

*THE AUTONOMY OF JESUS: A STUDY IN THE
FOURTH GOSPEL.*

CHARGES of indifference and callousness had for long been a commonplace with critics of the Stoics' theory and practice, by the time this book was written. Their main grievance against the Stoic ideal was that freedom from perturbation and sollicitation came only at the expense of human sympathy. Impassivity and alienation, as they held, awaited any such attempt to exaggerate an attitude of claustral, philosophic isolation from the world. Not very dissimilar is the charge often levelled against the treatment of Jesus in the Fourth gospel, where (it is argued) under the stress of theological and speculative requirements the person of Christ has been somewhat removed from the breathing life of men, the divine in him overpowering the human, the mysterious overshadowing the natural. If autonomy is thus intensified to the detriment of natural pity in the Fourth gospel, it is a defect of its quality. There is indeed onesidedness in the treatment all through. Perhaps it is more apparent than real. But none the less one must admit some grounds exist for the critique that while in the earlier gospels, for example, compassion is primary, in the Fourth it is usually secondary as a motive. This is patent in the case of the so-called "miracles," which lose here almost entirely the gracious and tender motives commonly prefixed to them in the synoptic tradition, and minimize—though they do not utterly exclude—the natural compassion of which they had been correctly described as the glad outcome. "The synoptical miracles are, in the main, miracles of *humanity*; the Johannine miracles are, so to speak, miracles of *state*. They are wrought for the purpose of glorifying the worker. . . . (They) are, in fact, acts of humanity, but, from the point of view of the narrator, if not of the actor, that seems an

accident."¹ The selected *σημεῖα* are transformed into proofs of mysterious power and immanent glory resident in the personality of Jesus; they witness to the importance and the authority, not to the affection, of the worker. No doubt this represents a genuine and certain element in the miraculous activity of Christ. It is an element also which is already beginning to show itself in the later portions of the synoptic narratives, where even already the cures and deeds of Jesus are not untinged with a theological or official aim.² But in the Fourth gospel this aim is allowed practically to dominate the conception of Jesus as a whole, to the almost total exclusion of the other features; as if the writer felt the autonomy of the Lord so strongly that any representation of him as relying upon human love or responding to human need would be equivalent to making him a pendant

¹ Bruce, *The Miraculous Elements in the Gospels*² (1886), p. 151. Or, as Mr. Hutton puts it (*Theological Essays*, p. 178), the miraculous power in the Fourth gospel is "intended more as a solemn parting in the clouds of Providence, to enable men to gaze up into the light of Divine mystery, than as a grateful temporary shower of blessing to a parched and blighted earth." As the stress falls upon the appeal of revelation to the intelligence, or to the evidence for God accessible in the moral intuitions, it is natural, if not necessary, that Christ should be somewhat emancipated from the common and close relationships congenial to a Redeemer.

² A comparison of the miracles in Mark and Matthew shows in the latter (a) an increase of emphasis upon their extraordinary and impressive character, and (b) a tendency to view them not so much as incidental acts of mercy or sympathy, but as repeated and general demonstrations of Christ's Messianic power. As the apostolic and sub-apostolic development of belief proceeded, the miracles ceased to be merely what they had been to the primitive tradition. Originally the expression of personal sorrow and sympathy upon the part of Jesus as he moved among men, they came to possess a deeper significance as embodiments of a principle and acts of an authoritative agent of the Divine kingdom. This advance is patent in Matthew (Wernle, *Synoptische Frage*, pp. 126, 158), and in one sense the Fourth gospel represents merely its culmination (Wendt, *das Joh.-Evangelium*, pp. 24-28). As in some other points this combination of ideas in the latter book reflects a stage at which certain aspects of Christology had become elaborated to a high pitch within Christian circles which felt the gnostical *Zeitgeist*; but there is evidence to show that these ideas rest upon a basis which is not substantially untrue or illegitimate, even when judged by the standard of the primitive tradition, much less when viewed in the light of previous developments such as are worked out in Colossians and Hebrews.

upon human life. Hence, as the Johannine signs in their present setting¹ usually symbolize spiritual truth personified in Jesus, they corroborate that impression of spontaneity and self-determination upon the part of our Lord, which pervades the rest of the gospel as a whole.

All this undoubtedly tends to lessen the moral impact of Jesus upon mankind. Not only do the great promises of pardon and the appeals for repentance fall away, but there is a certain remoteness in the connexion between Jesus and his age as that is described in the Fourth gospel, a lack (if we may say so) of direct and simple and continued intercourse. He is abruptly introduced as addressing men (viii. 12, viii. 21), and as abruptly breaks off. Figures are brought forward (e.g. Nikodemus and the Greeks) apparently for the sole purpose of furnishing a situation for some speech of Jesus. Before long the speech passes quite away from its immediate topic; then the figures are dropped, as if the writer had no more interest in them, nor does he trouble to describe any spiritual results that followed from the interview. At the same time, this freedom of action is scrupulously safeguarded, upon the Divine side, by a careful subordination of Jesus to the Divine will and mind, and the writer is at pains to bring out the balance of these qualities by treating autonomy in constant relation to necessity. Self-determining as Jesus is, he aims at pure and absolute submission to God his Father (iv. 34, vi. 38, x. 16), depending upon God for his knowledge (vii. 16-17, xii. 49 f.), his authority (viii. 42, x. 36), and life itself (vi. 57). Life to Jesus is described as a necessity of obedience (v. 19-30; ix. 4); the author steadily views Christ's death as the

