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# Authorship of the fourth gospel

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## Authorship of the Fourth Gospel.

### I. Extent of the Controversy.

Luthardt in his *Saint John, the Author of the Fourth Gospel*, translated by C. R. Gregory, devotes eighty eight pages to an enumeration of all the work and pamphlets written on the positive and negative sides of this prolonged controversy, from Evanson, an Angelican clergyman; in 1792, to Beyschlag in 1875.

The controversy was opened in 1792 by Evanson, who suggested that the Fourth Gospel was the work of a Platonist of the second century. He was replied to by a number of eminent scholars in defense of the Johannine authorship.

Luthardt-Gregory enumerated about fifty works before 1820, but the first deep impression was made when Bretschneider issued his *Modest Inquiries into the Genius and Origin of the Gospel and Epistle of John*. In this work he gathered up all the doubts that had been raised for a generation. He was replied to by able men, and finally he admitted that his doubts were overcome.

In 1840 Bruno Bauer demonstrated that the Fourth Gospel cannot be explained by the mythical theory. His demonstration throughout reveals the presence of a commanding thinker.

Before 1850 some eminent theologians had made the date of writing as late as 60 A. D., while Hilgenfeld, in 1854, did

not consent to postpone the date of the origin beyond A. D. 120 - 140.

Baur reads into the Gospel the influence of the second century Gnosis, and also sees in it an effort to heal a violent schism between the Jerusalem apostles and St. Paul, and between the churches which derived their origin and tone from these respective sources. He even goes so far as to suppose that, in an effort to bring about a fusion of the opposing parties, a number of forgeries were made. In this list of forgeries and fabrications he includes the Epistles to the Colossians, the Ephesians, the Hebrews, Timothy, and Titus, and the Book of Acts, also this Gospel, which he says was a part of the forgeries by which the Catholic Church was originated. This hypothesis of Baur places the date of writing at 170 A. D.

In 1860 H. Ewald showed that no authorship of an ancient writing is so conclusively attested as that of the Fourth Gospel.

The controversy was carried on by able advocates on both sides until in 1868 Riegenbach endeavored to show that John the presbyter and John the apostle were one and the same. Later Holtzmann took up the claims of John the presbyter.

In 1872 Schaff and Sandy put forth valuable works on the subject. Farrar in his Life of Christ (1874) sustained the Johannine authenticity. Matthew Arnold defended the authen-

ticity with peculiar skill, making a partition theory of his own. B. Weiss in his Life of Christ gives some space to the discussion of the Johannine sources, in which he stands for the genuineness of the Gospel. Within the last twenty years many volumes have been written on both sides of the argument, the best known of which is perhaps Edersheim's Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, in which the Johannine authorship is sustained by one in a position to speak with authority, being intimately acquainted with Hebrew literature.

The number and variety of arguments resorted to on both sides are so great, and in many cases so skillfully wrought out, that it has been necessary to give only a mere glance at the field covered. It is not the purpose of this paper to meet all or even a considerable number of the arguments which have been employed by previous investigators, and either to refute or to sustain them; it is rather to give a reason for the convictions of the author. So great a controversy leads one farther and farther into uncertainty as he proceeds in a review of the many and varied arguments left on record by eminent scholars. I therefore deem it wise for each inquirer to do much independent thinking, for he must finally arrive at some definite conclusion.

## II. Place of the Gospel in the Canon.

H. R. Reynolds in Hastings' Dictionary affirms that there is sufficient evidence that this Gospel is among the least dis-

puted components of the earliest collections of documents.

The Apocalypse, II Peter, and II and III John are missing from the Peshitta; in the Old Latin belonging to the second century, Hebrews, II Peter, and James are wanting; and the Muratorian Canon contains, if at all, doubtful references to Hebrews, and II and III John, yet these early indications of a list of New Testament books contain the Gospel of John. This is also true of Origen's list (184 - 253) and of the Canon of Eusebius. The earliest codices of the fourth century, the Canon of Athanasius, and all those of the ecclesiastical councils also include it.

### III. External Evidence.

#### I. Evidence Showing the Early Existence of Four Gospels.

No writers of the present attempt, as did Volkmar, to deny that Justin quoted from the Fourth Gospel, and there are good reasons for believing that Tatian, a disciple and contemporary of Justin, constructed a Harmony of the Four Gospels, with a chronological basis in the Gospel of John.

Towards the last quarter of the second century, in all parts of the Roman Empire, four Gospels had been selected, and were regarded as authentic. These four documents were identical with those which are spoken of as "according to" Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. These writings came under the classification of τὸ εὐαγγέλιον or the good message. Theophilus of An-

tioch applied the name to the four separate gospels; henceforward we read not only of the Gospel, but of τὰ εὐαγγέλια the Gospels.

