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## The Jesus of History and the Christ of Faith

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### 3 HISTORY AND THE FOURTH GOSPEL

By LEON MORRIS BSC MTH PHD, *Principal, Ridley College, Melbourne.*

I IMAGINE that the principal difficulty most people see in accepting the Fourth Gospel as a reliable historical document arises from the marked difference between the Synoptic and the Johannine portraits of Jesus. If Jesus was as the Synoptists depict Him, men reason, then He could not have been as St John portrays Him. Or, in the words of F. C. Burkitt, 'It is quite inconceivable that the historical Jesus of the Synoptic Gospels could have argued and quibbled with opponents, as He is represented to have done in the Fourth Gospel.'<sup>1</sup> Burkitt not only stresses the difference but in this way brings out strongly his preference for the Synoptic picture. He does not find the Jesus of St John an attractive figure.

It is a pity that Burkitt chose to write these words. 'Quibbled' is a loaded word and unworthy of this great scholar. The reality behind his statement is not that Jesus adopted questionable methods, but that He could and did meet His opponents on their own ground. Jewish scholars have not infrequently recognized the essential Jewishness of this Gospel. Thus Israel Abrahams can say, 'My own general impression without asserting an early date for the Fourth Gospel is that that Gospel enshrines a genuine tradition of an aspect of Jesus' teaching which has not found a place in the Synoptics', and

he refers to 'the Fourth Gospel's close acquaintance with Hebraic traditions'.<sup>2</sup> With Burkitt, we may not like this. But it is idle to deny that the Jesus of the Fourth Gospel fits into the Jewish environment of the day. He may not fit into our notions of what the Christ of God should be, but that is another matter.

R. V. G. Tasker puts some stress on this as he reminds us that it is not Jesus as He was that is contradicted by the Fourth Gospel, but Jesus as the liberals saw Him: 'It is very true that the portrait of the Johannine Christ does not at all square with the portrait that has often been drawn of Him by liberal theologians. But we have to remember that Jesus was put to death not because He was inoffensive, but because He struck at the roots of the pride, the prejudices, and the self-satisfaction of mankind.'<sup>3</sup> It simply will not do to say that we know from the Synoptists what Jesus was like and that therefore He could not have been as John depicts Him. The fact is that it is easy to construct from the Synoptists, by a selective use of the materials (and of the critical imagination!), a portrait of Jesus which is incompatible with John's picture. But whether we are justified in doing so is another matter.

The Johannine portrait is life-like. It is true that it contains some features not in the Synoptic picture, but we cannot without further ado put this down to the evangelist's imagination. At the very least it contains an authentic Jewishness.

It is redolent of the holy land. And it should not be overlooked that there is at any rate one passage in the Synoptists which is definitely of a Johannine type: 'I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes; yea, Father, for such was thy gracious will. All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him' (Mt. 11: 25ff.; cf. Lk. 10: 21f.). One swallow may not make a summer, but at least this passage shows that the Synoptists are not ignorant of the kind of teaching which is so abundant in John. That more of this type of teaching is not recorded is not really surprising. Setting down this sort of thing is not easy (try recalling these exact words!). Nor is it congenial to all. The minds of the Synoptists appear to have moved along different lines. They record the things in which they are interested and which have relevance to their purpose. They omit what is not. But what they omit is not necessarily unauthentic. To affirm this is to make the gate far too narrow.<sup>4</sup>

### A GREAT PERSONALITY

A great personality will always transcend the descriptive skill of a single biographer. We need the impressions made on many if we are to gain any adequate impression of the man. And what is true in the ordinary affairs of history is even more true in the case of Him whom Christians revere as the incarnate Son of God. We must bear in mind here that there are limitations to what the method of the historian can elicit. Sometimes men write as though we ought to accept all that the historian certifies as authentic, but that when the man of faith speaks we must immediately discount what he says. It is well to bear in mind M. Goguel's warning about the limits of the historical method: 'The rôle of the historian is to recognize facts and organize them in relation to others. Yet he cannot fully explain history, because history has to do with personalities, and every personality is a mystery which it needs human sympathy and comprehension to understand.'<sup>5</sup>

The warning is timely. We need not disparage the historian. His work is most necessary and it yields invaluable information. But neither should we

idolize him. He cannot give us the complete picture. For that other considerations than the narrowly historical may well be necessary. Goguel points us to this on the level of human personality in general. We cannot get to grips with any personality by historical methods alone. At the very least we must add to them sympathy and the like. And if this is true in the case of any historical personage much more is it the case with Jesus of Nazareth. At the very least, His has been the profoundest of influences through all subsequent history. It would be folly to take, say, the Synoptic portrait, and affirm that this is the one authentic picture of Jesus. The Johannine picture has every indication of being authentically Palestinian, and it has brought Jesus alive to very many through the centuries. Once grant that there may be more than one portrait, and that part, at any rate, of the test is the impact made by a great personality, and it is difficult to rule out the Johannine picture.

