

STOIC ORIGINS OF THE PROLOGUE TO ST. JOHN'S GOSPEL.

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THOSE who have been interested in following my recent attempts at discovering the literary origin of the *Prologue to St. John's Gospel*¹ (which leads on at once to the discovery of a historical line of development for the *Doctrine of the Trinity*),² will not be surprised to hear me say that there are still some lacunæ in the argument, and that, in consequence, the exposition of the theme is not, at all points, equally and finally convincing. One must criticise oneself sometimes, as well as employ one's learned friends for a critical mirror.

For example, when we say that underlying the Johannine doctrine of the Logos, which was in the beginning and was with God, there is a hymn in honour of Sophia or the Heavenly Wisdom, it is easy to show that Sophia could once be expressed in similar terms to the Logos : so much was clear from the first great hymn to Sophia in the eighth chapter of Proverbs. Here Wisdom was represented as the Beginning of the works of God, or as being in the Beginning with God's works, and this Wisdom was definitely said to be "with God". We were able at once to replace the first two clauses of St. John's Gospel by two lines of a hymn to Sophia. And in the same way, at point after point in the Prologue, we were able to make a replacement of the corresponding lines of the lost hymn. But, as we said, there were missing links in the chain of evidence. For instance, we replaced the sentence that

The Word was God

by the supposed equivalent

Sophia was God :

¹ Cambridge University Press, 1917.

² Manchester University Press, 1919.

but it must have been felt in many quarters that this is not as explicitly stated in the eighth chapter of Proverbs, and its two pendant hymns in the *Wisdom of Solomon* (c. 7) and the *Wisdom of Ben Sirach* (c. 24); and even if it be implied, there is still a measure of improbability about the categorical equivalence of God and Wisdom: God and Logos was difficult, God and Wisdom more so.

It might also be said that the personification of Wisdom as the Daughter of God, even in Spenser's form,

There in His bosome Sapience doth sit,
The soueraine dearling of the Deity,

would, at first sight, seem to preclude an equation between Daughter and Sire. Should we, in a parallel case, be entitled to say of Wordsworth's hymn to Duty, as the "stern daughter of the Voice of God," that the poet has here equated Duty and Deity? It becomes proper, then, to show from the Old Testament itself, that Sophia had been visaged with complete Divine attributes, and so to justify the restored clause of our hymn.

This is what we propose to do, and it may perhaps be said that in the eighth of Proverbs, Wisdom has the connotation of creative power, of consubstantiality and perhaps of co-eternity, and that, therefore, we may be allowed to make our restoration. But, as we said, this is not quite so explicit a statement as we could wish. It is too near to the Nicene Creed to be primitive. Let us see if we can make out a stronger case by a more careful study of the documents involved.

Suppose we turn to the seventh chapter of the *Wisdom of Solomon*, where we find a hymn in honour of Sophia that is a pendant to the original hymn, much in the same way as Cowper's splendid versification in the *Olney Hymns*, or Spenser's in the *Hymn to Heavenly Beauty*, are pendants. We shall establish two theses: (i) that the hymn in the *Wisdom of Solomon* is a Stoic product; (ii) that the terms in which Wisdom is there described are, for the most part, Stoic definitions of Deity: and from thence it will follow that, to the mind of the writer: (iii) Wisdom was God. We premise, to avoid misunderstanding, that we do not profess, and have not professed, that everything which we have said on this great theme is from our own anvil; it would be less likely to be true if it were: we are

catching the sparks that fly, like chaff, from the threshing-floor of all the fathers of all the early Christian centuries. They all knew that Christ was the Wisdom of God as well as the Word of God, and if they did not know how the Word was evolved from the Wisdom, that is another matter. Perhaps they would have found it out for us if they had lived in the twentieth century : for they all prove their doctrine from the eighth chapter of Proverbs. When we, then, approach the first of our two theses, we are not claiming to be the first to detect that the *Wisdom of Solomon* is a Stoic book, written by a Jewish scholar who has been attending Stoic lectures. We might almost take this preliminary statement for granted, if it were not that the first observers have dealt with it so incompletely and illustrated it so inadequately. Quite apart from any use which we are ourselves going to make of the admitted Stoicism of the language, it is necessary for the exegesis of the *Wisdom of Solomon*, that its translators and interpreters should have an adequate familiarity with the philosophical terms that are employed.

