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THE AUTHORSHIP OF THE FOURTH GOSPEL
IN PRESENT-DAY THOUGHT

A Thesis Presented to
The Faculty of Concordia Seminary
Department of New Testament Theology

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Sacred Theology

by
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INTRODUCTION

The Fourth Gospel is one of the best loved books of the Bible. For many this high esteem is closely connected with the conviction that it came direct from the heart of a man who had been close to the heart of Jesus, John, the beloved disciple, who also lay on His breast at the last supper. There was a time when this was unanimously accepted: John, the son of Zebedee, a member of the inner circle of three, was the beloved disciple and the author of the Gospel which bears his name. This John was also believed to be the only one of the apostles who escaped a violent death, to have lived to a very old age, and to have written his Gospel late in his long life.

But today, what used to be unanimous conviction has become incredible confusion. The question of the authorship of the Fourth Gospel has become a subject upon which there is almost as much disagreement as there was agreement before. The very fact that "Fourth Gospel" has become a standard designation for the book traditionally known as "The Gospel according to St. John" is symptomatic of the uncertainty that pervades this question.

It is the purpose of this paper to explore recent literature to ascertain the prevailing views on this subject. The available English and German literature which has

appeared since approximately 1915 has been surveyed to determine mainly this one thing: What is the current thinking on the subject of the authorship of John's Gospel? In this sense, this is largely a statistical study, and no particular effort has been made to distinguish between the authority and scholarship of those whose opinions are presented. The date 1915 was selected as the terminus a quo since the second decade of our century is often referred to as marking a change in the position of several scholars who formerly held staunchly to the traditional view of Johannine authorship. We are referring to Sanday, and, in a measure, also to Stanton.

In dealing with the authorship of a book, it is almost impossible to avoid questions like those of date, place of writing, etc. Since there is also a wide divergence of opinion on these matters, we have incorporated many of them into the discussion. The question of whether John was martyred is so prominent in the whole problem of the authorship of the Fourth Gospel, that one section has been devoted to its treatment.

The historical nature of John's Gospel is, in a sense, a matter distinct from that of authorship. By this, we mean that the position which any particular person holds regarding authorship does not in itself indicate his opinion of the historical reliability of the work. The matter is, however, much discussed in our day, and there will be a

brief treatment of this phase of the Johannine problem.

While we have indicated that the real purpose of this paper is a rather complete cataloging of the various trends of thought on the subject under discussion, certain conclusions naturally suggest themselves. In the last section, an attempt will be made to summarize briefly what are some of the outstanding agreements.

CHAPTER ONE

A BRIEF HISTORY AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

There was a long period of time, when the authorship of the Fourth Gospel was no problem. Except for a slight flurry created by a sect called the Alogoi, in the late second century, there was almost universal agreement on this point up to the end of the seventeenth century. At that time, some English Deists raised some questions regarding the authenticity of the Gospel, but they failed to attract much of a following. A century later, however, in 1792, an English theologian named Evanson raised some noteworthy objections to the accepted belief in a treatise called, The Dissonances of the Four Generally Received Evangelists. Evanson attributed the Gospel to some Platonic philosopher of the second century.

Six years later, a German, Eckermann, took up the fight, with several other German theologians joining in. Their efforts were so successful that Godet writes,

From 1801, the cause of the authenticity seemed to be compromised to such a degree that a German Superintendent, Vogel, allowed himself to cite the Apostle John and his interpreters to the bar of last judgment. This, however, was still only the first phase of the struggle, the time of skirmishes which generally preludes that of pitched battles.¹

¹F. Godet, Commentary on the Gospel of St. John, Vol. I, p. 9.

Bretschneider, in his Probabilia de evangelii et epistolarum Johannis apostoli indole et origine, published in 1820, began the concentrated attack which is believed by many to be the opening gun of the modern attack on the tradition. Taking his cue from the differences between the Synoptics and John's Gospel, Bretschneider proposed that "the fourth Gospel must be the work of a Christian of pagan, probably of Alexandrian, origin, who lived during the first half of the second century".² Following Bretschneider, DeWette and Reuterdahl took up the work, the latter claiming that the tradition of John's sojourn in Asia Minor was a forgery.

Strauss' Life of Jesus, 1835, although it did not concern itself directly with the study of the documents involved, reacted strongly on the criticism of the Gospels. Christian Hermann Weisse positively rejected the authority of the Fourth Gospel, but not without recognizing in the book an apostolic foundation. Taking up the idea of an apostolic source, worked over in an altogether unhistorical manner by a non-apostolic hand, Bruno Bauer maintained that John's Gospel was the reflective work of a thinker and of a poet conscious of his procedure. "The history of Jesus thus became a philosophical and poetical romance; which, according to the witty expression of Ebrard, who reduced

² Ibid.

the narrative of it to a single line: 'At that time it came to pass.....that nothing came to pass.'³

The next important name is that of Ferdinand Christian Baur, whose activity dates from 1844. He hoped to find an historical situation in whose soil so grand a work as John's Gospel might have grown. He found it in that situation which combined Gnosticism, the growth of Montanism, and the Paschal rite controversy. Upon this basis, he comes out for the unity and integrity of the Gospel, but he dates it forward to 170 A. D. Baur was supported by a brilliant group, including Zeller, Schweigler, Koestlin, Volkmar, Hilgenfeld, and others. The last two set the date of the Gospel back twenty years, while accepting Baur's theories in general.

Baur and Hilgenfeld had accepted the tradition of John's stay in Asia Minor, but Keim, in his attack on the authenticity of the Fourth Gospel in the introduction to his History of Jesus, 1865, rejects it as a mere fable. At the same time, Keim puts the date still farther back, wavering between 110 and 130 A. D. Keim finds the source of the fable of John's stay in Ephesus in a misunderstanding of Irenaeus, while Scholten, who wrote a book, Der Apostel Johannes in Klein Asien, 1872, explains it as due to another mistake, namely, that the author of the Apocalypse was the Apostle John.

³Godet, Op. cit., p. 11.

Other important names in the attack on the authenticity of the Fourth Gospel were Davidson, Holtzmann, and Krenkel.

Many voices were raised in protest against this attack. Eichhorn, Wegscheider, and Guericke, were early defenders of the Gospel, prior to the days of Bretschneider, Schleiermacher, Olshausen, Hauff, and others, quieted the storm aroused by Bretschneider, and they even seemed to satisfy Bretschneider himself, who later claimed that he had written his book only to call forth a more vigorous demonstration of the authenticity of the Gospel. Tholuck and Neander, Gfroerer and Hase, attacked Strauss' position, while Ebrard also gave an answer to Bruno Bauer. Thiersch, Bleek, Ewald, Meyer, and Hengstenberg are famous names connected with the defense against the claims of the Tuebingen school.

It was about 1862 that the 9th century chronicle of George Hamartolos was first adduced, with its claim that John was killed by the Jews. Wittchen, as early as 1869, believed the Gospel composed by the Apostle John in Syria immediately after the fall of Jerusalem, and he makes the John of Asia Minor, the presbyter, the author of the Apocalypse.

Zahn and Riggenbach, studying the Papias passage about the "Elder John", came to the conclusion that the Elder was to be identified with the Apostle. Professor Milligan, in 1867, came to the same conclusion.

1872 brought the work of a man who devoted fifty years of his life to the study of this question, and whose about face near the end of his life has been widely quoted. We refer to Sanday's The Authorship and Historical Character of the Fourth Gospel. Luthardt and Beyschlag are the other names that should be mentioned.

In the meantime, there were also those who took a mediating position. Weizsaecker assumed a double character in the narrative, an historical character on the one side, and a speculative one on the other. This leads to double authorship: the witness, the source of information, and the editor, the actual writer. Paulus ascribes the redaction to a disciple of John, who was himself a personal disciple of Jesus. Nicolas finds the actual writer in the Elder of I and II John, who may be identified with John the Presbyter. Tobler takes John as the witness, but has Apollos as writing the Gospel on instructions from the Apostle before 100 A. D. Renan, in the 13th edition of his Life of Jesus, concluded that "a half Gnostic sectary constituted himself the editor of the narratives of the aged apostle".⁴

Mangold, in the third edition of Bleek's Introduction to the New Testament, finds sufficient external evidence to confirm the authenticity, but the internal difficulties seem insurmountable.

⁴Godet, Op. cit., p. 26.

The preceding summary has been based in toto on the work of Godet which has been repeatedly quoted. In the years after that work appeared, defenders of the authenticity included such prominent names as Lightfoot, Westcott, B. Weiss, Ezra Abbot, James Drummond, Stanton, Watkins, and Sanday, to whom we referred previously, as well as Theodore Zahn. A. T. Robertson points out that two of these, Abbot and Drummond, were Unitarians, so that they were scarcely moved by theological considerations in arriving at their conclusions.

On the other hand, we have increased pressure to accept the martyrdom of John at an early date, and thus to deny his presence in Asia Minor. This has been encouraged by the finding of the DeBoor fragment, in 1888, containing portions of an epitome of the chronicles of Philip of Side. This contained statements attributed to Papias supporting the martyrdom. A further trend was the tendency to find the author of the Gospel in the Presbyter John. Baron v. Huegel's presentation of the case, as presented in the Encyclopedia Britannica, seems to have influenced Sanday strongly, according to these words:

On the one hand, I have never faltered in the conviction that the testimony of an eye-witness lies behind this Gospel.....On the other hand, I feel increasingly the difficulty of bringing the whole of the Gospel into relationship with the fisherman of Galilee, and take refuge provisionally in the hypothesis that John of Ephesus, the beloved disciple, was a youthful follower of our Lord at Jerusalem, to whom His Jerusalem ministry would have been especially familiar.⁵

⁵ Quoted in C. A. Turner, The Study of the New Testament, page 34.

Sanday also says,

I'm afraid there is one important point on which I was probably wrong - the Fourth Gospel -..... Perhaps I should say in passing that the contribution to this subject which made the greatest impression upon me in recent years has been the article by Baron Friedrich von Hügel in the eleventh edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica.⁶

In general it may be stated that during the last part of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, German scholars tended to lead the way in the denial of the accepted position regarding the Gospel's origin, while the stoutest defense of tradition came from England. In the United States, there has been a strong inclination to learn from the Germans. Of course, there have also been important champions of the Johannine authorship in Germany, even as there are today.

The purpose of this treatise is to trace the development of critical thinking on the subject of the authorship of the Fourth Gospel, from about the year 1915 on. Various people have claimed that Sanday's admission, that he had been wrong in holding to the apostolic authorship, as well as his refusal to have a former work on the subject republished because it no longer represented his position, was the signal for a general rout in that direction, among those who studied the matter with an open mind. Has this been the case? If so, to what extent? If so, what has

⁶Quoted in W. E. Howard, The Fourth Gospel in Recent Criticism, p.

caused this? Are there any new pieces of evidence, or is the whole discussion based upon the same material that has been available for years? These are some of the questions which face us as we begin our investigation of recent sources.

For the sake of completeness, we shall briefly state the case for and against the apostolic authorship, before proceeding to the actual investigation.

The external evidence for the Johannine authorship is very strong. The Gospel is claimed by some to have been recognized by Ignatius and Polycarp as early as the first half of the second century, but the first one to name the author is Theophilus, about 180. Irenaeus, about 190, says that John, the disciple of the Lord, published the Gospel while he was residing at Ephesus. Irenaeus has about a hundred quotations from the Gospel. The testimony of the Muratorian Fragment, which is as early as Irenaeus, is also definite. Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and others left abundant testimony to the existence and apostolic authority of all four gospels.

The internal evidence is mainly that contained in the appendix chapter, especially the last five verses, although some also base their claims on 19:35. This, however, is closely linked up with the identification of John, the son of Zebedee, with the Beloved Disciple. To what extent

this identification is due to the tradition that John was the writer of the Gospel, and how many people who had never heard that John was the writer would come to the conclusion that he was the Beloved Disciple is difficult, yes, impossible to determine.

Besides the direct claim of authorship contained in chapter 21, there are many hints that fit in well.

The author seems to have been a Palestinian Jew. He was quite familiar with Jewish ideas, customs, and traits. He quotes the Old Testament from the Septuagint and from the Hebrew. His language has a marked Aramaic style⁷, so much so that some men think that it was written in Aramaic and then translated into Greek. The author frequently brings in minute matters of topography of Palestine which in themselves are of no importance but are exactly the kind of detail which would lodge in the mind of an observant eye-witness. The author knows the companions of Jesus intimately, and he tells about many of them by name, but he never speaks by name of the apostles John or James. Now we know that Peter, James and John were the inner circles of disciples, the ones that Jesus seemed to love in a special sense. Peter is mentioned by name time and again all through the Gospel, so he is not to be thought of as the anonymous "disciple whom Jesus loved." James could not have been the author, because we know that he was martyred early, long before the Gospel could have been written. John, the son of Zebedee, is then the natural one to identify as the beloved disciple.⁸

The external evidence against the Johannine authorship includes, first of all, the hesitation of Rome, in accepting this Gospel as authoritative, as evidenced by a

⁷ Others claim that it is pure Greek.

⁸ A. A. Cartledge, A Conservative Introduction to the New Testament, p. 186.

sect called the "Alogoi", that is, those that did not want to accept the "Logos" doctrine, claiming that it was the work of a Gnostic author. Hippolytus, about 200, wrote a defense of the Gospel, thus implying an attack. The Muratorian Canon, also from the second century, goes out of its way to defend the Fourth Gospel.

The external evidence makes much of indications that John was martyred by the Jews. An indication of this is found in Mark 10: 39, which those who do not admit the possibility of true prophecy take as vaticinium ex eventu, thus indicating that John had already suffered a martyr's death when those words were written. The indications in the writings of George Hamartoles and in the DeBoor fragment - containing the Epitome of Philip of Side - stating that both James and John were killed by the Jews, combined with the testimony of Syriac church calendars that James and John are celebrated as martyrs in Jerusalem on Dec. 27, lend an air of probability to the claim of martyrdom.

