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## Some Observations on the Vocabulary of the Fourth Gospel

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then being that employed in Biblical theology, which usually carries conviction to the student.

It stands to reason that the alert teacher will often use a combination of these various forms of motivation or that he will discover others which can be applied with good success. It will be best for him to remember at all times that the requirement in the lower grades is chiefly to stimulate curiosity and arouse interest, while the upper grades of the elementary school demand that he meet the psychological level of the children. During the post-confirmation age the approach must be based upon the contacts with life established by the young people and by the interests which they develop, and in adults the instructor must strive to meet the thinking of his pupils with reference to social and economic conditions with which they are concerned.

P. E. KRETZMANN

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### Some Observations on the Vocabulary of the Fourth Gospel

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The fact is well known that the "disciple whom Jesus loved" frequently employs such simple but withal deeply significant terms as "life," "light," "truth," etc., and their antonyms, words and phrases totally lacking in the synoptic gospels.

The Gospel of St. John has none of the terms translated "compassion," or "pity" (ἔλεος, ἐλεέω, σπλαγχνίζομαι), although the synop-  
tists have thirty-three of them. John supersedes them with ἀγάπη, and its verb αγαπάω. The noun is exclusively Biblical, used by both the LXX and the New Testament. The assumption that the "Great Prayer to Isis" (Oxyrhynchus Papyrus No. 1,380), composed in the second century A. D., may have called Isis ἀγάπ(η) in the North Egyptian coast town of Thonis (line 28), or even ἀ(γά)πη θεῶν in Italy (according to a more or less doubtful restoration in line 109), does no violence to this claim. As early as the second century a gradual interchange between Christian and pagan vocabularies began to take place; indeed, it is difficult to draw the line always to determine just which expression was exclusively Christian and which pagan. So, for instance, some of the early Christian writers had no scruples to use ἔρωσ, love between the sexes, in place of the apostolic ἀγάπη. Theodoret writes: "He who hath received the divine love (ὁ τὸν ἔρωτα τὸν θεῖον δεξάμενος) despises all earthly things"; but Theodoret did not despise the use of the very earthly ἔρωσ. Ignatius uses the noteworthy expression: "My love hath been crucified" (ὁ ἐμὸς ἔρωσ ἐσταύρωται). Origen interpreted ὁ ἐμὸς ἔρωσ of Christ and thus gives evidence by the introduction of ἔρωσ into the Christian vocabulary for the departure from apostolic care

and purity of expression. By the same token it is not impossible for pagan phraseology to be touched by the ever-growing Christian vocabularies, particularly of the Apologists.

The sacred writers, and among them St. John, while employing the Greek language, "the noblest and most subtle instrument of human speech ever invented," repudiated certain pagan terms which might involve the acceptance of unworthy heathen ideals and purposes. At the same time they appropriated to a nobler and Christian use such terms as conveyed the expression of what was best and purest in pre-Christian thought. This fundamental method is still employed by Bible-translators of today.

But when we say that ἀγάπη is exclusively Biblical, we make reference to the truth that Christianity literally revealed a new life, made a new life possible, and thus required a new vocabulary to express the new conditions. Thus words came into use which in some cases were absolutely new coinings; in others they were so charged with fresh meaning as to be the equivalent of new words.

To St. John (1st Ep., 4:8) ἀγάπη expresses the very essence of the divine nature. It also expresses the greatest Christian grace, the sacred bond of Christian society, the fulfilment of the new law bequeathed by the Lord to His disciples. Ἀγάπη is not classical in the sense of being found in the writings of Greek authors of antiquity. The LXX use it, however, and it may therefore have been a colloquial word before it took its place in Biblical literature. But the LXX use differs widely from its use in the New Testament. There it is used in a sense identical with ἔρωσ, a sense absolutely excluded from the New Testament. In the sense of ἔρωσ the new word occurs in 2 Sam. 13:15.

As far as its history was concerned, ἀγάπη could not present an unblemished record for admittance into the Christian vocabulary. But if the choice lay between ἀγάπη and ἔρωσ, as it surely did, then there could be little doubt as to the decision. Although Plato had idealized ἔρωσ to such a degree that all civilized tongues still can speak of "Platonic love," ἔρωσ was nevertheless so steeped into the worst associations of pagan life as to render it ill fitted to convey the sublime message of divine love. Ἀγάπη, on the other hand, with its literary newness, its suggestion of pure and self-sacrificing affection (as should indeed be present in connubial love), became an apt instrument of expression in the gospels, particularly that of St. John. It occurs twice only in the synoptic gospels: Luke (11:42) modifies it by τοῦ θεοῦ; our Lord uses the word when He prophesies the coldness of love in these latter days, ψυχῆσεται ἡ ἀγάπη τῶν πολλῶν, the love of the many will wax cold, Matt. 24:12.