This, moreover, has been the constant Christian verdict. From the earliest times the church has thought of the four Gospels as being essentially in harmony. It has accepted the four-fold picture of Christ with scarcely a qualm. If there really were a fundamental incompatibility it is difficult to see how it escaped the notice of the church (including some acute thinkers) over so many centuries.

### SYNOPTIC AND JOHANNINE IDEAS

The question of the historicity of the Fourth Gospel has often been pursued by concentrating on the incidents and words it has in common with the Synoptic Gospels. Since, apart from the Passion narrative, the number of incidents common to the two traditions is very small, and since there are striking differences in vocabulary, it has been widely held that John's narrative must be viewed with the gravest suspicion. But it is not necessary to concentrate all our attention on minutiae. It is possible to think of the great *ideas* given expression in this literature, and when we do John does not appear to be as dissimilar to the Synoptics as is sometimes thought.

H. Balmforth has subjected the structure of the Second and Fourth Gospels to close scrutiny and finds impressive resemblances. As an example of his method let us take the following reference to John chapters 2 to 4, a section of his Gospel which most of us would

hold to be essentially independent of the Synoptic tradition:

'There is a miracle that Mark never mentions, a cleansing of the Temple that Mark puts at the end of the story, not at the beginning, and two long discourses, with a certain Nicodemus about new birth, and with an anonymous Samaritan woman about water and worship. Mark had given a short, straightforward narrative of how Jesus came proclaiming the advent of the Kingdom of God and making its presence known by mighty words and mighty works. Yet is not John doing precisely the same thing? The Kingdom is the dominant theme of the tradition about Jesus' teaching, its leading motif from the beginning, when Jesus came declaring that the time was fulfilled and men must repent and believe the good news. And here John takes this theme and, as his manner is, unfolds the underlying meaning of the tremendous phrase βασιλεία θεοῦ. At Cana of Galilee the waters of Judaism are changed into the wine of the new age of the Kingdom. The cleansing of the Temple is seen as more than an explosive act of prophetic indignation; it signifies the passing of the old worship "through the blood of goats and calves" and the coming of the new worship in "the temple of his body", the messianic community. In both these signs we are to see the new age of the Kingdom bursting forth from the old order. The two discourses reinforce and expound the truth shown in the signs. In the discourse with Nicodemus we have the theme of spiritual rebirth ἀναγεν. In the discourse with the woman of Samaria we hear of new life given, new and true worship made possible: the life and worship of the citizens of the Kingdom.'<sup>6</sup>

This type of examination of the evidence convinces Balmforth that the main lines and the structural themes in these two Gospels are the same. John was not trying to put before men a different gospel.

This is, of course, essentially the point made years ago by A. M. Hunter, when he argued for an essential unity throughout the New Testament.<sup>7</sup> He maintained that John was not saying something essentially different from the Synoptists or from Paul or other New Testament writers when he used his characteristic terminology, but conveying the same basic Christian message in his own way. It is important not to see things too small. There can be basic unity even when the terminology is

strikingly different.

A slightly different twist can be given to this line of reasoning by pointing out that there is an interrelationship between the Synoptic Gospels and John. I have elsewhere argued that on at least eleven points the Synoptic teaching is difficult or impossible unless we interpret it in the light of John.<sup>8</sup> This we normally do quite automatically, without stopping to notice how curious the Synoptic teaching is in isolation. To take an example, the Synoptic Gospels speak of prayer in an absolutely unqualified way. Thus we read, 'Ask, and it will be given you; seek and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For every one who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened' (Mt. 7: 7f.). There is no requirement from the side of the worshipper. He is not asked to be living piously, to be seeking to serve God or anything of the sort. In this passage he is not even required to believe. Since, however, in other places in the Synoptic Gospels faith is said to be required for effectual prayer, it may well be contended that the demand for faith is implicit here. But nothing seems to be impossible where there is faith. It is remarkable that we take all this so calmly. Even very godly people often find unanswered prayer a problem. Our experience does not seem to square with this aspect of Synoptic teaching.

