

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

THE
CHURCHMAN

OCTOBER, 1895.

ART. I.—WHAT WAS THE LANGUAGE SPOKEN BY
OUR LORD ?¹

TOWARDS the close of the last century a controversy was opened in Italy, both the nature and the occasion of which were of an unusual character and interest. The great Empress Catherine II. of Russia, amid all the cares of empire, had given attention to the question which perhaps too little occupied the minds of the theologians of that day, "What was the language employed by our Lord in His public teaching and private intercourse with His disciples?" A Neapolitan layman of great learning, Dominico Diodati, who had received many favours from the Empress, acknowledged his obligation by endeavouring to prove that Greek, the sacred language of the Eastern Church, was the native and exclusive language used by Christ both publicly and privately, and propounded his reasons in a treatise entitled "*De Christo Græcè loquente*," dedicated in a panegyrical address to the Empress. The work was published at Naples in 1767, and does not appear to have met with much opposition until the year 1772, in which the great Oriental scholar, De Rossi, attempted its refutation in a treatise called "*Della Lingua propria di Cristo*," produced in that year at the royal printing establishment at Parma. It would be impossible in the narrow limits of these pages to give anything more than a sketch of these treatises, both of them replete with learning, and, even where failing in argument, suggestive of topics of surpassing interest to the Christian student.

To those who reflect that the language of the Jews was

¹ A brief examination of the treatise of Diodati, "*De Christo Græcè loquente*" (Neap., 1767), and of De Rossi, "*Della Lingua propria di Cristo*" (Parma, 1772).

bound up with their nationality, and, in a manner, with their life itself, it would seem, even at first sight, an incredible supposition that they could ever suffer it to fall into disuse, and that while their very thoughts were formed and moulded in the sacred language, they could give them utterance in one so singularly unlike it in all its essential characteristics. If they found it so hard a thing to "sing the Lord's song in a strange land," surely they would have found it a still harder one to "sing the Lord's song" in a strange language in their own land. They would in such a case, indeed, have forgotten Jerusalem, even when the temple was standing again before them. But a still weightier consideration has been suggested by Dr. Credner in his invaluable "Introduction to the New Testament." "A Greek-speaking Messiah," he writes, "was to the people of Palestine more than an abomination; it could not be even imagined" ("Einleitung," p. 186). In spite, and even in defiance, of these preliminary obstacles, the Greek advocate opens his cause with the boldness of one having before him the certainty of a triumph.

His fundamental propositions which he lays down almost as axioms are :

- I. The language of the conquered changes into that of the conquerors.
- II. The Egyptians in the age of Ptolemy Lagos spoke Greek.
- III. The Syrians from the time of Seleucus Nicator employed the Greek language.
- IV. The Jews received that language from the Greeks, the Egyptians, and Syrians.

From these premisses he concludes that Christ, the Apostles, and all the Jews employed the Hellenistic language.

I. The first of these propositions is met by De Rossi with an emphatic denial. The instances adduced are, as he shows, not only inadequate, but contrary to actual history. His own native country is admitted by Diodati to be an exception, and he vainly apologizes for the fact that Naples, Spain, Tuscany, though frequently changing their masters, retained throughout their ancient tongue. Still weaker is his argument from the case of England. Relying on an exaggerated and misunderstood passage of a fourteenth-century chronicler, he assumes that the Conqueror contrived to destroy the Saxon language, and to substitute for it the Norman-French. Upon which fiction he builds up the astounding assertion, "Thus by degrees the English language became altogether extinct." After glancing at the Oriental and Northern nations, whose languages, without the least proof, he concludes to have thus become extinct, he refers to the changes effected in the earlier

Hebrew language by the Babylonian conquest. Here he fails to see the distinction between the effect of a cognate language upon another of the same origin and family, and that of a language absolutely foreign and different in its entire structure and character.

De Rossi justly observes that it is not the mere conquest of a country, but its colonization which introduces the language of the conqueror among the conquered. And even where colonies are thus established among the conquered people they do not impose their language upon them, but in the natural course produce a mixed language, which gradually becomes distinct and permanent, and instances the beautiful language of Italy as an example of the mutual influence on each other of the language of the conqueror and the conquered; that of the Goths and the Lombards on the ancient language of the Peninsula. A remarkable proof of the tenacity of a native language is presented in the fact that on the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, they kept up in Africa, in Italy, and in Holland the Spanish language, and in Leghorn, Amsterdam, Constantinople, and Smyrna preserved it unchanged.

