

election of its Chairman, the Very Rev. Mgr J. M. T. Barton, D.D., F.S.A., to the position of President (1952) of the Society for Old Testament Study. This motion was seconded by Dr Leahy and passed, *nem. con.*

In response to some requests we reprint on page 43 with appropriate modifications an answer published originally in 1945, in *SCRIPTURE*, before it became an official quarterly. The subject is the Millennium, and we believe many readers will be glad to have this reprint.

The Liturgical Apostolate, Abbey of St Andrew, Bruges, Belgium, has produced an excellent booklet on the restored Easter Eve service, giving the text in Latin and English and adding just such short explanations as are necessary for the intelligent following of the ceremonies. Thus, a very interesting plan of the ceremonies is printed on page 4, showing the main parts and subdivisions; and throughout the text, short notes are inserted wherever necessary. The booklet is available at the very modest price of one shilling, and is entitled 'Easter Eve'.

THE FOURTH GOSPEL, AN OBJECTIVE RECORD?

SINCE the portrait of Christ in John differs apparently from that in the Synoptics, because there are notable differences in the discourses and on account of the Evangelist's elaborate use of symbolism there have been constant attempts to maintain that the fourth Gospel is in fact not a work of history at all but largely an allegorical composition designed to portray Christ, not as he actually was in life but as he was believed to be at the beginning of the second century. 'Such a view' notes MacRory, 'reduces the claim to divinity made by our Lord himself in the discourses of the Gospel to claims set up on his behalf by the Evangelist seventy years or more after his death' (Gospel of St John, p. xlix).

Before dealing with the difficulties it is well to note first that the Gospel presents itself as a record of fact. This is stated categorically in xx, 30-31. The text of the Gospel bears this out. There are the same historical persons as in the Syn., eg. the apostles, the holy women, Caiaphas, Pilate and Joseph of Arimathea. The events too, generally speaking are the same—the Baptist's testimony, Christ's many miracles, feeding of the 5,000 and above all the details of the Passion. That John relates many events not in the Syn. and *vice-versa* is accounted for by his intention of supplementing, not repeating their account in detail.

John's Gospel has more chronological indications than the other Gospels. At least three Paschs or a period of two full years, the feasts of

Tabernacles and Dedication are mentioned. Days are mentioned in series (I, 29ff; xii, 12), and even hours of the day are noted (i, 39; iv, 6, 52; xix, 14). Geographical details are likewise more abundant than in the Synoptics. Events are described too with an attention to picturesque detail which equals Mark's; and many new facts are supplied.

Eight miracles are described in some detail—the changing of water into wine at Cana, the healing of the official's son at Capharnaum, the cure of the man at Bezatha, the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, the walking on the water, the cure of the man born blind, the raising of Lazarus—and the miraculous catch of 153 fishes after Christ's Resurrection. All are regarded as signs, the first two being related to the faith which they increased or provoked, and the fourth and fifth being closely connected with the Eucharistic discourse. The symbolism of three others is declared by Jesus himself. He cures on the sabbath to show that he is one with the Father in a coequal continuity of operation; he gives sight to the blind, to show that he is the light of the world; he raises Lazarus, after declaring that he is the resurrection and the life.

The symbolism of the Fourth Gospel is pronounced and apparently intentional. Nevertheless caution should be used in its investigation lest one read far more into the mind of the Evangelist than was actually there. The opening words of the Gospel 'In the beginning . . .' the reference to the Word as the Light of men, the bringing of new life to men, and even the exact arrangement of events into seven days from the Baptist's testimony to the miracle of Cana, remind us forcibly of the details of Gen. i, and can hardly be anything but intentional, cf. Allo,¹ 833. Authors have sought the perfect number seven in many other places in John, for example, seven miracles, but it does not seem that any special significance attaches to the numbers quoted.

We find that John gives great prominence to the ideas of Light and Life, and these appear to be constantly represented by the symbols of water and blood. The Life was the Light of men, died on the Cross and from his side pierced by the lance there flowed water and blood, in which many have seen figured the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist. One should compare this with the water and blood of I John v, 5ff. Allo thinks one may discern a series of eight events in which these two main ideas are illustrated. Thus: (1) Marriage feast of Cana, water and wine (blood) (2 and 3) Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman, faith symbolized by water, proposed to a Jew and a non-Jew. (4) Healing of ruler's son, iv, 46ff. (5) Paralytic at Pool of Bezatha. (6) Miracle of loaves (Eucharist) implying wine (blood). (7) Man born blind. (8) Raising of Lazarus. Thus 2-3, 5, 7 refer to Light, and 4, 6, 8 to Life, while 1, refers to both.