But John supplements the Synoptists and that in more ways than one. He shows us the perfect life of One who fulfilled all the conditions of prevailing prayer, and who habitually practised this kind of prayer. In Jesus we see how men ought to pray. And John tells us that there are certain conditions to be fulfilled by those who pray. Thus prayer must be 'in the name' of Jesus (Jn. 14: 13f.; 15: 16; 16: 23, 26), which, in view of the significance attaching to 'the name' in the first century is not so very different from praying 'according to his will' (1 Jn. 5: 14). So also, close communion with Christ is a necessity for right prayer (Jn. 15: 7). The Synoptic passages must be read in the light of the Johannine teaching. Then they become luminous. And what is true in the case of prayer is true over and over again. Many Synoptic passages are difficult, taken by themselves, but read in the light of Johannine teaching they become intelligible.<sup>9</sup>

From all this it appears that the *ideas* in the Synoptists and in John are not in conflict. It is the one Christ that lies

behind both portraits. We should recognize the differences and give them due weight. But this should not blind us to the fact that the underlying unity is real.

### A HISTORICAL SENSE

When very many critical scholars are ready to abandon any notion that John took his facts seriously it is refreshing to find W. H. Brownlee referring to 'a historical sense on John's part'.<sup>1</sup> This he sees in the way John refers to Jesus. In the Prologue he speaks of Him as the Logos, but he does not put the term on the lips of Jesus or of John the Baptist. Indeed, in the body of the Gospel he does not use the term as a name for Jesus at all. Jesus calls Himself 'the Son of man' as in the Synoptists, or perhaps 'the Son of God' or 'the Son'. Again, 'the Son of man' is not found in the Johannine Epistles, nor in the Gospel other than on the lips of Jesus Himself (except when the crowd takes up the term from Jesus and asks who the Son of man is, Jn. 12: 34). This does not look like a lack of concern for the facts.

All the more is this the case since, as has often been pointed out, the speeches in this Gospel are in a uniform style. This is sometimes taken as an objection to John's historicity, since it is urged that otherwise there would be differences in different speakers. The uniform style is probably a reflection of the fact that John is reporting in Greek what was originally spoken in Aramaic. But for our present purpose the important thing is that he made no attempt to give verisimilitude to his narrative by introducing variation in the speeches. If he has not done this in the speeches we cannot ascribe to conscious artifice his variation in the way Jesus is referred to. It is surely a reflection of the way the terms were used and is a mark of his accuracy.

Beside this we should perhaps place some aspects of his portrayal of Jesus. A frequent objection to his picture is that he presents us with a Christology too high for a first disciple.<sup>2</sup> He certainly has a high Christology, but it should not be overlooked that he also puts emphasis on the complete dependence of Jesus on the Father in a way incomprehensible if he were simply enunciating the doctrine of a divine Christ. He reports that Jesus said, 'I can do nothing on my own authority' (Jn. 5: 30), and his Gospel is full of the same thought. Jesus' message is not

His own, for He prays, 'Now they know that everything that thou hast given me is from thee; for I have given them the words which thou gavest me' (Jn. 17: 7f.). Again and again Jesus refers to His having been 'sent' by the Father, the frequency of mention making quotation superfluous. Jesus' witness to Himself is not necessarily to be accepted, but God bears the decisive witness to Him (Jn. 5: 31f.). Jesus obeys the commandment of the Father (Jn. 14: 31); indeed, His very food 'is to do the will of him who sent me' (Jn. 4: 34). Much more could be cited, but perhaps it will be sufficient to refer to the verdict of J. E. Davey who has submitted the evidence to close scrutiny. He notices that in the Synoptists we see Jesus going about doing good, that is, manifesting love which 'is the Christian name for God'. Likewise he sees in dependence 'the essential mark of true human religion', and goes on, 'we have here a reversal of the usual formula of the theologians and find that it is in a real sense the Synoptics who show us the divinity, and *John* the humanity, of Christ'.<sup>3</sup> Whether this estimate be accepted in its entirety or not, there can be no doubt but that John does stress the dependence of Jesus on the Father in a way the Synoptists do not. This is a major theme. We cannot thus accept lightly the thesis that John's high Christology rules him out as unhistorical. This is all the more significant in that his Gospel may well have originated at a time when Christians in general were putting their emphasis on the divinity of Christ. A stress on the dependence under these circumstances points us to a concern for Jesus as He was.

