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CHRIST AND THE CATEGORIES

OR

THE LOGOS IN THE COSMOS

A study of the relationship between the seven miracles of Christ recorded in John and the ten categories of Aristotle.

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It was the pre-christian sage Aristotle who first gave systematic statement to the categories of human pr positions as they apply to the world around us though these modes of thought had been used ever since rational beings have existed. The philosopher said:

In how many senses a thing essentially is is shown by the forms of predicates we use in speaking of it, for to be has as many senses as there are forms. Some predicates tell what the thing is, others its quality, others its quantity, others its relation to something else, others its activity or passivity, others its place, others its time...others its position and others its state.¹

That is to say, when we make an analysis of all human assertions we find that they may be classified into no more than ten basic forms or categories, and these ten categories represent the ten different ways that things actually exist. They show that there are ten different modes of being because we speak about beings in only these ten different ways.

When we say that a thing "is", we assert its SUBSTANCE. This term answers the question what is. The answer to the question how much exist is denoted by the term QUANTITY. Since things come into contact with other beings, we may enquire to what does this thing have reference. This is called RELATION. Where it exists defines its place or SPACE and when, its TIME. Likewise, on what leads to assert POSITION and in what denotes its STATE or habit of existence. When the thing is producing motion we attribute to it ACTION,

¹Aristotle, Metaphysics, p. 23.

and when it is viewed as receiving motion, we call it PASSION.

Hence, according to Aristotle, we have here a linguistical analysis of all the possible ways that statements or sentences may be used or asserted. And Ontologically¹ or Metaphysically, we have all the possible ways or modes of existence itself.

Now the observation that we would like to point out is that the seven signs recorded in the Gospel of John correspond to seven of these categories set forth by the philosopher of old. Is there any significance in this parallel? Which categories are not mentioned and why? These are the questions to which we now turn our attention.

Preliminarily, it is interesting to note that it is in this, the Gospel of the eternal Λόγος or "reason" that we have Christ envisioned as the One working in mastery over the categories of human logic and reason as set forth by the ancient sage, Aristotle. But first of all we must attempt to tell what the seven signs of the fourth gospel are and how they relate to the categories of Aristotle before we further discuss their importance.

In order to do so, we will first make reference to a study of these signs made independently² of any supposed

¹Emmanuel Kant latter disagrees with this when he makes a radical distinction between the phenomenal and the noumenal, i.e., between appearance and reality. Critique of Pure Reason, p. 264. "The understanding can never transcend those limits of sensibility within which alone those objects can be given to us. Its principles are merely rules for the exposition of appearances, and the proud name of an Ontology...must, therefore, give place to the modest title of a mere Analytic of Pure understanding." However, it would be a gross anachronism to represent Aristotle in terms of this distinction.

²This information was secured from a personal interview with Dr. Tenney.

connection with Aristotle's categories but merely on an inductive basis from the gospel itself. This has been very ably done by M. C. Tenney in John: The Gospel of Belief.¹ According to the author, each of these signs manifests the teaching and power of Christ. "The teaching attached to each miracle is designed to bring out its spiritual significance, and conversely, the miracle is the concrete demonstration of the power discussed in the teaching."² And so the author concludes that we have here a picture of Christ as master of quality, space, time, quantity, nature, misfortune, and death respectively.³ Now upon reexamining these miracles in the light of Aristotle's categories we have discovered that with but a slight revision⁴ of this list it can be seen that each miracle corresponds exactly with one of the philosopher's categories and this for significant reasons that will be forthcoming, one of which is mentioned by Dr. Tenney when he says, "These seven...signs...point to those aspects of Jesus' ministry in which He demonstrates His transcendent control over the factors of life with which man is unable to cope...."⁵

On this basis, ~~IT WOULD APPEAR THAT THIS MAY BE~~ ~~we propose to further develop this to~~ include the transcendent control of the Creator over the categories of human or finite existence and thought as Aristotle

¹Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. 1957. Fourth printing.