¹ *Jean, Evangile de Saint, in Dictionnaire de la Bible, Supplement.*

Granted some symbolism to a greater or lesser degree, we have now to ask whether this is compatible with an historical work? It should be observed first that we are not here considering parables which are fictitious narratives designed to convey spiritual teaching. The symbolical or allegorical method is quite distinct and consists in selecting an actual historical event or fact or person and seeing in it or him a spiritual meaning. As Bernard¹ says 'It is one thing to spiritualize history: it is quite another to put forth as history a narrative which is not based on fact', p. lxxxvi. There cannot be the slightest doubt that it was John's express purpose and intention to record fact. At the same time, he does undertake to interpret the facts as is shown not only by his comments (e.g., ii, 21; iv, 2; xx, 9), but also by his arrangement and selection of material, so as to present his thesis (xx, 30) in the most effective way.

DIFFERENT SUBJECT MATTER

If we only had the Synoptic Gospels, we should conclude that Jesus spent almost all his public life preaching in Galilee. On the other hand, John concentrates mainly on the events in Judaea and Jerusalem. Nevertheless, the reference to the Baptist's imprisonment in John iii, 24 indicates that the account is meant to supplement the Synoptics. Again, the Synoptic accounts suggest a one year ministry; yet in John, at least three Paschs are referred to (cf. p. 27) implying at least two years. But this need cause no special difficulty, because as Temple² has pointed out 'the Synoptists provide no chronology of the ministry at all until the last week', p. xi. The impression of a one-year ministry is due rather to an absence of chronological indications. John, on the other hand is careful to give many notes of time.

The Fourth Gospel indeed, far from being incompatible with the Syn., is rather their necessary complement. That our Lord should have ignored Jerusalem and Judaea and preached exclusively in Galilee and that he should then have journeyed to Jerusalem, where he was at once put to death, is hardly intelligible. For, seeing that Christ, on his own admission was not come but to save the lost sheep of the House of Israel (Matt. xv, 24), he must surely have offered salvation officially and directly to the leaders of the people and to the inhabitants of the Holy City. Indeed how else can we explain his cry of sorrow over Jerusalem (not just Israel). 'How often would I have gathered thy children . . . Matt. xxiii, 37? The explanation is surely given us in John. Moreover Jesus, as an orthodox Jew, would be bound by Law to visit Jerusalem at the great feasts, and one can hardly believe he would not take such opportunities to preach to the people.

¹ *St John's Gospel.*

² *Readings in St John's Gospel.*

THE DISCOURSES

A special feature of the Fourth Gospel is the length of our Lord's discourses. But even more remarkable is the difference between them and those recorded in the Syn. No one can fail to notice, for example, the difference between the Sermon on the Mount or the parables by the Lake shore (Matt. v-vii, xiii), on the one hand, and the discourses of Jesus in the Temple (John v, viii) on the other. In the former we have elevated moral instruction, homely illustrations from everyday life, an almost complete absence of polemics. In the latter one finds a pre-occupation with our Lord's Person and Mission expressed often in difficult language and in a tone of open hostility. The matter and the language are those of crisis—the supreme crisis of acceptance or rejection of his claims. Moreover there seems to be a remarkable similarity in phraseology between what is put into our Lord's mouth and the wording of the rest of the Gospel, so that at times it is not easy to say precisely whether it is our Lord or the Evangelist who speaks, e.g. iii, 16ff.

All this has led many to ask whether we have not here the Evangelist's developments of what our Lord originally said, rather than an exact historical record of his utterances.

To deal with the last point first. One recognizes of course that our Lord's Aramaic has been put into Greek and that in the translation personal characteristics of the Evangelist would appear. It must also be admitted that the discourses are not usually reported verbatim as may be seen by the differences in the records of so solemn an utterance as the Words of Institution of the Eucharist. Again, not all that Christ said on any given occasion is necessarily recorded. It may be no more than a summary. Finally the later date of John's Gospel would give further scope for the personal characteristics of the Evangelist to appear: though one might reasonably ask whether it might not rather be a case of John's having absorbed his Master's modes of thought and expression after so many years of profound meditation on them, to a greater extent than the other Evangelists.

As regards the different subject-matter—in the first place, there is a different audience. In Galilee, Jesus was speaking to the simple unsophisticated fishermen and peasants, who had no vested interests and no malice in their hearts. In Jerusalem it was otherwise. There he came up against the leaders at once, and they from the beginning took their stand against him (John ii, 18). This being so, the polemical note could not fail to appear in his dealings with them. Moreover, being learned in the law, the Pharisee would expect to discuss deeper matters than those set before the Galileans. Jesus met and overcame them with their own weapons.

It is moreover significant that, in the Synoptic Gospels when our Lord is speaking directly with the Pharisees, the polemical note is equally prominent, cf. Matt. xxiii.