In the writings of Irenaeus there is very conspicuous and weighty testimony to the existence of four Gospels. He wrote between A. D. 180 and 190. His writings are of considerable interest, and show, in combination, that the "Four Gospels" are, together with the Old Testament, to be regarded as the Scriptures. He makes frequent reference to St. John by name. He makes five hundred or more references to the Four Gospels, one hundred of these being to the Fourth. This shows that at that writing there must have been four Gospels in circulation for a long time, for, as R. W. Dale says in his *Living Christ and Four Gospels*, "Religious veneration such as that with which Irenaeus regarded these books is of slow growth. They must have held a great place in the Church as far back as the memory of living men extended."

Another witness to these four Gospels is Theophilus. He quotes John by name (A. D. 180). There is much dispute as to the genuineness of his commentaries on the Gospels, but no question remains as to his being acquainted with the writings of St. John.

In the writings of Clement of Alexandria, preserved for us by Eusebius, there is mention made of the existence and value of the Four Gospels. In the Exhortation he speaks of St.

John by name. Clement was the head of the celebrated Catechetical School in A. D. 189.

Tertullian, who wrote between A. D. 190 and A. D. 230, makes many references to the Gospels, and attests to their authenticity. According to Godet, Introduction to the Gospel of St. John, Tertullian makes it plain that Marcion was acquainted with the Fourth Gospel.

A very trustworthy witness is found in the person of Justin Martyr, whose most important works are two Apologies and his Dialogue with Trypho. These were written between A. D. 145 and 160. He makes many references to passages of Scripture which are contained in the Gospels. He speaks of them as "Memorials composed by the Apostles and their followers." In one place he adds "which are called Gospels." The reason for his not speaking of the authors as Matthew, Mark, Luke and John is easy to understand if we take into consideration the fact that he was writing to the Roman emperors, with whom the names of a few obscure Jews would have had no weight. The conclusion to be drawn from the writings of Justin is that he must have been acquainted with, and accepted the Four Gospels, for there could not have arisen another new Gospel between his time and that of Irenaeus, with whom he was contemporaneous, and who gives the Fourth Gospel great prominence.

For one who will become at all familiar with the Ante-Nicene writers, there is opportunity to find very convincing evidence for the early existence of the Four Gospels.

## II. Evidence of the Early Existence of the Fourth Gospel.

As before mentioned, some have sought to make John quote Justin rather than Justin quote John; however, their attempts have been so strained as to meet with little favor. There is so great similarity in the Logos of Justin to that contained in the opening chapter of John that it is far more probable that Justin received his idea from John than from any other source.

Other portions of the Gospel, besides the Prologue, are referred to by Justin; e. g. in Apology 35 he makes an allusion to John 19:13. In another Apology he declares that the Jews knew neither the Father nor the Son; this suggested John's Gospel. In our study of the Christology of Justin, a course given by Professor Rishell in Boston University, we found many passages in Justin's writings which had every indication of a Johannine origin; that is, they appeared to be quotations, or reproductions from the Fourth Gospel.

One of the earliest to write a commentary on any of the books of the New Testament was Heracleon. Origen quotes him a number of times from his commentary on the Fourth Gospel. The point to be made here is that, before Irenaeus, and even back to the time of Valentinus, this Gospel was held in high esteem. That Justin should not have known of it, is very improbable.

Tatian, a pupil of Justin, explicitly refers to the Fourth Gospel (A. D. 160 - 170).

Mention has been made of the Muratorian Mss., one of the earliest attempts to give a list of the books of the New Testament. It not only includes the Fourth Gospel, but in legendary fashion, describes the way in which John came to prepare his narrative. It was through the suggestion of Andrew and other apostles, according to this account. Now if this work can be found to be of early origin, it will be of great value as evidence on the side of the early existence of the Gospel under discussion. Eminent scholars differ as to its date, yet, although Harnack would make it as late as A. D. 200, most writers have made the limit 156 A. D., while such men as Lightfoot and Wescott make the extreme limit A. D. 170.

Eusebius gives us a few words concerning one known as Papias, Bishop of Hierapolis, who was contemporary with Polycarp, the disciple of John. He must have written somewhere near the year 135 A. D. He mentions a number of disciples, among them John, to whom he makes special reference. Bishop Polycarp has been mentioned as a disciple of John. His testimony for the existence of the Gospel carries it back to the lifetime of St. John. Irenaeus tells about his acquaintance with the others who had known the Lord. Polycarp retold the miracles and doctrines of the Lord consistently with the Scriptures. Waddington and Lightfoot give A. D. 155 as the Martyrdom, and A. D. 69 as the date of Polycarp's birth; hence we have in him an early witness to the authenticity of the Fourth Gospel. Others of the early fathers who might be men-

tioned as bearing like testimony are Romanus and Ignatius.

Very valuable evidences of the existence of the Fourth Gospel can be found in the writings of the enemies of Christianity, but this field of research is so extended that the limits of the present discussion will permit only the mention of the most prominent of these writers. Celsus in his writings clearly refers to passages in the Fourth Gospel.

