

Some Notes on the Fourth Evangelist

F.F. Bruce

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I. THE WITNESS OF PAPIAS

In the preface to his five books of *Exegesis of the Dominical Oracles* (ap. Euseb. *HE* iii. 39), Papias says:

“If ever anyone came who had kept company with the Elders, I would inquire about the words of the Elders: ‘What did Andrew or Peter, or Philip or Thomas or James, or John or Matthew or any other of the Lord’s disciples say? And what do Aristion and the Elder John, the Lord’s disciples, say?’”

Most scholars to-day, following Eusebius, find two Johns in the fragment, and they may be right. Eusebius, to be sure, had an axe to grind, for he was glad to find a possible non-apostolic author for the Apocalypse; but this cannot be said of such impartial scholars as Tregelles and Lightfoot, who also distinguished two Johns here. But the question is by no means closed. Against Tregelles and Lightfoot might be quoted Salmon and Zahn. Lawlor and Oulton, in their edition of Eusebius (1928), say in their note on this passage (Vol. ii. p. 112.):

“But the reasoning of Eusebius seems unconvincing: and the argument of others who have reached the same conclusion on other lines is of doubtful validity (e.g. Schmiedel in *Encyc. Bib.*, 2506ff.; Harnack, *Chron.* i. 660ff.)”

And Professor C. J. Cadoux, who will not be suspected of conservative bias, writes in *Ancient Smyrna* (1938), p. 317n.:

“Many contend that Papias himself distinguished between John the Apostle and John the Elder: but his words may equally mean that he regarded them as identical.”¹

Irenaeus, himself a hearer of Polycarp, says that Papias was a hearer of John and a comrade of Polycarp” (*adu. haer.* v. 33. 4). Eusebius, however, thinks that Papias makes it plain that while he had heard Aristion and the Elder John, “he had by no means been a hearer and eyewitness of the holy Apostles” (*loc. cit.*).

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The anti-Marcionite Prologues to the Gospels are now generally dated *c.* 160-180. Only the Lukan Prologue survives in the original Greek; those for Mark and John are extant in Latin. The Johannine one runs:

“The Gospel of John was published and given to the churches by John when he was still in the body, as a man of Hierapolis, Papias by name, John’s dear disciple, has related in his

¹ Dr. Cadoux continues: “Many also urge that Papias stated that John was slain by the Jews (and therefore, presumably, in Palestine before 70 A.D.): but the evidence that Papias stated and meant that is late and highly precarious.”

five Exegetical books.² He indeed wrote down the Gospel accurately at John's dictation. But the heretic Marcion was thrust out by John, after being repudiated by him for his contrary views. He had carried writings or letters to him from brethren who were in Pontus."

We cannot deal here with the curious reference to Marcion, on which Dr. Robert Eisler bases part of his fantastic theory in *The Enigma of the Fourth Gospel* (1938). For the rest, the Prologue states that Papias (1) ascribed the authorship of the Fourth Gospel to John, (2) was a disciple of John, (3) copied the Gospel at John's dictation. There is no good reason to doubt the first statement; it gives us, indirectly, the earliest testimony to the Johannine authorship of the Gospel.³ The second supports Irenaeus; the third, while not impossible if the second be true, is on other grounds improbable, and is perhaps best explained by Lightfoot's suggestion (*Essays on Supernatural Religion*, p. 214) that Papias's "they wrote down" (ἀπέγραψον or ἀπέγραψαν) has been misunderstood or misread as "I wrote down" (ἀπέγραφοι or ἀπέγραφα).⁴

II. A SECOND JOHN AT EPHESUS?

In the fourth-century *Apostolic Constitutions*, vii. 46, there is a list of bishops alleged to have been appointed to various sees during the lifetime of the Apostles, including "in Ephesus, Timothy appointed by Paul, and John appointed by me John". The historical value of this list is practically nil (e.g., Ignatius is said to have been made bishop of Antioch by Paul!), except that the names are not inventions. This might be taken as evidence for two Johns at Ephesus, the Apostle and a second

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John, appointed bishop by the Apostle; but the statement may be simply an inference from Eusebius.

