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Hugo Odeberg
University of Lund, Sweden

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By Professor Hugo Odeberg

Professor Hugo Odeberg, D. D., Ph. D., who made the present article available to our journal, is professor of New Testament interpretation at the University of Lund, Sweden. He is widely known as the author of *The Fourth Gospel* (Uppsala och Stockholm, 1929), as chief consultant of *Erevna*, a Swedish theological journal interested in conservative Biblical studies, and as contributor to other theological journals. He is a recognized authority on Rabbinical literature. The present article was translated from Swedish into English by Miss J. Guinness and edited by P. M. B.

Some New Testament books contain clear statements as to who wrote them. Oftentimes the author's name is mentioned at the beginning of the book. This is natural when it is an Epistle, for it is usual to specify in a letter both by whom it is written, and to whom it is sent. Most New Testament Epistles begin with the name of the sender and also mention the name or names of those to whom the Letter is addressed. The Epistle to the Galatians, for instance, opens with the author's name: "Paul, an Apostle . . . to the churches of Galatia." The writer not only gives his name, but also adds a personal attribute which proves his identity. The first Epistle of Peter, too, begins: "Peter, an Apostle of Jesus Christ, to the elect who are sojourners in the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia." The Epistle of Jude begins: "Judas, a servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to them that are called." Other New Testament books, besides the Epistles, also contain in instances definite information regarding their authorship. Revelation, for example, states unmistakably and explicitly that its author is the John who was once banished to the Isle of Patmos. "I John, your brother and partaker with you in the tribulation and kingdom and patience which are in Jesus, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus" (Rev. 1:9).

But there are other New Testament writings, and among them some written in the form of Epistles, which do not reveal their authorship. The Epistle to the Hebrews opens without mentioning either the name of the writer or of those to whom it is sent. The same applies to the First Epistle of John. Of the four Gospels, Matthew and Mark are entirely anonymous. Also the Gospel of Luke does not state the author's name. Yet in its opening sentences the writer speaks in the first person singular, addressing the one to whom his Gospel is dedicated, thus taking it for granted that the writer was personally known to the addressee.

There are, however, other writings which, though they are neither entirely anonymous nor identify the writer by name, yet indicate so clearly who he is that it is impossible to call his identity in question. Among these are the Second and Third Epistles of John and the book which we are about to approach, the Gospel of John. The author of the Second and Third Epistles of John was known to contemporary readers, since the sender is named as ὁ πρεσβύτερος, i. e., "the elder," or "the aged." According to the earliest sources of information, this was a way of naming John, the son of Zebedee. Examining now the Gospel of John, we discover in the last chapter that the writer is "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (21:20, 24).

This disciple, who in the text of the Gospel is stated to be its author, never speaks of himself in the first person singular. He rather reserves the pronoun "I" for the principal person in the Gospel, Jesus Christ. However, in the Epistles of John and in the Book of Revelation, which are written by the same author, he often speaks in the first person singular.

Nevertheless, the writer of the fourth Gospel does refer to himself in the first person plural. That is to say, he includes himself when mentioning others, and he is one of those of whom the Gospel tells in its use of the pronominal third person. The Gospel contributes several passages which help us to identify the disciple "whom Jesus loved."

We find, for instance, the first person plural in John 1:14: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among *us*, and *we* beheld His glory. . . ." The writer here refers to himself expressly as one who had seen Jesus and His works, who had indeed not only

seen, but had "beheld," that is, who had not only grasped that which the outward senses might note, but had seen Him as He really is, in His glory, that is, in His divine majesty. *The author is therefore an eyewitness who has recognized and understood the mystery of the Person of Christ.* This points to a particular disciple, one who had been with the Lord from the beginning and who remained with Him as His disciple. One is reminded of the opening words of the First Epistle of John: "That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we beheld, and our hands handled, concerning the Word of life . . . declare we."