First of all let us remind ourselves with regard to the Stoic philosophy, that it constitutes a religion as well as a philosophy, and the religion involved is a popular religion, with a propaganda and an open-air preaching, not so very remote in some aspects from the methods of the Salvation Army. This means that its philosophy was capable of throwing off formulæ from itself ; it could be reduced to gnomie forms, such as the popular mind could assimilate ; it had a Shorter Catechism, as well as a Longer Confession of Faith. Suppose we imagine a Stoic philosopher turned into an open-air preacher, like Paul at Athens, a "picker-up of learning's crumbs" (σπερμολόγος) and distributor of the same. If he began with the doctrine of God (ἐκ Διὸς ἀρχώμεσθα) he would have to explain in some simple way who Zeus was, or who Athena ; like St. Paul he would look at the Parthenon and look away from it. He would avoid sculpture, and in all probability take to philology. "Zeus," he would say, "my friends, is so named because he lives and causes to live, he is the Living One (ὁ ζῶν). Or if we think of him as Διὸς or Δία, he is so-called because he is the one *by whom* (δι' οὗ) are all things, and *for whom* (δι' ὃν) are all things." Everyone in the crowd could understand and carry off the doctrine of the Living One, by whom are all things and for whom are all things, much the same as if our ancestors

had explained *Thor* as the person *through* whom are all things. If these are Stoic statements, then there are among the hearers of this Stoic preacher Christians who will know how to appropriate the statements and incorporate the terms of the teaching with their own tradition. For does not the Apocalypse disclose the fact that one of the early titles of Christ was the Living One, (Apoc. i. 18) and does not the Epistle to the Hebrews speak of God as the One "by whom are all things and for whom are all things" (δι' οὗ τὰ πάντα καὶ δι' ὃν τὰ πάντα), Heb. ii. 10? Is this, then, Stoic doctrine? Let us see.

Chrysippus,¹ the great Stoic teacher, tells us that God pervades all nature, and has many names to match his many operations. "They call him Δία through whom are all things (δι' οὗ τὰ πάντα), and they call him Zeus (Ζῆνα), inasmuch as he is the cause of life (τοῦ ζῆν αἰτιός ἐστιν) or because he pervades what lives (διὰ τοῦ ζῆν κεχώρηκεν).

Stobaeus, quoting from Chrysippus, says, "He appears to be called Zeus from his having given life to all (ἀπὸ τοῦ πᾶσι δεδωκέναι τὸ ζῆν). But he is called Δία because he is the cause of all things and for him are all things: ὅτι πάντων ἐστὶν αἰτιος καὶ δι' αὐτὸν πάντα."²

Surely St. Paul was using Stoic language on the Areopagus, when he spoke of God as "giving to all life and breath and all things". This is the very A.B.C. of Stoic doctrine. If we do not understand the Stoic meanings of Zeus and Dia, we shall find philosophical references obscure and unintelligible. For example, Philodemus³ quotes Chrysippus as saying that Zeus is the soul of the world and that by a participation in Zeus all things live, that is why he is called Zēn (τῆ τούτου μετοχῇ πάντα [ζῆν] . . . διὸ καὶ Ζῆνα καλεῖσθαι): but he is called Δία because he is the Cause of all and the Lord of all (ὅτι πάντων αἰτιος καὶ κύριος). Evidently he means to read αἰτιος out of δι' οὗ and κύριος out of δι' ὃν. The formula in the epistle to the Hebrews underlies the language of Chrysippus and Philodemus. This simple formula which we have been quoting, which we call the street-corner preaching of the Stoic, led almost at

¹ Diog. Laert., vii. 147.

² Stobaeus, *Eclog.*, ed. Wachsmuth, i. 31, 11.

³ *De pietate*, c. 11.

once to their fundamental pantheistic statement. They had said that Zeus was the Life of all things, and they interpreted this pantheistically. To make the doctrine clearer, they used the Greek preposition *διὰ*, not only in the sense of "through" (whether instrumental or directive), but also when compounded in verb forms, of which the favourite was the verb *διήκω*, to penetrate, to pervade, which is used of the Soul of the World : and a companion verb is *διοικέω*, to regulate, to administer. These two words are used as an expansion of *διὰ*, which is itself the accusative of Zeus (*Δία*).