In the fourth gospel ἀγάπη is used eight times, most often in chapter 15. The epistles of St. John have it nineteen times; it is

found twice in Revelation. In the remaining apostolic writings few important words occur as often as *ἀγάπη*. Christianity itself is summed up in *ἀγάπη*.

Eternal, *αἰώνιος*, lasting for an age, or even longer than the ages, as contrasted with that which is brief and fleeting, is not only more frequent with John, but he always uses it with *ζωή*. If life is brief and fleeting, it is not so with the beloved disciple: In Christ it is a life eternal, *ὁ πιστεύων εἰς τὸν υἱὸν ἔχει ζωὴν αἰώνιον*, 3:36, *et al.*

A form of *ἐρευνᾶω*, I search, not known before the first century A. D., is *ἐθαυνᾶω*. It occurs nowhere in the synoptic gospels, but John has it in the celebrated passage 5:39 and in 7:52. *Ἐθαυνᾶτε* is now commonly taken to be a statement rather than a command. The Lord was here making an assertion with an implied condemnation. His opponents to whom He here addresses Himself were as a matter of fact in the habit of searching their own Scriptures, because they thought they had eternal life in them. They were mistaken in this, for eternal life is 'not in the Scriptures apart from Him of whom these same Scriptures testified. They were wrong, indeed not in searching the Scriptures, but in doing so with prejudiced minds and mistaken motives and refusing to come to Him who is the Life and the Light of men.

Strikingly the first seven verbs in the Johannine gospel fall into two groups: *εἰμί*, four times; then *γίνομαι*, three times: the Word "was"; everything else "became." As an ellipse is described about its two foci, so all philosophy is said to be involved in these two concepts, *εἰμί*, I am, and *γίνομαι*, I become. Common English parlance has no fine distinction here, but the German differentiates between *sein* and *werden*, as also the subtle Spanish with its two verbs *ser* and *estar*. The Greek is always very careful to distinguish between the two.

John in his vocabulary observes a fine discrimination where the absoluteness of the Deity in contrast to the relativity of whatever is human is under consideration. "Before Abraham came to be, I am," 8:58, says the Lord. The eternal Son is not in the same category as Abraham, who had no being until a given point in time. Subsequently, the Word *became* flesh; without ceasing to be what He ever had been, He became what previously He was not; and so our salvation is bound up with Him who eternally *was* and yet in time *became*. The force of *γίνομαι* can be recognized from such passages as speak of a change in the nature or appearance of something. At Christ's first miracle, water *became* wine; remaining fluid and a beverage, it took to itself new qualities and became what it was not before.

Stephen became the first in a long line of Christian martyrs,

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but the verb μαρτυρέω does not occur in Mark; it is found once in each Matthew (22:31) and Luke (4:22); while it is extremely common in John, being found there thirty-three times.

John's gospel has no parables, and the word παραβολή is entirely absent, while frequent enough among the other three. But παρουσία occurs in John 10:6; 16:25, 29. Elsewhere in the New Testament it will be found only 2 Pet. 2:22, employed by John's lone companion in the morning race to the empty tomb. Παρουσία is a "cryptic saying," a "veiled speech," a way of stating things "beside the common way" (παρά and ὁμός).

The Doric form πιάξω, I seize, apprehend, arrest, etc., occurs eight times in John, but is not found in the synoptists, although Luke employs it Acts 3:7 and 12:4.

The famous noun πίστις occurs 24 times in the synoptic gospels, but is never used by St. John. On the other hand, its verb, πιστεύειν, while employed only 36 times by the synoptists, is used over 100 times by St. John. Certain heretics, like Celsus, later, might say that πίστις simply means "credulity" or, in its earlier pagan meaning, a certain "intellectual conviction"; but St. John's persistent use of πιστεύειν forbids such shallow interpretation.

A further peculiar feature of John's vocabulary is that προσεύχομαι and προσευχή (pray and prayer) are never used by him, while the synoptists have these words 54 times. Neither has John μετανοέω and μετάνοια (repent and repentance), although these occur 24 times in the three other gospels.

These few observations on St. John's vocabulary do not purport to be exhaustive and all-inclusive, but they serve to show that a comparison of the evangelists' vocabularies yields rich reward in stimulating and often revealing study.

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