But the writer is mentioned as an eyewitness also in the third person, and this witness is formally declared to be the writer of the Gospel in chapter 19:35: "And he that hath *seen* hath borne *witness,* and his witness is true; and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye also may believe." Our first impression of this statement is that the writer wishes to say that he *knows* that he is speaking the truth, not merely that he knows that he is not lying. Yet he suggests more. *He means that he has seen that of which he testifies so completely that he really knows the truth about it.* Thus one who claims to know that he is speaking truly of Jesus Christ alleges himself to be among those who have been initiated into the deeper mysteries regarding the Person and work of Christ.

In the Gospel story this confidant and eyewitness is expressly called "the disciple whom Jesus loved" for the first time in the chapter which tells of Jesus' last supper with His disciples. It is there said of him: "There was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved" (John 13:23). He had the place nearest to Jesus. Among the chosen disciples who were with their Lord on specially solemn occasions such as this, His last supper with His nearest followers, this disciple is given precedence over the others. His rank has been immortalized by the Fathers of the Church by the epithet they applied to him, ἐπιστήθιος, which corresponds to the expression "bosom friend."

The next mention of this disciple refers to him as standing at the foot of the Cross (John 19:26-27). He is the disciple to whom Jesus committed the care of His own mother, Mary, just before He gave up His spirit.

Again, it was "the disciple whom Jesus loved" and the foremost of the Apostles, Simon Peter, whom Mary Magdalene first told of her discovery that Jesus' grave was empty (John 20:2). Peter and this disciple went together to the grave, and although this disciple reached it first, he waited for Peter to enter before him and then followed him. These references indicate that this disciple was among the chief of the Apostles both during the earthly life of Jesus Christ and afterwards and that only Peter took precedence over him, a prerogative which the beloved disciple spontaneously accorded him.

Now, we know from the Gospel tradition, as we also know from the other three Gospels, that the three most prominent disciples of Jesus were Peter, James, and John. A disciple who was given the special privileges which the beloved disciple of John's Gospel was given must have been one of these three: Peter, James, or John. Now he cannot have been Peter, for Peter, as we have seen, is named in the passage referred to (John 20:2) as well as the beloved disciple. The choice remains, then, between James and John, both sons of Zebedee. Of these James must be excluded as being the author of John's Gospel, since, according to the testimony of the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 12:2), he was murdered by the order of Herod at an early stage in his Apostolic ministry, probably in the year 44 A.D. Now, we know that this Gospel cannot have been written as early as 44 A.D. Therefore only one disciple remains whose rank among his brethren corresponds to the one attributed to the writer of the Gospel, the Apostle John, the son of Zebedee. The Gospel itself, therefore, points to John, the son of Zebedee, as its author.

Having recognized this, one finds other, less prominent details in the Gospel which, in their turn, confirm the assumption that it is the Apostle John who is affirmed to be its author. Such passages as those which in a curious manner omit the mention of John's name, under circumstances which would normally have called for its use, are among these. We find an illustrative example in the record of the calling of the first disciples (John 1:35-51). We are told that first two of John the Baptist's disciples followed Jesus, but with regard to their names it is only stated that *"One of the two* which heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon

Peter's brother" (John 1:40). The name of the other is not given. After this incident, each of the disciples is named: Simon Peter, Philip, Nathanael. There can be no question that the second of the first two disciples spoken of in John 1:40 is John, the son of Zebedee, the author of the Gospel. Thus it is tacitly indicated that the eyewitness, who is the writer of the Gospel, was with the Lord from the very beginning of His ministry, just as it is expressly emphasized, as we have seen, that he was present in the hour of Jesus' death and at the occasion when the grave was seen to be empty. The close relationship between "the beloved disciple" and Peter is confirmed by the Book of Acts, which repeatedly mentions Peter and John in one breath. We read there how "Peter and John were going up to the Temple" (Acts 3:1), how a lame man saw Peter and John about to go into the Temple (3:3), and how he "held Peter and John" (3:11). Again we find that the people "saw the boldness of Peter and John" (4:13), that "Peter and John answered" the Council (4:19), and that the Apostles sent Peter and John to Samaria when they heard that "Samaria had received the Word of God" (8:14). We see, therefore, that the references to "the beloved disciple" in the Gospel of John tally exactly with the picture we are given in the other Gospels and in the Acts if we assume that "the beloved disciple" was John, the son of Zebedeee. There can be no doubt that the Christians who lived at the time when the Gospel was first written well understood to whom the expression "the disciple whom Jesus loved" referred. It referred to John, the son of Zebedee.