¹ The introduction, now and then, of concrete material traits (e.g. ii. 6, ix. 6, xi. 39) is due to the general blending of historical and ideal elements, which characterizes the whole book (Holtzmann, *Neutest. Theologie*, ii. pp. 375-378). The general tendency, however, is to obliterate from the picture of Jesus not merely the sordid conditions and surroundings but also the homely and plain background. Hence the literal tears and thirst are all the more impressive.

outcome, not of human force and malice, but of God's providential purpose (iii. 14, xii. 34, in line with Acts iv. 23-30), while his resurrection is in complete harmony with the Divine decree of prophecy and Scripture (xx. 9). Similarly, the teaching of Christ is referred to no human invention or natural occasion, but to the authority and truth of God, from whom he receives it as a trust and revelation (vii. 17 f., viii. 26, xii. 49, xiv. 10, etc.). In this way the author does his best to keep any grounds for a suspicion of irregularity and presumption out of his sketch of Christ's character, and indeed in one famous passage he gives with admirable insight spontaneity and submission as two sides of one being (x. 1-18). Here the gain and end of choice, for Jesus, is to choose God's will; death comes to him as a result of faithfulness in his vocation, for his relation to God and men involves responsibilities which impose upon him suffering and martyrdom. These he will not avoid. Later on, with a dramatic touch, the writer again brings out this law of Divine necessity (xi. 50 f.), proceeding further to illustrate, in the case of Jesus (xii. 23 f.), the natural law that without self-sacrifice and loss no gain for others can be won. Under this Divine pressure Jesus lies passive (xii. 32-4). His death is necessary, in God's moral order, as the prelude to an outburst of spiritual life among his followers (xv.-xvi.), and as such it is accepted by him. Throughout, his personal authority and his Father's will are conceived as absolutely one (xvii.). Obedience is the outcome of perfect sonship to the Father — an idea (*πατήρ-υῖός*), by the way, which is rather a common feature in the book of Wisdom. Similarly in a piece of Jewish apocalyptic, two centuries earlier, the career of the Messiah had been expressly referred to a series of Divine commands (*Sibyll.* iii. 652-656):

Καὶ τότε ἀπ' ἡελίου θεὸς πέμψει βασιλῆα,
 Ὃς πᾶσαν γαῖαν πᾶνσει πολέμοιο κακοῖο,

Τοὺς μὲν ἄρα κτείνας τοῖς δ' ὄρκια πιστὰ τελέσσας.
 Οὐδέ γε ταῖς ἰδίαις βουλαῖς τάδε πάντα ποιήσει,
 Ἄλλὰ θεοῦ μεγάλοιο πιθήσας δόγμασιν ἐσθλοῖς.

In dwelling upon this aspect, the author is of course working out a moral principle which lay upon the surface of the synoptic tradition; but in view of what has been already said upon the sources for his autonomy idea, it is interesting to remember that along this complementary line he is true to what also formed a cardinal principle of contemporary Stoic ethics: the more freedom, the more power to obey the Divine will (e.g. Seneca, *de Benef.* vii.; *Epp.* 59, 76, 96; Epiktetus, *Diss.* iv. 1). Acquiescence in the designs and dealings of Providence formed a large part of what passed for virtue in the Stoic creed. As a man conforms to the supreme Will with constancy and cheerfulness, the Stoics taught, so he approximates to the ideal of the perfect man; in proportion to his belief that nothing can happen essentially noxious to his own person or contrary to the Divine will for him, he thinks truly of himself and God. Not wholly unlike Marcus Aurelius and Epiktetus,¹ the author of the Fourth gospel expressly disclaims the misinterpretation that the autonomous man is hard, insensible, unsocial; like them also he finds the supreme manifestation of *αὐταρκεία* to lie in submission or resignation. In fact,

¹ "Stoic theology as represented by Epictetus is fast wiping away its reproach" of arrogance and blasphemy; "but in so doing it has almost ceased to be Stoic" (Lightfoot, *Philippians*, p. 316). "Roman Stoicism in fact presents to us not a picture with clear and definite outlines, but a dissolving view. It becomes more and more eclectic. The materialism of its earlier theology gradually recedes; and the mystical element appears in the foreground" (*ibid.* p. 319). Not merely in Tertullian, but in Justin Martyr's theory of Christ (not half a century later than the Fourth gospel) and general moralism, Stoicism indirectly operated. Generally, as Holtzmann remarks (*Hand-Commentar zum N. T.* iv. 1, sec. edit. p. 45), for the development of what was to be a world-religion no watchword could be more apt than the term λόγος, which Philo had secured through a combination of the term for Jewish revelation with the Stoic world-reason. There is a monograph by Winckler (*der Stoicismus eine Wurzel des Christenthums*) which I have not been able to see.