The conclusion is that these early testimonies to the existence of this Gospel bring the date of its first appearance down to the life of the Apostle himself; now it only remains to prove that this Book is consistent with what we know to be the character of John. It will first be necessary to ascertain some knowledge of his character through other writings.

#### IV. Internal Evidence.

##### 1. John's Character as Disclosed in other Writings.

In the Synoptic Gospels we read about one named John with his brother James, the sons of Zebedee. They lived at Bethsaida on the Lake of Galilee and were fishermen. In all probability Salome was their mother. According to Matthew 20: 20, she presented a request to Jesus that her two sons might sit, one on the Saviour's right, and the other on his left hand, when He should come into His kingdom. She probably cherished a hope of the establishment of a materialistic kingdom. Very likely John at that time had not divorced himself from that ideal; yet he must have had some lessons to indicate the

contrary.

For years John had enjoyed close fellowship with Jesus. He had been with Him when he performed his miracles, including the raising of the daughter of Jairus. He had been with Him on the Mount of Transfiguration, and had heard the marvelous things concerning the final judgment. He with Peter prepared the Passover, and he was a witness to the scene of agony in the garden. All these circumstances are certainly favorable to the development of a character such as is disclosed in the Fourth Gospel. In all references to John in the Synoptic Gospels, he is represented as a man actuated by deep love. This is significant in the fact that the current mediæval representations of the author of the Fourth Gospel were those of one characterized by effeminate softness: This must have been read into, not out of, the Gospel. John was certainly a man of love, but his love was a deep, dignified affection.

In the Acts of the Apostles and in the Epistles of St. Paul there are no very direct references to John, but in so far as he is mentioned, the character disclosed is entirely compatible with the one required.

## 2. Character of the Author as Disclosed in the Style and Teachings Contained in the Gospel Itself.

The Fourth Gospel is generally admitted to be the work of one remarkably gifted man. Neither in style nor in motive

can criticism break it up into different centuries or tendencies. It has not suffered through the hands of editors, thus it has retained its marvelous beauty. It stands alone in its attractiveness and is marked for its original style.

The Book will always be of greatest interest to students of the Scriptures, for it stands out as eminently precious. Those who strenuously deny its historicity and its apostolic character are ready to admit that it is the highest, and the truest revelation of the Son of Man, and of the will and mind of God. I quote from H. R. Reynolds, " We hail the teaching of the Fourth Gospel as establishing for us the inspiring persuasion that the divine and human are not separated by an impassable chasm, but are in their innermost essence one; that, in the portraiture of the Logos-made man, humanity at its best is nothing less than the clearest and most gracious revelation of the Eternal God, and that Divinity at its greatest has been manifested through the human."

Harnack, in his History of Dogma, admits that the origin of the Johannine writings is a marvelous enigma, "that therein a Christ clothes the indescribable with words, that a Pauline Christ walks on the earth, far more human than the Christ of Paul, yet far more divine."

Another peculiarity of this Gospel is pointed out by C. W. Rishell in his Foundations of the Christian Faith. He says, "It is a peculiarity of the gospel of John that it furnishes us almost all that Jesus is reported to have said concerning

Himself." If the many things of this kind which John records are not genuine, then we have practically no knowledge of what Jesus thought of Himself. It is not probable that Jesus gave no expression to His thought of His origin, nature, mission, and character. It is also improbable that expressions of this kind should not have been recorded by some one. And further, it is improbable that such a series of utterances regarding Himself, as John's Gospel affords, should have been invented, or that they should have resulted from misunderstanding. Such a series could not seriously misrepresent the thought of Christ. It is too extensive and self-consistent. Besides, if John were one of a little inner circle who were closer to Jesus than others of the twelve, and particularly if he were that disciple whom Jesus loved, as is generally supposed, he would be the one best qualified and most likely to know and to accurately report what Jesus said of Himself."

As to the specific end of this Gospel, we see that each Gospel has its peculiar functions. The oldest Gospel-narrative is that by St. Mark, which addresses itself to no particular class, but pictures Jesus as the Messiah for all men. Next comes the Gospel of St. Matthew as it is to-day. This goes into fuller detail than St. Mark did, giving the history of the miraculous birth of Jesus. This is distinctively a Hebrew writing. Third comes the Gospel by St. Luke which, going still more into particulars, gives us not only the account of the birth of Jesus, but also that of John, "the pre-

parer of the way." This Gospel presents the Messiah, perhaps to the Jews first, but certainly to the Gentiles also.

The list is not yet complete. There is a larger world to be reached. The great Western, Jewish, and Greek worlds must have the Christ presented to them, for He is to be the Saviour of the whole world. St. John was the man to see this state of affairs; his age and the increased experience of the early Christians made all this evident to his mind. Thus the Fourth Gospel became, not the supplement, but the complement of the other three.