Much is made of the silence of Ignatius, who writing to the Church at Ephesus, in the first quarter of the second century, elaborates on the fact that St. Paul had labored there, but does not even mention that John had been there. This is thought to indicate that John the Apostle was never in Ephesus. When Papias said that he used to inquire what the disciples of the Lord, including John, had said, and "what Aristion and the Elder John, the disciples of the

Lord, say", as Irenaeus reports, this is thought to indicate that John was already dead in the days of Papias' youth, and that the John whom Papias actually heard was another John, a disciple of the Lord also. The tradition concerning John's residence in Asia Minor, they say, had arisen as a result of a confusion of this John with the Apostle.

Those who are opposed to the apostolic authorship, maintain that it was the internal evidence which first moved scholars to doubt the external evidence for the Apostle John. Assuming that the Synoptic account of Jesus is the historical one, radical criticism cannot believe that one who had been a personal disciple of Jesus, could have written ^{an} account of Jesus' life that was so very different from the others. It is claimed that the Synoptics lay little stress on the divine nature of Jesus, whereas in John Jesus is the pre-existent Logos, the sinless One, the Son of God, yes, one with God Himself.

As to the person of John, these critics find it difficult to see how that John who wanted to call down fire on a Samaritan village, and who, with his brother was called a "son of thunder", and who showed the ambitious spirit of wanting to have preference over the other disciples, could have been the disciple whom Jesus loved. In line with this is the feeling that the Fourth Gospel

is too Greek in language and thought, to have been written by a simple fisherman of Galilee, of whom it is said in Acts that he was an "unlearned" man.

The Gospel of John also contains what on the face of it seem to be contradictions to the Synoptics. Perhaps the best known of these is the reporting of the cleansing of the temple at the beginning of Jesus ministry, while the Synoptics place it in Passion Week. The statement in the 19th chapter, that the Jews did not want to enter into Pilate's judgment hall because it would lead to defilement which would make it impossible for them to eat the Passover, seems to be in contradiction with the other Gospels which indicate that the Passover was eaten the evening before. The story of the raising of Lazarus, while it does not contradict the Synoptics is striking inasmuch as the other Gospels fail to mention it.

On the face of it, it would seem that the honors were rather evenly divided, unless one is inclined to lean towards the traditional view. There are, however, many who claim that the traditional view has been definitely proven untenable. Into the welter of arguments and counter-arguments our investigation has thrown us, and the remainder of this paper is to be a polling of the various authorities whom we have consulted, to determine what progress, if any, this controversy is making.

CHAPTER TWO

THE AUTHORSHIP OF THE GOSPEL

A. Several Related Questions

1. Did John die a martyr's death? One of the principal reasons for denying the possibility of apostolic authorship for the Fourth Gospel is that it is assumed to have been written late in the first century at Ephesus, whereas there is considerable evidence that John was killed by the Jews and, in that case, he was never in Ephesus, nor could he have lived to the end of the century.

W. F. Howard, in his excellent treatise, The Fourth Gospel and Recent Criticism, makes the statement,

The silence in early writers about the Apostle John and his residence in Ephesus probably accounts for the readiness with which so many modern scholars have accepted the slender evidence which is adduced for his early martyr death.¹

We are not here concerned with the slenderness of the evidence, but rather with the acceptance of that evidence by the modern scholar. In Germany, we find among many others, Walter Bauer² and Martin Dibelius in the ranks of those who accept the martyrdom. Dibelius bluntly states:

¹ W. F. Howard, The Fourth Gospel and Recent Criticism, p. 22.

² Walter Bauer, Handbuch zum Neuen Testament, Zweiter Band, p. 4.

Anscheinend ist der Apostel Johannes, der Zebedaeussohn, laengst bevor ein ephesinischer Johannes auftaucht, in Palaestina von den Juden getoetet worden.³

From England comes this word of H. Latimer Jackson:

To speak, then, of 'the universal tradition of the Church' is no longer possible, and it becomes less and less easy to dismiss as 'altogether untrustworthy' the story of the 'Red martyrdom' of the Apostle John.⁴

Charles, in his commentary on the Apocalypse, devotes considerable space to the discussion of John's possible martyrdom and comes out with this conclusion:

The conclusion to which the above facts and inferences point is that John the Apostle was never in Asia Minor, and that he died a martyr's death between the visit of St. Paul to the "pillar" Apostles in Jerusalem, circa 64 (?), and 70 A. D.⁵

Emanuel Hirsch leaves no doubt of his opinion when he writes:

Der Maertyrertod des Johannes zugleich mit Jakebus, 62, ist fuer mich zur Gewissheit erhoben.⁶

Mary E. Andrews shows her agreement with this:

Modern scholars accept the martyr death of both sons of Zebedee as established in consequence of the de Boor Fragment discovered in 1888.⁷

There are, however, many scholars of equal rank who are not so ready to admit that John was martyred. Bernard, in his commentary on John's Gospel takes the opposite view to that held by Charles when he says,

³ Martin Dibelius, "Johannesevangelium" in Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart, Vol. III, p. 362.

⁴ H. Latimer Jackson, The Problem of the Fourth Gospel, p. 150.

⁵ Charles, The Revelation of St. John, I. C. C., Vol. I, p. 1.

⁶ Emanuel Hirsch, Studien zum Vierten Evangelium, p. 141

⁷ Mary E. Andrews, "The Authorship and Significance of the Gospel of John", p. 192.

In the preceding section of this chapter we have reached the conclusion that the evidence alleged in favor of the martyrdom of John the Apostle by the Jews is worthless. We continue to follow the tradition of the second century, that he died in extreme old age at Ephesus, where he was buried.⁸

This is a good illustration of a scholar who holds to the Ephesian residence of John even though he does not believe the Apostle to have been the author of the Fourth Gospel, for Bernard credits the Gospel to John the Elder.

Broomfield can find "no reliable evidence for the early death of John, the son of Zebedee"⁹ while Bruce thinks that "the evidence that Papias stated and meant that"¹⁰ is late and highly precarious.¹¹

H. P. V. Nunn in commenting on a statement of Schwartz that "the martyrdom of John and James rests on the sure and impregnable witness of Papias and the Syrian Martyrology", unburdens himself of these strong words:

If he stated the full truth he would have had to say that it rested on the evidence of a late and self-contradictory compilation of uncertain authorship in which a quotation was made from an author of "small intelligence" which contains a statement which contradicts all the other available evidences, and also on a modern emendation of a fourth-century martyrology.¹²

⁸ Henry Bernard, The Gospel of John, I. C. C., Vol. I, p. xlv.

⁹ Broomfield, John, Peter, and the Fourth Gospel, p. 170.

¹⁰ Namely, John's death at the hand of the Jews.

¹¹ F. F. Bruce, "Some Notes on the Fourth Evangelist", p. 101

¹² H. P. V. Nunn, The Son of Zebedee and the Fourth Gospel, 1927, p. 51.

In similar vein Bueschsel in his recent commentary on John has this to say,

Unbefriedigend bleibt, was aus den Bruchstuecken des Papias zu entnehmen ist. Aber das kann kaum anders sein, da wir von Papias nur Bruchstuecke haben. Jedenfalls ist es aber nicht zu rechtfertigen, wenn man die Bruchstuecke des Papias der klaren Ueberlieferung vorzieht, die ueber Irenaeus bis zu dem Johannes-Schueler Polykarp und zu den Johannes-schuelern in Joh. 21, 24 zue verfolgen ist.¹³

This first point which we have considered is illustrative of the general situation in the criticism of John's Gospel. Directly opposite conclusions are drawn from the very same facts. But this much must be said, there is a very strong tendency to accept the martyrdom of St. John. In fact, most of those who look to the Presbyter John as the author, believe John never to have been in Asia Minor. On the other hand, all those who still hold to the apostolic authorship almost all deny the martyrdom, although there are a few voices which suggest that the martyrdom might have occurred after the Gospel was written.¹⁴

¹³ F. Buechsel, Das Evangelium nach Johannes, p. 26.

¹⁴ A. W. Miller, An Introduction to the New Testament, p. 304.

2. What part does the Beloved Disciple play in the author-
ship of the Fourth Gospel?

The tradition has been very definite on this point, maintaining that the Beloved Disciple is none other than John, the son of Zebedee, and that he is the author of the Gospel. This identification is made on the basis of John 21:24, where the claim is directly made that the disciple whom Jesus loved, who also leaned on Jesus' breast at supper - v. 20 - was "the disciple which testified of these things, and wrote these things". If this verse is accepted as a genuine part of the Gospel, there is no other choice than to make the Beloved Disciple the author. On the other hand, there is still no direct indication that this disciple is John, the son of Zebedee. As a result of the uncertainty regarding John's authorship, as well as the fact that this beloved disciple appears only in the scenes occurring within the last few days of Jesus' earthly life, many have been unwilling to make the traditional identification. In this section of our treatise, we shall endeavor to point out some of the most important attempts to solve this problem.

Needless to say, most of those who hold the traditional view that John the Apostle wrote the Gospel also believe that John was that disciple. It is scarcely necessary to produce evidence for that.

But there are a considerable number of scholars who, while denying the apostolic authorship, still accept the identification of the beloved disciple with the son of Zebedee. Thus Bernard is moved by the fact that "there is no other tradition".¹⁵ Strachan is "certain that John, the son of Zebedee, is meant," because "this disciple would otherwise remain without mention in the Gospel, an inconceivable omission".¹⁶ But Strachan sees the Beloved Disciple not as the author of the Gospel, but as being the Evangelist's source of information and inspiration. "This Evangelist claims the special authority of the Beloved Disciple for the traditions he employs. In one place he speaks of him as a 'reliable witness' (19:35)".¹⁷ In this group we must also include Johannes Jeremias, the outstanding German exegete of our day. On the basis of the findings of Sievers' so-called "Schallanalyse", Jeremias concluded:

Im vierten Evangelium ist der 'Juenger, den der Herr lieb hatte', Johannes, der Juenger, selbst. Er redet persoendlich, waehrend die Kritik hinter dem umschriebenen Ausdruck die Person des Berichterstatters vermutet hat. Johannes verschweigt also seinen Namen geflissentlich und nennt ihn doch, indem er ihn in mannigfachen Wendungen umschreibt. Er begnuegt sich mit Andeutungen, er mag seinen Namen selbst nicht ins Licht stellen, damit desto heller das Licht des Jesusnamen strahlen kann, welcher der Inhalt eines neuen Lebens ist.¹⁸

¹⁵ H. Bernard, The Gospel of John, Vol. I, p. xxxvii.

¹⁶ R. H. Strachan, The Fourth Gospel, Its Significance and Environment, p. 82.

¹⁷ Strachan, Op. cit., p. 84.

¹⁸ Johannes Jeremias, Der apostolische Ursprung der vier Evangelien, p. 57.

In support of this same view, Tasker writes:

The Fourth Gospel.....cites the evidence....in particular of him who became known as 'the disciple whom Jesus loved,' whom tradition has, probably, correctly, identified with John, the son of Zebedee, but who is probably not the author of the Gospel in spite of John 21:24, a verse which must be regarded as a later addition.¹⁹

Cadoux inclines to the same view, although he is content to have the Gospel "rest (in part at least) on the evidence of the Beloved Disciple."²⁰

Closely related to the above view is another one which finds in the Beloved Disciple the witness for the Gospel, but does not identify him with any known person. Jackson finds it difficult to accept the Gospel as a genuine Johannine work from the pen of the Apostle, but he adds:

Author of our Gospel the Beloved Disciple to whom it points may be; or, if not himself²¹ the author, then a main authority for that Gospel.

But Jackson doesn't know who this Beloved Disciple is:

In any case, his identity, assuming that he was a real personage and not an ideal figure, remains unrevealed.²²

¹⁹

²⁰R. V. G. Tasker, The Nature and Purpose of the Gospel, p. 90.

C. J. Cadoux, "The Gospel Story and the Higher Criticism of To-day", Hibbert Journal, 23:615.

²¹H. Latimer Jackson, The Problem of the Fourth Gospel, p. 48.

²²Ibid., p. 170.

The same uncertainty is seen in Fowler, although Fowler may be more inclined than Jackson to see in the Beloved Disciple the actual author:

It is generally inferred that the one to whom in the last analysis we owe this great interpretation of life in its highest reaches is that disciple of Jesus who is often mentioned in the book but never by name; he is alluded to as 'another disciple', or more specifically as 'the disciple whom Jesus loved.' That the author was a Palestinian Jewish Christian and that he felt competent to correct the Synoptic narrative is clear.²³

Sanders offers the suggestion that the Gospel is written by an Alexandrian who had access to traditions which came from the Beloved Disciple whom he calls "a Jerusalem disciple".²⁴ Our final authority for this view is MacGregor, who wrote the commentary on John's Gospel in the Moffatt Series. He writes:

But though we may accept this picture of the Beloved Disciple as a Witness, it does not follow that he is also the author of the Gospel. To begin with, it is more likely that the predicate 'whom Jesus loved' was used of the disciple by another. That he should so distinguish himself would be, to say the least, an affectation; but it would be natural enough for a devoted follower to speak so of his idealized teacher.....We conclude then that the Evangelist was not himself the Beloved Disciple-Witness, but rather a younger contemporary and admiring follower of the latter, standing in much the same kind of relation to him as did Mark, the author of another of our Gospels, to Peter.²⁵

²³H. T. Fowler, The History and Literature of the New Testament, p. 415.

²⁴J. N. Sanders, The Fourth Gospel in the Early Church, p. 45.

²⁵G. H. C. MacGregor, The Gospel of John, p. xlvi and xlvi.

While MacGregor nowhere states that the Beloved Disciple is not John, he carefully avoids making that identification.

Other views which are held of the Beloved Disciple are exemplified by the following. Benjamin W. Robinson writes:

The Fourth Gospel nowhere names its author. It was written by a Greek-speaking Christian leader of Ephesus. If we cannot be content to let the author remain anonymous, we can reconstruct a possible identification of him as follows: There was a young man in Jerusalem, a Greek or Hellenist, whom Jesus 'loved' as he 'loved' Lazarus or Martha of Bethany.....This disciple was among the first to visit his tomb. He moved from Jerusalem before the destruction of the city in 70 and went to Ephesus.During the passage of years he became known as the 'veteran' or 'presbyter', and may be the presbyter John mentioned by Papias and Eusebius. Toward the close of a long ministry he gathered and put together the materials of his Gospel, which was published soon after the death of its author.²⁶

Garvie, while he does not find it possible to identify the Beloved Disciple reports that Dr. Swete identified him with the rich young ruler, while B. Grey Griffith believed he was Lazarus, an identification which is easily explained by the fact that the Beloved Disciple is mentioned only in incidents which occur in close connection with Jerusalem and that we are told directly that Jesus loved Lazarus.²⁷

²⁶ B. W. Robinson, The Gospel of John, A Handbook for Christian Leaders, p. 27.