In the passage which we quoted above from Chrysippus (through Philodemus) we are told that Zeus is the Logos that regulates all things and is the Soul of the World (*τὸν ἅπαντα διοικούντα λόγον καὶ τὴν τοῦ ὅλου ψυχήν*). Again, Poseidonius (the Stoic whom Philo and Cicero and others quote so freely) says that Zeus is so-called, as being the All-Regulator (*τὸν πάντα διοικούντα*), but Crates says he is the All-Pervading One (*τὸν εἰς πάντα διήκοντα*).¹ The latter statement is fundamental for Stoicism : we have it enunciated for us again by Hippolytus,² with a slight variation, to wit, that Chrysippus and Zeno have maintained God to be the origin of all things, and that he is a body, the purest of all, whose providence pervades all things. We shall see presently how this fundamental Stoic doctrine is reflected on the Wisdom of Solomon. Meanwhile observe that our supposed Stoic preacher is in difficulties : he has abandoned Plato and made God corporeal : he has affirmed Pantheism and has to meet objections on all sides. The man in the crowd wants to know if God pervades ugly things as well as beautiful things, dung-heaps as well as stars. The philosopher in the crowd, a stray Epicurean, who will have nothing to do with Pantheism or Providence, wants to know the shape of the all-pervading Deity ; is it still anthropomorphic ?

Clement of Alexandria,³ who knows what everybody thinks, reports that the Stoics regard God as pervading all matter, even the most dishonourable forms : and as to the body of God, the Stoic has to admit that the all-pervading Zeus is not in human form, and so good-bye to Olympus and its inhabitants. Notice here again that St.

¹ Johan. Laur. Lydus, *de mensibus*, iv. 48.

² *Philos.*, 21.

³ *Cohort. ad gentes*, p. 58.

Paul plays the Stoic against the Epicurean in his discourse : first by quoting Stoic poetry :

We are also his offspring :

but he is not like the images made of him in gold, silver, marble. But what shape is God, then ? The Stoic replies, he is the most perfect shape, for if a more perfect shape than he could be found, it would displace him, and be the Divine Thing. Press the question more closely and ask for a definition of the perfect shape, and the Stoic says "spherical".¹ And this shape is the most perfect, because all the parts are equally related to the centre, and because it is the form adapted to the swiftest motion. Someone asks whether a cube or a cone is not equally perfect,² but he is a geometer and may be neglected. It is clear now to the common man that Zeus is gone, for a spherical Zeus³ could have neither head nor limbs. Pheidias could make nothing of him. And the wily Epicurean, who has been watching his time, begins to enquire whether, if God is *σφαιροειδής*, in sphere-form, those persons whom Homer describes as *θεοειδής*, of godlike form, are also rotund : Paris, for example, and Agamemnon, are they all-round men ? And the Stoic, driven into a corner, can only repeat that God is a spirit of the purest, and pervades all things. He is mind in matter : "Nature the body is, and God the soul". We are to think of Zeus as the intellectual breath or spirit ; he is the *Noûs* and his adjective is *νοερός*.

But here emerges another enquiry from someone who does not easily absorb the doctrine of the revolutionary Stoic. What becomes of the rest of the Pantheon, if Zeus disappears into universal mind ? The only possible reply is that they disappear also, for they are really only the names for different activities of Zeus. Philology, which certainly never created the gods, can be invoked to dispossess them. Philology, that is, must play the part of Medea, and then

One by one, at dread Medea's strain,
The sickening stars fade off the ethereal plain.

Apollo is Zeus, and Dionysos is Zeus, as surely as Zeus is Zeus.

But is Zeus, then, female as well as male ? What about Athena ?

¹ Aetius, *Placit.*, 2 ; Plut., *Epit.*, ii. 2, 3 ; Stob., *Ecl.*, i. 15.

² Cicero, *De nat. d.*, i. 10, 24.

³ Metrodorus, in *Voll. Herc.*, vi. p. 31.