the example of Jesus upon this side forms one of the fine contributions to Christian morality made by this author; it shows how he could rise above the growing "legalism" of the age. Emphasizing Christ's conduct as a pattern (xii. 24-26, etc.) and type, he implies that it is not unique but a rôle and rule for human life. By means of Christ's career he exemplifies the truth conveyed in the contemporary conception of Christianity as the new Law; but he makes it breathe and move and persuade, as it could not do within the chilly precepts of the Stoic creed, or the thin dreams of philosophic thought. For as the proof of friendship lies in obedience (xv. 4, etc.), and as the Christian's relation to Christ is that of Christ to God, i.e. dependence and obligation (xvii. 18-23, etc.), it follows that for them as for him strength and peace lie in obedience, and that the essence of freedom consists, not in the absence of control, not in caprice or wilful self-direction, but in loyalty at any cost to the revealed will of God and his requirements. The moment a man is put in full possession of his powers, and equipped with lordship over the world, his life dawns upon him as a mission. Such is the Christian ideal of the Fourth gospel upon one side. "The free man is he who is *loyal* to the Laws of this Universe; who in his heart sees and knows, across all contradictions, that injustice *cannot* befall him here. . . . The first symptom of such a man is not that he resists and rebels, but that he obeys. . . . He that will go gladly to his labour and his suffering, it is to him alone that the Upper Powers are favourable, and the Field of Time will yield fruit. Who is he that, in this Life-pilgrimage, will consecrate himself at all hazards to obey God and God's servants? With pious valour this free man walks through the roaring tumults, invincibly the way whither he is bound" (Carlyle, *Latterday Pamphlets*, vi.).

Further, this fine conception of autonomy as a means to

the service of God rests upon another ethical principle, viz. that the higher a character rises, the more independent it becomes of the rules which are required for ordinary life. Advance in moral excellence means less and less reliance upon specific directions and counsels; virtue ceases to be so much of a conscious effort; the right cause is seen more intuitively, and chosen with less deliberate decision. Man is not always meant to be "a shop of rules." The more purified he becomes in motive the less capable is he of choosing anything except the good, or turning to anything except the truth; for, by dint of repetition, the right choice comes to be largely a delight and habit. Henceforward he is free to follow his bent, since his bent is unalterably in the right direction—

Indulging every instinct of the soul

There, where law, life, joy, impulse are one thing.

Thus the Christ of the Fourth gospel is from the first so absolutely in line with God's purpose, eternally set in the mission of the Father, that his spontaneity, while apparently a neglect of common rules and ordinary motives, is really an overflow from the very intensity of his devotion. He is independent of the average and natural suggestions or standards in life (so, we may conjecture, the narrative implies), simply because he lives in a higher world of being where these are no longer necessary. In this light autonomy with Jesus, as with ordinary people in their own degree, forms a privilege granted, as it only can be granted, to the high reaches of devotion, where a will can be implicitly trusted to act in the spirit of the supreme Will in heaven. It is in fact the same idea as that which Dante elucidates at the close of canto 27 in the *Purgatorio*. There he describes how Vergil left the pilgrim at the verge of the celestial forest to wander on unguided for the rest of his journey. His independence, as Vergil explains, is a privi-

lege not a penalty: it is the right granted to maturity of experience.

By intellect and art I here have brought thee;
 Take thine own pleasure for thy guide henceforth
 Beyond the steep ways and the narrow art thou.
 Expect no more or word or sign from me;
 Free and upright and sound is thy freewill;
 And error were it not to do its bidding;
 Thee o'er thyself I therefore crown and mitre.

(tr. by W. M. ROSSETTI.)

Only, this freedom which is gained by ordinary men after long experience and discipline, is the possession of Jesus in the Fourth gospel from the very outset, in full measure (iii. 34, etc.) throughout every province of existence.

Such a brief analysis of some ethical elements in this conception of autonomy helps to vindicate generally the soundness of its use by the author of this gospel, even although its application to Jesus may have led to methods of historical statement which were in danger of occasionally producing an impression of remoteness and unreality. It certainly furthered his aim of exhibiting the Divine greatness of Jesus, as one superior to human conditions and earthly circumstances, who was in the world but not of it, maintaining his inherent sovereignty amid the exigencies of our common lot. In life and death alike this Christ was represented to faith as one who moved on a Divine plan, executing Another's purpose; his life no accident, but an outcome of God's love and a revelation to the world; his death, so far from being a misfortune or a failure, that it proved a fruitful episode in the advancement of God's redeeming providence for mankind, as it had been a supreme act of submission to the Father's will. Consequently, for the author to vindicate, as he has laboured skilfully and earnestly to do, the independent authority of Jesus among men, was to corroborate, not to contradict, the great Christian belief that his life formed the final and

providential expression of God's will and heart for the world. Signs and speculation alike contributed a proof for Judaism and Hellenism that this Jesus of the Church's faith was the genuine Messiah and the real Logos.