What the Early Church Taught About the Author

We are not dependent, however, only on the internal evidence and the suggestions of the Gospel itself regarding its author's identity; there are also important data outside the Gospel which must be examined. The most significant source of information outside the Gospel itself with reference to its origin is the knowledge preserved by the Church. This knowledge is called tradition.

The faithful preservation of tradition is not a characteristic only of the primitive Church. In the history of almost every people, in widely separated areas, and at all periods, we find that there has been the effort to preserve traditions, and the capacity to do so.

Every people having a treasury of knowledge which it values and venerates, strives to preserve that treasury by means of tradition. This is most emphatically true when the treasure is looked upon as sacred. The ability faithfully to preserve tradition has been, and still is, peculiarly prominent among oriental peoples, although, as we have said, it is probably not entirely absent from any nation. Among the Eastern nations which have most carefully preserved their traditions, the foremost are the Jews, the Hindus, and the Chinese. Of these the Jews come first.

The primitive Christian Church, which in its early stages consisted largely of Jewish converts, possessed this capacity both to secure and to preserve tradition. But what do we mean by a genuine tradition? The question is not so irrelevant as it at first appears to be, for the word is sometimes used to connote things which cannot be called genuine tradition.

If a tradition is to be accepted as genuine, it must, first of all, be something handed down and carried forward with unchanged content and, essentially, in an unchanged form from one person to another, from one generation to another, and from one group to another. It must be a series, a chain, in which each link is fastened to the next. This is the first condition.

The second condition of a genuine tradition is that the first link in this chain of tradition must reach back to the place and time from which the content of the tradition derives, so that its foundation rests on facts. A tradition about an event must, in order to be genuine, have as its first link its "tradent," as it is called, that is, one or more persons who themselves witnessed the event. A tradition which contains someone's saying or doctrine must have as its first tradent a person or group of people who actually heard the utterance and carefully remembered its substance and even its form.

Hence we see that if a tradition is to be accounted genuine, it must derive from the original source and have been handed down in an unbroken chain, unchanged in any case, as to its content.

That it is important to keep these simple, obvious, and elementary principles in mind may easily be demonstrated from a few examples which lie well within the compass of the task we have set ourselves: the effort to determine the authorship of the fourth Gospel.

The narratives in the fourth Gospel, for instance, have sometimes been spoken of as being traditional. They are indeed narratives of what Jesus did and said or of what happened to Him. If these narratives are to be regarded traditional, or if we are to speak of tradition in them or behind them, we must assume two things: first, that what is told here really comes to us from an eyewitness and one who himself heard what is told; and, secondly, that the one who recorded it, that is to say, the author or compiler of the Gospel, is *not* himself that eyewitness, but one who has received the narrative indirectly or directly from an eyewitness. If we believe that the one who tells any event of the Gospel of John was himself an eyewitness, then his story is not a tradition. Nor is it a tradition if the Evangelist himself had adapted a typical Gospel story or has expounded a theological doctrine in order to meet the problems and needs of a later generation.