In an article on "The Authorship of the Fourth Gospel" in the *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, xiv (1930), pp. 333ff., Dr. A. Mingana mentions that some Peshitta MSS. contain a treatise ascribed to Eusebius, which gives a short account of each of the Twelve Apostles and Seventy Disciples (though Eusebius, *HE* i. 1, 2, says that "no list of the Seventy is anywhere extant"). The section on John, translated from Mingana's Syriac quotation, is as follows:

"John the Evangelist was also from Bethsaida. He was of the tribe of Zebulun. He preached in Asia at first, and afterwards was banished by Tiberius Caesar to the isle of Patmos. Then he went to Ephesus and built up the church in it. Then three disciples went thither with him, and there he died and was buried. [These three were] Ignatius, who was afterwards bishop in Antioch and was thrown to the beasts at Rome; Polycarp, who was afterwards bishop in Smyrna and was crowned in the fire; John, to whom he committed the priesthood and the episcopal see after him. He then [the Evangelist, having lived a long

² The Latin is corrupt: *in exotericis id est in extremis quinque libris*. Evidently *extremis* is a corruption of *externis* or *extraneis*, a gloss on *exotericis* (ἐξωτερικοῖς), which is itself a corruption of *exegeticis* (ἐξηγητικοῖς).

³ But B. W. Bacon argued that the Prologue was a second-hand reflection of Papias's testimony to the *Apocalypse* (see his *Studies in Matthew* [1931], pp. 452ff.).

⁴ Other less simple explanations have been made, e.g. by Dr. F. L. Cross who, writing to *The Times* of Feb. 10, 1936, says: "My own reading of the Prologue, if I may set it down dogmatically, is that in its original form it asserted that the Fourth Gospel was written by John the Elder at the dictation of John the Apostle when the latter had reached a very great age."

time, died and was buried in Ephesus, in which he had been bishop. He was buried by his disciple John, who was bishop in Ephesus [after him]; and their two graves are in Ephesus—one concealed, namely the Evangelist's; the other being that of John his disciple, who wrote the Revelations, for he said that he heard all that he wrote from the mouth of the Evangelist."

Though not the work of Eusebius, this section is certainly based on him and on his report of Dionysius of Alexandria's views of the Apocalypse (*HE* vii. 25). Dionysius (c. A.D. 250), who held anti-millenarian views, distinguished the Apocalypse from the Fourth Gospel on stylistic grounds, and thought that the former was the work of another John than the Apostle, the Fourth Evangelist. He suggested that there had been a second John in Asia, since report averred that there were two tombs in Ephesus ascribed to John. Eusebius linked this report with Papias's, double mention of John, and supposed that the second John posited by Dionysius was John the Elder, as distinct from John the Apostle. But this Syriac document, unlike Dionysius and Eusebius, does not make the second John the author of the Apocalypse, but simply the amanuensis of the Apostle, who was the real author—unless indeed, as some think, the plural "Revelations" (Syr. *gelyane*) refers not to the Apocalypse but to the Gospel, in which case an early precedent would be provided for those writers of our day who, believing in a second John at Ephesus, regard him as the

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Apostle's amanuensis (or more than amanuensis) in the writing of the Gospel.

This Syriac treatise hardly provides *independent* evidence for the Ephesian residence and episcopate of a second John. But Mingana gave further interesting information. Peshitta MSS. regularly have this colophon after the Fourth Gospel: "Here ends the Gospel of John who spoke in Greek at Ephesus." But one MS. (Mingana Syriac 540) has the unique colophon: "Here ends the writing of the holy Gospel—the preaching of John who spoke in Greek in *Bithynia*"; and also the unique prefatory note: "The holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ the preaching of John the younger" (*euangelion gaddisha d'Maran Teshu' M'shiha—karuzutha d'Yuhanan na'ara*). The MS. is dated 1749, but is copied from one of c. 750. Mingana very cautiously suggested the inference that this "younger John" was the disciple of the Apostle mentioned in the treatise just referred to; but if so, the Apostle must have been the elder John. Some, however, will have it that he who is here called "the younger" is the same as Papias's Elder⁵. But as we do not know on what authority the unique colophon and prefatory note rest, we can regard them only as interesting curiosities.