²⁷ A. E. Garvie, The Beloved Disciple, Studies of the Fourth Gospel, p. 228.

Before leaving this subject, we should mention that there has been some inclination to consider the Beloved Disciple an idealized figure and not represented by any real person. As varied as have been the identifications made, we failed to find anyone who followed Noack in seeing the traitor Judas Iscariot in the disciple whom Jesus loved.²⁸

²⁸ Jackson refers to this brainstorm as having been printed in Noack's Geschichte Jesus, published in 1876.

B. The Leading Candidates for the Authorship

1. John the Elder.

One of the puzzles of Johannine criticism is the popularity of John the Elder as a candidate for the authorship of the Fourth Gospel. Briefly, it is probably to be explained this way. The tradition of Johannine authorship is so strong that when doubts were cast upon the Apostle's having written the Gospel, everyone felt the need of explaining the unanimity of the tradition. Surely, the name John must have been connected with the Gospel in a very definite way for such a strong tradition to arise. Therefore, when the reference in Papias to a second John, called a "presbyter", or "elder", was discovered, and this elder was also referred to as having been a disciple of the Lord, he looked like the tailor-made answer. Add to this that the second and third epistles which were traditionally ascribed to John were written by one who called himself "the elder", and the case looks closed. When another note was found in the writings of the fathers regarding two graves being shown in Ephesus as belonging to John, there could no longer be any doubt. That, it would seem, is the story of the development of the "John the Elder" candidature for the authorship of the Fourth Gospel.

Beginning with the assumption that John the Elder wrote the Gospel, various scholars have worked out the details of the procedure in different ways. Many believe that he had a close connection with the Apostle, or with the Beloved Disciple, at least. Adolfv. Harnack is a name that commands respect in scholarly circles, and his solution of the problem is stated in these words:

The author of the Johannine writings was not, and does not claim to be, an eye-witness, but the Son of Zebedee is the authority on whom he relies. The author is the Presbyter John of Ephesus, and his identification with the beloved disciple is the work of an interpolator in John 21:24.²⁹

Bernard finds the author in John the Presbyter, while he, incidentally believes that the Apocalypse was written by the Apostle.³⁰ Jeremias does not think of John as the special source of the Evangelist's writing, but only one of many original sources, albeit an important one. The actual composer of the book is John the Elder, whom he refers to as the redactor:

Das Johannesevangelium enthaelt wertvolle Ergaenzungen zu dem Berichte der drei anderen Evangelien und ist durch die persoenliche Note der Berichterstattung durch den Redaktor, den Presbyter Johannes, noch besonders ausgezeichnet.³¹

²⁹ Hans Windisch, "Literature of the New Testament", Harvard Theological Review January, 1926, p. 63.

³⁰ Bernard, The Gospel of John, Vol. I, p. xxxiv.

³¹ Jeremias, Der apostolische Ursprung der Evangelien, p. 112.

MacGregor leans to the Elder, but adds another person as redactor:

We conclude then that three persons have played their part in reducing our Gospel to its present form, of whom the second is the author in the true sense of the word, who has stamped upon the book the marks of his genius and welded it into an organic whole. 1) Behind the Gospel is the Witness, the 'disciple whom Jesus loved', a young Jerusalemite disciple, outside the number of the twelve, but admitted to the inner circle during the closing days. 2) The Evangelist himself, afterwards John the Elder of Ephesus, younger contemporary and disciple of the Witness. If he is the 'other disciple' referred to 18:15, he may have had priestly connections, and he was a Sadducee. He was a Jew, but in some way he came in touch with the Alexandrine modes of thought which have left so clear an influence on the Gospel. 3) The Redactor, whose part in the writing may have been caused by the death of John of Ephesus, who was dead by the time the appendix was added, 21:20-24 was intended to correct some current misconception.³²

MacGregor takes up the possibility that Burney's theory of an Aramaic original may be correct, and, in that case, it was the redactor who translated it into Greek. The redactor felt free to rearrange sections, and to interpolate certain new material. - Another voice raised in favor of composition by the Elder, using materials supplied by another, is Hunter. He suggests that we may "neatly describe the Fourth Gospel as 'The Gospel of John (the Elder) according to John (the Son of Zebedee)'."³³

³²MacGregor, The Gospel of John, p. lxxiif.

³³A. M. Hunter, Introducing the New Testament, p. 50.

Rather elaborate explanations of the doings of John the Elder have been constructed by various scholars.

Thus Dibelius writes:

Damit ist der Punkt erreicht, an dem man die aeusseren Zeugnisse ueber Johannes von Ephesus kombinieren kann mit dem Zeugnis des Johannesevangeliums ueber den Lieblingsjuenger. Seine Schilderung stimmt mit dem, was wir ueber jenen Johannes den Alten (den 'Presbyter') wissen: nicht Apostel, nicht Maertyrer, aber eine "Schueler des Herrn" genannte lange lebende Persoenlichkeit von grosser Autoritaet. Besondere Aufmerksamkeit verdient die Angabe Joh. 18:15, nach der Petrus in den Hof des Hohenpriesters durch Vermittlung eines andern Juengers (d. i. wohl des Lieblingsjuengers) gekommen sei der mit dem Hohepriester bekannt war. Die Nachricht des Polykrates ueber das Priestertum des kleinasiatischen Johannes darf damit vielleicht kombiniert werden; etwa in dem Sinn, dass Johannes einer priesterlichen Familie angehorte (somit nur in Jerusalem Juenger Jesu war) und darum in den Hof Zutritt hatte.³⁴

Baron v. Huegel's opinion interests us especially because Sanday refers to his article in the Eleventh Edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica as having influenced him very much in changing his position. Here is what v. Huegel has to say, in part:

The facts of the problem would all appear covered by the hypothesis that John the presbyter, the eleven being all dead, wrote the Revelation (its more ancient Christian portions) say in 69, and died at Ephesus say in 100; that the author of the Gospel wrote the first draft here, say in 97; that this book, expanded by him, first circulated within a select Ephesian Christian circle; and that the Ephesian church officials added to it the appendix and published it in 110-120. But however different or more complicated may have been the actual origins, three points remain certain. The real situation that confronts us is not an unbroken tradition of apostolic eye-witnesses,

³⁴ Martin Dibelius, "Johannesevangelium" in Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart, 2te Auflage, Vo. iii, p. 362.

incapable of re-statement with any hope of ecclesiastical acceptance, except by another apostolic eye-witness.³⁵

Others who assign the book to John the Elder are the Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple³⁶, A. H. McNeile³⁷, F. C. Burkitt³⁸, and Emanuel Hirsch.³⁹

The belief that this Elder John was of Jewish birth is so general, that we might well speak of it as representing a consensus; but there are also those who do not agree, but make him a Greek. Outstanding among those who take this position is Dr. Goodspeed. Of the author he writes:

There are indeed some points in the Gospel which seem to involve better information on the part of its writer than the earlier evangelists had. But the whole character of its narrative and its evident preference for the symbolic and theological, as compared with the merely historical, are against the assigning of its composition to a personal follower of Jesus. It is very probable that it was written by that Elder of Ephesus who perhaps after the publication of this Gospel wrote the three letters that bear the name of John.⁴⁰

In a later work, Goodspeed says,

The thoroughly Greek character of the thought and interest of the Gospel, its literary (dialogue) cast, its thoroughly Greek style, its comparatively limited use of the Jewish Scriptures.....combine to show that its author was a Greek, not a Jew.⁴¹

³⁵ Baron F. v. Huegel, "John, the Gospel of" in Encyclopedia Britannica, 14th Edition, Vol. 13, p. 98.

³⁶ William Temple, Readings in St. John's Gospels, p. x.

³⁷ A. H. McNeile, An Introduction to the Study of the New Testament, p. 264.

³⁸ F. C. Burkitt, The Gospel History and Its Transmission, p. 254.

³⁹ E. Hirsch, Studien zum vierten Evangelium, p. 154.

⁴⁰ E. J. Goodspeed, The Story of the New Testament, p. 121.

⁴¹ E. J. Goodspeed, Introduction to the New Testament, p. 314.

Goodspeed's fellow-townsmen, Benjamin Robinson, seems inclined to agree, for he writes:

The Fourth Gospel nowhere names its author. If we cannot be content to let the author remain anonymous, we can reconstruct a possible identification of him as follows: There was a young man of Jerusalem, a Greek or Hellenist, whom Jesus "loved" as he "loved" Lazarus or Martha of Bethany.....During the passage of years he became known as the "veteran" or "presbyter", and may be the presbyter John mentioned by Papias and Eusebius. Toward the close of a long ministry he gathered⁴² and put together the materials of his Gospel.

On the opposite side, we must at least mention Burney's contention that the author of John's Gospel is this same John the Elder, but that he wrote his Gospel at Antioch in Aramaic.⁴³ We shall take up this theory in more detail later; we merely mention it here as representing another phase of the "Elder John" Hypothesis.

Opponents of the Elder John theory of Fourth Gospel authorship have been very determined in their efforts to disprove it. Many have gone so far as to maintain that this Elder John is a pure fiction and rests upon a misunderstanding of Papias. Others admit the existence of the Elder John, but they question his relationship to the Elder of I and II John.

Barth, Appel, and Feine, whose Introductions appeared in the early twenties, are unanimous in finding little proof for the Elder John hypothesis. Appel writes:

⁴²Robinson, The Gospel of John, A Handbook for Christian Leaders, p. 27.

⁴³F. C. Burney, The Aramaic Origin of the Fourth Gospel, p. 129 and 141.

Der Wortlaut der Papiasstelle ist der Annahme eines Presbyters Johannes neben dem Apostel guenstig, aber die genaue Pruefung der Aussagen fuehrt zu dem entgegengesetzten Resultat.⁴⁴

Barth goes farther and claims that this attempt to solve the problem only adds new problems to the old:

Alle naeheren Ausfuehrungen der Presbyterhypothese, wie sie bei Harnack, Bousset, etc., vorliegen, leiden an grosser Unwahrscheinlichkeit und inneren Widerspruechen. Die Presbyterhypothese gibt neue peinliche Raetsel auf, anstatt die vorhandenen zu loesen.⁴⁵

Feine is not concerned about the two graves of John in Ephesus but says:

Papias weiss nichts von zwei Johannes, dem Apostel und dem Presbyter, er kennt nur einen, den Apostel... Die wirkliche Tradition kennt nur einen Johannes in Kleinasien. Den zweiten darf man getrost zum ersten ins Grab legen, es wird dann doch nur einer drin liegen.⁴⁶

Hausleiter echoes this sentiment when he writes, "Es ist Zeit, dass wir ihm den verdienten Frieden im Grabe zu Ephesus goennen."⁴⁷

⁴⁴Heinrich Appel, Einleitung in das Neue Testament, p. 183.

⁴⁵Fritz Barth, Einleitung in das Neue Testament, p. 310f.

⁴⁶Paul Feine, Einleitung in das Neue Testament, p. 90f.

⁴⁷Johannes Hausleiter, Johanneische Studien, p. 132.

Special mention should be made of the efforts of Theodore Zahn, who is known as one of the most important authorities who identified John the Presbyter with John the Apostle. In his last published work Zahn writes:

Der Ausdruck 'ho presbyteros Iooannes' laesst sich, auch rein sprachlich betrachtet, nicht so deuten, wie es Eusebius in tendenziöser Absicht tut, dass naemlich durch diesen Titel ein gewisser Johannes von dem Apostel Johannes unterschieden werden soll, sondern setzt voraus, dass jener Johannes im Kreise seiner schueler auch durch 'ho presbyteros' ohne Namen hinreichend gekennzeichnet war, weil man ihn in seiner Umgebung als "den Alten" schlechthin zu bezeichnen pflegte. Eben dies wird bestaetigt durch 2 Jo 1; 3 Jo 1; sowie durch ein Fragment des Papias ueber das Markusevangelium, worin er sich auf den Presbyter, ohne Eigennamen beruft. Das ist niemand anders als der Apostel Johannes.⁴⁸

From England and America come other protests against the Elder John.

Dr. Holland writes:

Now, is there any explanation but one of this assumption of indisputable authority over the tradition - an authority which the whole Church will accept without a quiver of hesitation, as included in the inevitable position of him who speaks? In the face of this phenomenal fact, what room is left for a supposition of some unknown, unnamed, unrecorded believer, working upon some unknown reminiscences of an unknown old man called John the Presbyter, who is reported to have been, in some uncertified sense, a disciple of the Lord; and weaving out of them a novel and allegorical picture of what he fancies to be the Ideal Christ, as He might have been? Such a supposition cannot pretend to bear the strain of the facts. It offers no explanation whatever of the one thing that needs to be explained. It is not even an alternative to the traditional hypothesis. For it offers no account at all of what happened or of how it came about. It is, simply, a confession that if the book is not the Apostle John's, then we do not know anything about it, nor can give any

⁴⁸Th. Zahn, Grundriss der Einleitung in das Neue Testament, p. 77.

intelligible interpretation of its origin and acceptance. We give it up. This is all that can be said.⁴⁹

After reading that, one might feel inclined to say that Dr. Holland had not been influenced by Sanday's about face. Henry Thiessen, representing the United States, quotes approvingly an ironical statement of Salmon's in his Introduction to the New Testament:

A whole school of critics speak of John the Presbyter with as assured confidence as if he were a person concerning whose acts we had as much information as concerning those of Julius Caesar.⁵⁰

Among others Friedrich Buechsel⁵¹ and C. J. Cadoux⁵² join their voices in the chorus of denial of the reality of John the Presbyter, distinct from John the Apostle.