Another significant example may be given of beliefs held regarding the time and place of composition of the fourth Gospel. It is evident that one may speak not only of the traditions of the Gospel, that is, traditional records of the words and works of Jesus which are found in the Gospel text itself, but also, for instance, of traditions *about* the Gospel, traditions regarding its authorship, its date, the place where it was written, etc. Properly speaking, however, the word *tradition* in this connection can only be applied to such statements touching these questions which go back to the actual time and place of the writing of the Gospel and which have been preserved as a direct testimony regarding them. If some outstanding author, one of the fourth-century Fathers, for instance, on the ground of his researches, his study of the Bible, and of comparisons between the historical knowledge he had acquired and the statements of the Gospel itself, *draws* conclusions with regard to the authorship and date of the Gospel, and if afterwards these conclusions are repeated by later writers who quote him, this can never constitute a genuine tradition. Regardless of the number of years this Father's conclusions may be repeated and handed on, they can never become a tradition in the real and correct sense of the word, since they do not go back to the time of the origin of the Gospel. They remain the private conclusions of one of the Church Fathers. Now one often meets the claim in exegetical literature

that a statement referring to the origin of the Gospels is a tradition which may be found in the works of such and such a one of the Fathers. In such cases the word tradition is used in a misleading way. It is, therefore, of great importance to distinguish between a genuine tradition and the private opinions or conclusions of a Church Father or, indeed, of any learned man or of any individual group.

A genuine tradition must be conceded the utmost significance. When there is a chain of tradition, there is a strong guarantee for the truth and validity of its content. It is also a rule, practically without exception, that wherever there is an unbroken chain of tradition, the content of the tradition is preserved from generation to generation with the minutest accuracy. This fact has been definitely proved by experience in a variety of ways. Over and over again historical and archaeological discoveries have proved the accuracy of a tradition which had been subject to doubt owing to its apparent incredibility or to other arguments and conclusions. It has been proved that it is possible to preserve the content and even the form of a tradition unchanged through thousands of years. That which has been handed down by word of mouth has often shown itself to be better protected from corruption than that which has been committed to writing and print. Copies and reprints always leave room for clerical and printers' errors, that is, for mistakes and changes.

We must call attention to another very simple and somewhat obvious thing because it is frequently overlooked. A tradition may consist of the content only, or of both content and form. Or, to use a technical term, there are traditions with a fixed content only, and traditions with both a fixed content and a fixed form. The latter are much more common than the former. Traditions which are only fixed as to content, not as to form, usually consist of only a few facts. A tradition which is made up of a large number of related facts is usually wholly or relatively fixed as to its form and, if it was not fixed from the first, became so in course of time.

With regard to the authorship of the Gospel of John, its date, and the place where it was written, there is an unbroken tradition which admits of only one construction. But this tradition is fixed in its content, not in its form. This, however, is, as we have just

proved, quite natural. The tradition, although it is clear and cannot admit of more than one interpretation, contains only three plain, simple facts: (1) The author of the Gospel is John, the son of Zebedee; (2) the Gospel was written in Asia Minor; (3) the Gospel was published by John while he was living at Ephesus and had reached an advanced age.

The tradition is chiefly found in the writings of the early Fathers. The most important reference to it is to be found in Irenaeus (142—202 A.D.), who was Bishop of Lyons about 178 A.D. Irenaeus' statement about these facts is in a clear and well-connected chain of tradition: The Apostle John — Bishop Polycarp of Smyrna — Bishop Irenaeus of Lyons. Bishop Polycarp of Smyrna was the personal disciple of the Apostle John, and Irenaeus the personal disciple of Polycarp, and in each case their period of discipleship was in their youth. According to the quotation in Eusebius' *History* (5:8:4), Irenaeus says: "John the disciple of the Lord, who leaned on the Lord's bosom, published the Gospel himself while he was living at Ephesus in the province of Asia." Whenever Irenaeus says, "The Lord's disciple," he names John the son of Zebedee.

In a fragment of a list of the writings which were regarded sacred in the churches at the end of the first century, a fragment which has been named after its discoverer and is called Muratori's Fragment, Luke is named as the third Gospel and John as the fourth. The section of the list which mentioned the first and second Gospels is missing. The compiler of this list, who was probably Bishop Hippolytus (about 165—234 A.D.), says about John's Gospel:

