

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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THE WITNESS OF JOHN (Part II)

H. P. Liddon (1823-1890) deserves to be better known today than he is. He graduated from Oxford and soon gained a reputation as a powerful preacher. In 1860, he delivered the Bampton lectures on the deity of Christ. Liddon's fame rested on his grasp of the subject, clarity and lucidity and elegance of diction. He was a very accomplished Greek scholar (he wrote a magnificent commentary on Romans). What follows is a digest of his treatment on Christ in John's writings.¹

"The Eternal Word, incarnate and dying for the truth, inspires St. John to guard it with apostolic chivalry; but also, this revelation of the Heart of God melts him into tenderness towards the race which Jesus has loved so well. To St. John a lack of love for men seems sheer dishonor to the love of Christ. And the heresy which mutilates the Person or denies the work of Christ, does not present itself to St. John as purely speculative misfortune, as clumsy negation of fact, as barren intellectual error. Heresy is with this Apostle a crime against charity; not only because heresy breeds divisions among brethren, but yet more because it kills out from the souls of men that blessed and prolific Truth, which, when sincerely believed, cannot but fill the heart with love to God and to man. St. John writes as one whose eyes had looked upon and whose hands had handled the sensibly present form of Light and Love. That close contact with the Absolute Truth Incarnate had kindled in him a holy impatience of antagonist error; that felt glow of the Infinite Charity of God had shed over his whole character and teaching the beauty and pathos of a tenderness, which, as our hearts tell us while we read his pages, is not of this world. This ethical reflection of the doctrine of God manifest in the flesh is perhaps mainly characteristic of St. John's first Epistle; but it is not wanting in the Apocalypse. The representation of the Person of our Saviour in the Apocalypse is independent of any indistinctness that may attach to the interpretation of the historical imagery of that wonderful book. In the Apocalypse, Christ is the First and the Last; He is the Alpha and the Omega; He is the Eternal; He is the Almighty. He possesses the seven spirits or perfections of God (Rev. 3:1). He has a mysterious Name which no man knows save He Himself (Rev. 19:12). His Name is written on the foreheads of the faithful (Rev. 3:12); He is the giver of grace and victory (Rev. 22:21). In the Apocalypse, His Name is called the Word of God (Rev. 19:13); as in the first Epistle He is the Word of Life, and in the Gospel the Word in the beginning. As He rides through heaven on His errand of triumph and of judgment, a Name is written on His vesture and on His thigh; He is 'King of kings, and Lord of lords' (Rev. 19:16). St. John had leaned upon His breast at supper in the familiarity of trusted friendship. St. John sees Him but for a moment in His supramundane glory, and forthwith falls at His feet as dead (Rev. 1:17). In the Apocalypse especially we are confronted with the startling truth that the Lord of the unseen world is none other than the Crucified One (Rev. 12:10). The armies of heaven follow Him, clothed as He is in a vesture dipped in blood, at once the symbol of His Passion and of His victory (Rev. 19:13, 14). But of all the teachings of the Apocalypse on this subject, perhaps none is so full of significance as the representation of Christ in His wounded Humanity upon the throne of the Most High. The Lamb as It had been slain, is in the very centre of

the court of heaven (Rev. 5:6); He receives the prostrate adoration of the highest intelligences around the throne (Rev. 5:8); and as the Object of that solemn, uninterrupted, awful worship, He is associated with the Father, as being in truth one with the Almighty, Uncreated, Supreme God (Rev. 5:13).