It is argued further that the 'self-assertiveness' of Jesus in the Johannine discourses is unlike what we should expect of him, indeed unworthy of him. But surely all depends on whether it is true. That Christ speaks of himself is inevitable if his task is to offer himself for acceptance by the leaders. If his claims were false there would of course be intolerable pride.

It is often conceded that John has entered more deeply into the mind of Christ than the other Evangelists and that his over-all portrait of the Master may give a truer picture than that of the others. But it is maintained that John's account is less historical in detail. 'We may sometimes feel sure that this saying or that was uttered by our Lord as it is recorded: but it would be a mistake to look for original and authentic utterances as each the nucleus of a discourse' (Temple, p. xvii).

It is true of course that John does interpret as well as record. He interprets the significance of events (ix, 34-7) and also of sayings (ii, 21-2). Might he not also expand our Lord's discourses in the same way? Some think, for example, that in iii, 16-21 we have the reflections of the Evangelist, though there is no obvious break after our Lord's words in the preceding verses. So also in iii, 31-36, we may have John's comments on the Baptist's preceding words. But it is surely destructive of the historical character of the Gospel, so well established as the record of an eye-witness, to maintain that, in effect, we cannot be sure that Christ actually pronounced any of the discourses as recorded in John. To those who so readily stress John's supposed inability in his old age to distinguish between what our Lord actually said, and what might be deduced (admittedly under the guidance of the Holy Spirit) from those sayings, we must point out that such a viewpoint does not well agree with the other evidence of the Gospel. If there is one thing which stands out more than another, it is surely the evangelist's minute attention to details of time, place and persons, see p. 28. Is it likely that the man who remembered what was said by the Baptist, Andrew, Philip and Nathanael (chap. i), and on another occasion by Andrew, Philip and Peter (chap. vi), that the narrator of the vivid and circumstantial story of chap. ix or again chap. xii (cf. esp. xii, 22), would be unable to distinguish between his Master's words and his own reflections? Moreover, even if for the sake of argument this were conceded as a possibility, we have other factors to reckon with. The readers of the Gospel were not seeing this teaching for the first time. The Gospel was in fact merely the written record of the Tradition which they had cherished continuously over the years. All the evidence shows that this Tradition was jealously guarded and any deviation would be noticed at once.

There was indeed theological development almost from the beginning, as one may see from the epistles, but it was not set down as the utterances of our Lord. St Paul for example makes it perfectly clear

when he is quoting the Lord directly and when he is issuing instructions on his own authority. Speaking of the Eucharistic Assemblies he says, 'For I have received from the Lord that which also I delivered unto you' (I Cor. ii, 23). But 'Concerning virgins I have no precept from the Lord' (I Cor. vii, 25); and again, 'But for the rest, I speak, not the Lord' (I Cor. vii, 12). Is it reasonable to suppose that John who was more historically minded than Paul should have been so vague as to set down his own reflections as his Master's sayings? It may of course be granted that in reporting the discourses John had in mind contemporary needs and selected and arranged his material in order to provide an answer to heretics. Indeed this consideration must have been in his mind when arranging the Gospel as a whole.

Strachan,¹ in attempting an explanation of the Johannine discourses, suggests a parallel with the OT prophets. 'When a Hebrew prophet used the expression 'Thus saith the Lord', he did not usually mean that the actual words were heard by him with the outward ear, although he may have had 'auditions'. He meant that he spoke with certainty and authority the mind of God on a particular situation . . . The Fourth Evangelist feels himself to be in the same relation of communion in the Spirit with the exalted Christ as the OT prophet experienced with God' (p. 17). It is difficult, however, to see any parallel such as Strachan suggests. The OT prophet is generally concerned with communicating to man the mind of God here and now on a particular situation. He is the προφήτης, the speaker on behalf of God, the mouthpiece of God. But it remains clear, generally speaking, that it *is* the prophet who speaks. He is used by God to communicate the message. But the people know the man through whom the message comes. His personality is not hidden as is so often the case with that of the inspired writer. When the prophet says 'Thus saith the Lord' all know that the Lord is then and there speaking through him. The Evangelist is in a very different role. His task is to record what the greatest of prophets actually said in definite historical circumstances. Our Lord, the Incarnate Word, was himself the mouthpiece of God. If John puts into his mouth what was in fact communicated to the Evangelist at a later date we have a totally different situation. John was indeed also a prophet and we have his book of prophecy, the Apocalypse where it's clear from the start that John speaks as the mouthpiece of the Risen Lord.

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Extract from the forthcoming *Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture* and here printed by permission.

¹ *The Fourth Gospel, its significance and environment.*