

Jesus as the Fullness of Philosophy: A Philosophical Commentary on John 14:6

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Abstract: This miniature commentary on John 14:6 is an attempt to argue that Jesus was not only a philosopher but that he is also the embodiment of Philosophy itself. Using ontology, Ethics and Epistemology, the *opusculum* points to the fact that Christianity has significantly influenced social and moral life of human races for centuries and that even if it were to be erased its imprints would remain all over and forever, otherwise it would possibly mutate and re-grow into a powerful force. The permanency of Christianity is attributable to the fact that it is a Philosophy and that its founder is the *Philosophia ipse*.

**"I AM THE WAY THE TRUTH AND THE LIFE"
JOHN 14:6**

I. ONTOLOGY- "I AM/I AM THE LIFE..."

Ontology studies *being qua being*. By asserting that 'he is', Jesus makes an ontological assertion- that he is existence and life itself, and in so being he is thus the yardstick for determining what is real. In biblical language, the phrase 'I AM' is not just a conjugation of the verb 'to be' but a metaphysical assertion. While revealing Himself to Moses in the bush (Exodus 3:14), God says 'I am whom I am' to mean he is existence itself and pure essence, or merely the ontological one. In fact according to Thomas Aquinas "the most appropriate name of God is the name he gave to Moses at the burning; 'He who is' "(Aquinas cited in Mattei, 2007, p.141). Aquinas qualifies this assertion by indicating that in God, there is no distinction between Essence and Existence; he does not receive his existence, but he is his existence. As such God is *Ipsium esse*. Any other name given to God apart from "I AM" can be challenged (Mattei, 2007, p.141) due to their descriptive nature. Jesus takes up this title to communicate that he is the *existentia ipse*, and in being such he is *ipso facto* the *Purus actus* (pure act). It is from him that life emanates and culminates, and by commutation, it is from Jesus that Philosophy, which is a critical aspect in human life emanates and culminates. Besides, the evangelist John posits that Jesus is 'the Reason'. He says in Greek "Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ Λόγος, καὶ ὁ Λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν Θεόν, καὶ Θεὸς ἦν ὁ Λόγος." translated as "In the beginning was the word, the word was with God and the word was God" (John 1:1). The concept of <<'Λόγος>> has its original meaning in early Greek philosophy which predates Christianity, and according to Heraclitus, Anaxagoras, Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics, Logos (Λόγος) was used to refer to pure reason or propositions...not just 'word'. John was writing from a Greek Philosophical background and couldn't have meant 'Word'. As a matter of fact, the Greek equivalent word for 'word' is not logos but

Lexis (λέξις). Therefore if Jesus is the Logos, then he is reason in its purest form, he is pure philosophy in its incarnate form. The persecution and the killing of Jesus thus was akin to persecution and murder of Philosophy in its metaphysical domain, but the problem is that Reason(Jesus) cannot be killed, an idea cannot be vanquished, worse off if the idea is God himself. The suffering of Jesus is therefore not an evil *per se*, but a means to life and an inductive proof that Philosophy cannot be *nihilised*. Further, the reason why the Friday on which Jesus was crucified is called 'Good Friday' is the invincibility and the redemptive nature of his being and his philosophy. As such the Friday is Good Friday for Christians and for the Philosophers, for pagans and the atheists, for the sinners and the saints. From Philosophical quarters we can infer it as the ontological Friday.

II. ETHICS- "I AM THE WAY"

In ethics, we investigate moral values as determined by moral principles. These principles are, therefore 'the way' that direct human conduct and life in general. To live a moral life is to operate within values like love, humility, prudence, fortitude, honesty. Two fundamental principles explain why we need for instance to love or to be humble; the theory of duty and obligation (Deontology) which states that it's our duty to love at all costs (Ochieng' -Odhiambo,2009, p.52). The second is the consequential theory (Teleology)(Ochieng' - Odhiambo,2009, p.42) which looks up to the consequence or the end-in-view of the act of loving or being humble, prudent or honest. When Jesus says 'I am the way' he asserts that he is the principle personified upon which all values are measured. He is, at the same time, the deontological principle and the teleological principle. We know how much we love in comparison to how much Jesus loved, He gave his all as a duty, and the consequence of his love is love itself, that is God himself(for John the Evangelist says God is Love and love is God(1John 4:7-21)). In other words, we ought to love others including God, not for some fringe benefits like being given eternal life, or being favoured, but for the simple reason that love is not a means to an end, but the end (*Telos*) itself. Jesus, the ethicist, loved to the point of death (There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends (John 15:13)). He did not recoil in front of pain, whips, the cross, insults, hatred, false accusation and even execution; he expressed fortitude and courage as a matter of duty. In fact, during his passion, he became, as it were, the encyclopedia of all virtues or simply '*the way*'.

III. EPISTEMOLOGY- "I AM THE TRUTH"

Epistemology, from Greek *Episteme* and *logos*, is the rational study of the meaning, nature, criteria and sources of knowledge. According to Armstrong (1973), Knowledge is essentially defined as justified true belief. When Jesus asserts that he is the Truth, he is making an epistemological assertion. He is not just an entity to be believed in (belief criteria) but a true belief (Truth criteria). The question that begs an answer is; to what extent is Jesus Truth? Theories of Truth come in handy in an attempt to resolve this problem. This commentary appeals to Correspondence, Coherence and Pragmatic theories of Truth.