In closing this section, we can do no better than give the floor to B. W. Bacon. Bacon rejects definitely the identification of "Elder John" with the "Elder" of I and II John. He claims that there is no proof that Elder John lived in Ephesus or that he ever wrote anything. Bacon claims to know who the Elder of the Epistles was, and he calls him Stratias. He closes the article from which this information is taken with the words: "I even venture to repeat the opinion that as long as

⁴⁹ H. S. Holland, The Philosophy of Faith and the Fourth Gospel, p. 196.

⁵⁰ H. C. Thiessen, Introduction to the New Testament, p. 165.

⁵¹ quoted in F. F. Bruce, "Some Notes on the Fourth Evangelist" in Evangelical Quarterly, XVI, No. 2, p. 101.

⁵² F. Buechsel, Das Evangelium nach Johannes, 4te Auflage, p. 24.

criticism continues to follow this delusive identification little progress can be made with the vital problem of the Fourth Gospel.⁵³ Vincent Taylor tends to agree with Bacon in the distinction which he makes and believes that the author of the Gospel was the Elder of I and II John, but that his name remains unknown.⁵⁴

⁵³B. W. Bacon, "The Elder of Ephesus and the Elder John" in Hibbert Journal, 20:134.

⁵⁴Vincent Taylor, The Gospels, A Short Introduction, p. 106

2. John, the Apostle.

Among the supporters of John the Elder's candidacy whom we failed to mention is A. M. Hunter, known especially for his challenging book, The Message of the New Testament. Hunter makes this rather surprising statement:

For these and other reasons, scarcely a reputable scholar in this country nowadays is prepared to affirm that the Fourth Gospel was written by John the Apostle.¹

While Hunter does not say what he means by "a reputable scholar", we have found at least one person who is considered such by many who does still hold to the apostolic authorship and whose book appeared after the one in which Hunter makes his statement. We are referring to Bishop Headlam, who in a book which appeared just last year came out unreservedly for the Apostle John as the author of the Fourth Gospel. Here are his words:

So far as external evidence goes it is most probable that the Fourth Gospel was written by John the Apostle, the son of Zebedee, in the province of Asia towards the end of the first century after Christ.

The internal evidence told us that the Gospel claimed to have been written by a disciple of Jesus, called the beloved disciple, and that the disciple who seemed most clearly to fulfill all the conditions necessary was John, the son of Zebedee.

I therefore conclude that the balance of probability is that the author of the Fourth Gospel was, as the Christian Church has always held, the son of Zebedee.²

¹A. M. Hunter, Introducing the New Testament, p. 50.
²A. C. Headlam, The Fourth Gospel as History, p. 70.

Since so much is made of Sanday's change of mind, it is interesting to compare with the above a statement made by Headlam in 1923:

We come now to St. John's Gospel. You will recognize that at present there is nothing very convincing to be said about it. The whole critical question is in confusion, and neither those who hold the traditional view nor their opponents are able to put forward a theory which commands assent... The tradition of the Johannine authorship is very strong. On the other hand, a study of its contents places serious difficulties in the way of ascribing it directly to a contemporary and first-hand authority. It differs so remarkably from the Synoptic Gospels.³

A comparison of these two statements would indicate that Headlam was more definitely convinced of the Johannine authorship now than he was in 1923.

Other English scholars who still stood for the Apostle John are Holland, Nolloth, Broomfield,⁴ and Hart. Hart has this to say:

There is much more to be said in favor of the Church's ancient tradition than the scholars of the present day are willing to admit. It may be that in the future we shall be able to accept the witness of St. John as confidently as that of St. Mark and St. Luke, and with the added authority which belongs to one of the chosen Twelve.⁵

Nolloth, while warning against permitting questions regarding the authorship of the Fourth Gospel to affect the estimate of its intrinsic value, is not in doubt personally about its authorship if we may trust these words:

³ A. C. Headlam, The Life and Teaching of Jesus the Christ, p. 37.
⁴ G. W. Broomfield, John, Peter and the Fourth Gospel, p. 210.
⁵ C. F. Nolloth, The Fourth Evangelist, p. 36.

Criticism possesses but one John of Ephesus with whom to operate. It appears historically and psychologically impossible to account for the belief, early as Justin Martyr, and held throughout the Church of the second century, that this John was the son of Zebedee, if in reality he was another person.⁶

Of the argument that John would not call himself the "beloved disciple" Nolloth feels that it rests "upon nothing more solid than a subjective estimate of probabilities".⁷ - Holland, who expresses himself so forcibly on the subject of the mysterious Elder of Ephesus, is just as forceful when he speaks of

the extraordinary and incomprehensible confusion that we must attribute to the entire Church, by which it passively and unconsciously allowed the substitution of a disciple, whose record does not exist in any shape or form, into the place of the great Apostle who, by unwavering tradition, for some twenty years stood as a central pillar of the Church, close bound with Simon Peter himself, in the heart of the authoritative body of witness in Jerusalem itself.⁸

In Germany, the home of cold scientific criticism of Bible documents, there are still many who defend the apostolic authorship. Riggenbach, in a discussion of the latest finds relating to the witness of Papias, maintains that that Apostolic Father "testifies to the composition of the Gospel by the Apostle John".⁹

⁶ Ibid., p. 89/

⁷ J. S. Hart, The Gospel Foundations, p. 144.

⁸ H. S. Holland, The Philosophy of Faith and the Fourth Gospel, p. 198.

⁹ Quoted in Windisch, "Literature on the New Testament" in Harvard Theological Review, January, 1926, p. 62.

Appel,¹⁰ Feine,¹¹ and Buechsel,¹² who were unanimous in declaring against the Elder of Ephesus, are just as united in maintaining that the son of Zebedee wrote the Fourth Gospel. Adolf Schlatter writes in his Commentary to John 21:24:

Nachdem Petrus und Johannes mit dem verschiedenem Ausgang ihres Lebens nebeneinander gestellt sind, wird die Verhuellung, die bisher den Erzahler verbarg, beseitigt. Nun macht sich der Verfasser kenntlich, was durch "Dies ist der Juenger, der von diesen Dingen zeuget, und hat dies geschrieben" unzweideutig geschieht.¹³

In commenting on the first person plural in the same verse, Schlatter suggests that it is not a fanciful suggestion that John dictated the preceding words in the presence of his coworkers. Johann Rump, in commenting on this same passage, writes:

Aber es ist darueber hinaus noch eine an Gewissheit streifende Wahrscheinlichkeit, dass Johannes selber auch der Verfasser ist. Nur ein einziger Zug! Wir lesen: "Das ist der Juenger, der fuer dieses Buch hier als Zeuge eintritt und es selbst geschrieben hat." Diese Worte blaeben voellig dunkel, nach ihrem Zwecke und nach ihrer Absicht durchaus unerklaerbar, wenn man sie nicht als ein unbeabsichtigtes und darum nur um so unverdaechtigeres Zeugnis fuer die johanneische Autorschaft gelten lassen will, und zwar natuerlich fuer ein Zeugnis, das noch in die Zeit der Apostel selber zurueck geht.¹⁴

¹⁰H. Appel, Die Echtheit des Johannesevangeliums, p. 37.

¹¹P. Feine, Einleitung in das Neue Testament, p. 86.

¹²F. Buechsel, Das Evangelium nach Johannes, p. 7.

¹³A. Schlatter, Der Evangelist Johannes, Wie er spricht, denkt, und glaubt, p. 375.

¹⁴Johann Rump, Das Johannesevangelium, p. 436f.

Johannes Haussleiter has a long chapter on Andrew and Philip as "Zwei apostolische Zeugen fuer das Johannesevangelium" and then says: "Der Zebedaide Johannes ist der Verfasser des vierten Evangeliums, Andreas und Philippus sind seine Zeugen."¹⁵

While Catholic scholars are handicapped by official pronouncements on the authorship of Biblical books, it should be recognized that they do make a serious effort to meet and answer the claims of those who do not accept John as the author of the Fourth Gospel. Such discussions may be found in works of Chapman,¹⁶ Meinertz,¹⁷ Gutjahr,¹⁸ and Steinmueller and Sullivan.¹⁹

In the United States, there are still many writers who hold to the traditional view. Glancing through the literature, we find such expressions as these:

The author was the Apostle John.²⁰

Although the author of the last Gospel does not mention his name, he describes himself with sufficient exactness to make it clear that he was none other than John, the "beloved disciple".²¹

¹⁵J. Haussleiter, Johanneische Studien, p. 132.

¹⁶J. Chapman, The Four Gospels, p. 49ff.

¹⁷Max Meinertz, Einleitung in das Neue Testament, p. 243ff.

¹⁸F. S. Gutjahr, Einleitung zu den heiligen Schriften des N. T.

¹⁹Steinmueller and Sullivan, A Companion to the New Testament.

²⁰J. B. Tidwell, John and His Five Books, p. 15.

²¹P. E. Kretzmann, Popular Commentary, New Testament, Vol. I, p.

Only John could have written it.²²

From all these facts we draw the conclusion that John the Apostle wrote the Fourth Gospel.²³

Others who hold to the same view are Erdman,²⁴ Vedder,²⁵ Lenski,²⁶ and Vollmer.²⁷ Most of these writers represent what scholars consider an ultra-conservative group, as is true also of Samuel A. Cartledge, who, in his A Conservative Introduction to the New Testament, gives a very fine overview of the arguments on both sides and then adds this conclusion:

Such is the very confused evidence; scholars still differ widely in their conclusions drawn from it. The negative evidence has weight, especially to a Radical; but a Conservative cannot think that this negative evidence is conclusive. While it may be freely admitted that the internal evidence for the apostolic authorship is by no means conclusive, yet it does help out the external evidence we have, and together they make a very convincing case. We must refrain from being too dogmatic, but we can say that the Conservative at least has very good grounds for believing that the Apostle John was the author of all the Johannine literature.²⁸

²²C. B. Williams, An Introduction to the New Testament Literature, p. 266.

²³H. C. Thiessen, Introduction to the New Testament, p. 169.

²⁴C. R. Erdman, The Gospel of John, An Exposition, p. 7.

²⁵H. C. Vedder, The Johannine Writings and the Johannine Problem, p. 150.

²⁶R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel, p. 17ff.

²⁷Ph. Vollmer, The Writings of the New Testament, p. 118.

²⁸S. A. Cartledge, A Conservative Introduction to the New Testament, p. 182-200.

Jacobus is just a little stronger in his claims:

It would seem, therefore, that the external evidence confirms the conclusions reached from internal evidence that the author of the Gospel was St. John.²⁹

Among American scholars who enjoy world wide fame is the late A. T. Robertson. In a book written in 1916, Robertson, after discussing the reasons for Johannine authorship, says:

The reasons are satisfying to my own mind after due and long consideration of the minute and zealous criticism on all sides of the problem.³⁰

Twenty years later he writes:

After a lifetime of study of the Johannine problem as presented by Bretschneider, Baur, Bacon, Moffatt and all the rest, my own mind finds fewer unsolved difficulties in the single great figure who wrote the Johannine literature and became the eagle who soared above the clouds into the clear sky of eternal truth in Christ.³¹

In general, we must agree with E. F. Scott when he says that "few scholars would now accept the traditional view that he was the Apostle John"³², but there are still some outstanding scholars who, after looking over all the evidence are not convinced that it justifies forsaking so strong a tradition as that which establishes the Johannine authorship.

²⁹M. W. Jacobus, "John, Gospel of", in A New Standard Bible Dictionary, p. 471.

³⁰A. T. Robertson, The Divinity of Christ in the Gospel of John, p. 18.

³¹A. T. Robertson, Epochs in the Life of the Apostle John, p. 7.

³²E. F. Scott, "John, Gospel of", in An Encyclopedia of Religion, p. 399.

Something should be said here of those who, while they are not ready to accept John as the author without reservations, present a somewhat modified form of John's relation to the Gospel. Hedgson has this to say:

The synoptic Gospels seem like the obituary notice which gives our Lord as He was known to His contemporaries (though seen through the eyes of His followers); the Fourth Gospel gives Him as He revealed Himself to His most intimate friends.

In a footnote to the above, the author adds:

I am therefore in agreement with those scholars who hold that the Gospel in substance comes from St. John the son of Zebedee; but I am inclined to think that it was not St. John himself but a disciple of his who was the actual author.³³

Nairne has amplified this theory and supplied details from his imagination:

With the end of the century the death of the Apostle drew near. The secretary composed a Gospel from his bishop's oral lessons, as he had composed Pastorals from his instructions. He composed with freedom, using all the material he found useful, our three Synoptic Gospels especially, and shaping the narrative and his master's and his own reflections upon it in such a way as served to illuminate the problems of his own place and time. He put his own master into the story, with reverent affection, designating him 'the disciple whom Jesus loved'... He brought the finished book to his master before he died, and his master, S. John the Bishop, the Apostle, gave his approval and called the Ephesian Elders to join therein etc.³⁴

³³L. Hedgson, And Was Made Man, An Introduction to the Study of the Gospels, p. 208.

³⁴A. Nairne, Every Man's Story of the New Testament, p. 253.

After admitting that many modern scholars have abandoned the tradition because of "so many serious difficulties in the way of accepting" it, Russell adds:

Yet it seems impossible to escape the force of the many lines of evidence, traditional as well as critical, that connect the Gospel in some vital way with the Apostle John....The book has evidently passed through the hands of editors who at least added the last chapter.³⁵

In a similar vein, Redlich writes:

We have found reason for believing that the Apostle St. John cannot be dissociated from the authorship. His impress is to be found in every part of it, and his is the guiding hand and mind. He may have written the whole or parts of it, or he may have inspired the anonymous writer who wrote it.³⁶

To the list of those who stand for such "indirect" authorship, we may add the names of Gehman³⁷ and Scott. The latter, in a book published just this year, seems to lean more definitely towards the influence of the Apostle John than he did in previous writings. Scott has this to say regarding "the materials which have gone to its (the Gospel's) formation":

These, it has been held, may be reminiscences of the Apostle John, and the belief that he was the author of the Gospel may to this extent be justified.

³⁵E. Russell, The Message of the Fourth Gospel, p. 12f.

³⁶E. B. Redlich, An Introduction to the Fourth Gospel, p. 145.

³⁷H. S. Gehman, "John, The Gospel according to" in The Westminster Dictionary of the Bible, p. 321.