"As the fourth Gospel (we have) that by John, one of the disciples. Because his disciples and bishops (continually) urged him (to make his Gospel public), he said to them: 'Fast with me for three days from today, and let us then tell one another what has been revealed to each one of us.' It was then revealed to Andrew, one of the Apostles, that John should tell all in his name and the others should examine his work. It makes no difference therefore to the faith of believers that the Gospels begin in different ways, because everything regarding (the Lord's) birth, suffering, resurrection, converse with His disciples, or His two advents —

the first in lowliness (and) despised, which has already come to pass, (and) the second in royal power and glory, which is yet to be — because all this in each of them is set forth by the same guiding Spirit. Little wonder, then, that John so definitely states all this in his Epistles, and says of himself: 'That which our eyes have seen and our ears have heard and which our hands have handled write we unto you.' In this way he declares himself not only to be an eyewitness, but also one who has heard and recorded all the Lord's (Christ's) miracles."

There is no reason to doubt that the first part of this statement is something which the writer of the document quotes as having been communicated to him. It is not, however, expressly stated that it is in every detail a tradition, that is, a communication that goes back to the original source. The place of publication of the Gospel, which is taken for granted, and presumably regarded as so obvious that it did not require specific mention, is Asia Minor; for it was there the Apostle John had his bishops. While John was in Ephesus, he was quite naturally a spiritual father and authority for the bishops of the neighboring cities, a circumstance which is also inferred, as we shall show later, in the Book of Revelation, since we read there the letters which John sent to the seven churches of Asia Minor.

Clement of Alexandria in Egypt († A. D. 215) makes the following statement, telling us expressly that it is a tradition: "In consideration of the fact that what had been revealed in the (other) Gospels was (so to speak) the bodily form (of the Gospel), John, as the last (of the Gospel authors) wrote a spiritual Gospel, being urged thereto by men of repute and divinely led by the Spirit." Clement of Alexandria tells, moreover, in another connection, that John appointed bishops when he returned to Ephesus after his banishment to the Isle of Patmos. We observe that Clement here makes the same statement as the Muratori Fragment, namely, that the Gospel was published at the urgent request of others.

This statement by Clement contains two expressions which demand a fuller explanation, "The bodily form of the Gospel" and "a spiritual Gospel." The word "bodily" here means simply the rudiments, the first things which were taught to those who had not yet become Christians, and which were to them the basic el-

ements of their Christian faith. The "spiritual," on the other hand, was what Paul in his First Epistle to the Corinthians also calls "spiritual," or "wisdom," and of which he says, "We speak wisdom among the perfect" (1 Cor. 2:6). The fundamental facts themselves around which the explanation was built in the elementary teaching, that is, in the "bodily form," were the same as in the more advanced teaching, the "spiritual" Gospel. The central themes were in both cases Christ's work of salvation, His death and resurrection. The difference consisted in the deeper penetration into these facts of salvation, or foundation facts, which was imparted in the "spiritual" Gospel. This difference was caused by the fact that the readers or listeners had arrived at different levels of maturity. It is natural to present a body of doctrine to listeners or readers who are mature, experienced, and spiritually advanced in a way different from that which we employ when instructing those who as yet have no spiritual experience or only a very elementary one. This is true in all areas of learning.

The first three Gospels correspond manifestly to what has been called missionary teaching, that is to say, elementary teaching. But the Gospel of John, according to tradition, represents a deeper understanding of revealed truth. Yet the subject matter is in each case the same: Christ's work of salvation. It is not, therefore, entirely correct to represent John's Gospel as being, in relation to the first three, a spiritual Gospel and the others as only bodily Gospels if this implies that the first three treat of the externals of the work and teaching of Christ and John's more of the inner side. The first three are not called "bodily" Gospels to suggest that they do not deal with the central truths of the work of Christ or that they only regard His work from the outward point of view. The rudimentary teaching truly had as its content the most central theme of the Gospel: Jesus Christ and Him Crucified, as Paul puts it in First Corinthians (2:2). On the other hand, it is true that a "spiritual," "pneumatic" Gospel penetrates more deeply into this central theme and points out the deeper significance of all that Jesus did and said.