For an explanation of the precise form into which this sustained vindication of Christ's authority is thrown, one has to look, as has been already hinted, to the eclectic speculative atmosphere¹ which pervaded the situation of faith at this epoch in the Asiatic communities (Renan,

¹ The direct use of the Book of Wisdom in the Fourth gospel cannot, I think, be demonstrated; nor is such a demonstration necessary for the purpose of the above argument. But some of the resemblances are remarkable, whether they are taken as coincidences or as results of a literary filiation. Cf., for example, the function of the Spirit in John xvi. 8 (ἐλέγξει τὸν κόσμον περὶ ἀμαρτίας καὶ περὶ δικαιοσύνης καὶ περὶ κρίσεως) with the description in Wisd. i. 3-8 (δοκιμαζομένη τε ἡ δύναμις ἐλέγχει τοὺς ἄφρονas . . . ἅγιον γὰρ πνεῦμα ἐλεγθήσεται ἐπελθοῦσης ἀδικίας) and the reiteration of "conviction" (ἐλεγχος) as the doom of the wicked (e.g. i. 8-9, iv. 20, xviii. 5=John iii. 20); also the passages upon an uneasy conscience reprov'd by goodness (Wisd. ii. 14, ἐγένετο ἡμῖν εἰς ἐλεγχον ἐννοιῶν ἡμῶν. βαρὺς ἐστὶν ἡμῖν καὶ βλεπόμενος . . . καὶ ἀλαζονευεται πατέρα θεῶν=John iii. 20 and vii. 7, also v. 18, ἐξήτουν οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι ἀποκτεῖναι αὐτόν, ὅτι . . . πατέρα ἴδιον ἔλεγεν τὸν θεόν), the collocation of death and the devil (Wisd. ii. 24=John viii. 44), the inscrutability of heavenly things (Wisd. ix. 16, τὰ δὲ ἐν οὐρανῶς τίς ἐξίχνιασεν;=John iii. 12 f.), the claim of the righteous to know God (Wisd. ii. 13, ἐπαγγέλλεται γνώσων ἔχειν θεοῦ=John viii. 55, vii. 29), the safety of the righteous in God's hand (Wisd. iii. 1=John x. 28-30), the knowledge of the truth (Wisd. iii. 9=John viii. 31), the authority of evil magistrates (vi. 3 f., John xix. 10-11), love and obedience (Wisd. vi. 18; of Wisdom, ἀγάπη δὲ τήρησις νόμων αὐτῆς=John xv. 10, 14, xiv. 15, with 1 John v. 3, αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ, ἵνα τὰς ἐντολάς αὐτοῦ τηρῶμεν), Wisd. viii. 19-21 with John i. 13, creation by the λόγος (Wisd. ix. 1=John i. 1-2), knowledge of Divine things due to the Holy Spirit sent from heaven (Wisd. ix. 13-17=John xvi. 12-14), the knowledge of God equivalent to eternal life (Wisd. xv. 3=John xvii. 3). Ewald, an excellent judge in matters of style, thought that he detected in the nervous vigour of this author's proverbial style, as well as in the depth of his conceptions, a certain premonition of the Fourth gospel, "like a warm rustle of the spring, ere its time is fully come." In view of some of these passages, and of others which might be quoted, I am unable to see how Harnack can deny the existence of any Hellenic influence whatever in the farewell discourses of the Fourth gospel (*Dogmengeschichte*, E. Tr. i. p. 329 n.). The whole spirit and subject of these addresses naturally precludes any direct references such as are noticeable throughout the rest of the book; but, although lowered and restricted, the influence is there. It is just as impossible to absolutely insulate these discourses from the gospel as a Hellenic product, as to draw distinctions sharply between the prologue and the subsequent narratives.

l'Eglise Chrétienne, chaps. v. ix.). At Ephesus it is more than possible that a native phase of Logos speculation flourished, which was largely independent of Alexandria; ¹ to describe any element in the Fourth gospel as "Philonic" does not necessarily imply that it was drawn wholly or directly from a study of the Alexandrian philosopher. But the analogy between this particular conception of autonomy and the allied ideas of Stoicism is so remarkable that upon this point there is good reason to believe the author of the Fourth gospel was susceptible to some influences disseminated by this current and dominant system of philosophy, which approached Christianity in a far-off fashion upon the side of ethics, just as Platonism did upon the side of pure theology.² The prominence assigned in this gospel to features of autonomy and self-determination may be partially accounted for along lines of purely internal Christian development. Materials and motives for this conception of spontaneity undoubtedly lay to the author's hand, as he lived in the area of the earlier Christian tradition and felt the pressure of surrounding reflection upon the personality of Jesus. But some allowance must be also made for the influence of Stoicism, which had many seats and chiefs, as Zeller has shown, studded over Asia Minor,³ and which, at this very epoch, was permeating the general

¹ See Sabatier's remarks on this point in *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* (1897), pp. 173 f. The general culture and atmosphere of Ephesus and Ionia are brilliantly sketched by Renan in *Saint Paul*, pp. 330-370. Cp. too Dr. E. Pfeleiderer's *die Philosophie des Heraklit*. pp. 294 f.