But if the Jews were thus tenacious even of a language they had acquired in the day of their persecution and dispersion, how firmly they must have clung to the language which to them was the sacred language, so closely allied to their religion as to be almost identified with it! The Greek advocate, in his proofs of the attempts made by the successive conquerors of Judæa to force upon the Jews the adoption of the Greek language and idolatry, is an unwilling witness against his own cause. For if these efforts had been in any degree successful, we should never have heard of the cruel persecutions which followed them, nor would the martyrs of the Maccabæan period have addressed and exhorted one another "in their native tongue" instead of in the Greek, which was the language of their persecutors. He is forced to admit that at this period the Jewish people were "bilingual" (p. 71), that their language in their intercourse with one another was the Chaldæan (which De Rossi more accurately terms the Syro-Chaldaic), and then, without the slightest authority, affirms that from the year 162 (B.C.) they threw off their old habit, and adopted the Greek language exclusively. Yet he admits that the "phrases and idioms peculiar to their earlier and native tongue were still retained," and of these he gives instances from the New Testament Scriptures. De Rossi traces with his usual clearness and judgment the gradual stages of decadence through which the original language of the Hebrews passed, chiefly through the admixture with it of other dialects, whose contributions to it were, however, recog-

nised and distinguished as words of foreign origin, the natives of Palestine being zealous to preserve as far as possible the integrity of their ancient language, and to secure "the Chaldee dialect of Babylon," as R. Elias Levita terms it, as the language of religion and of the synagogue, and in their more public and sacred writings. This would specially be the case in Jerusalem, where the language would be naturally purer, and the learned more influential than in any other part of Palestine. The language spoken in Galilee, where the Greek colonists abounded, was necessarily of a more mixed character than that spoken in Jerusalem. Yet here, again, De Rossi shows that a distinction must be drawn between the languages of Lower and Upper Galilee—Galilee proper and the Galilee of the Gentiles. Peter, whose occupation led him to mix constantly among the inhabitants of Galilee, was recognised by the bystanders as a follower of Jesus of Galilee by his speech, as we read in Matt. xxvi. 73. This is remarkable as the only place in which we have an indication of the kind of language employed by Jesus and his Apostles. This language is denominated by Zanolini the "Syriac of Jerusalem," and by the learned Oriental, Assemann, the "Syriac-Palestine" (*lingua Siriaca Palestina*). The early traditions of the Church embodied in the Apocryphal Gospels indicate the prevailing belief that our Lord not only used the language of His country in its then vernacular form, but that He was fully instructed in the Hebrew itself. And when St. Luke asserts that He "increased in wisdom," he points to that knowledge of the law which was involved by the Hebrews in the conception of the true wisdom, and which formed the text, as it were, of the "wisdom which is from above."¹ And without the knowledge of the sacred language this wisdom could not be acquired.

We may reasonably believe that the traffic of the Apostles on the Sea of Galilee rendered a knowledge of the Hellenistic Greek a necessity to them, while the occupation of St. Matthew as a tax-collector would require the same indispensable qualification, and thus admit that our Lord and His Apostles were in a certain degree bilingual. But that they used their native language in their intercourse with their fellow-countrymen in Jerusalem, Judæa and Samaria cannot be disputed for a moment. Unless they had formed for themselves a kind of tessellated language composed of separate fragments of the two dialects popularly spoken in Palestine, they must have adhered to the native language of Palestine. The universal tradition of the ancient Church that St. Matthew's Gospel (or, at least, the materials out of which it was arranged) was written in

¹ Vide "Maimonidi; Moreh Nebhchim," pars. iii., cap. 54.

Hebrew for the use of the Jews of Palestine, is a strong incidental proof that the words and teaching of Christ were conceived in the same language, that is, in the Syro-Chaldaic, into which the purer Hebrew had degenerated. It is, moreover, impossible that the words of Christ which are given in that dialect by the Evangelists, as "*Ephphatha*," "*Talitha cumi*," "*Aceldama*," "*Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani*," should be mere fragments, foreign and obsolete words mounted in a Greek setting. Nor can we imagine that the lowly family of Bethany, or the humble companions of our Lord during His progresses through Judæa and Samaria, could have used any other than the language which was the only one in which their religion was embodied. The assertion of Diodati that the citations of our Lord and the Apostles from the law and the prophets were made from the Septuagint is refuted by De Rossi, who proves that the quotations of our Lord are taken from the original Hebrew, and not from that strangely erratic translation. He compares the citation of Isaiah (xlii. 1) made by St. Matthew (xii. 18) with that of the Septuagint, from which it differs entirely; also that made from Deuteronomy viii. 3 by the same Evangelist (iv. 4). Still more discordant with the Septuagint version is the citation from the Prophet Zechariah (xiii. 7) by St. Mark (xiv. 27). A more signal example is that word uttered on the cross, "*Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani*," in which our Lord substituted for the original *hazawtani* the word in common use at a later age, which is found in one of the Targums, with which the public ear was familiar. On these words, so full of mysterious import, and so especially memorable as the words of David in his affliction, adopted by the Son of David in His agony, a controversy naturally arises between the learned Hebraist and the ingenious but too confident Hellenist. The latter exclaims of the ignorance of those who cried, "He calleth for Elias"—"En, quam bene Chaldaicam linguam intelligebant Judæi"—assuming them to have been Jews. Against this view almost all the greatest commentators are enlisted, holding that these were the words of the Roman soldiery. To this Diodati rejoins, "But how could the Roman soldiery know anything of Elias?" But surely, even if it were proved that no apostate Jews were admitted into the army of Herod, which is a point not capable of proof, the exclamation of our Lord would appear to any ignorant bystander to be an appeal to some person capable of assisting him who had failed to appear at the critical moment. Or, as De Rossi suggests, the utterers were Roman soldiers, who from their constant intercourse with Jews, had heard of the Elias who was yet to come and to work great miracles on behalf of His people. But a signal proof that our Lord employed the Syro-