III. POLYCARP AND JOHN

Irenaeus leaves no doubt that his teacher Polycarp (martyred A. D. 155) was a disciple of the Apostle John. In his letter to Florinus he reminds him how Polycarp "used to tell of his intercourse with John and with the others who had seen the Lord" (Euseb. *HE* v. 20); and in his letter to Victor of Rome he tells how Polycarp had always observed Easter according to

⁵ "The younger John may well have been the John we call the 'Elder' or 'Presbyter'—the name 'Elder' or 'Presbyter' was not meant to indicate his age in relation to any other John" (C. J. Wright in *The Mission and Message of Jesus* [1937], p. 657). But W. F. Howard sums up Mingana's discovery with wise caution: "Interesting as this is, we can hardly treat it as other than a bit of irresponsible guesswork by some scribe of a late date in the history of the transcription of the Gospel" (in *The Story of the Bible* [Amalgamated Press, 1938], p. 1233); In *The Fourth Gospel in Research and Debate* (1910) and elsewhere, B. W. Bacon, following Scholten and Schlatter, identified Papias's Elder John with John, the seventh bishop of Jerusalem, who died c. A.D. 117 (Euseb., *HE* iv. 5; Epiphanius, *Haer.* lxvi. 20).

the Quartodeciman reckoning "along with John the disciple of our Lord and the rest of the Apostles with whom he associated" (*ib.*, v. 24). We have also his statement that "not only was Polycarp taught by Apostles and conversed with

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many who had seen Christ, but he was also appointed by Apostles in Asia bishop in the church in Smyrna" (*adu. haer.* iii. 3. 4; Euseb. *HE* iv. 14). Tertullian, still more explicitly, says he was placed there by John (*de praescr. haer.* 32).

Against this clear testimony B. H. Streeter in *The Primitive Church* (1929), pp. 94ff., 265ff., sets the evidence of the *Life of Polycarp* which is ascribed, probably rightly, to Pionius, who was martyred at Smyrna in 250 (presumably the same Pionius as is mentioned in a note at the end of the Letter of the Smyrnaeans on the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*). In it nothing is said about Polycarp's association with Apostles; he is represented as the protege of Bucolus, his predecessor in the Smyrnaean episcopate. That Irenaeus's account should thus be ignored by a third-century writer was regarded by Streeter as proving that the latter drew his information from a source sufficiently authoritative to outweigh even the authority of Irenaeus. Lightfoot could find no historical value in the Pionian *Life* (*Apostolic Fathers*, II, i. 419f.). But Dr. Cadoux (*op. cit.*, pp. 305ff.) gives sound reasons for treating its statements as in the main reliable, without rejecting the testimony of Irenaeus. He points out that the strong anti-Quartodeciman convictions of the author of the *Life*, which apparently made him omit all reference to Polycarp's visit to Rome in the Quartodeciman interest in 154, were also responsible probably for the omission of any mention of John, who was regarded as the greatest authority for the Quartodeciman practice.

Dr. Cadoux also argues that the episcopate to which Polycarp was apostolically appointed was not the monarchical episcopate, but the episcopate in the earlier N.T. sense, synonymous with the presbyterate. In that case his succession to the monarchical episcopate came later, but before 115, in which year Ignatius writes to him as "bishop of the church of the Smyrnieans". This helps, too, to dispose of the difficulty raised by Streeter (*op. cit.*, pp. 95f.), that Polycarp was too young to have been appointed bishop in the Apostles' lifetime.