But Scott adds cautiously:

More likely they were derived from some primitive document which had escaped the knowledge of the other evangelists although it was of first class value.³⁸

Scott makes these statements in connection with his discussion of some of the latest papyrus finds, including the Egerton Papyrus, Fragments of an Unknown Gospel.³⁹

³⁸E. F. Scott, The Purpose of the Gospels, p. 111.

³⁹Ibid., p. 110.

C. Other Theories of Authorship

1. The Aramaic Original Theory.

After very careful study of the language of John's Gospel, C. F. Burney has come to the conclusion that our present Gospel is a translation into Greek from an Aramaic original. This is not the place to go into a discussion of the details of Burney's reasoning, but his theory of authorship is quite simple. Surprisingly enough, Burney does not, as one might expect, support the Johannine authorship, but looks to John the Elder. After a rather lengthy discussion of Irenaeus use of terms like "apostles", "disciples", etc., Burney comes to the conclusion that Irenaeus is not as inaccurate as many critics have made him out to be. His conclusions from this study are stated as follows:

On the basis of these facts we conclude without hesitation that by 'John the disciple of the Lord' Irenaeus means John the presbyter, and that when he refers to Papias as 'ho Iocannou men akoustees', he is at any rate as correct as Eusebius when he says 'ho nyn de heemiin deeloumenos Papias...tou presbyterou Iocannou auteeskoon heauton pheesi genesthai...' In reality Irenaeus appears to be an impeccable witness as to the early Asian tradition in regard to John; and he completes our evidence that John the Evangelist and disciple of the Lord, who survived to old age at Ephesus, was not the son of Zebedee, but the presbyter.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ C. F. Burney, *The Aramaic Origin of the Fourth Gospel*, p. 141.

For the sake of completeness, it should be mentioned here that Burney accepts an early date for the writing of the book, but yet not earlier than A. D. 75-80. He does not believe it was written in Palestine, as there are "a number of indications which suggest a certain remoteness, both in time and place, from the scenes described, and also seem to imply that the author was writing, at least, not primarily, for Jews, but for a larger circle of Christians."⁴¹ At the same time, "the theory of an Aramaic original seems to demand that it should have originated in an Aramaic-speaking country". Thus Syria is indicated, and if Syria, then Antioch. This is corroborated by a statement found in a Syrian fragment appended to the Armenian translation to the commentary of St. Ephrem on Tatian's Diatessaron, that John wrote the Gospel in Greek at Antioch.⁴²

Torrey in supporting Burney's hypothesis of an Aramaic origin, differs with him on the date. He writes:

It is perhaps conceivable that one evangelist writing after the year 70 might fail to allude to the destruction of the temple by the Roman armies....., but that three (or four) should thus fail is quite incredible. On the contrary, what is shown is that all four Gospels were written before the year 70. And indeed, there is no evidence of any sort that will bear examination, tending to show that any of the Gospels were written later than about the middle of the century. The challenge to scholars to produce such evidence is hereby presented.

⁴¹

⁴²Ibid., p. 129.

⁴²Burney, op. cit., p. 129f.

Torrey suggests that the combination of Greek originals and the assumption of a late date is what is causing all the difficulty in Gospel criticism:

Two false premises, Greek Gospels and a late date, have stood in the way of any plausible solution of the resulting problems. These problems disappear completely, leaving no new difficulties in their place, when the natural suppositions are adopted, Gospels written early and in the language of the people.⁴³

Thus we have proponents of the Aramaic original theory on both sides of the Atlantic, but even their witness does not agree together.

MacGregor, without inquiring into the merit of the case, recognizes the possibility and suggests that in that case the Redactor would be the translator.⁴⁴

2. Theory that the Fourth Gospel is Anonymous.

We have noted in a previous section that the elusiveness of John the Presbyter has caused some people to ascribe the Johannine works merely to the "Elder of Ephesus", rather than to the "Elder John". Many critics have taken the next step and have decided that the books are anonymous. Prominent among these is E. F. Scott, whom we have quoted previously as recognizing a little bit

⁴³C. C. Torrey, The Four Gospels, A New Translation, p. xlii f.

⁴⁴MacGregor, The Gospel of John, p. lxiv.

of Johannine influence in a late work. Scott summarizes the situation in these words:

Surveying the investigation as a whole, we have to admit that all the results which have yet been obtained are inconclusive. The author of the Gospel was a religious thinker of the first rank, next to Paul the greatest and most original mind of the early church, but we cannot even form a guess as to his identity. It may appear strange that a man so outstanding should be quite unknown, but we have to remember that the period of fifty years after the death of Paul is the most obscure in all Christian history. Scarcely a name has come down to us out of that period, and there may well have been teachers of the highest gifts of whom no record was preserved. It seems evident, too, that the evangelist took pains to leave his work anonymous.⁴⁵

With this Sypherd agrees when he says, "The Gospel of John is anonymous...Whoever may have been the author, he was a religious thinker of the highest order."⁴⁶

A similar indefiniteness is noticeable in Heitmueller's introduction to the Gospel of John in the third Edition of Weiss' commentary:

Unser Evangelium ist demnach im ersten Drittel des 2. Jahrhunderts in Klein-Asien in dem Kreise entstanden, in dem ein Herrenjuenger namens Johannes, (nicht der Apostel) bis in hohes Alter gelebthatte und auch nach seinem Tode als entscheidende Autoritaet galt. Der Name seines Verfassers bzw. derer, die an seiner Entstehung beteiligt waren, die tatsaechlichen Beziehungen der Schrift zu jenem ("Lieblings-") Juenger sind uns verborgen.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ E. F. Scott, The Literature of the New Testament, p. 246.

⁴⁶ W. O. Sypherd, The Literature of the English Bible, p. 166.

⁴⁷ Wm. Heitmueller, Die Schriften des Neuen Testaments, 4. Band, 3. Auflage, p. 37.

In this entire investigation, only one writer has been found who suggested pseudonymous use of the name of John in the gospel. Ballantine says that "the Jews saw no wrong in attributing new books to famous men of the past. The Old Testament has such books bearing the names of Moses, Solomon, and Daniel, altho written centuries after those great men were dead".⁴⁸ This claim might be understandable if the book had directly claimed to be a writing of St. John, but in view of its actual anonymity there seems little justification for it.

3. The Highpriest John Theory.

This is the theory put forth by Robert Eisler in a book which appeared in 1938 under the title, The Enigma of the Fourth Gospel.⁴⁹ Eisler refers to Hugo Delff, as having been "the first scholar who saw that the evangelist John must have been a former high-priest of Jerusalem, the John of Acts 4:6". In arriving at his conclusions, he makes much of the statement of Polycrates that John was a priest who wore the frontlet, which to him means that he was a highpriest. It is impossible to give even in outline the complete line of reasoning which Eisler pursues. Suffice it to say that he claims to be able to reconstruct a tolerably full life-history of this priestly John. He was the little child whom our Lord took

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W. G. Ballantine, Discovering Jesus, p. 11.

⁴⁹Op. cit., p. 2.

in his arms when He rebuked the Apostles for having disputed in the way who was the greatest (Mark 9:36). He was the young man who, with a linen cloth cast about him, followed his arrested Master from the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:51).

How he came to write the Gospel is explained in about this way: In A. D. 37, John became highpriest - the crucifixion, incidentally, is placed in A. D. 21 - and in A. D. 66 he was commander of Gophna and Acrabetta, and took part in the insurrection against the Romans. In advanced old age he was living at Ephesus, and at the close of Trajan's reign (A. D. 115-117) was persuaded by Marcion to write down his reminiscences of the Master. Marcion facilitated this task by presenting the memoirs of the Beloved Disciple, who was none other than Lazarus. Marcion himself undertook the responsible work of secretary. "The Pontic dreamer and schemer", as Eisler terms him, proved himself sadly unworthy of the office and worked in some of his own heterodox views. When this treachery became known to John, copies of the book had already been sent out. The revision that followed was beyond the strength of the centennarian Author and traces of Marcion's insertions remained. The theory of Marcion's secretaryship is based on an old Latin Prologue. Eisler, by the way, makes much of the testimony of these old prologues.

The expression in Polycrates that this John who wore the frontlet "lay on Jesus' breast", Eisler explains as referring to an occasion when Jesus took little John in his arms as a child.

Another interesting identification which Eisler makes is that of the highpriest John with the Theophilus to whom Luke dedicates his books. This is required in some way to find a place for John in the lists of the Jewish highpriests.

As interesting as this story is, it has not aroused much favorable comment. In fact, one seldom finds it referred to in the most recent literature on the subject. Sutcliffe in a review of the work, claims that Eisler's attempt to make Polycrates' work mean that the author of the Fourth Gospel was a highpriest, a key-point in Eisler's exposition, "will not bear the weight of the superstructure built upon it".⁵⁰ The presence of Lazarus at the Last Supper, which would be implied if he is to be taken as the "Beloved Disciple" is also clearly against the clear statements of the Synoptics that only the Twelve were present. For other weaknesses of Eisler's position, we refer the reader to the review referred to above. It is not in the province of this paper to treat all of these

⁵⁰E. F. Sutcliffe, Review of Robert Eisler's The Enigma of the Fourth Gospel, in The Hibbert Journal, 37:189-192.

theories critically, even if the writer felt qualified to do so.

Eisler's claims for his theory are extravagant, and if we may believe him, "we now know more of this John, the Fourth Evangelist, than of all the other three Evangelists together, and of St. Peter to boot".⁵¹

⁵¹Robert Eisler, The Enigma of the Fourth Gospel, p. 205.

III. THE DATE OF THE WRITING OF THE FOURTH GOSPEL

The question of the dates of the Gospels is one on which there will probably never be full agreement, and this is true also of the Fourth Gospel. The traditional date is the end of the first century. To what extent this dating is the result of the traditional position that John wrote the book at an advanced age is hard to say. Those who do not follow tradition arrive at this dating by using the appearance of the last of the Synoptics - usually Luke - as a terminus a quo, and the first reference to the Gospel in post-apostolic literature as a terminus ad quem. Those who take the late date - no one thinks of following the extremely late date of Baur any longer - have various reasons, one of them being a supposed reference to the uprising of Bar Kochba. There are various reasons advanced for placing the Gospel earlier, one of the chief being that there seem to be no good reasons for placing it so late. In the discussion which follows, the late dating will be discussed first, to be followed by material which shows the definite trend to date the Gospel no later than the end of the first century. Finally, the advocates of an earlier date will receive a hearing.

A. Late Date Theories

We have said above that no one holds any longer to a date as late as 170 A. D., the date set by Baur about a century ago. Even people like Mary Andrews,¹ who pleads for a reevaluation of Baur's work, are satisfied with a date between 125 and 150. As a matter of fact, many of them are no more specific than to suggest the first third of the century, or the second quarter. Thus Enslin gives as his view:

Enough has been said to make argument unnecessary that the date of the gospel cannot be set before 100 A. D. It would seem most likely to have been penned during the first three or four decades of that (the second) century.²

Jackson is in essential agreement with this, setting the terminus ad quem at about 125.³

There, are however, still authorities who date it quite definitely after 125. Thus Grill writes:

Nach den obigen Ergebnissen zur Datierung des Evangeliums (um 135) und der drei bezueglichen Briefe (etwa Mitte des fuenften Jahrzehnts bis 150) kann es sich nur um den Zeitraum 135-145 handeln.⁴

Couchoud reasons as follows in arriving at a late date:

¹ Mary E. Andrews, "The Authorship and Significance of the Gospel of John" in Journal of Biblical Literature, 64:183-192.

² S. Enslin, Christian Beginnings, p. 451.

³ H. L. Jackson, The Problem of the Fourth Gospel, p. 96.

⁴ Julius Grill, Untersuchungen ueber die Entstehung des vierten Evangeliums, Zweiter Teil, p. 408.

At what period did the Gospel literature make its appearance? Hermas, about 120, is ignorant of it; Justin, about 144, alleges its existence. The only historic allusion which can be used to furnish a date is that to 'the abomination of desolation'. (135).....The Gospel of John also contains a clear allusion to Bar Kochba. The composition of the Gospels, therefore, falls approximately between 135 and 143.

In spite of these few examples of extremely late dates, we must agree with Buechsel when he says, "Die Nachfolger Baur's datieren allgemein das Buch wesentlich frueher, auf 100-125."⁶

B. Middle Date Theories

A common attitude of Bible students on going back to a fairly early date is illustrated by these words of Huber:

Dass auf Werke wie die von Schweitzer (z. B. Die Mystik des Apostels Paulus) u. a. nicht eingegangen ist, begruende ich damit, dass eine Festsetzung des Johannes-Evangeliums ins zweite Jahrhundert, unter Verneinung des palaestinischen Kolorits, wie Schweitzer dies tut, als eine erledigte These betrachtet werden sollte. Selbst liberalen Forschern wie Knopf, Lietzmann, Weinel ist die zeitliche Praezedenz des Verfassers des Johannes-Evangeliums for Ignatius eine sichere Tatsache.⁷

Iverach expresses a similar thought:

The appearance of the Johannine writings at the end of the first century may safely be accepted as a sound historical conclusion. Slowly the critics who assigned their appearance to the middle of the second century or later, have retraced their steps.⁸

⁵ P. L. Couchoud, "The Historicity of Jesus - A Reply to Alfred Loisy", in The Hibbert Journal, 37:2, p. 211.

⁶ F. Buechsel, Das Evangelium nach Johannes, p. 2.

⁷ H. H. Huber, Der Begriff der Offenbarung im Johannes-evangelium, p. 5.

⁸ J. Iverach, "John, Gospel of" in The International Standard Bible Encyclopedic, 1925 edition, Vol. III, p. 1720.

Moffatt sets the terminus ad quem not much later than A. D. 110 and says that the terminus a quo "is determined approximately by the date of the synoptic gospels, all of which, as we have already seen, were probably known to the writer".⁹ There is no general agreement on the point of John's use of the Synoptics, but Moffatt's words represent quite a common viewpoint. Regarding the terminus ad quem, Scott says:

References to the Gospel can be discovered in the literature of about 150 A. D., and it seems to have been known in Gnostic circles as early as 130 A. D., and must then have been for some time in circulation.¹⁰

Assuming the date of the Gospel of St. Luke to have been about 90 A. D., Scott would find the date of the Gospel somewhere between 95 and 115.