This is a particularly interesting case, and one answer is to say that Zeus is both male and female, which makes the boys in the crowd to laugh. The correcter reply is that Athena's name shows that she is the Aithēr, and the Aithēr is Zeus, which has its extension (διάτασιω) from marge to blue marge.¹ Here we have again to observe that διὰ in composition betrays the presence and activity of Zeus. So Chrysippus teaches. He is Zeus for whom (δι' ὄν) are all things, and Zēn because he is the pervading cause of all things, and *he is Athena* in regard to the extension (διάτασις) of his power of rule as far as the aether.

We shall see presently the importance of this little piece of Stoic etymology, which has hitherto escaped notice. Philology has now swept the decks and carried away the sails of the earlier faith : we are scudding along under bare poles, with a prospect of falling into the Syrtis of mere negation, unless our teacher of the new school can tell us that this fiery, all-embracing, all-pervading aithēr is another name for the Providence with which men can be brought into relation. We have reached the stage where Chrysippus stood, when he declared the ruling power of the world to be the aithēr, the purest (καθαρώτατον) and clearest and most mobile (εὐκίνητότατον) of all things, which carries round the whole framework (φύσις) of the world. And now we are to be told that this all-pervading power is beneficent, that it is a lover of man, that it communicates wisdom to the wise, and that the wise man thus initiated becomes himself a friend of God, a king in his own right. He has his "second birth" into the purple. "The desire of Wisdom brings him to a Kingdom." "We may," says Philodemus, in his discourse on the *Blessed Life of the Gods*, "declare the wise to be the friends of the gods, and the gods the friends of the wise." For according to Musonius, "God is lofty of soul and beneficent (εὐεργητικός) and philanthropic (φιλόανθρωπος)". "Not merely immortal and blessed," says Plutarch, "but philanthropic and care-taking (κηδεμονικός) and helpful must we assume God to be."²

And now it is time to leave our Stoic preachers and the tracts which they have been distributing to us and turn back to the hymn in the Wisdom of Solomon. Reading the seventh chapter over in the light of what we have been describing as Stoic teaching and Stoic

¹ Diog. Laert., vii. 147.

² Plut., *de comm. not.*, c. 32.

propaganda, we can see at a glance that the hymn is a Stoic product. Occasional suggestions of this have been made from time to time by critics and by commentators. They recognised the artist who described Wisdom as an intellectual spirit (*πνεῦμα νοερόν*), which penetrated and pervaded all things by reason of its purity (*διήκει καὶ χωρεῖ διὰ πάντων διὰ τὴν καθαρότητα*). It was evident that the spirit which in all ages enters into holy souls and makes them friends of God and prophets, because God only loves the one that dwells with Wisdom, must be the same spirit which teaches us that the wise are the friends of God, and, as such, have the mantic gift. Every term used to describe Wisdom and the operations of Wisdom must now be examined for its Stoic counterpart. When in verse 22 we find the series of adjectives,

ἀκώλυτον, εὐεργετικόν, φιλόανθρωπον,

we compare the description of Zeus in Musonius,

μεγαλόφρων, εὐεργητικός, φιλόανθρωπος.

when we are told that "no defiled thing can fall into Wisdom" we recognise the language of Diogenes Laertius, that God is a being intellectual (*νοερόν*) in happiness, and non-receptive of evil (*κακοῦ παντὸς ἀνεπιδεκτόν*).

Is Wisdom more mobile than any motion? We quoted Chrysippus for the clearness and purity and mobility of the encircling ether. Cicero carries on the same theme.¹ "That burning heat of the world," says he, "is more luminous and much more mobile, and for that very reason more adapted to make impact on our senses than this terrestrial heat of ours, by which the things known to us are kept in place and flourish. How silly to talk of the world as senseless when it is kept together by a heat so complete and free and pure and most acute and mobile; (*acerrimo et mobilissimo*)." And Philo, who may be regarded as a Stoic, with only the change of a Jewish gaberline for a toga (which he borrowed from Poseidonius), tells us that the world is spherical in shape, because it thus becomes more swiftly mobile than if it had any other figure.²

We need not hesitate to say that we know what it means to declare Wisdom to be more mobile than any motion. Wisdom, then, is

¹ *De nat. deorum*, ii. 11, 30.

² Philo, *de Providentia*, ii. 56.

the soul of the world. So much had been already suggested by other writers. But if Wisdom is the soul of the world, this soul is from the Stoic point of view no other than God himself.

