

The Gospel of John

A COMMENTARY

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the author's literary remains on the basis of separate manuscript pages, left without order. In any case the present form of our Gospel is due to the work of a redactor.

With this observation the second problem emerges: Are we to attribute not only the present order but also particular sections of the Gospel to the hand of the redactor? The question must be answered in the affirmative. Precisely such a redaction of John's Gospel is convincingly demonstrated by ch. 21; for the original Gospel concluded with 20.30.f, and it was subsequently extended by ch. 21, which exhibits in its details many differences from chs. 1-20, as the exposition will show.

If ch. 21 betrays the redactional influence, the further question must be raised whether other parts of the Gospel are due to the redactor. This question also must be answered in the affirmative. An example is the passages that relate to the Lord's Supper and baptism, i.e. 6.51b-58 and 19.34b-35. Sentences which express an apocalyptic expectation of the future are also due to the redactor, i.e. 5.28f.; 6.39, 40, 44; (12.48). And lastly, individual explanatory glosses that clearly break into the context should be viewed as editorial, e.g. 3.24; 4.2; 18.9, 32.

The exposition will go into all these passages more fully. The tendency of the redaction referred to shows features that heighten ecclesiastical interests. Since the redaction additions are current in all manuscripts, it may be assumed that the redactor and the editor of the Gospel, to whom we owe its present order, are identical.

6. *Authorship, Time and Place of Composition*

We are not in a position to say anything definite about the author or about the redactor. The Gospel does not name either person, and the superscription of the Gospel comes from a later time. From 21.24f. (cp. 19.35) we gather that the redactor holds the author to be an eye-witness of the life of Jesus. He identifies him with the enigmatic figure of the Beloved Disciple, mentioned in 13.23, 19.26f., 20.2-10 (hardly in 18.15f.), and in the redactional appendix 21. 20-23 it is assumed that the disciple has died. But the Gospel itself does not mention this identification (see on 13.30).

Later the Beloved Disciple was equated with John, the son of Zebedee and brother of James, a member of the circle of the Twelve, and it was claimed that he died in advanced age in Ephesus. The first clear testimony to this tradition is offered by Irenaeus III, 1.2. But John the son of Zebedee must have been killed by the Jews very early, as Mk. 10.39 shows, and as is indicated by several witnesses of the ancient Church. Moreover the Gospel itself makes no claim to have been written by an eye-witness. And in no way does it give occasion to presume that

an eye-witness lies behind it, rather it completely contradicts such an assumption.

Now the much discussed testimony of Papias (in Eusebius, H.E.III, 39.3f.) refers not only to John the son of Zebedee but also to the Presbyter John, who may have written the Book of Revelation. Probably Irenaeus and the whole later tradition confused the Ephesian Presbyter with the son of Zebedee of the same name. Prior to Irenaeus, then, the Presbyter John could have been regarded as the author of the Fourth Gospel, and possibly this was already the view of the redactor of the Gospel. But this assumption, of course, is quite uncertain, and it is no longer possible to demonstrate the correctness of such an opinion. The author remains unknown to us.

Before Irenaeus there is no certain attestation for the use of John's Gospel by any author belonging to the Church; for it is improbable that Papias and Justin knew it, and without question Ignatius did not make use of it. Admittedly in the papyrus P. 52 we possess a testimony to the fact that our Gospel was known in Egypt in the first half of the second century. We cannot therefore put the composition and redaction beyond about 120 A.D., and we should define the period for the composition and redactional edition of the Gospel as about 80-120 A.D.—the processes could have been relatively distant from one another.

The Semitic style of the author and the relationship of the Gospel to the Gnostic revelation discourses, the letters of Ignatius of Antioch and the Odes of Solomon, strongly supports the supposition that the author of the Fourth Gospel originated from the area of Syria. Above all it must be said that nothing in the Gospel points to its origin in Egypt or Asia Minor.