This dating of the Gospel at about the end of the first century seems to be utterly unconnected with the opinion held on the authorship. Among those who vote for this date we find the exponents of various theories of authorship. Needless to say, however, that all those who held to the traditional view, consider the trend backwards as a vindication of their position. Scott does not think this is justified, but says:

⁹J. Moffatt, An Introduction to the Literature of the New Testament, p. 581.

¹⁰E. F. Scott, The Literature of the New Testament, p. 235.

Assuming that John at the time of his companionship with Jesus was a very young man, it is conceivable that he survived until 100 A. D., and wrote the Gospel in his extreme old age. Yet it has sometimes been too readily assumed that, if its early date can be proved, the Gospel must necessarily be by John. The two questions are entirely separate and must not be confused.¹¹

On the other hand, it remains a fact that the converse was true, that the late date ruled out Johannine authorship rather definitely.

C. Early Date Theories

Scott's opinion regarding the lack of direct connection between an early date and authorship, does not seem to apply to the early date theories. In almost every case, those who claim that the Gospel was written early, also hold some unusual theory regarding the authorship of the book. Thus Shelton, in making out a case for the composition in the Alexandrian region claims:

One difficulty that disappears is that there is no reason to assume that the Gospel of John was appreciably later than the others.¹²

P. Gardner-Smith, in his work on Saint John and the Synoptic Gospels, in setting up the claim that John may well be a primitive Gospel, makes this statement:

We do not know the date of St. Mark with any certainty, and as to the date of the other Synoptists there is very little evidence, but few critics would put them much earlier than A. D. 85-90. Is there any compelling reason for supposing that St. John is much later? Is it certain he must be

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² H. S. Shelton, "The Authorship and Date of the Gospels Reconsidered" in The Hibbert Journal, Vol. 41 and 42, p. 171.

put so late?.....Indeed, we might tentatively suggest that Mark and John were almost contemporaries.¹³

Gardner-Smith answers the claim that the Fourth Gospel must be later because it represents a higher type of theology, as though this type of theology could not have developed at an earlier date, by saying:

There is more thinking behind the Epistle to the Romans than behind the Epistle of St. James, but the probability remains that Romans is very much the earlier document.¹⁴

The position of Burney and Torrey regarding the date has already been treated in connection with the theory that the Gospel was originally written in Aramaic. We refer the reader to that section for details, merely mentioning that Burney holds that the Gospel was written after the fall of Jerusalem, while Torrey maintains that all the Gospels, including John, were written before that event. Others who are inclined to look on John as an early Gospel are Burch¹⁵ and Goodenough.¹⁶ The latter points out that, while only the most conservative scholars still cling to the idea that John was written by the "beloved disciple" himself, many who have given up the apostolic authorship still cling to the early date and the Ephesian origin of the book, even though in his opinion these two matters are closely connected with the belief that it was the aged John who wrote it.

¹³P. Gardner-Smith, Saint John and the Synoptic Gospels, p. 95.
¹⁴Ibid., p. 96.
¹⁵Vacher Burch, The Structure and Message of St. John's Gospel.
¹⁶W. R. Goodenough, "John a Primitive Gospel" in Journal of Biblical Literature, 1945, p. 145-182.

Here again, it has become so very evident how difficult it is for the Bible student to view the evidence objectively without interpreting the facts according to preconceived notions. There can be no doubt that many have taken the theory that Mark is the original Gospel as their starting point, and no matter what new evidence may present itself to them, they still start out from that supposition in evaluating it. It is refreshing from this angle, to find an occasional person who doesn't simply repeat that John must have come after the Synoptics but strikes out on his own and estimates the book in its own right.

CHAPTER FOUR

IV. THE PROVENANCE OF THE FOURTH GOSPEL

In the foregoing, it has been necessary to refer to the matters which we now take up in more detail. The question before us is: Where was the Gospel of John written? Here, as in the case of the date, we have a definite consensus, with various deviates on the side. We shall consider the most commonly held view first, namely, that the Gospel was written in Asia Minor, specifically in Ephesus, and follow that with a brief discussion of the other views held on the matter.

A. The Fourth Gospel was Written in Ephesus

The ancient tradition was very clear on the point that John wrote his Gospel in Ephesus in his old age. For those who hold to the tradition, there can be no doubt about this point any more than there is that John the Apostle was the author. But the truth of the matter is that the lack of evidence of John's ever having been in Ephesus is one of the main reasons for questioning the Johannine authorship. This fact has, however, not changed the attitude of most scholars over the place where the Gospel was written. They look at the matter this way. The Gospel was written in Ephesus. Only if that were the case could the tradition have arisen. It was written by someone called John. This John was later confused with the Apostle. This identifica-

tion has now been disproven. But that does not alter the fact that the Gospel was still written in Ephesus. Off-hand, it would seem that that is very good reasoning.

As a result, we find very little discussion of the place of origin in most of the investigations except where there is an attempt to bring forth a different theory. This is quite natural in the case of those who accept the tradition, for the very tradition which establishes John as the author also makes it plain that he wrote in Ephesus. For this reason we shall not call up any witnesses from the ranks of the traditionalists, but we shall content ourselves with evidence from those who no longer accept the Apostolic authorship. Thus we have v. Huegel speaking of "a select Ephesian Christian circle",¹ Goodspeed referring to an "Asian Elder",² and Hunter telling us plainly that the Gospel was written in Ephesus.³ We could quote many more examples, but we scarcely deem it necessary.

Broomfield is one of a very small group who believe that John wrote the Gospel but not in Ephesus. He says:

¹ v. Huegel, "John, The Gospel of", in The Encyclopedia Britannica, 14th Ed., Vol. XIII, p. 98.

² E. F. Goodspeed, The Story of the New Testament, p. 107-112.

³ A. M. Hunter, Introducing the New Testament, p. 51.

It often appears to be assumed that if we abandon the story of John's residence in Asia, we thereby recognize that he did not write the Fourth Gospel. But this assumption is quite unwarranted. The evidence for the Ephesian origin of the Gospel is no stronger than that for the Ephesian residence of John. The Fourth Gospel and the Johannine Epistles contain nothing at all to suggest that they were written in Ephesus or Asia.⁴

Others question both the Johannine authorship and the Ephesian provenance. Prominent among these are the Lakes:

In conclusion, one curious point may be noted in the history of criticism. Modern critics have doubted the correctness of the tradition that connects the Fourth Gospel with John the son of Zebedee. But they have hardly ever doubted its connection with Asia Minor. The late Professor Bacon indeed sometimes suggested that it was Palestinian, but few followed him. Yet the evidence for the Ephesian origin of the gospel is not strong apart from that which supports its Johannine authorship.⁵

The Lakes are in essential agreement with Broomfield, except that they can come to no conclusion regarding the author, whereas Broomfield believes that John wrote the book.

B. The Fourth Gospel Was Written in Alexandria

Kirsopp Lake in setting forth the claim that the Fourth Gospel was written in Alexandria, says:

Internal evidence would suggest Alexandria, for the gospel is extremely Philonic. This point has been brought to the front by an amazing document published by Dr. Bell. It is a papyrus of the

⁴G. W. Broomfield, John, Peter, and the Fourth Gospel, p. 172.

⁵Lake and Lake, An Introduction to the New Testament, p. 53.

first half of the second century: a combination of Johannine, synoptic, and unknown material. The Fourth Gospel therefore was read and used as a source in Egypt before A. D. 150. Exactly what the effect of this fact will be when it is fully appreciated, we cannot say, but it will raise many questions.⁶

Lake wrote these words in 1937, but as yet we see very little change in sentiment as a result of this find. But in such a matter as Biblical criticism, twelve years is a short time.

Broomfield explains his predilection for Alexandria in this way: First of all, there is no evidence apart from that which connects John with the Gospel, to point to Asia as the place of origin. Then, he considers it important that Polycarp doesn't seem to know John's Gospel. Finally, he claims that "as a hypothesis, it does satisfy the requirements of the case in several noteworthy respects".⁷

A third protagonist for the Alexandrian theory is Alfred Perry. He feels that "the tradition regarding the source and authorship of the Fourth Gospel we may easily ignore", and then after weighing the reasons for supposing that the Gospel was written in Alexandria, puts the question: "Does not a survey of the evidence warrant anew the question: Is not John an Alexandrian Gospel?"⁸

⁶ Lake and Lake, Op. cit., p. 53.

⁷ Broomfield, Op. cit., p. 181.

⁸ A. M. Perry, "Is John an Alexandrian Gospel?" in J. of Bib. Lit., Vol. 63, p. 166.

Sanders believes that John 21:24, with its "we" is the imprimatur put upon the Gospel by the church which first accepted it as canonical - most probably Ephesus. "Then", he writes, "it would be quite possible to conclude that the author was an Alexandrian Christian, probably a Jew by birth, who wrote A. D. 100, and had access to traditions which came (possibly at first hand) from a Jerusalem disciple."⁹

The Alexandrian theory of provenance is intriguing from this angle that several of the latest papyrus finds made in Egypt, including the Egerton Papyrus,¹⁰ have had portions of John's Gospel inscribed on them.

C. Other Theories of Provenance

Burney's position that the Gospel was written by John the Elder at Antioch has been mentioned previously. We add it here for the sake of completeness. Burney writes, after stating why he doesn't believe the book was written in Palestine, but that it was probably written in some Aramaic-speaking country:

Thus Syria is indicated, and if Syria, then Antioch. Though Antioch was a Greek city, it stood not far from the heart of the district whence from the earliest times the Aramaic speech was diffused, eastward through Syria and Palestine.....As we learn from Acts, the natural line of expansion for the infant-Church at Jerusalem was northward to Antioch. If the writer of the Fourth Gospel really spent the last part of his life at Ephesus, then we have in Antioch a half-way house between this and Jerusalem and if the line of his missionary activity was Jerusalem - Antioch - Ephesus, he was following in the footsteps of St. Paul.¹¹

⁹J. N. Sanders, The Fourth Gospel in the Early Church, p. 45.
¹⁰See E. F. Scott, The Purpose of the Gospels, p. 110.
¹¹Burney, The Aramaic Origin of the Fourth Gospel, p. 29f.

The testimony of St. Ephrem that John wrote in Greek from Antioch has been mentioned in a previous section.

Mingana, the keeper of Oriental manuscripts in the John Rylands Library reports concerning a relatively modern manuscript which was recently discovered, that it has the notation at the end: "Here ends the writing of the holy Gospel (according to) the preaching of John who spoke in Greek in Bithynia." Before the Gospel, there was this note: "The holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ (according to) the preaching of John the younger." Mingana points out that

The tradition regarding the composition of the Fourth Gospel at Ephesus is now for the first time challenged by documentary evidence, and the possibility that it was composed in Bithynia has to be considered.¹²

Mingana tells us that the original from which this manuscript was copied dates from about 750 A. D. Needless to say, unless further evidence of this kind is found, the Ephesus theory will not be seriously challenged.

¹² A. Mingana, The Authorship of the Fourth Gospel, A New Document, Reprinted from a Bulletin of the John Rylands Library, p. 7.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE HISTORICAL VALUE OF THE FOURTH GOSPEL

We should like to introduce this section of this treatise with a quotation from The Screwtape Letters:

The Historical Point of View, put briefly, means that when a learned man is presented with any statement in an ancient author, the one question he never asks is whether it is true. He asks who influenced the ancient writer, and how far the statement is consistent with what he said in other books, and what phase of the writer's development, or in the general history of thought, it illustrates, and how it affected later writers, and how often it has been misunderstood (especially by the learned man's own colleagues), and what the general course of criticism on it has been for the last ten years, and what is the "present state of the question".¹

This little piece of satire might well be used to describe the attitude of many today towards the Fourth Gospel. Many fine theories have been spun about the book on the assumption that what it contained was not historical fact, but the possibility that the book contains the very truth itself has frequently been disregarded.

If we were to classify present-day opinions on the historical character of the Fourth Gospel, we might well use the usual right, left, and middle classification. On the left, we should find those who think that it contains allegory, symbolism, a wonderful spiritual interpretation of a great man and his teaching, but little or

¹ C. S. Lewis, The Screwtape Letters, New York, The MacMillan Co., 1944, p. 139f.

no history in the real sense of the word. On the right are those who believe that the Fourth Gospel contains history. And in the middle are those who find a considerable amount of history in the book but don't quite know what to do with some of the passages.

Duncan gives us a good definition of "form-criticism", which is the popular pastime of German scholars like Bultmann and Dibelius and others.

Form-criticism is an attempt to penetrate behind all written sources of the Gospels to that dim period during which the stories about Jesus were being told and re-told in oral tradition; and its basic contention is that these stories took shape, not primarily in the hands of a biographer, but in connection with the developing life of the primitive Christian communities - in their mission-preaching, for example, or in their meetings for worship, instruction and edification. By stressing the fact (which, of course, had been previously recognized) that the Gospels are primarily collections of reminiscences current in the Christian communities, Form-criticism goes on to raise doubts regarding their value as historical documents, and (without disputing the essential historicity of Jesus) questions how far the material exists for a strictly historical account of His life and teaching.²

It is this sort of approach that is to be seen in much of the literature on the Fourth Gospel today. The practical result of it may be seen in these words of Bultmann's:

²G. S. Duncan, Jesus, Son of Man, p. 18.

I do indeed think that we can now know nothing concerning the life and personality of Jesus, since the early Christian sources show no interest in either, are moreover fragmentary and often legendary.³

H. E. Dana some time ago contributed an article on The Stratification of Tradition in the Fourth Gospel in which he made the claim that as a result of the painstaking investigations of the critics

three conclusions now stand beyond successful challenge. Challenged they will be, but their intrinsic plausibility and support from undeniable inferential evidence will enable them to survive all dispute.⁴

Those are strong words for someone to make about books on which there are so many divergent opinions. So it might be well to hear what these conclusions are:

The first is that the ultimate basis of our evangelic records is the tradition formulated by the first-century Palestinian churches.... In their teaching and preaching the primitive Christian congregations utilized their recollections of the ministry of Jesus, and molded these more or less detached recollections into a tradition - or, better stated, an aggregation of many brief traditions. These were transmuted (not translated) into a Greek or Hellenistic tradition, utilized for catechetical purposes in the gentile churches. This Greek tradition eventually found permanent record in our Gospels. Consequently, in the Gospels, particularly the Synoptics, we see Jesus through the eyes of the early Christian churches. The nearest we can ever hope to get to the historical Jesus is the Jesus reflected in primitive Christian consciousness.