But this last objection of Streeter, that Polycarp was only about thirty at the end of the first century and therefore too young to have received apostolic ordination, depends upon taking his words at his martyrdom, "Eighty-six years have I served Him", to mean that he was eighty-six years old in 155. Zahn, however, reads this interpretation as untenable, since

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the available evidence indicates that Polycarp did not become a Christian until he was ten or twelve years old, so that he was nearly a hundred at the time of his death (*Forschungen zur Geschichte des NT Kanons* iv. 249ff.; vi. 94). This extra margin of a decade quite disposes of Streeter's difficulty, if we accept (as we should) the tradition that the Apostle John lived at Ephesus until c. A.D. 100.

IV. GAIUS OF ROME AND THE FOURTH GOSPEL

Eusebius (*HE* iii. 28) gives a quotation from Gaius's *Disputation* with the Montanist Proclus (c. 200), which is usually taken as ascribing the Johannine Apocalypse to the heretic Cerinthus. The Montanists appealed specially to the Johannine writings in support of their

doctrine of the Spirit; it would therefore disconcert them if one or more of these, writings were shown to be of heretical origin. In the fourth century Epiphanius (*Haer.* l-liv) and, Filaster (*Haer.* lx) mention some people who ascribed both the Apocalypse and the Fourth Gospel to Cerinthus (Epiphanius's *Alogoi*), stressing the differences between this Gospel and the others in the order of events.

Epiphanius and Filaster drew largely on the treatise *Against all Heresies* and other anti-heretical works of Hippolytus (c. 160-240). One of these works of Hippolytus was a *Defence of the Gospel according to John and of the Apocalypse*, mentioned on the Chair of Hippolytus (A.D. 222) and also in the list of the Syrian writer Ebed-Jesu (c. 1300). Ebed-Jesu also mentions a work of Hippolytus entitled *Heads against Gaius* which may, however, have been simply another name for the above-mentioned *Defence*. The *Heads against Gaius* were known to the West Syrian bishop Dionysius Bar-Salibi (d. 1171), who quotes frequently from them in his Biblical commentaries. In one place Bar-Salibi tells us:

"Hippolytus of Rome said that a man named Gaius appeared, who said that the Gospel was not John's, nor the Apocalypse, but that they were the work of the heretic Cerinthus. The blessed Hippolytus rose against this man and showed that the teaching of John in the Gospel and in the Apocalypse was different from that of Cerinthus."

And elsewhere he quotes Hippolytus as saying:

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"The heretic Gains argued that John disagreed with his brother-evangelists in saying that after the Baptism He went to Galilee and performed the miracle of the wine."⁶

These quotations suggest that Dom J. Chapman was not far wrong in saying of the *Alogoi*: "I am inclined to think that the best name for them is Gaius & Co." (*John the Presbyter and the Fourth Gospel* [1911], p. 3).⁷

Why then did Eusebius mention Gaius's criticism of the Apocalypse only? Was it because of his personal dislike of the Apocalypse? At any rate, Eusebius must surely have known of Gaius's attitude to the Fourth Gospel, and it is probably such arguments as his that he has in mind when he says (*HE* iii. 24):

"Thus John in the course of his Gospel relates what Christ did before the Baptist was cast into prison, but the other three Evangelists relate what happened after his imprisonment. If this be understood, the Gospels would no longer appear to disagree with each other, in view of the fact that John's contains the first acts of Christ, and the others the account of what happened to Him towards the end of the period."

Streeter exaggerates when he says that concerning the Fourth Gospel "there was at Rome in the middle of the second century considerable hesitation even in orthodox circles" (*op. cit.*, p.

⁶ The first quotation comes from J. Sedlacek's edition of Bar-Salibi in the *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* (1909-10); the second is quoted by P. de Labriolle from Bar-Salibi's, unedited commentary on the Gospels. See Lawlor and Oulton, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p.208; M. J. Lagrange, *L'évangile selon saint Jean* (ed. 3, 1927), p. lviii; T. H. Robinson in *The Expositor* VII. i (1906), p. 487.

⁷ Cf. the similar verdict of Salmon, *Intr. to N.T.*, p. 229. The *Alogoi* may possibly be connected with the people mentioned by Irenaeus (*adu. haer.* iii. r r. 9), who "do not admit that type of teaching presented by John's Gospel, in which the Lord promised that He would send the Paraclete, but reject at once both the Gospel and the prophetic Spirit". Cf. Zahn, *Geschichte des NT Kanons* i. 220ff.; ii. 967ff.