The same thing comes out from the other point which we made regarding the Stoic play upon *διὰ* and the words compounded therewith. We gave as specimens the Stoic proofs that Zeus pervaded (*διήκω*), administered (*διοικέω*) all things, and reached out (*διατείνω*) to the limits of the aether. Well, here they all are in the hymn to Wisdom: she is said to "pervade all things through her purity," "she reaches from marge to marge valiantly," and "she administers all things bonnily". Then Wisdom is Zeus, or, in the case of the extended aether, Zeus-Athena. Clearly we have to do with a Stoic hymn, whose theme is the pantheistic interpretation of the Universe. It is true that the pantheistic element has been disguised in our published text, which describes Sophia by saying that "there is *in her* an intellectual spirit" (*ἔστιν γὰρ ἐν αὐτῇ, κτέ*), but a reference to the Alexandrian MS. shows that we ought to read

"For she is an intellectual spirit,"

i.e. in Stoic language,

"For Wisdom is God".

The same thing comes out from the Stoic use of the term *νοερόν*. Nothing could be more characteristically Stoic. The Cosmos, says Sextus,¹ is intelligent; if it were not so, there would have been no mind in ourselves, but if the world is *νοερός*, then God is also to be so described. We see the *νοῦς* in ourselves superior in its rich variety to any statue or any painting, and we must conclude that there is an artist at work in the region of mind, and in the world at large, regulating the same (*διοικῶν αὐτόν*). This must be God. Note the connection between the *νοῦς* that is everywhere, and its regulative power: the Stoic adjective *νοερός* may almost be equated with *θεῖος*. As Diogenes Laertius says, "the Stoics teach that God and Mind and Fate and Zeus are all one thing";

ἐν τε εἶναι θεὸν καὶ νοῦν καὶ εἰμαρμένην καὶ Δία.

It would be easy to pursue the subject of the Stoicising of the Wisdom of Solomon in other directions, where we should find traces

¹ *Adv. math.*, ix. 95.

of the work of other students. It is enough, for the present, to have shown that the missing factor in the evolution of the Prologue to St. John's Gospel is found in the Wisdom of Solomon, and that we may see underneath the oracle that,

The Word was God,

the earlier oracle that,

Wisdom was God.

It will have been observed that the results obtained in the foregoing pages have been reached to a large extent by treating Stoicism not merely as one of the great Greek philosophies, but also as Greek popular religion. The Stoic doctrine and practice was democratic enough : it was the custom of these teachers and preachers to invite bond and free, male and female, to the study of philosophy. None were excluded, and in this respect Stoicism is again seen to be a precursor of Christianity. It was inevitable that doctrines propagated in this way should develop formulæ and catchwords, that the simplest ideas should float on the current of the teaching, and the deeper considerations elude attention. But it was for this very reason that we were able to say that Sophia was a Stoic maiden, and that all her finery in the *Book of Wisdom* was borrowed array. Theologians who have discoursed on the meaning of the great passages in the *Book of Wisdom* have commonly contented themselves by saying that there were Stoic elements in the language ; that *διήκω* was Stoic and *δουικέω* and the like ; but they did not detect the reason why these and the like expressions were Stoic. Now that we know the reason to lie in a misuse of Philology (and all Greek philology from Plato onward is bad philology), we must use our acquired knowledge as a general means of interpreting the *Book of Wisdom* and its pendant, the *Prologue of St John*. We are bound to examine whether it is really true that both these writings have a pantheistic origin, and go back to Zeus and Athena, to the Soul of the World and the doctrine of Fate, to Nous and to Providence. For example, when we read of the Johannine Logos that,

In Him was Life,

we have to replace this by the antecedent formula,

In Her was Life :

and then we ask the reason why this abrupt transition in the

description of Sophia was required. The answer is that it was perfectly natural, for Sophia had been identified with Zeus ("Wisdom was God"), and Zeus had been explained as an equivalent to Zēn, and Zēn had been derived from the verb "to live" (ζῆν). The transition of thought is evident. It enables us again to say that the *Prologue of St. John* is a Stoic product, if we look at it closely enough. This enables us also to correct one of the worst lapses of the modern editors and translators of the Gospel. They found in the earliest MSS. traces of a certain spacing, or division of clauses in the sentence,