³ R. Bultmann, Jesus and the Word, p. 8, Quoted in Duncan, Op. Cit., p. 21

⁴ In The Journal of Religion, 17:62.

A second impregnable conclusion is that the Gospels were never intended as chronological biographies... Gospels were primarily and essentially records of catechetical and hortatory tradition.

The third conclusion proceeds immediately from the second. Our Gospels are essentially interpretations of Jesus, and hence contain a large doctrinal interest.....There was a time when New Testament scholarship set John over against the synoptists in rigid contrast at this point, but we are now aware that John also presents here in a more pronounced degree that which is also true of the other evangelists.⁵

In other words, Dana is trying to tell us that instead of having four historical Gospels, we now don't have any.

On the other hand, we frequently find this view that Mark may well be considered an historical source, but John never. Denny dismisses the historical character of the Fourth Gospel as follows:

Modern scholars, almost without exception, recognize that this Gospel cannot be used as an historical source with the same confidence that we feel towards Mark and the 'Teaching Source'. It is not so much a biography, as an interpretation of Jesus that we find in John.....Hence, as history, the fourth Gospel has very little value.⁶

Fite expresses his agreement with the above when he writes: "If John is history, then there is little history in the synoptics."⁷

⁵ H. E. Dana, Op. cit., p. 63f.

⁶ W. B. Denny, The Career and Significance of Jesus, p. 24f.

⁷ Werner Fite, Jesus the Man, A Critical Essay, p. 11.

Burkitt sees the origin of the Fourth Gospel in a situation where a faithful disciple of Jesus was confronted with people who were saying that the Son of God was not a real man at all. This to the Evangelist was the greatest error: to deny the coming of Jesus Christ into the flesh was the doctrine of Antichrist. So Burkitt adds:

The Fourth Gospel is written to prove the reality of Jesus Christ. But the Evangelist was no historian: ideas, not events, were to him the true realities, and if we go to his work to learn the course of events we shall only be disappointed in our search.⁸

Burkitt expresses a similar thought in his article in the Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics:

For work of philosophy, or philosophical history the qualifications required in the writer are mental, rather than local or temporal. We do not need to ask how near he stands to the events, but whether he sees them in their true proportions.⁹

Lake tells us that the real reason for rejecting the tradition of Johannine authorship is that

the contents of the gospel seem irreconcilable with the theory that it was written by a disciple who had been a companion of Jesus and an eye-witness of his life. This view is based on the theory, now widely held, that the Gospel of Mark gives a true account of the ministry, and the Gospels of Matthew and Luke a true account of the teaching of Jesus. Thus, since the Johannine narrative is so different from them it must be largely, if not entirely fictitious and written by a Hellenistic Christian in order to support the sacramental theology which finds a centre in the divine Jesus.¹⁰

⁸F. C. Burkitt, The Gospel History and its Transmission, p. 256.

⁹F. C. Burkitt, "Gospels", in Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, Vol. VI, p. 341.

¹⁰Lake and Lake, An Introduction to the New Testament, p. 50.

Prominent among those who made much of the differences between the Synoptic accounts and that of John is the French commentator, Alfred Loisy. Although none of his later works was available to the writer in translation, Loisy's importance in this field requires that his views be presented. This shall be done in the words of Hoskyns. The following excerpt is from Hoskyns, but the words in quotation marks are taken by him from Loisy:

Controlled and permeated by its author's 'idea', 'notion', 'doctrine', 'teaching', 'conception', the Theology of the Fourth Gospel is 'Johannine Theology' and its Christ a 'Johannine Christ'. Upon the Evangelist's 'power of imagination' and 'energy of conviction' the whole movement and colour of his narrative depend. Setting out from his idea of Christ, his 'religious meditations' assume 'symbolic' form. In the unity of the symbol what is 'real' and what is the 'product' of his imagination are so fused together that it is impossible for him to distinguish the 'ideal from the real, the symbol from its object, the theory from the history'. So powerful was his conviction, so vivid his imagination, that he was unable to differentiate between what came to him from tradition and what came to him 'from himself'. To take an example, in the story of the Healing of the Paralytic the history 'loses itself' in the discourse. No doubt the Evangelist did not intend to do more than disengage the 'spiritual truth' already contained in the earlier documents of Apostolic Christianity, but in the process of disengagement the 'real history' is 'lost sight of'....Hence it comes about that the reality with which the Evangelist is concerned is not that of history

but of 'mysticism'....The Gospel is 'allegorical' in the sense that it is written on the assumption that historical and terrestrial things have their supernatural and 'intelligible' counterparts which are accessible to the mind, or rather to the minds of those who have been 'initiated'.¹¹

This is in full agreement with Loisy's Gospel and the Church. There, in speaking of the sources of the Gospels, Loisy writes:

Would not a critical examination demonstrate further, with equal facility, that the greater part of those elements of the Fourth Gospel, that are held to show a special tradition, happen to be symbolic, and represent not the memories, but the personal conceptions of the author?¹²

Loisy finds allegory even in the chronology of John. In fact, when Loisy gets through, there is little left of the historical Christ. It is little wonder then that Loisy, who didn't hesitate to publicize his views and attack those who did not agree, was excommunicated from the Catholic Church.

Over against this very definite tendency to deny to the Fourth Gospel any value as an historical record there is also a very decided trend in the opposite direction, not only among those who are extremely conservative, but among scholars of various shades of orthodoxy.

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Hoskyns, The Fourth Gospel, p. 21ff.

¹² Alfred Loisy, The Gospel and the Church, English translation by C. Home, p. 30. New York, Chas. Scribner's Sons, 190

Jeremias, who on the basis of "quellenanalyse" has many interesting things to tell us about sources in the Gospel, does not arrive at the same conclusions as does Dana. He, too, places the Fourth Gospel on a level with the Synoptics, but he makes it, like them a true record of events;

Da das vierte Evangelium neben den Evangelien Markus, Matthaeus, und Lukas die drei apostolischen Zeugen, naemlich Johannes, Petrus und als dritten Andreas aufweist, der an bedeutsamer Stelle mit den drei vorerwaehten Zeugen Jesus genannt wird, liegt kein Grund mehr vor, das Johannesevangelium von den sogenannten synoptischen Evangelien, die durch gemeinsamen Berichtsinhalt in weitem Umfang eine Synopsis, eine Zusammenschau gestatten, zu trennen. Es ist vielmehr aller Grund vorhanden, das vierte Evangelium in diese Zusammenschau der andern drei Evangelien mit einzubeziehen, da es besonders durch die zeitraeumlichen Angaben von Andreas eine notwendige Ergaenzung und Vervollstaendigung zu dem Rahmen im Leben Jesu liefert. Wir haben nicht drei, sondern vier Synoptiker.¹³

To emphasize the reliability of the Gospels as historical documents, Jeremias adds:

Die Feststellung der Quellenurheber in den Evangelien hat einen bedeutsamen Eigenwert. Sie foerdert die neue Erkenntniss zu Tage, dass viele Berichte aus erster Hand stammen, und dass sie als apostolische Zeugnisse auf voellige Glaubwuerdigkeit von vornherein berechtigten Anspruch erheben koennen.¹⁴

The importance of obtaining this trustworthiness for the Gospel records is emphasized by Duncan in his recent book, Jesus, Son of Man:

¹³Jeremias, Der apostolische Ursprung der vier Evangelien, p. 145.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 155.

Christianity has always challenged the world with a message which it claims to be rooted in history; and that challenge will be robbed of its force if the position must be accepted that the truth about its historical origins can no longer be known. In that case, the Gospel will become a mere "mythos", a scheme of salvation, the representation in story-book form (may we even have to say "in fairy-tale form"?) of certain religious ideas.¹⁵

Applying this to the Fourth Gospel, Duncan says:

There are accordingly sayings even in the Synoptic Gospels which point to a readiness on the part of Jesus to regard Himself as in a unique sense the Son of God; and we may infer that the much greater frequency with which such sayings occur in the Fourth Gospel is not to be attributed merely to the development of Christological interpretation, but represents an authentic tradition. - In all this we can see how the Fourth Gospel, which is so often represented as being indifferent to historical truth, is emphatic in presenting the Gospel as rooted and grounded in history.¹⁶

Hodgson has a very interesting discussion on the relation of John to the Synoptics:

We began this chapter by raising the question whether the characterization of our Lord in the Fourth Gospel is consistent with that in the Synoptists. I should like to end by suggesting that that question needs to be turned round the other way, and that what we have to ask is, "Are the synoptic Gospels credible apart from the Fourth?" When we think of that tremendous figure, the synoptic Christ, who spoke with authority and not as the scribes, who said to the leper, "I will, be thou clean," who proclaimed His Messiahship and prophesied His return on the

¹⁵ Duncan, Jesus, Son of Man, p. 22.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 107 and 252.

clouds of Heaven as the Son of Man, who spoke of giving His life a "ransom for many", and who prayed as they nailed Him to the cross, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do" - when we think of Him, we cannot avoid the question, Are the records which tell of Him in any way credible apart from just such a life of inner dependence and communion with the Father as is presented to us in the Fourth Gospel?¹⁷

In spite of those words, Hodgson does not seem to believe in the historical character of the Fourth Gospel.¹⁸

Several quotations which will show the trend to give to the Fourth Gospel more weight as a source of history might be added. Malden writes:

Although the lapse of time may have blurred some minor details, and although he undoubtedly did to some extent read his own thoughts into the story, yet, taken as a whole, the essential truth of his portrait of Christ may deserve to be ranged above that of any other which we can ever possess.¹⁹

In a similar vein, Gardner-Smith says:

The primitive elements which crop up from time to time in the Gospel must be given full weight. In the last few years there has been a distinct tendency to admit that in some respects the Fourth Gospel is nearer to primitive tradition than either Matthew or Luke.²⁰

As our last two witnesses to the historical value of the Fourth Gospel we shall call E. F. Scott and Bishop Headlam. Headlam's last book was entitled, The Fourth Gospel as History. In regard to the popular notion that many of

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¹⁸Hodgson, And Was Made Man, p. 208.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 182.

¹⁹R. H. Malden, Problems of the New Testament To-day, p. 214.

²⁰Gardner-Smith, Saint John and the Synoptic Gospels, p. 95.

the historical accounts of the Fourth Gospel are to be interpreted allegorically, Headlam says:

We have now reviewed the incidents recorded in the Gospel from the point of view of their historical value. Are we to consider them a series of allegories written with a view to their spiritual value and having no pretensions to be true history? I must confess that I can find no evidence to support that view. They are all told as straightforward stories. A definite appeal is made to their historical truth. Their value as evidence depends on their historical truth. The allegorical interpretations are generally unreal and far-fetched.²¹

In these words, we see the aged Christian lifting up his eyes in faith to Jesus, sitting at the right hand of God:

One thing more I would say in conclusion. The Christian Church teaches that Jesus Christ, who lived in Palestine in the first century and founded the Christian Church, was the incarnate Son of God. It is a stupendous fact. It is natural that many thoughtful people should wonder if it is true. But if it is true, it must be realized that our difficulties vanish. We need have no difficulty in accepting the divine as well as human character of His life, and it is witnessed by all our authorities. It also witnesses to them. There may be many minor difficulties, as there always will be in constructing our history from original authorities, but the great difficulty which has been at the root of all the critical troubles passes away.²²

We have had occasion repeatedly to quote E. F. Scott. Scott is not moved by the same considerations as is Headlam. And yet, in his latest book, The Purpose of the Gospels, published this year, Scott writes:

²¹A. C. Headlam, The Fourth Gospel as History, p. 30.
²²Ibid., p. 83.

In recent years the attitude of criticism of the Fourth Gospel has been steadily changing from what it was fifty or sixty years ago. It is coming to be recognized that while this Gospel has a character of its own, it is yet historical in the same sense as the others.²³

With that we close our case for the historical value of John's Gospel.

²³ E. F. Scott, The Purpose of the Gospels.

CHAPTER SIX

VALUE JUDGMENTS ON GOSPEL AND EVANGELIST

It is the irony of fate that John wrote so well that history refuses to believe that he could be the author. John was an unlettered Galilean fisherman, they say, and he could impossibly have produced such a masterpiece of theological and philosophical thought. Various people have tried to show that such judgments are not in keeping with the experience of history. No one would think of claiming that Mark Twain could not have written his delightful books just because he was an unschooled Mississippi River steamboat pilot. Nor is it historically true that old age does not produce masterpieces. But we are not here to defend John against these detractors from his fame. We shall rather leave the question of who the evangelist is out of this present discussion and note what the world has had to say about the evangelist, whoever he may be.

In introducing Llwyd's book, Son of Thunder, Robert Norwood says of the author:

I think that he rightly sets aside all questions of debate concerning the authorship of the Fourth Gospel, for I suspect that the debate will never be concluded. He is too sound a scholar to ignore the findings of men like Canon Streeter and his brave company of scholars; but, at the same time, he is justified in

his description of the unique genius that enriched the world with one of the most inspired documents, the Fourth Gospel. Shakespeare will always be Shakespeare to those who love the dramas of the great Elizabethan who gave them to the world, and John will always be John the Beloved to those who find in the Fourth Gospel the soul of that Galilean who will forever remain the light of the world to those who have received him.¹

Mary Ely Lyman has this to say of John:

We know him through his work to be a choice and dedicated spirit, a man of lofty religious genius, and high artistic gifts.²

This is not the place to ask to what extent those gifts were the result of special gifts of the Holy Spirit. We are merely reporting opinions.

Scott is also profuse in his praise of the Evangelist. Like many others he recognizes the book as a unit and is not ready to admit the possibility that it might be a haphazard collection from various sources. He writes:

But when all this has been taken into account two things appear to stand out as indubitable - that the Gospel, in spite of minor inconsistencies, is a homogeneous work, and that it everywhere bears the stamp of highest genius. It cannot have come into existence by some haphazard process of compilation or collaboration. Only one man in the course of centuries is capable of such thought as we find in the Fourth Gospel, and we cannot imagine that a group of men, all of them of that magnitude, were teaching at the same time in the church at Ephesus.....The author of the Gospel was a religious

¹ J. P. D. Llwyd, Son of Thunder, p. xi.