²Tenney, John: The Gospel of Belief, p. 29.

³Ibid., p. 30, 31.

⁴Actually, it is a revision in terminology more than concept in some while the rest bear a slightly different shade of meaning.

⁵Tenney, op. cit., p. 31.

defined them. ~~THIS SEEMS TO BE A~~ So we hope to show that the correspondence ~~is~~ not ~~one~~ arbitrarily conceived or artificially superimposed upon the content of the fourth gospel, but one that can be seen in the very structure of its text as well as bearing a relationship to the Greek concept or the categories of human cognition and being.

~~First of all,~~ ^{WHAT} then, ~~what~~ are these signs and what do they signify?

1) The turning of water into wine. (John 2) It seems clear from the nature of the miracle itself that it is an act of creation. That is, while there was first the substance of water there was subsequently a new substance, wine. In Aristotelian terms it is a transition from this "what" to that "what" and not merely from this "kind" to that "kind" of substance. In other words we have a new substance and not merely a new kind of the same substance. It was not merely better beverage but a different drink altogether. In short we have the Creator of chapter one creating in chapter two.

2) The feeding of the five thousand. (John 5) Here the significance is quite obviously one of the quantity produced. A little became much in the Master's hands. There was no generation of a new substance but a miraculous extension of the same substance, bread. As the Saviour divided the cakes he multiplied their contents. In short we have here not so much the marvel of a new substance as the magnitude of an extended substance.

3) The opening of the blind man's eyes. (John 9) This

seems to be a miracle of quality. That is to say, here we have a man who though possessing certain perfections of being such as "hearing", "locomotion", rationality" etc., ~~yet he~~ ^{NEVERTHELESS} lacked the quality of "sight". However, Jesus demonstrated that for Him who had no difficulty in ~~producing~~ ^{SEEKING} the human ~~personality~~ ^{NATURE} itself there ~~is~~ ^{was} no obstacle in restoring to it one of its perfections or qualities. In short, we are faced here not so much with the marvel of the act or the magnitude of the fact but with its magnificance, i.e., a miracle of "kind" and not of quantity;¹ a sign of manner not of making.

4) The raising of Lazarus (John 11) declares Christ's power over the category of relationship. That is, when faced with the loss of man's most cherished horizontal relationship by death, He proves to be more than a match for the severing power. Certainly, He who could restore such a broken relationship as death brings to human beings,—for there is none more final and permanent,—has proven Himself able to master the category of relation as well as creation.

5) The healing of the Noble Man's son. (John 4) This is especially unique in respect to the distance of the disabled one from the Master. Christ was in Cana and the child in Capernium (16 miles away). But Jesus needed not to be in the

¹This is especially vivid in the Aristotelian sense. For a perfection or quality is a "good", and an evil is defined as "a privation of a good which is due to a being". That is, blindness is a natural evil because the blind man lacks this quality or perfection due to him as a human being, viz., the ability to see. So the restoration of sight is the bestowal of a quality.

place of the ~~recovery~~^{Sick Son} for His power transcended the space that separated the one to be cured from the Curer. Martha once remarked, "Lord, if Thou had been here (*italics mine*), my brother had not died".¹ But Jesus demonstrated that He need not be present to heal for He is master of distance as well as death. He is deity over distance and sovereign over space.

6) The impotent man at the pool (John 5) had been incapacitated for thirty eight long years; he lay a seemingly helpless^Wreck of time. The context implies that there was no little despair and gloom that had overtaken him during this prolonged impotency even to the point of enfeebling his will and rendering hopeless his heart. However, the time of illness was no obstacle to the Eternal One whom he beheld, for just a word from His lips turned back the stretches of time, spanned the years, and transcended the man's temporal difficulties rendering him whole. The reference to time here may seem somewhat "stretched", but the difficulty will disappear once we remember that there is hardly any other way to represent time than by the toll it has taken on some one who is present here and now. That is, though Jesus as a man could only act in the present, nevertheless His act transcended the present and thirty-eight years of the past. Only the Eternal One can do this.