The rest of the early Fathers who speak of the origin of the Gospel of John repeat the details concerning authorship, date, and place of writing which have been mentioned in the statements

already quoted, in so far as they make reference to tradition. There is, as we have observed and emphasized already, a great difference between referring to tradition and making a statement on the ground of one's own conclusions. The isolated statements which may be found in the writings of the Syrian Father Ephraim (Efrem) must be counted among the latter. He says at the end of his commentary on the Gospel harmony, the *Diatessaron:* "John wrote it (the Gospel) in Greek at Antioch, for he stayed in that country until the time of the Emperor Trajan (98 A. D.)." This is not recorded from a tradition. It is comparatively easy to reconstruct the deduction which led Ephraim to this conclusion. He knew that Bishop Ignatius of Antioch was a disciple of the Apostle John, and draws the conclusion from this fact that John must have had his settled ministry in Antioch. To the Syrian Father, it was natural to regard the Capital of Syria, Antioch, as a central see from which John's sojournings in Asia Minor might be looked upon as temporary excursions. Antioch lay approximately halfway between the two places where John would appear chiefly to have lived, Jerusalem (in his early period) and Ephesus (during the later period of his life).

The Authenticity of the Gospel

The term *authenticity* denotes the fact that a given book really was written by the one who is said to be its author either in the writing itself or in a tradition regarding it. The question whether the Gospel of John may be regarded as authentic, is, then, a question whether the Apostle John, the son of Zebedee, was or was not its author. That he was the author the Gospel itself implies, as we have seen, and tradition expressly states.

If we call in question the authenticity of John's Gospel, a few fundamental things must be pointed out.

First, we must recall that the early Christian Church tested most thoroughly the authenticity of all writings which laid claim to be of Apostolic origin. It must not be imagined that credulity carried any weight in this matter. One of the first conditions a book had to meet to be regarded as a genuine Christian Scripture was that it was in general use in the churches, and that it was used for public reading in the services. The early Christian Church was, indeed,

so careful in this respect that some writings which were certainly of Apostolic origin were not regarded as genuine Christian Scripture. We know, for example, that the Apostle Paul wrote at least one Letter to the church in Corinth which was not included among the authentic Scriptures, simply because it was not generally used throughout the whole Church. And we have every reason to suppose that other Letters by Paul were not included. The Church knew that she was under the guidance of the living Lord, Christ, and the Scriptures which had been generally accepted in all the churches had, because of this very circumstance, the sanction, so to speak, of the Lord Himself. And the usage of certain Christian Scriptures in the Church evidently went back to the source itself, so that the fact of usage became a significant point in the tradition.

Secondly, the fact that there is a tradition with regard to the origin and authorship of any writing is a very important point. Tradition must, as we have already shown, be regarded as a strong credential, and we must have peculiarly emphatic reasons for rejecting it. Anyone who calls the traditional point of view in question must give proof of his position. Any reasons which disregard the statements of a tradition must be supported by documentary evidence, that is to say, there must be valid proofs taken from writings or from historical discoveries to which unquestionable dates can be affixed. If there were, for example, a writing dating from the beginning of the second century, the genuineness of which was beyond question, and which showed that the Gospel of John had another author, or which proved that the Gospel was not written until the second century, a certain doubt might arise regarding the authenticity of this Gospel. But there are *no documents whatever* and *no historical discoveries* which in any way contradict the tradition that the Gospel of John was published by the Apostle John during the latter part of his ministry, while he was residing at Ephesus.

No objections to established authenticity may be seriously entertained if these objections result only from personal and private conjectures as to what is reasonable or possible. Experience has proved such conjectures so utterly worthless that their day should by now be past among those who claim to be seriously interested