² Mary E. Lyman, The Christian Epic, A Study of N. T. Literature, p. 216.

thinker of the first rank, next to Paul the greatest and most original mind of the early church.³

MacGregor, who believes that three people had a hand in the work, must word his praise a little differently, but the estimate is about the same:

Whoever wrote it, the Fourth Gospel will always be the Holy of Holies of Christian literature. Whoever Witness, Evangelist, Redactor, may have been, to all three the world owes its gratitude for the book which is, as Luther puts it, the 'chiefest of the Gospels, unique, tender and true'.⁴

But let us pass from estimates of the writer to the judgments which have been passed on the work of his genius. Several people have pointed out the universal nature of its message, its timelessness, its all-embracing philosophy. Quimby elaborates on this thought:

John's Gospel has been called the Gospel to the Hellenes, that is, the Greeks. For he interpreted the Galilean Jesus and His message in terms of Greek culture and experience. This John did, but in doing this he did more. He went beyond Hellenic culture and phrased his gospel in the universal terms of all basic human experiences everywhere. Again, John has been called the Defender of the Gospel. Defend the Gospel John did. But in defending the Gospel, he interpreted the life and teachings of the Palestinian Jesus in terms of everyman's experience and life through all time. Also, John has been called the Spiritual Gospel. This old, old description from early times,

³Scott, Op. Cit., p. 245.

⁴MacGregor, The Gospel of John, p. lxvii.

means that in John, Jesus and His Gospel are set forth in terms of the inner human spirit universal in all men. Thus did John universalize the Gospel.

This is the glory of John for today. He speaks in terms of our common humanity. At first glance John seems devoid of any practical interest now. He has nothing specific to say about such pressing present-day problems as an international government or a world economic order. What John offers is not a ready-made cure for broken governments and shattered economies. He offers a far deeper remedy: the cure of the corrupt human heart.⁵

Filson has some fine words on the centrality of Jesus in the Gospel:

Of all the Gospels, the fourth Gospel most sharply defines the issue and presents Jesus, to use a Barthian phrase, for decision. This Gospel stands or falls by this choice. If it is mistaken in its deep and sincere conviction that Jesus is the Son of God in a unique sense and has a valid claim on every man's loyalty, then it may be appreciated as a great work of a mistaken yet beautiful soul, but it will inevitably suffer a severe discount. If, however, it is essentially right in giving to Jesus a central and lasting place for believing men, then it is a classic of simple and profound expression of one of life's deepest insights.⁶

The Church has certainly held to the latter view, and that is why the Gospel of John has ever been the devotional Gospel.

While we aren't too sure that we understand just what Hoskyns means, we can't refrain from giving his statement of the theme of the book:

⁵C. W. Quimby, John, the Universal Gospel, p. vii f.

⁶F. V. Filson, Origins of the Gospels, p. 209.

The theme of the Fourth Gospel is the non-historical that makes sense of history, the infinite that makes sense of time, God who makes sense of men and is therefore their Saviour.⁷

Less cryptic and more fitting to bring this part of our treatise to a close is this word by Erdman:

The Fourth Gospel is the most familiar and the best loved book in the Bible. It is probably the most important document in all the literature of the world. It has induced more persons to follow Christ, it has inspired more believers in loyal service, it has presented to scholars more difficult problems, than any other book that could be named.⁸

And who should understand the truth of those last words better than the writer?

⁷E. C. Hoskyns, The Fourth Gospel, p. 129f.

⁸D. R. Erdman, The Gospel of John, p. 7.

CHAPTER SEVEN
SUMMARIES AND CONCLUSIONS

While it is impossible in many cases to speak of an absolute consensus among critics in regard to the various points involved in this discussion, there are certain trends that are very evident. It is these that shall be treated in this concluding chapter.

Many serious scholars are reminding us that the question of the authorship of the Gospel should not be confused with that of its integrity and reliability.

They believe it weakens the authority of the book if we make that authority dependent on a position which is not demanded by the book itself. Therefore, it is being emphasized more and more that the book per se is anonymous. There is, essentially, no more reason for questioning its place in the inspired Scriptures if it is truly anonymous than there is for doubting the right of the other Gospels to be there, for they are all anonymous, as far as the text itself is concerned. The fact that the doubts which were expressed concerning the Johannine authorship originally came from people who thereby wished to make it a book of human origin can, of course, not be so easily forgotten. But this circumstance should not

blind the student to the real facts in the case. To try to maintain a position which is not clearly established by Scripture itself and make it a sine qua non of orthodoxy is a questionable procedure. This trend towards open-mindedness is very evident even in the writings of those who finally come to the conclusion that John did write the Gospel, and, even if such open-mindedness is often linked up with unbelief in the inspired character of the work, it would seem that the facts in the case demand that we take that position and by a careful study of those facts come to a conclusion for ourselves.

The denial of Johannine authorship is, it must be admitted, very widespread. The chief reasons for this are, on the one hand, the subjective feeling which many have that the book is not in keeping with the character of a personal eye-witness disciple of Jesus. This feeling is largely the result of comparing the Synoptic picture of Christ and his life with that of the Fourth Gospel. The assumption is that the Synoptic picture is historical, or, at least, largely so, and, therefore, the Johannine picture cannot be. The other important reason, and this one looms larger in the minds of those who find no difficulty in harmonizing the two accounts,

is that the evidence for the martyrdom of St. John at the hand of the Jews, in other words, at an early date, makes it impossible for John to have written it at the time and place indicated by the tradition. This subject has been fully treated in the body of the paper, but it should be emphasized here that scholarly criticism shows a decided trend in that direction.

The only outstanding consensus on a substitute for the Apostle is the Presbyter John of Ephesus. The line of reasoning followed in arriving at this conclusion has been briefly outlined previously. In view of the rather inconclusive evidence on this point, it seems surprising that so many scholars should come out unreservedly for this candidate. It would seem to indicate that there is a lot of "follow the leader" spirit evident among these students of the Gospel. Outside of the popularity of Elder John the only other noticeable trend is that which makes an unnamed disciple of Jesus the author. This trend is the result of the recognition of the weakness of the evidence for the Presbyter.

It must be pointed out that there are still many who cling to the Apostolic authorship as offering less difficulties than any other theory. We refer the reader to the Second Chapter for evidence of this. A number of Introductions which have come from Germany during the period

which has been considered are included in the works which espouse this view. And also in England, where Hunter thought that hardly any reputable scholar still held to that view, there are outstanding scholars who see no reason for changing their position. That there is somewhat of a leaning in the direction of Johannine authorship also among "reputable scholars" might be indicated by the large number who seem to see the influence of St. John behind the writer. From assuming John's influence it is not too big a step to assume his authority. When people are sure that the author was an eye-witness, that he was a Jew, that he was familiar with Palestine, it almost seems the logical conclusion to add: he was the Apostle John.

Opinions on the date of the Gospel are so overwhelmingly in favor of the period near the close of the first century that it almost looks as if Lightfoot's statement made in 1871 were approaching fulfillment. We are referring to the opinion which he expressed in Biblical Essays:

We may look forward to the time when it will be held discreditable to the reputation of any critic for sobriety and judgment to assign to this Gospel any later date than the end of the first century, or the very beginning of the second.¹

Even the extremest critics have gone far back from the date proposed by F. C. Baur, 170 A. D. In addition to this,

¹ Quoted in H. C. Vedder, The Johannine Writings and the Johannine Problem, p. 154.

there is a small, but quite vocal group of scholars who are ready to say that there is no reason why the Fourth Gospel could not have been written just as early as the rest. The trend is all in the direction of early dating and away from the extremely late date theories.

The whole question of the use of sources by the Fourth Evangelist and the unitary character of the book involves so many things that it was not deemed advisable to include a special chapter on it. But, because of the close relationship between those questions and that of authorship, it might be well to indicate the trend here. There are indeed those who go searching about for sources and claim to find them. Hoernle, e. g., claims that "the Fourth Gospel is a compilation from two distinct sources."² He finds an "R", The Record of the Loved Disciple, and a "P", A Gospel according to St. Philip. He even knows that R is in two volumes, of which the second also consists of two parts. But he represents such an insignificant minority, that we need scarcely consider his theory. Jeremias also finds various apostolic sources in the Gospel. In addition, we might mention that there are many who believe that chapter 21 is an appendix added by a different hand from that which wrote ch. 1-20. Much is also written about transpositions and interpolations, this matter of transpositions being explained by a very

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E. S. Hoernle, The Record of the Loved Disciple, p. 8f.

ingenious theory that in some way or other the pages on which the Gospel was written became disarranged and were copied in an improper order. Bernard treats this matter quite fully.³ But the surprising thing is, that even many of those who claim that various sources are evident still maintain that the finished product is the work of one hand, yes, of one master mind. Thus Percy Gardner:

If we except the episode of the woman taken in adultery, the whole book is of uniform character, and is the literary creation of a single writer, including the last chapter, which is of the nature of a supplement.⁴

Dodd has this to say:

If the Fourth Gospel is regarded, with a whole school of critics, as the work of several hands, it might be suggested that the author of the Epistle had a part in its composition. But the tide of criticism seems to be getting away from separatist theories. It seems almost certain that the Gospel bears all through (apart from possible minor and occasional editorial touches, and in spite of the possible use of various sources) the stamp of a single mind.⁵

Headlam is glad to hear from Professor Dodd that "it is fashionable at present in critical circles to accept the unity of the work, and to reject either partition theories or the presence of large interpolations". He then adds, "A work of genius is not created in that way."⁶

³ Bernard, I. C. C., The Gospel of St. John, pp. xvii to xxv.

⁴ Gardner, The Ephesian Gospel, p. 53.

⁵ Dodd, Moffatt Commentary on the Johannine Epistles, p. iv.

⁶ Headlam, The Fourth Gospel as History, p. 83.

That rather neatly sums up the general trend in most of the Johannine literature of recent years. Whether the writer is looking for sources or not, he generally has to admit at the end that whoever put it together did a superb job. From the standpoint of style and thought patterns there is a unity that will not be denied.

The final conclusion to which we have come is that, in spite of the many learned commentators who claim that John's stories are merely the basis for his discourses and are of questionable historical value and only to be interpreted allegorically, there is also a noticeable tendency to uphold the historical character of the events recorded in the Fourth Gospel. Some are only willing to concede that on a few points the Fourth Gospel has more reliable sources behind it than have the Synoptics. Others will say that the Fourth Evangelist deliberately sets out to correct the Synoptics. But, by and large, there are many who no longer make the claim that the Fourth Gospel was never meant to contain history, but admit that there is definitely an historical basis in the Fourth Gospel.

To show that this is a recent trend, it might be well to quote from several recent works. We begin with Howard's The Fourth Gospel in Recent Criticism and Interpretation, which appeared in a third edition in 1945. There we read:

With one notable exception, there is no reason why the Synoptic account of the Galilean ministry, with journeys through Samaria and into the North, should not fall within time-limits marked clearly in this Johannine outline of the life of Jesus from the Baptism to the Cross.....In John there are indications of superior sources of information regarding the last days in Jerusalem.....The main result of this part of our examination is that in certain respects the Fourth Gospel is a valuable source for our knowledge of the course of the ministry of Jesus, supplying information where the Marcan narrative fails us.⁷

Bishop Headlam, well-known Anglican bishop, entitled his last book, The Fourth Gospel as History, published in 1948, and says that he can find no evidence to support the view that the incidents recorded in the Gospels are a series of allegories which have no pretensions to be true history. He claims that "a definite appeal is made to their historical truth. Their value as evidence depends on their historical truth."⁸ We also call attention to two other works, both of 1949 vintage. The first is E. F. Scott's, The Purpose of the Gospels and the other Duncan's Jesus, Son of Man. The former, after remarking about the changed attitude of criticism of the Fourth Gospels compared to what it was fifty to sixty years ago, states pointblank that in spite of the peculiar character of the Gospel, "it is yet historical in the same sense as

⁷Op. cit., p. 176f.

⁸Op. cit., p. 30.

the others".⁹ Duncan speaks of "a growing readiness to find real historical values in the evidence of the Fourth Gospel, not only as regards episodes, but also as regards much of the teaching".¹⁰ Those seem to be clear, straightforward testimonies in support of the claim that there is a definite trend towards viewing the Gospel of John not only as a philosophical and theological composition, but also as a record of historical events.

In summing up the last three conclusions, it should be pointed out that not a single one contains anything which would make the apostolic authorship impossible, or even improbable. Wherever there has been a change in the attitude of criticism, as in the case of the date, the unity, and the historical character of the work, the change has been such as to reestablish the theory of Johannine authorship as a possible solution of the problem. This does not mean that the people who represent these positions are necessarily supporting the traditional view. No, many have reached these conclusions in spite of the fact that they do not hold to the Johannine authorship. This makes their conclusions all the more meaningful.

⁹ Op. cit., p. 110.

¹⁰ Op. cit., p. 16.

The significance of all this may be different for those who hold to the inspiration of the Scriptures than for those who take a different view. For those who look upon the Gospel as a divine message but not the inerrant inspired Word of God, this is of great importance. Christian faith is grounded in history, in the historical Christ, the Son of God. The Fourth Gospel, which has contributed so much to that faith, be it ever so wonderful as a work of art, would lose immeasurably if the picture it paints of the Word made flesh were just the figment of the imagination of one who had experienced the meaning of this Jesus instead of the true-to-life presentation of one who had walked and talked with Jesus for several years and had entered into close personal fellowship with Him. For him who believes in the inspired nature of this Gospel, the present trends serve to strengthen him in his determination to abide by these Scriptures as God's very message of life. Even if we should be forced to the conclusion that not John, but some other disciple of Jesus wrote the Gospel, it would still remain Scripture with all that that implies. But because of the feeling which many have towards this Gospel as being particularly close to the source of Christianity, humanly speaking, many will feel relieved to discover that there is no compelling reason for discarding authorship by John, the beloved disciple, who also leaned on Jesus' breast at the Last Supper.

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