118). He is impressed by the fact that Eusebius (*HE* ii. 25) calls Gaius a "churchman" (ἄνθρωπος ἐκκλησιαστικός); but Gaius may well have been the exception that tests the rule, and it is striking that the *Alogoi* are also represented as orthodox in all respects except in their attitude to the Johannine writings (Lightfoot, *Biblical Essays*, p. 117). Bar-Salibi, however, as we have seen, quotes Hippolytus as calling Gaius a heretic.

V. THE FOURTH GOSPEL AND THE APOCALYPSE

Professor J. A. Findlay expresses a common opinion when he writes:

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"No books could be more different than are the Fourth Gospel and the Apocalypse, and it is amazing that anyone has been able to bring himself to believe that they came from the same author" (*The Way, the Truth and the Life* [1940], p. 208).

Yet the external evidence for each separately points to John the Apostle as the author. For the Apocalypse we begin with the explicit statements of Justin (*Dial.* 81), Irenaeus (*adu. haer.* iv. 20. 11), and the anti-Marcionite Prologue to Luke, which ends: "And later John the Apostle, one of the Twelve, wrote the Apocalypse in the isle of Patmos and afterwards the Gospel." "We seem led therefore", in the words of Dr. Cadoux, "to the conclusion that the Apostle John did survive to a great age in Ephesus, and was himself the author of the 'Apocalypse'" (*op. cit.*, p. 317). But there are at least equally good grounds for concluding that the same Apostle was himself the author of the Fourth Gospel.⁸

In his new book, *Christianity according to St. John* (reviewed on p. 152), Professor W. F. Howard looks on all five Johannine writings as having "originated in the same circle", though he believes in a separate authorship for the Apocalypse, partly because of its "grammatical idiosyncrasies" and partly because "its employment of Jewish non-Christian sources involved the incorporation of conceptions which are distinct from the views that are characteristically Johannine" (p. 15). But among the many valuable things in his book is a practical demonstration that eschatology and mysticism are by no means antipathetic and mutually exclusive. They are combined in the Fourth Evangelist and in Paul, and, by way of a more modern illustration, Dr. Howard aptly quotes two hymns of Charles Wesley, one "the prayer of a Christian mystic" and the other written in "the dialect of undiluted Jewish apocalyptic" (pp. 202f.). Two better-known hymns of Wesley than those quoted by Dr. Howard might be adduced; if one and the same poet wrote *Jesu, Lover of my soul* and *Lo! He comes with clouds descending*, it is difficult to argue on grounds of difference of religious outlook that one and the same author could not have written the Fourth Gospel and the Apocalypse.

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In Vol. XV (1943), p. 16, C. F. Burney was quoted as asserting that "the case against identity of authorship of the Gospel and Apocalypse can certainly not be maintained upon the ground

⁸ See articles in *The Evangelical Quarterly*, iv (1932), pp. 24ff. by D. M. McIntyre; x (1938), pp. 113ff. and xiv (1942), pp. 81ff. by E. K. Simpson; xv (1943), pp. 169ff. by H. P. V. Nunn. The recent attempt by J. N. Sanders in *The Fourth Gospel in the Early Church* (Cambridge, 1943) to find an Alexandrian origin for the Fourth Gospel, denying any real value to the evidence of Irenaeus, can certainly not be pronounced a success.

of style" (*Aramaic Origin of the Fourth Gospel* [1922], p. 1922).⁹ Neither, it seems, can it be maintained by simply setting the mysticism of the Gospel against the apocalyptic of the Revelation—or, shall we say, the "realised eschatology" of the former against the "futurist eschatology" of the latter—as if the two could not co-exist in the same mind.

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⁹ In his *Documents of the Primitive Church* (1941), pp. 149-144, C. C. Torrey has a chapter on "The Language and Date of the Apocalypse", in which he gives a detailed argument that the Greek of the Apocalypse is a most literal translation of an Aramaic original.