Without Him was not anything made . . . that was made ;

so they divided the text anew and produced the barbarism, "that which was made in Him was Life". A little more knowledge of Stoic formulæ would have saved both editors and translators from this unhappy mistake. For Chrysippus,¹ in teaching the meaning of Fate, says that "it is the Reason (λόγος) of all things in the world that are providentially ordered," and "it is the Reason according to which all things that have been made have been made, and all things that are being made are being made, and all things that are to be made will be made". Obviously the language of the Prologue is Chrysippean ; it covers the Stoic doctrine of Fate and ought not to be obscured by an ungainly re-casting of the sentences.

In the sources, then, of the Prologue to John, the Logos is Sophia, and Sophia is Zeus, and Zeus is Fate. The Stoics say definitely "Zeus and Fate are the same thing". "One cannot," says Proclus,² "deflect the mind of Zeus, which is, as the Stoics say, Fate". "The Nature of the Universe," says Chrysippus, "pervades the whole : everything in it down to the minutest particulars happens according to nature and the reason (λόγος) of Nature, without any impediment (ἀκωλύτως)".³

This is why, in the Wisdom of Solomon, among the other titles of Wisdom, it is said that she is "an unimpeded spirit (ἀκωλυτόν)". The doctrine of fixed fate is part of the writer's faith.

The parallel with the Christian doctrine of predestination, of

¹ Stob., *Ecl.*, ed. Wachsmuth, i. 79, l.

² On Hesiod, *Op. et dies*, v. 105.

³ Plutarch, *de Stoic. repug.*, c. 34.

which the Scriptures show so many traces, should not be overlooked. Only we must keep in mind that the line of approach between the two cults is that of popular religion, not of philosophy. As we have intimated, the background of Stoic philosophy is popular religion. To take an illustration from this very region of Fate and Freewill, the popular method of resolving the antagonism involved in the terms is to say that the human will is a dog, tied to a carriage; the dog has a certain freedom of motion, but it is limited; when the carriage moves, the dog must move too. It should be noticed that this unfortunate dog has been versified for us in a famous passage quoted by Epictetus from Cleanthes: ¹

Lead thou me on, O Zeus, and mighty Fate,
Whither my destiny may be designed;
Not slack I follow; or, reluctant yet
To follow, still I needs must follow on.

The popular concept underlies the poetic; Zeus is Fate and Fate is inevitable; in the same way it underlies the philosophical expression of determinism.

It will be an interesting study to trace the relative approach and recess of the Christian teaching to or from the Stoic. We see them, for example, in conjunction when they talk of the final conflagration, or when they begin their catechisms with the question as to the nature of God, to which the answer is that "God is a Spirit". Equally we see them elongating one from the other when in the second century Tatian makes his *Address to the Greeks* and is careful to explain that God is not a Spirit in the Stoic sense of an all-pervading power and presence in material things. The Christian apologist is, as a rule, a definitely Stoic orator; the opening chapter, for example, of the *Apology of Aristides* might be taken direct from a Stoic essay on the order and the beauty of a world governed by Providence.

Nor are there wanting literary parallels between the two religions in regard to their origin and diffusion. Diogenes Laertius, in his *lives of the philosophers*,² tells us that Zeno carried on his teaching in a cloister (*στοά*), known as the painted porch, from its being adorned with pictures by Polygnostus: in the cloister so named he composed

¹ *Encheiridion*, c. 53.

² *l.c.* vii. 1.

his discourses, and hence his disciples were called Stoics ; and on the same ground they carried his teaching much further (*lit.* increased the word, τὸν λόγον ἐπὶ πλείον ἠύξησαν). One naturally thinks of Jesus and his disciples making their headquarters in Jerusalem, in the cloister named after Solomon.¹ To the mind of those who had any familiarity with Greek culture, the new movement would have suggested a new Stoa, and the early Christians would have had, at first, little occasion to complain of the parallel.

As we have said, the recognition of such popular parallelism will supply us with a new key to the elucidation of the primitive Christian doctrine, in its earliest stages of development.

¹ John x. 23, Acts iii. 11, v. 12, vi. 7.