² Harnack, *Dogmengeschichte* (E. Tr.), i. pp. 116-133; Hatch, *Influence of Greek Ideas and Usages upon the Christian Church* (7th ed.), pp. 139 f., 238.

³ Tarsus e.g. was a famous Stoic centre, and Hierapolis was the native place of Epiktetus; on the Eastern affinities and Oriental origins of Stoicism, see Lightfoot's essay in his *Philippians* (1891), pp. 273 f.; and on the moral reformation of the age, outside Christianity, Hatch as above. "Nearly all the most important Stoics before the Christian era belong by birth to Asia Minor, to Syria, and to the islands of the Eastern Archipelago" (Zeller). On the Stoics as the Puritans of Nero's age and court, cf. Mr. W. W. Capes' *Stoicism*, pp. 97 f.; also his chapters (xii.-xiii.) on Stoicism in the cottage and on the throne.

atmosphere of thought and activity throughout the Roman Empire. As the Julio-Claudian dynasty drew to a close, "the Stoical philosophy, passing beyond the limits of the schools to become at once a religious creed and a practical code of morals for everyday use, penetrated deeply into the life of Rome. At first associated with the aristocratic opposition to the imperial government, it passed through a period of persecution which only strengthened and consolidated its growth. The final struggle took place under Domitian, whose edict of the year 94, expelling all philosophers from Rome, was followed, two years afterwards, by his assassination and the establishment, for upwards of eighty years, of a government deeply imbued with the principles of Stoicism."¹ It was this practical philosophy which was in possession, when early Christianity began to emerge upon a large scale among the Greek currents of the Roman Empire. Surely then it is not an utterly unreasonable hypothesis to conjecture that behind the chief Christian writing of that age, intended to coalesce with philosophical idealism inside the Church, composed in a country² where

¹ J. W. Mackail, *Latin Literature* (1895), p. 171.

² The history of Apollonius of Tyana is itself enough to show the importance of Ephesus as a religious, no less than an administrative, centre in the province of Asia; it represented a ferment of credulity and civilization, of popular superstitions and religious culture in its higher forms. But the connexion of Stoicism specially with Ephesus is indicated in the letters of pseudo-Herakleitus earlier in the first century, and in the fact that Justin Martyr, who was at first attracted to Stoicism as a system of austere morals, probably came under the influence of Christianity at Ephesus. During the Pauline mission in the sixth decade of the century Christianity had spread inland, and in spite of the break in Paul's work it seems that the new faith continued to flourish in these districts, although seriously exposed to internal corruption (Acts xx. 29 f.; Apoc. ii.-iii.; Ignat. *ad Ephes.* vii., ix., xvi.). Ephesus also formed one influential centre for the tendency to exalt John the Baptizer (Acts xix.), against which (among other things) the Fourth gospel (i. 8, 15, iii. 22 f., v. 33-36, also 1 John v. 6) anxiously sets the subordinate and transitory nature of his mission, besides the inadequacy of mere water-baptism. The narrative of Acts throws a wavering light upon these semi-Jewish tendencies within the Church and the welter of contemporary local superstitions among which early Christianity was thrown at Ephesus; it also reveals the interesting fact that Paul's appearance there resembled that of a wandering sophist, advocating a new system (Acts xix.).

such ideas had for long flourished and were still flourishing, composed, too, with an avowedly apologetic aim and in a spirit not unsympathetic with the leading movements of the time—that behind such a work one may feel the vibration here and there of an element which sprang originally from the potent morals of the Stoa.

But if the expansion of this conception of autonomy betrays a ripple of Stoic influence upon early Christian thought, it is impossible not to hear in it as well the reply of a Christian apologist to outside cavils and internal doubts. The death of Jesus had for long (1 Cor. i. 22, 23, *Χριστὸν ἐσταυρωμένον, Ἰουδαίους μὲν σκάνδαλον, ἔθνεσιν δὲ μωρίαν*) been adversely criticized in Jewish and Hellenistic circles, and evidently its inferences and issues formed a perennial topic of discussion in the period when the Fourth gospel was composed. The claims advanced by the church for the divine origin and messianic status of Christ, his relation to the authority of Scripture and the like, these occupied men's minds, and probably suggested not unnatural doubts. Did he die simply because he was not strong enough to escape? Were his enemies too clever and powerful for him? Was he the hapless victim of envy and ignorant passion? And was his death an ineffective, involuntary accident? Answers to such criticism, whether levelled from Jewish or from Hellenistic circles, are to be heard in the representation (given in this gospel) of Christ's death and of the life which led to it. He could have escaped, had he wished, is the reply. But he would not. His death was chosen and free; he went to it open-eyed, and suffered it, not as something forced upon him, but as a free moral act. Viewed in the light of his calling and mission, his death is thus seen to subserve the purpose of God for mankind, as already the Old Testament had prophesied (iii. 19 = Luke xxiv. 25 f.). His acceptance of it sprang from his noble and conscious desire to further that purpose,

and from his knowledge that it would effect universal and eternal good for men (xii. 31).