Chaldaic language during His life is given us in the Acts, where the voice of Christ heard by St. Paul on his conversion is said to have been uttered "in the Hebrew tongue." No effort of skill or ingenuity can discredit a testimony so supreme in its authority and so clear in its statement. Carrying on the proofs that the Evangelists took their citations from the Old Testament, not from the Septuagint, but from the original Hebrew, De Rossi refers to Matthew i. 23 to ii. 6 and to the prophecy of Hosea xi. 1, where St. Matthew reads with the Hebrew, "Out of Egypt have I called my son," not "his sons," as the Septuagint has it. In Matthew ii. 18 "comforted" is in the LXX. turned into "rest." In ii. 30, "He shall be called a Nazarene," he shows that in the original Hebrew of Isaiah xi. 1, to which this name refers, it is lost entirely in the Greek version. In iv. 4, "Man shall not live by bread alone," our Lord follows the Hebrew original and not the LXX. In iv. 16, "The people that were sitting in darkness," which is the true Hebrew reading, is turned in the LXX. from a past tense into an imperative. In viii. 17 there is a still wider discrepancy between the Hebrew original and the Greek translation, and many others are pointed out by our author which space prevents us from describing.

The attempt of the Hellenist advocate to force the Septuagint version upon the Evangelists with the same unreasoning zeal with which he imposes the Greek language upon the Jewish nation is successfully refuted by the testimony of history and the uniform traditions of the Jewish people. The learned Jew, Azarya dei Rossi, the greatest ornament of Judaism in the sixteenth century,¹ writes, "The Chaldean language was then" (in the time of the Apostles) "the vulgar tongue and that used by the people. . . . The language employed in those times by the inhabitants of Palestine and the Evangelists was the Chaldean."² By them the Septuagint translation was regarded as the profanation of their most sacred treasure. However popular it was among the Egyptian Jews of Alexandria, the effect produced by it upon the pious inhabitants of Judæa was far different. "They feared not unnaturally," writes Dr. Grätz, their greatest modern historian, "that the law would be disfigured and perverted by its translation into Greek. "When the law was presented to them in a foreign tongue, the pious Judæans deemed Judaism itself altered and profaned. Consequently the commemoration of the translation which was celebrated as a festival by the Judæans in Egypt, was kept by their brethren in Judæa as a

¹ See Grätz, "Hist. of the Jews," vol. iv., p. 653.

² De Rossi, p. 125.

day of national mourning, similar to that upon which the golden calf had been worshipped in the desert, and this day became numbered amongst their fasts.”¹ The clamour of the Jews when St. Paul was addressing them, which was hushed to silence when they found that “he spake in the Hebrew tongue to them,”² is a signal proof that that language was their native tongue, and that the language of the conqueror was regarded with repugnance. In the Talmudical tract *Sota* a tradition is recorded that during the invasion of Titus a law was passed that everyone should forbear to teach his son Greek, and the Gemara on this passage affirms that a similar law was promulgated under the Asmonæan kings. In the tract *Bava kama* anyone who dares to teach his family the literature of the Greeks is said to be accursed.³

With almost flippant contemptuousness the Hellenist advocate dismisses every Hebrew authority, relegating every Rabbinical writing to a later period than the sixth century, and treating with the contempt of a supercilious ignorance the Targums, the Mischna, the Gemara, and every ancient Jewish document.⁴ The profound Hebraist, Dr. August Wünsche, whose “Illustrations of the Gospels from the Talmud and Midrasch” are one of the most valuable contributions to New Testament exegesis, observes with much force that though their production belongs to a comparatively late period, the traditions they embody ascend to a much earlier one, and represent materials which were current not only among the learned, but among the common people in the days when the Jews were yet a nation.⁵

It would seem, however, that the Hellenist advocate, anticipating the anti-Semitic violence of a later age, has determined rather to destroy every vestige of Judaism in Christianity, than to build up our faith upon the prophets as well as the Apostles, and to admit the continuity of the sacred and imperishable language in which their great revelations are embodied. To flatter the zealots of the Eastern Church, which has from early times shown the most relentless hostility to the scattered house of Israel, and in our own day, to the fatal injury of our religion, has almost renewed the afflictions of the Middle Ages, he has undertaken the task of depriving our Lord of His inheritance in the language of His ancestors, and of representing Him as a foreign claimant of the office of the Messiah. Yet a kind of misgiving occasionally presents itself

¹ Gratz, “Hist. of the Jews,” vol. i., p. 531. ² Acts xxii. 2.

