God.

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have a germ of truth. For, although the whole secret of the Divine birth and the Messiahship of Jesus had not been revealed, John knew enough of the wondrous and innocent childhood to form a lofty conception of Jesus. Hence the words in Matt. (iii. 14), 'I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?' Hence too his ready acceptance of the sign.

**for this cause**, &c., the end or first cause of John's baptism was the revelation of Jesus as the Christ, made first to John and through John to others.

**32.** The synoptics add the voice from heaven: 'Thou art my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased,' Mark i. 11; Matt. iii. 17; Luke iii. 22: the two first apparently describe the vision as witnessed by Jesus; St Luke notes that our Lord was *praying* when the heavens were opened.

With the descent of the Spirit in the form of a dove at this new creation compare 'the moving' (*Heb.* hovering as of a bird) of the Spirit of God upon the face of the waters at the first creation, Gen. i. 2.

**abode**, denoting the continual presence of the Holy Spirit on Jesus. See Is. xl. 2, 'The spirit of the Lord shall *rest* upon him.'

**34. this is the Son of God**, the definite conclusion of the Baptist's testimony that Jesus the Christ is Divine. The expression 'Son of God' signifies identity of nature without any notion of succession in time, or of inferiority.

It will be noted that the Baptist's testimony as reported in this Gospel is more decisive as to the Divine nature (*v.* 34) and office (*v.* 36) of Christ, than the synoptic report. Observe too that St John does not record the act of baptism.

## PART II. The Ministry. I 35-11 55.

The first call of the disciples, 35-51. A valuable addition to the Synoptic account. It describes the gradual inner drawing of the disciples with Jesus before they were summoned to be with Him.

35 Again on the morrow John was standing, and two of  
 36 his disciples; and he looked upon Jesus as he walked,  
 37 and saith, Behold, the Lamb of God! And the two  
 38 disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. And  
 Jesus turned, and beheld them following, and saith unto  
 them, What seek ye? And they said unto him, Rabbi  
 (which is to say, being interpreted, Master), where abidest  
 39 thou? He saith unto them, Come, and ye shall see.  
 They came therefore and saw where he abode; and they  
 abode with him that day: it was about the tenth hour.  
 40 One of the two that heard John *speak*, and followed him,  
 41 was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He findeth first  
 his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have  
 found the Messiah (which is, being interpreted, Christ).

**35. John was standing.** In A.V. less accurately 'stood.' He was standing to continue his work of baptizing.

**two of his disciples.** Andrew, see *v.* 40, and probably the Evangelist himself. This is inferred from the minute details of his testimony, and from his usage of silence in respect to himself.

**36. looked upon Jesus.** The Greek word implies an earnest, penetrating look, lit. 'looking in him': the same word is used *v.* 42.

**37. followed Jesus,** a result of the preparatory work of the Baptist.

**38. being interpreted, Master.** This note shews that St John wrote for Greek readers.

**39. the tenth hour,** 4 o'clock p.m. if the reckoning was from 6 a.m. as usual. This is one of the many points of precise accuracy in statement which distinguishes this Gospel.

**40. Simon Peter's brother.** This description of Andrew shews that, when St John wrote, St Peter was better known in the Church than St Andrew.

**41. He findeth first his own brother Simon.** There can be little doubt that this implies that afterwards he finds his companion's brother, James, the son of Zebedee.

**We have found the Messiah.** This 'finding' implies search.

He brought him unto Jesus. Jesus looked upon him, and 42 said, Thou art Simon the son of John : thou shalt be called Cephas (which is by interpretation, Peter).

On the morrow he was minded to go forth into Galilee, 43 and he findeth Philip: and Jesus saith unto him, Follow me. Now Philip was from Bethsaida, of the city of 44 Andrew and Peter. Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith 45 unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. And Nathanael said unto him, Can any good 46 thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see. Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith 47 of him, Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile !

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They were fellow students of Scripture, as were Philip and Nathanael (*v.* 45).

**42. son of John**, by far the best supported reading, replacing 'son of Jona,' A.V.

**Cephas**. The Aramaic form of the Hebr. *Ceph* a rock. The new name signified a fresh departure in life and work ; or a changed condition. Comp. Is. lxii. 2, 'Thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name.'

These four, the first called, form a group by themselves and are always placed at the head of the list of the Twelve. This is the germ of an organized Church. Special capacity destined these four for a special place in the ministry.

**43. On the morrow**, the second day of the ministry of Jesus.

**Philip** is the first disciple whom Jesus Himself finds ; comp. ch. ix. 35. The name is Greek and indicates the Græco-Macedonian influence. For other notices of Philip see chs. vi. 5-9, xii. 21, 22, xiv. 8, 9.

**44. Bethsaida**. See Map.

**45. Nathanael**. Most probably to be identified with Bartholomew. Nathanael seems to rank as an Apostle here and in ch. xxi. 2. But his name does not appear in the synoptic lists ; on the other hand Bartholomew is not named in the Fourth Gospel. If the two are identified all difficulty vanishes.

From this address it appears that Philip and Nathanael were friends and fellow students of the Law and the Prophets. Philip comes to the conclusion affirmed by Christ Himself, Luke xxiv. 26, 27.

**46.** Nathanael's objection seems formidable, but is solved by the presence of Jesus.

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10

ST JOHN

I 48-51, II 1-2

48 Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me?  
 Jesus answered and said unto him, Before Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee.  
 49 Nathanael answered him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God;  
 50 thou art King of Israel. Jesus answered and said unto him, Because I said unto thee, I saw thee underneath the fig tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things  
 51 than these. And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye shall see the heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.

2 1-11. The marriage feast in Cana of Galilee. The first miracle of Jesus.

2 And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there: and Jesus

48. **when thou wast under the fig tree**, probably engaged in prayer or confession, or in meditation on the coming of the Messiah; and that in a spot inaccessible to any human eye. For this manifestation of Christ as knowing the secret thoughts and lives of men see ch. iv. 16, 17, and comp. Ps. cxxxix. 1-3. The well-known incident of St Augustine's conversion took place under a fig-tree: *Confessions*, VIII. 12-28.

51. **Verily, verily**. This repeated affirmation is peculiar to this Gospel.

**the angels of God ascending and descending**. The reference is undoubtedly to Gen. xxviii. 12.

The angels ascending and descending denote uninterrupted spiritual communication between the Christ and God. For Jacob the vision was an assurance of Divine protection: Jesus by recalling the vision indicated that He, the Son of man, has at command the forces of heaven which ascend and descend to do His bidding. Christ is Son of man as well as Son of God (v. 49). He is the representative man, the second Adam, in Whom all are made alive, in Whom all humanity is centred.

II. 1. **the third day**, probably the third day after leaving the Jordan.

**Cana of Galilee**, so called to distinguish it from a Cana of Coele-Syria (Jos. *Ant.* xv. 5. 1). The site is disputed. The existing Kâna el Jelîl, 6 miles N. of Nazareth, answers the conditions, as an exact equivalent in name, as being above Capernaum and on the way to Nazareth from the Jordan valley.