Similarly the apologetic value of this manifesto consists not only in its repudiation of the view that Christ was a victim, weak and helpless, but in the assurance that his choice of death was for the best, that the spiritual and moral gains won thereby would more than compensate for the loss of his earthly presence (xiv.), and that Jesus had by his eternal existence (xii. 34) really fulfilled the Jewish rôle of Messiah.¹ This is of course the outcome of prolonged reflection and experience (xvi. 8-11), under stress of Jewish criticism and Christian doubts. As in so many passages of the Fourth gospel, it shows the history of the church reflected in the history of Jesus; his answers and counsels often are the reply of the Christianity which he created, made by her in his Spirit to outside unbelief and opposition or even to her own wavering self, towards the opening of the second century. By his repeated insistence upon Christ's spontaneity in life and death, this writer hopes to reinforce his readers' faith that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God—by his death fulfilling the prophetic rôle of the Messiah and providing, strangely but sufficiently, for the best interests of his church within the world. He was no victim of chance or fate, suffering what is to be regretted; he was the true Logos, enduring nothing unworthy of himself or incompatible with the best interests of his kingdom, cramped by no limitations, and swayed by no compulsion. Plainly the writer's object is to comfort and justify faith by expressing, as clearly and imperiously as

¹ xii. 34 f. is the Christian answer to a contemporary objection of the Jewish school, which had for long cherished in some circles the belief that eternity was a predicate of the Messiah: pre-Christian evidence in Enoch lxii. 14, and Sibyll. iii. 50 (both from first century B.C.); a later allusion in Apoc. Baruch lxxiii. 1 (before 70 A.D.), though Schürer explains the "in aeternum" of this passage by the phrase (xl. 3) "in saeculum, donec finiatur mundus corruptionis." Cf. however Stave, *über d. Einfluss des Parsismus auf den Judenthum* (1898), pp. 202 f.

possible, the dignity, serenity, and solemn majesty of its object. The natural inference is that One possessed of such autonomy and omniscience¹ must have deliberately chosen a career which he knew to be fraught with blessing and profit for his own people. Hence it is that the reasonableness of his death is vindicated by an account of the innate glory possessed by him who died; while belief in the providential aspect of the Christian tragedy is justified by considerations of the sublimity and deliberation with which the Sufferer made it part of his life-plan and eternal mission.

These considerations run up into the conception of Christ's sovereignty and authority in the general course of Providence, which is another contribution of value made by this Johannine idea of autonomy. "It was not as an example but as a Master that Christ spellbound the apostles" (Hort, *Hulsean Lectures*, p. 205). Seen in this light, Jesus requires no suggestions and suffers no force from without. The true embodiment of the Divine Spirit, he controls all by his word, and remains unshaken amid the clash and whirl of things,² bearing his purpose and task to

¹ Harnack acutely points out that the Jewish idea of pre-existence really springs from a devout aspiration of faith, namely, from the confidence that all is known to God and controlled by Him, "to whom the events of history do not come as a surprise, but who guides their course" (*Dogmengeschichte*, E. Tr. vol. i. p. 318). Thus the phenomena described above as belonging to the autonomy of Jesus simply represent, from this standpoint, the natural outcome of this conception as applied to the existent Christ on earth.

² This Johannine tendency to emancipate the human Jesus more and more from the changes and claims incident to an earthly career, is probably a development of one feeling which, among others, helped to suggest the idea of pre-existence to the apostolic consciousness. Especially in apocalyptic circles, haunted by the transitoriness and dissolution of their age, it was natural to attribute an eternal pre-existence to the loved objects of their faith, and thus to render them independent of time and its ruinous hazards (cf. Baldensperger, *Selbstbewusstsein Jesu*, pp. 3 f. 86 f.). This disposition had been for long prevalent in Jewish circles, and obviously fitted in with the high Christology of the Fourth gospel. As, however, Christ had to be brought down to earth and exhibited as a being of flesh and blood, the author needed other means for preserving this inviolate status of the Logos. Consequently he adopts the