“Whatever, then, may have been the interval between the composition of the Apocalypse and that of the fourth Gospel, we find in the two documents one and the same doctrine, in substance if not in terms, respecting our Lord’s Eternal Person; and further, this doctrine accurately corresponds with that of St. John’s first Epistle. But it may be asked whether St. John, thus consistent with himself upon a point of such capital importance, is really in harmony with the teaching of the earlier Evangelists? It is granted that between St. John and the three first Gospels there is a broad difference of characteristic phraseology, of the structure, scene, and matter of the several narratives. Does this difference strike deeper still? Is the Christology of the son of Zebedee fundamentally distinct from that of his predecessors? Can we recognize the Christ of the earlier Evangelists in the Christ of St. John? Now it is obvious to remark that the difference between the three first Evangelists and the fourth, in their respective representations of the Person of our Lord, is in one sense, at any rate, a real difference. There is a real difference in the point of view of the writers, although the truth before them is one and the same. Each from his own standpoint, the first three Evangelists seek and portray separate aspects of the Human side of the Life of Jesus. They set forth His perfect Manhood in all Its regal grace and majesty, in all Its Human sympathy and beauty, in all Its healing and redemptive virtue. In one Gospel Christ is the true Fulfiller of the Law, and withal, by a touching contrast, the Man of Sorrows. In another He is the Lord of Nature and the Leader of men; all seek Him; all yield to Him; He moves forward in the independence of majestic strength. In a third He is active and all-embracing Compassion; He is the Shepherd, Who goes forth as for His Life-work, to seek the sheep that was lost; He is the Good Samaritan. Thus the obedience, the force, and the tenderness of His Humanity are successively depicted; but room is left for another aspect of His Life, differing from these and yet in harmony with them. If we may dare so to speak, the synoptists approach their great Subject from without, St. John unfolds it from within. St. John has been guided to pierce the veil of sense; he has penetrated far beyond the Human features, nay even beyond the Human thought and Human will of the Redeemer, into the central depths of His Eternal Personality. He sets forth the Life of our Lord and Saviour on the earth, not in any one of the aspects which belong to It as Human, but as being the consistent and adequate expression of the glory of a Divine Person, manifested to men under a visible form. The miracles described, the discourses selected, the plan of the narratives, are all in harmony with the point of view of the fourth Evangelist, and it at once explains and accounts for them.

“Plainly, my brethren, two or more observers may approach the same object from different points of view, and may be even entirely absorbed with distinct aspects of it; and yet it does not follow that any one of these aspects is necessarily at variance with the others. Still less does it follow that one aspect alone represents the truth. Socrates does not lose his identity, because he is so much more to Plato than he is to Xenophon. Each of yourselves may be studied at the same time by the anatomist and by the psychologist. Certainly the aspect of your complex nature which the one study insists upon, is sufficiently remote from the aspect which presents itself to the other. In the eyes of one observer you are purely spirit; you are thought, affection, memory, will, imagination. As he analyzes you, he is almost indifferent to the material body in which your higher nature is encased, upon which it has left its mark, and through which it expresses itself. But to the other observer this your material body is everything. Its veins and muscles, its pores and nerves, its colour, its proportions, its functions, absorb his whole attention. He is nervously impatient of any speculations about you which cannot be tested by his instruments. Yet is there any real ground for a petty jealousy between the one study of your nature and the other? Is not each student a servant whom true science will own as doing her work? May not each illustrate, supplement, balance, and check the conclusions of the other? Must you necessarily view yourselves as being purely mind, if you will

not be persuaded that you are not merely matter? Must you needs be materialists, if you will not become the most transcendental of mystics? Or will not a little physiology usefully restrain you from a fanciful supersensualism, while a study of the immaterial side of your being forbids you to listen, even for a moment, to the brutalizing suggestions of consistent materialism?

“These questions admit of easy reply; each half of the truth is practically no less than speculatively necessary to the other. Nor is it otherwise with the general relation of the first three Gospels to the fourth. Yet it should be added that the Synoptists do teach the Divine Nature of Jesus, although in the main His Sacred Manhood is most prominent in their pages. Moreover the fourth Gospel, as has been noticed, abundantly insists upon Christ’s true Humanity. Had we not possessed the fourth Gospel, we should have known much less of one side of His Human Character than we actually know. For in it we see Christ engaged in earnest conflict with the worldly and unbelieving spirit of His time, while surrounded by the little company of His disciples, and devoting Himself to them even ‘unto the end.’ The aspects of our Lord’s Humanity which are thus brought into prominence would have remained, comparatively speaking, in the shade, had the last Gospel not been written. But that ‘symmetrical conception’ of our Lord’s Character, which modern critics have remarked upon, as especially distinguishing the fourth Gospel, is to be referred to the manner in which St. John lays bare the Eternal Personality of Jesus. For in It the scattered rays of glory which light upon the earlier Evangelists find their point of unity. By laying such persistent stress upon Christ’s Godhead, as the true seat of His Personality, the fourth Gospel is doctrinally complemental (how marvelous is the complement!) to the other three; and yet these three are so full of suggestive implications that they practically anticipate the higher teaching of the fourth.”