Correspondence Theory and the Historicity of Jesus

Correspondence theory indicates that "... a belief is true when there is a corresponding fact and is false when there is no corresponding fact (Russell(1906). This raises the question' Did Jesus factually exist? Is there any tangible or reasonable evidence that Jesus existed empirically? In theological circles, this question is known as the problem of the historicity of Jesus. Several extra-biblical documentary pieces of evidence by historians like Josephus, Tacitus, Lucian of Samosata, Celsius the Platonist and Suetonius give accounts of Jesus' factual existence. According to Flavius Josephus(37-100AD), Jesus existed as a man with the personal name Jesus. Cornelius Tacitus (56-120 AD) reports that Jesus was executed during Pontius Pilate's governorship over Judea (26–36 C.E.), Lucian of Samosata(125AD-180AD) on his part observes that "the Christians ... worship a man to this day – the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites, and was crucified on that account." While Lucian does not mention Jesus, he is referring to him satirically. Pliny the younger (61AD-113AD) notes in one of his letters concerning the Christians:

"They were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verses a hymn to Christ, as to a god, and bound themselves by a solemn oath, not to do any wicked deeds, never to commit any fraud, theft or adultery, never to falsify their word, nor deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up; after which it was their custom to separate, and then reassemble to partake of food – but food of an ordinary and innocent kind". Alongside the documentary sources, there are recorded real eyewitness accounts and archaeological artefacts like the shroud of Turin which to some appreciable degree point to the true existence of Jesus. The documentary pieces of evidence, Eye witness accounts and artefacts serve as correspondence evidence of the existence and the person of Jesus, proving that Jesus was a factual being, not some fancy mythical figure.

Coherence Theory and Prophecies

According to Bradley (1914) coherence is mutual explanatory support between propositions, it involves the rejection of realism about Truth because of its ambivalence, that is a proposition can be true or false at the same time. This can be

explained of Jesus by appealing to various Prophecies about Jesus, which are then fulfilled by one or the other aspects of Jesus life and activities. For instance consider 2Samuel 7:12-13 which indicates "When your days are over, and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise your offspring to succeed you, your flesh and blood, and I will establish his Kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his Kingdom forever". This Prophecy is fulfilled or philosophically speaking coheres with Matthew 1:1 "This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham". Another Example would be the Prophecy of the Messiah being preceded by a forerunner in Isaiah 40:3-4 "A voice of one calling in the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill shall be made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain' fulfilled in John 1:23 when John says "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, "Make straight the way of the Lord.

The betrayal of Jesus Christ by Judas at the cost 30 pieces of silver in Matthew 27:6-10 coheres with Zechariah 11:12-13. Consider "I told them 'If you think it best, give me my pay; but if not, keep it.' So they paid me thirty pieces of silver. And the Lord said to me, 'throw it to the potter'—the handsome price at which they valued me! So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them to the potter at the house of the Lord" (Zechariah 11:12–13). Compare the above citation with Mathew 27:6-10;

The chief priests picked up the coins and said, 'It is against the law to put this into the treasury since it is blood money.' So they decided to use the money to buy the potter's field as a burial place for foreigners. That is why it has been called the Field of Blood to this day. Then what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: 'They took the thirty pieces of silver, the price set on him by the people of Israel, and they used them to buy the Potter's field as the Lord Commanded me.

While we may talk of similarities between the two propositions, it is these similarities that make biblical coherence a truth, and a *de facto* proof that Jesus is the Truth.

Pragmatism and the Ministry of Jesus

The life and the ministry of Jesus Christ of Nazareth depict a synthesis of Philosophical truths which have lasted over two thousand years. Jesus performed miracles of healing, exorcism, raising the dead and nature miracles, all of which acted as proofs of his divine nature. His miracles could not have scientific explanations, and up to now some of the wonders like his resurrection cannot be explained scientifically. This means that his being is not just true, but it is Truth itself, or rather *Veritas ipse*, it might not be grasped by contingent human intellect. The teachings of Jesus are a measure upon which most if not all ethical and social truths are constructed, as such all other facts and doctrines can be considered as emanating from and culminating into the truths of Jesus' teaching. However, one

peculiar thing is that whenever Jesus taught and performed miracles, his intention was to solve both mediate and immediate problems of the people he met. This means that Jesus intended his followers to be practical people and not to be detached from real problems in the society. Christianity is essentially a pastoral and missionary religion; it is love incarnate- a pragmatic Philosophy.

IV. CONCLUSION

Given that it has been possible to locate the ontological, axiological and the epistemological bases of Jesus statement 'I am the life, the way and the truth', it most valid to infer that Jesus is Philosophy personified in its fullness. From historical perspective this Philosophy has lasted over two thousand years and shaped the way humans think and reason. From ontological perspective the Philosophy that Jesus is predates time because it is commutable to the eternal existence of God.

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