its great end. As I have tried to show, the attempt to represent this in the concrete form of history, along synoptic lines, has occasionally led to several incongruities, as was perhaps unavoidable; despite its impressiveness and beauty, the idea is expressed in a form which has not altogether escaped the hazard of artificiality. What is true and timely in the Christian conception of the exalted Christ is apt to be dislocated as it passes down into the atmosphere of incident and utterance, as these exist upon the level of ordinary experience. To convey the judgment of faith in the guise of history is no easy task. But, after allowance has been made for such inevitable accompaniments of a fusion between the ideal and the concrete, the religious value of the conception remains unimpaired. Especially at emergencies or times of transition, like that at which the Fourth gospel was composed, when an old system is yielding to new forms of thought and statement, when traditional methods fail to satisfy so extensively or adequately as before, or when some of the great practical advances of the church are being undertaken—at such moments there is a natural inclination to suspect that the change which means so much to men, affects God also. Humanity, perplexed and over-anxious, distrustful through its very sense of need and of responsibility, seems eager to press or hurry God. A feeling often spreads abroad, even among people of a religious temper, that God is being taken by surprise, as though the swift changes and quick turns of human thought and experience anticipated Him. The result is that there is a half-concealed tendency to thrust these upon His notice, to demand a solution, or to dictate certain antidotes and methods of escape which appear to

idea of autonomy, or rather heightens one or two features in the synoptic tradition until they form this conception of Christ's person. This tendency was naturally accelerated, as I have shown, by the transcendental importance of the Logos in itself and by fusion with the allied ethics of Stoicism.

our judgment to be requisite. Prayer then becomes a species of panic. It is really a cry of impiety, though it is veiled under the name of piety and faith. Changes and crises, such people suspect, are more obvious to themselves than to the Divine wisdom; and in their anxiety to have Divine truth adjusted to these altered circumstances, the devout are prone to fall into impatience and presumption. Like Martha, in the story of Lazarus (John xi. 21-39), they despair of God's help—a despair which is a form of implied reproach and exaggerated self-reliance; or, like Mary in the same situation, they obtrude their opinions as if all rested upon themselves, making prayer a form of advice to God.

Now the conception of autonomy, as applied to Jesus in devout idealization by the Fourth gospel, furnishes a telling and gentle rebuke to this temper of unworthy panic in a crisis. (i.) The true Jesus of faith, in whom God is shown to us, is master of the situation. He is never taken by surprise. The tide turns with him, not he with it (x. 4, 16). In short, this idea, as worked out with wonderful effectiveness in the pages of the Fourth gospel, forms a very graphic and personal expression of belief in Providence. God possesses the power of initiative in the world's course. Free beginnings are still possible to Him. Unaided and absolute He moves. How foolish then to suspect that Christ, the head of the Church, the supreme manifestation of God, the eternal Son of God, acts ever carelessly or indolently in history! With such a Being, the author implies, it is irreverent and absurd to dictate or to forecast what is to happen. Human wishes and anticipations are quite out of place; fear is as idle as advice is superfluous; the principles and motives of God's providence for His church are and will ever be His own concern. Or—to take this message in its particular and historical setting—the contemporary expansion of Christianity into the Hellenic world (xii. 20 f., xvii. 20), together with the gradual and bitter estrangement of

Judaism from the new faith, must be all part of a predestined plan, not wholly unexpected but foreseen and executed by God's power and wisdom as mediated through Jesus. The general career of the church, subsequent to the crucifixion, is viewed in the Fourth gospel as foretold by Christ (xvi. 1 f., etc.) and really as the prolonged effect of his personality; for the writer has grasped the great idea and expressed it in a singularly apt method,¹ that Jesus was only to be adequately revealed or understood in the history and experience of his church. He and it are indissolubly one, bound together eternally. His life on earth is thus the prelude to all the after-development. But at the same time it becomes a microcosm of the church's history, so that in reading the story and sayings of Jesus in this gospel (even more than in Matthew and Luke) we see some acts and hear some utterances of the apostolic age as it lived out his principles and executed his mission.² By identifying Jesus and his church

¹ Like the modern notion of a certain irreconcilability between the spheres of matter and spirit, the idea that a man's historical existence was limited by the cradle and the grave did not readily present itself to the mind of antiquity. History, to the ancients, embraced all that occurred on, under, and above the earth, in the lives of men and the gods; so that in referring to Christ actions and energies previous or subsequent to his earthly career, the author of this gospel is not wholly without precedent for his general historical method. See on this point Deissmann's *die neutestamentliche Formel in Christo Jesu* (1892), p. 81.

² To this author, the subsequent history of the Christian church is in one aspect a biography of Christ writ large, just as the biography of Christ is the subsequent history of the church writ small. The former supplies the material, the latter the formal, reason for the particular method in which the subject has been treated. Hence the use of the first person plural, in passages like iii. 11 f., ix. 4, implies that what the church uttered in the Spirit of Christ was the very utterance of Christ himself. To some extent this conviction can be traced even in the synoptic gospels, where the speeches occasionally include apostolic material which in all good faith the editors regarded as direct products of Christ's spirit, and which had no hesitation evidently in blending with the primitive memories of tradition. Such a practice was mediated by the attribution of direct speech to the semi-personal Wisdom (e.g., Luke xi. 49 f.), and not merely the Epistle of Barnabas but the oracles of Apoc. ii.-iii., show how the exalted Christ was conceived as speaking through as well as to his church on