### CONCLUSION

There are many other facets of the situation. It cannot be pretended that this survey is in any way comprehensive.<sup>4</sup> But it does draw attention to a number of factors which are in danger of being overlooked in the general emphasis on John's unconcern for history. That he did not have a high regard for the importance of stating the facts is inherently unlikely. There is general agreement that among his aims was that of combating a Docetic view of Christianity, and if this was the case he could not sit loose to the facts. That was the very error of the Docetists. The moment it could be pointed out that John was distorting the facts of the case the opening

was given to the Docetists to claim that in essence he was with them, for it was they who stressed that the theology mattered and the history did not. Only by sticking closely to the facts could this kind of heresy be effectively countered. I am contending that the kind of evidence to which attention is drawn in this article accords with a strict regard for history, and that this is in any case inherently likely. We shall need the strongest of evidence before accepting any other position.

<sup>1</sup> *The Gospel History and its Transmission*, Edinburgh, 1907, p. 228.

<sup>2</sup> *Studies in Pharisaism and the Gospels*, First Series, Cambridge, 1917, pp. 12, 135. J. H. Bernard also cites Abrahams, 'Most remarkable has been the cumulative strength of the arguments adduced by Jewish writers favourable to the authenticity of the discourses in the Fourth Gospel, especially in relation to the circumstances under which they are reported to have been spoken' (*St John*, I.C.C., Edinburgh, 1928 i, p. lxxxii, n. 3).

<sup>3</sup> *The Gospel according to St John*, London, 1960, p. 31. Elsewhere Tasker says, 'Though at times the utterances of Jesus in this Gospel sound harsh, particularly to those who over-emphasise the gentleness of Jesus' nature, there is no valid reason for supposing that, when dealing with the Rabbis at Jerusalem, Jesus did not debate with them in rabbinical fashion the nature of His claims; and it may well be just this side of the Lord's ministry that the Galilean disciples knew little about, but with which the Fourth Evangelist was more familiar, particularly if, as has already been suggested, he was himself a Jerusalem disciple' (*The Nature and Purpose of the Gospels*, London, 1962, pp. 96f.).

<sup>4</sup> C. H. Dodd regards this saying as one which serves 'as warning against a hasty assumption that nothing in the Fourth Gospel which cannot be corroborated from the Synoptics has any claim to be regarded as part of the early tradition of the sayings of Jesus' (*Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel*, Cambridge, 1963, p. 431). He has already pointed out that 'If (Matthew and Luke) had not happened to include this one isolated saying, we should never have suspected that we had before us anything but a purely Johannine theologoumenon' (*loc. cit.*).

<sup>5</sup> Cited in *The Expository Times*, LXXV, July 1964, p. 296. Cf. also, 'We cannot reconcile the postulates of faith with the findings of science includ-

ing historical science. We have to determine their relations by an entirely different method.' To the question 'What method?' the answer is 'The formulas of religion are of another order than those of science, and neither can confirm or disprove the other' (*loc. cit.*).

<sup>6</sup> *Studia Evangelica*, II, ed. F. L. Cross, Berlin, 1964, pp. 28f.

<sup>7</sup> In *The Unity of the New Testament*, London, 1944. He can say, for example, 'when Jesus said, "The Kingdom of God has come upon you" (Luke x. 9) and Paul "If any man is in Christ, there is a new creation" (2 Cor. v. 17) and John "The Logos became flesh and dwelt among us" (John i. 14), they were not making utterly different and unrelated announcements; on the contrary, they were using different idioms, different categories of thought, to express their common conviction that the living God had spoken and acted through his Messiah for the salvation of his people' (*op. cit.*, pp. 14f.).

<sup>8</sup> 'Synoptic Themes Illuminated by the Fourth Gospel', *Studia Evangelica*, II, ed. F. L. Cross, Berlin, 1964, pp. 73-84. The treatment is not exhaustive and other similar points could without difficulty be added.