³ De Rossi, p. 84.

⁴ Diodati, pp. 177-181.

⁵ Wünsche, “Erläuterung der Evang. aus Talmud und Midrasch Vorw.,” p. 1.

to his mind, as when he writes: "But observe, reader, that here we are inquiring into the vernacular language of Christ, that, namely, which then obtained in Judæa. For otherwise who will deny that Christ was versed in all languages? Wherefore, if sometimes He used a Chaldee or a Hebrew word, it does not follow from thence that He always employed the Chaldee or Hebrew language, for both were vernacular to Him" (p. 134). To this we may rejoin, that this mixed manner of speech is of modern origin, and we do not find the ancients making their ordinary conversation a kind of tessellated pavement of different languages. Nor could the inexorable rigidity and different structure of a Semitic language like the Hebrew enable the fragments to fit in together. The Christian ought rather to be thankful that the laws and precepts of his religion were constructed on the basis of a simple and inflexible language rather than on one whose subtle refinements so seriously disturbed the simplicity of his faith in the ages of controversy which too soon succeeded its first promulgation. But the effort of the Hellenist is not without its moral lesson. It shows the excesses into which a mind of no ordinary learning and acuteness may be betrayed by the blind devotion to a theory, not to speak of the desire to flatter a great Sovereign, which gave it an additional impulse.

It would certainly greatly injure the ideal beauty which the words of our Lord derive from their belief that they were originally clothed in the sacred language of His nation, if we could conceive them as uttered in a foreign tongue and in the language of an idolatrous people from whom His country had suffered so much. "Greece was the object of the hatred of the Jews, on account of the sufferings they had endured at her hands, and the indignities she had inflicted on their sanctuaries."¹ And surely the belief that our Lord in His intercourse with His disciples, and in His discourses to the multitude, spoke in the national dialect (of which, both in the Scriptures, in Josephus, and in other writers, we have so many direct proofs), must contribute greatly to the removal of those prejudices and asperities which have so painfully separated the Christian from the Jew for so many centuries of alienation and distrust. If both the one and the other were to act up to the great principles of their faith, it would not be difficult for them to acquire the spirit of the great Apostle whose intense love to Christ led him to regard with a special affection those who were nearest to him in nature and relationship, his "brethren and kinsmen according to the flesh, to whom pertained the adoption and the covenants, and the giving of the law and the

¹ Grätz, vol. i., p. 531.

service of God, and the promises ; whose are the fathers, and of whom concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever" (Rom. ix. 3, 4, 5). When we contrast this profound sentiment of affection with the anti-Semitism which is so painfully developed on the Continent of Europe, we may well say of our degenerate Christianity :

"O buon principio
A che vil fine convien che tu caschi!"¹

God grant that the social change in this respect, which has been brought about in England, may spread its influence over other lands, and that they who believe Christ to be "all and in all"² will remember that the "Greek and Jew" are alike included in this unlimited comprehension, and that they are equally bound to carry out the great principle upon which it rests, the love of that God who is "not only the God of the Jews, but of the Gentiles also."

ROBERT C. JENKINS.

ART. II.—REUNION, UNIFORMITY, AND UNITY.

WHITSUNDAY, 1895, is a red-letter day in the annals of our branch of the Catholic Church. On it, for the first time, the beautiful and most scriptural prayer for the unity of all Christians, in our Liturgy, was offered, we hope, in the greater number of the churches of the Anglican Communion throughout the world, and, by order of our chief Pastor, ought to have been offered in all of them. Shall we not look for, and expect, an answer to this grand concord of prayer which has gone up, and which we trust is still going up, from all parts of the world to the throne of Him who has Himself taught us to desire above all other things that we 'all may be one even as the Father and the Son are one'?

Our Blessed Lord's last prayer, the great High Priestly Prayer, which He offered the night before His crucifixion, contains these words : "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also that shall believe on Me through their word ; that they all may be one ; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us ; that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me. And the glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them ; that they may be one, even as We are one. I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one ; and that the world may know that Thou

¹ Dante, "Paradiso," cxxvii. v. 60.

² Col. iii. 11.