in this mystic fashion, the author is enabled to offer his readers an impressive assurance of guidance and control. The living Jesus rules his church: nothing can befall it that has not been anticipated by him, nor can any crisis outwit his power. (ii.) From this it follows that he does not require human advice or information. True faith, as this gospel implies, will leave Christ to do all in his own way and trust him to carry out his plans, despite appearances to the reverse. It is the place of man—however close he may be to Christ—to wait, to hope, to pray. The correlate to Christ's autonomy is human trust. That Christ knows best what is the proper moment for action or the proper method of help, is a truth which ought to be plain and welcome to any one who is acquainted with the resources, the foresight, the eternal significance of his Being. It was Kuenen, I think, who once remarked that every crisis in the history of ancient Israel found a man waiting with a timely word of God for the conscience of the nation. The unknown Christian thinker, to whose genius we owe the Fourth gospel, read Providence in a similar

earth. (Mr. Bartlet has some good remarks upon this point in his *Apostolic Age*, pp. 355-363.) But while this Johannine feature is not absolutely novel, it is intensely characteristic of the Fourth gospel: certainly it does not represent the final stage of a long, previous usage, as Zahn ingeniously endeavours to make out (*Einleitung*, ii. pp. 165 f.), for it is exegetically inadmissible to regard the genitive in phrases like τὸ εὐαγγέλιον, κήρυγμα, μαρτύριον, τοῦ χριστοῦ, as purely subjective. Further, as a correlative to this consciousness in the church, there is the privilege of prayer in the name of Christ; i.e. the Christian community, in its certainty of being mystically united to and identified with the glorified Christ, prays in such a sense that its words are equivalent to his.

It is interesting to observe that this tendency to connect the history of the church with the person and activity of Christ occurs in a slightly different phase within the preceding literature. The Third gospel was followed by a sequel, containing an account of apostolic experiences viewed under the light of a continued energy upon Christ's part (Acts i. 1 f. and *passim*). The significant fact that such a history naturally came as the sequel to a biography of Jesus, shows that by the last quarter of the century the Christian consciousness was moving rapidly towards the standpoint from which the Fourth gospel was eventually written.

light for the church of Jesus; only with him the recurring word is spoken by one Figure, who possesses the secret of each movement and the determining force in any phase of history. Thus the special contribution made by the Fourth evangelist to his age, and to Christian thought in general, is not merely the opportune and brilliant stroke of apologetic by which the Christian Lord was served heir to all that was best in the Hellenistic Logos—a stroke which won a vantage ground for Christian theology in the Greek world during two centuries and more. He achieved a task of greater lustre. He read history in such a way that when viewed as the background to a biography of Jesus it emphasized the conviction that the economy of the world (and of the church in the world) was the direct outcome of Divine care and control, the living Head of the church retaining and exercising unfettered powers of action as each successive crisis rose. This quality of self-determination, lying at the disposal of unerring insight, is picturesquely reflected in those narratives and sayings of the Fourth gospel which portray what we have termed the “autonomy of Jesus.” Such a supremacy had been already indicated by Paul, by the author of Hebrews, and by the synoptic writers, each in his own fashion. But in the Fourth gospel it reaches a climax, owing to the special situation of Christianity at the close of the first century. For, if we interpret the *métier* of the book correctly, it appears intended to show that the recent progress and extension of Christianity beyond the local limits of its founder, so far from being an eclipse of his career or an improvement upon his plans, was really their outcome, due to the spiritual power over the universe exercised by him in his exalted state (vii. 39, xiv. 12); while, upon the other side, the more novel forms of Christian thought and expression were as actually the product of his Spirit working from the first within the course and consciousness of the church (xiv. 26, xv. 26 f.,

xvi. 7-15). It was a thought which naturally lent verve and confidence to Christianity. Contemporary philosophy might be contented, perforce, with acquiescence at this changeful period. Its rôle might be to accept, rather than to inaugurate. "In the age of the Antonines . . . the wedge which philosophy had inserted in the world seemed to have made no impression on the deeply-rooted customs of mankind. The ever-flowing stream of ideas was too feeble to overthrow the intrenchments of antiquity. The cause of individuals might be turned by philosophy; it was not intended to reconstruct the world. It looked on and watched, seeming, in the absence of any real progress, to lose its original force."¹ With what force and resolution, then, we can conceive this Christian thinker would describe the moral insignia of his Christ! Here was a Logos indeed in whom there was no exhaustion or sad toleration, a Lord able and determined to take his own bearings and choose his own course, active with the vigour and the wisdom of God himself! Over the fortunes of the church and world alike, it was to be inferred, this self-determining Spirit presided; all progress, henceforth as hitherto, was nothing else than the result of his unaided power, controlling the efforts and the aims of men, especially of his followers and friends. Such in effect was one apologetic and edifying profit accruing from this gospel, as it pictured and reiterated the idea that Christ, the Son of God and the guiding authority of man, decides without anxiety and acts without effort, neither pliant nor perplexed in the emergencies of life, but ruling still, as in his days on earth, the turns and tides of history.

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¹ Jowett, *Epistles of St. Paul* (1894), ii. p. 223.