7) Finally, Jesus' walking on the water (John 6) signified that He was the master of the category of position. According to natural ~~procedure~~^{LAW}, the position of a man stepping into the

¹John 11:21, on the occasion of Lazarus' death.

the end of the list.¹ And furthermore, it is really reducible to two other categories, viz., position and quality. It is in this sense a "kind" of "position" thus combining both categories. However, even if it deserves legitimate attention as a separate category in the Aristotelian system, there is another reason, this one from the Scriptural view point, that may account for its absence. We refer to the divine significance of the number seven. Repeatedly ^{IN THE SCRIPTURES} this is the number of "earthly perfection", completion or covenant and it ~~seems likely~~ ^{MIGHT BE} that the Spirit of inspiration ordained the significance of this number ⁽⁷⁾ over the inclusion of the ~~others~~ ^{NUMBER 10.} It may be a kind of divine revelation over human reason. ~~implication of~~ At least the emphasis is on ^{REVELATION} ~~the former with the inclusion of the latter.~~ ^{OVER THE CATEGORIES OF GREEK REASON.}

What then is the significance of this correspondence between the ^{7 SIGNIFICANT} categories of Aristotle and the ⁷ miracles of Christ? Could it ~~not~~ be merely accidental? This possibility we are obliged to admit, however, only the casual observer of the divine revelation in Scripture would not ~~have a~~ ^{NOT BE} suspicion ^{AS} that such a unique correspondence might possibly ~~as well be a further~~ ^{ANOTHER} ~~extension of the~~ ^{ILLUSTRATION} ~~versatility and fertility of the Biblical~~ ^{SUPERIORITY OF REVELATION OVER REASON; OF} ~~THE CREATOR OVER HIS CREATION.~~ ^{THE CREATOR OVER HIS CREATION.} Could it not be that we have here a manifestation of the sovereign control of Christ over the Cosmos. That is, the Saviour's significant relation to the seven important categories of created being? ~~could~~ ^{Do} we not have here the Creator's control over the categories of the created? It would

¹This is borne out by the Scholastic Aristotelian's as well. See Oesterle, Logic the Art of Defining and Reasoning, p. 26.

seem that the first chapter of John would ~~bear this out.~~ ^{SUBSTANTIATE THIS ASSUMPTION}

Furthermore, ~~this is supported by the fact~~ ^{WHEN IT IS CONSIDERED} that the Apostle penned these words against the backdrop of the Greek philosophical mind ~~or at least of the categories, of rationality in general.~~ ^{AND THE SUPPOSITION SEEMS} Could it not be that there is likewise included here, ^{SUBSTANTIAL} even as the great Greek philosopher himself thought these to be the categories of the creature's cognition, a divine implication that Christ is likewise master of their meaning and captain of their conception.

However, if one would not desire to go to this extreme of speculation perhaps it could be agreed that ^{IS} ~~there is~~ ^{NOT} a suspiciously strong suggestion here that the $\Lambda\acute{o}\gamma\omicron\varsigma$ is Lord of logic and Creator and Controller of the categories of creation in so far as He is known both here and elsewhere (Heb. 1:1-3; Col. 1:16-17; etc.) to be the Author of both.

~~The~~ fact that in John and John ~~close~~ Christ is presented as the $\Lambda\acute{o}\gamma\omicron\varsigma$ in the $\kappa\acute{o}\sigma\mu\omicron\varsigma$ and that elsewhere as Creator over his Creation (Col 1:15-16) would ~~lead to~~ ^{seem} lead to the conclusion that in the Fourth Gospel ~~whereas~~ the significance of the seven miracles are tied to the fact that Christ is controller of the categories of Creation and that seven of the 10 categories of the Greek Kosmos (and the other three by implication) show ~~an interesting~~ ^{parallel} parallel to these 7 miracles.
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