<sup>9</sup> C. H. Dodd maintains that this is the case with the general picture as well as with specific details. He says, 'I believe that the course which was taken by *Leben-Jesu-Forschung* ("The Quest of the Historical Jesus" according to the English title of the most important record of that "Quest") during the nineteenth century proves that a severe concentration on the Synoptic record, to the exclusion of the Johannine contribution, leads to an impoverished, a one-sided, and finally an incredible view of the facts — I mean, of the facts as part of history' (*The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, Cambridge, 1953, p. 446). Those who have concentrated on the Synoptic record to the exclusion of the Johannine have come to some extraordinary conclusions, so that there is much to be said for Dodd's contention. So also Vincent Taylor, 'One cannot hesitate to affirm that the Fourth Gospel contributes to a fuller appreciation of Jesus and his teaching than can be gained from the Synoptic Gospels read in isolation' (*The Life and Ministry of Jesus*, London, 1955, p. 24).

<sup>1</sup> *The Scrolls and the New Testament*, ed. K. Stendahl, London, 1958, p. 47.

<sup>2</sup> Not all critics, of course, would agree that the Christology is too high. Thus Lord Charnwood can say, as the

conclusion of a critical treatment of the material, 'Make of it what we may, Jesus Christ of Nazareth did think and did speak as according to St John He thought and spoke, concerning His Father, Himself, His followers, and that Spirit of His which should abide with them for ever' (*According to St. John*, London, n.d., p. 244).

<sup>3</sup> *The Jesus of St. John*, London, 1958, p. 131. Davey devotes a long chapter to 'The Dependence of Christ as Presented in John' (pp. 90-157). He deals with this under sixteen headings and his treat-

ment of the subject should leave no doubt but that the concept is fundamental in John. He takes this to be a mark of historicity.

<sup>4</sup> I have drawn attention to other aspects of this problem in my article, 'History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel', *Faith and Thought*, vol. 92, no. 3, and in my chapter entitled 'The Fourth Gospel and History', in the symposium, *Jesus of Nazareth: Saviour and Lord*, ed. Carl F. H. Henry (to be published in Britain by the Tyndale Press early in 1967 at 35s.).

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## The Jesus of History and the Christ of Faith

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### 4 JESUS AND PAUL

By F. F. BRUCE MA DD, *Rylands Professor of Biblical Criticism and Exegesis in the University of Manchester.*

The subject of this paper is one which nowadays is commonly treated within the context of existential hermeneutics. The writer has never learned to think in this context, and is conscious that his treatment of this or any other New Testament subject may be thought to betray over-simplification or downright naiveté. So be it.

#### I. CHANGE OF PERSPECTIVE

'Paul', wrote Albert Schweitzer, 'shares with Jesus the eschatological world-view and the eschatological expectation, with all that these imply. The only difference is the hour in the world-clock in the two cases. To use another figure, both are looking towards the same mountain range, but whereas Jesus sees it as lying before Him, Paul already stands upon it and its first slopes are already behind him' (*The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, ET, 1931, p. 113). Without some such appreciation of the eschatological factor, it will be difficult to discern the true relationship between Jesus and Paul.

In the ministry of Jesus, eschatology is in process of inauguration. The Kingdom of God arrived with His ministry, but its powers were not unleashed in their fulness. Until He underwent the 'baptism' of His passion, He was conscious of restraint. But with the

passion and triumph of the Son of Man the restraint would be removed and, as He told His hearers on one occasion, some of them would witness the advent of the Kingdom of God 'with power' in their present lifetime.

For Paul the Kingdom's advent with power has taken place. The power which God exerted in raising Jesus from the dead is now at work in the followers of Jesus, conveyed to them by His indwelling Spirit; by that same indwelling Spirit the love of God, demonstrated supremely in the self-giving death of Christ for His people's sins, is poured out in their hearts. The perspective has inevitably changed, because the death and resurrection of Jesus, which were future events during His earthly ministry, are now past events, or rather parts of one comprehensive saving event, by which the irresistible advance of the cause of God has been released in the world. Eschatology has thereby been inaugurated; what remains to be done before the consummation has mainly the nature of mopping-up operations after the decisive victory which has already been won. Hostile forces, already disabled, have to be destroyed; with the destruction of death, the last of these forces, the resurrection age will be consummated, although its blessings are enjoyed here and now through the Spirit by those who have experienced faith-union with Christ. For them the age to come has dawned, although for others it may still be future. 'Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come' (2 Cor. 5: 17).