I. THE INVESTITURE OF THE LAMB: THE NEW SONG

There is a tremendous emphasis throughout the book of Revelation on singing praises. Dennis Johnson highlights the five doxologies and how they are linked.² “The first and second doxologies praise the enthroned One, the third and fourth praise the Lamb, and the fifth, both of them together. The second and third are addressed directly to the Object of praise in the second person (‘Worthy are You’) and give the reason for ascribing worthiness (creation, redemption; 4:11; 5:9-10). The last element of the second doxology (‘power’) is the first element of the fourth, and the last element of the fourth (‘blessing’) opens the fifth. ‘Glory and honor’ appear in the three doxologies that list divine excellencies (second, fourth, fifth), as do words expressing strength: ‘power’ (*dynamis*, 4:11; 5:12), ‘might’ (*ischys*, 5:12), and ‘dominion’ (*keratos*, 5:13). The second doxology ascribes three excellencies to God, the fourth song ascribes seven (4 + 3) to the Lamb (see 7:12 for another sevenfold list), and the fifth ascribes four to God and the Lamb. The relations of the doxologies can be viewed in this way:

“4:8	Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty, <i>who was and is and is to come.</i>	ETERNITY
4:11	Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive <i>glory, honor, power.</i> for You created. . . .	WORTHY + 2 ND PERSON LIST OF EXCELLENCIES REASON FOR WORTHINESS
5:9	Worthy are You to receive the book. . . . for You were slain, and purchased . . .	WORTHY + 2 ND PERSON REASON FOR WORTHINESS
5:12	Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive <i>power, riches, wisdom, might,</i> <i>honor, glory, blessing.</i>	WORTHY + 3 RD PERSON LIST OF EXCELLENCIES
5:13	To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb be <i>blessing, honor, glory, dominion</i> <i>forever and ever.</i>	LIST OF EXCELLENCIES ETERNITY”

CONCLUSION: James Ramsey notes the overwhelming evidence in this portion of Scripture for the deity of Christ. “It is as the slain Lamb, as He who had suffered on the cross; it is in His character of atoner and constituted Mediator, that He is here advanced to the supreme government of the universe. It is as the Lamb that He is adored by all the redeemed church, by all the angelic throngs, and by a whole worshipping creation; and that with precisely the same homage, the same ascription of universal sovereignty, which they offer to Him that sitteth on the throne. As we hear their songs, and with them behold His ability to look into the secret counsel of God, and to execute those counsels in unfolding the mighty scheme of Providence and Redemption, let us joyfully unite in their homage, prostrating ourselves before His throne in hearty consecration to His service, and hailing Him as our Lord and our God. Yes, believer, that Saviour who died for you is the mighty God, and is able to keep your immortal soul, and even your mortal body, safe in life, in death, and through eternity. That heart of His is full of human sympathies, but they are the sympathies of a God, and not powerless, like the tears of a mere man. Where Jesus weeps, death itself lets go its grasp, and Lazarus comes forth. He loves you with all the tenderness, and gentleness, and warm affection of His human heart, but with all the force of that divinity to which it belongs. Trust Him implicitly, love Him fervently, live for Him entirely, as redeemed unto God by His blood.”³

ENDNOTES

¹H. P. Liddon, *The Divinity of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ* (rpt. Klock & Klock, 1978), pp. 244-248.

²Dennis Johnson, *Triumph of The Lamb: A Commentary on Revelation* (P&R, 2001), p. 110.

³J. B. Ramsey, *Revelation: An Exposition of The First Eleven Chapters* (rpt. Banner of Truth, 1977), p. 304.