in scholarship. Data which were said to be impossible or improbable on the ground of personal views or conclusions — that is, without documentary evidence — have often proved to be the only possibility or probability when further knowledge came to light through discovery or research. Among many examples of this nature we quote one: From the earliest times St. Paul's Epistle to Philemon was believed to have been written from Rome to Philemon in Colossae in Asia Minor. The Epistle tells of a runaway slave, Onesimus, who was at the same place where Paul was. It was argued that it was impossible, or highly improbable, that a slave who ran away from his master in Asia Minor should have gone as far as Rome and, further, that he should have gone to the capital, where he would run a greater risk than anywhere else of being apprehended by the Roman instrument of justice, which was concentrated in Rome. This is a typical argument based upon what is taken for granted, that is, upon what is thought to be reasonable. But what is here thought "reasonable" is grounded, as it is so often in other connections, upon ignorance. In reality it has been found by those who have taken the trouble to inform themselves of the facts of the case that runaway slaves of that period chose to flee to Rome, where they had the surest prospect of being able to evade their masters' search and so escape being caught and sent back.

Another example of reasoning which is founded on ignorance, and which touches the Gospel of John directly, is the following: It is said that the Apostle John was a fisherman from Galilee. How could an ignorant, uncouth fisherman from obscure Galilee — so runs the objection — have written such beautiful Greek language and conceived so artistic a work as the Gospel of John? This argument can be defended only as long as one is entirely ignorant of the conditions of the time and circumstances here in question. Even a very little general reading and historical knowledge make this objection ridiculous. Even if the particular qualifications which came into being through the writer's apprehension by Christ are entirely ignored, one need only point, for example, to the number of remarkably learned rabbis in those days who were recruited from the artisan class. If one is acquainted, for instance, with the well-known story of Rabbi Ahiba, who until his fortieth

year was an entirely unlearned tiller of the soil and in a far lower social position than the Apostle John, but who at that age began to study and became a most learned and influential rabbinical scholar, then such an objection as the one mentioned above can only provoke a smile of compassion. We have, moreover, many examples from modern times which illustrate how a gripping experience can educate a man and give him knowledge and capacity far beyond that which may be acquired through regular schooling and academic training. But such objections often appear to be more enlightening than the reasons that rest on real facts. This is quite natural in cases when the reader is as ignorant of the matter as the person who propounds his objection. It is reasonable and probable to him who puts forward his opinion; and it is just as reasonable and probable to him who reads what the first has written. When the informed person tells the ignorant person the real facts of the case, he carries him beyond the sphere of experience, and doubt easily arises in the latter's mind, and he says: This is impossible and incredible. In brief, the argument built on the premise that John because he was a fisherman was therefore ignorant is an example of reasoning which grows out of lack of knowledge. It is not an objection which is worthy of being met in serious debate.

Doubts regarding, or denial of, the authenticity of the Gospel of John have found expression in only two limited periods in the eighteen hundred years in which the Gospel has been in existence. The first of these two periods was very brief. It occurred at the close of the second century and in a limited circle. A small group in Asia Minor denied the genuineness of the fourth Gospel and won over a certain Gaius of Rome to its point of view. The group is named by one of the Church Fathers, Epiphanius, in a list of heresies and false doctrines which he compiled and described. The group referred to is the fifty-first of the heresies which he enumerates, and Epiphanius gave them, intentionally, a name with a double meaning: *Alogi.* By applying to them this name, which means literally those who are without *Logos,* Epiphanius meant to emphasize the point that they deny the Gospel which speaks of the Word, the *Logos,* which was in the beginning with God and was God, that is, the Gospel of John. But *Alogi* also means "without reason," or "foolish" (cf. *illogical*).

It was not because of historical research that these people had reached the conclusion that John was not the writer of the fourth Gospel, much less because they had a tradition to support their views. Their rejection of the Gospel was the result of a theological interest. They were the bitter opponents of a sectarian movement, called Montanism, which had spread widely at that time and which used the Gospel of John to support the belief held by its members that the Spirit which Jesus had promised, the Paraclete, was actively at work among them. In order to deprive the Montanists of the support of the Gospel of John, the so-called *Alogi* maintained that it was not John, but Cerinthus, whom John opposed, who was the author of the Gospel.

The second time the authenticity of the Gospel was seriously questioned was at a much later date. This second period began at the close of the eighteenth century and has lasted to our own day. For all practical purposes it has ended in 1935, as we shall show immediately. But because there still are many New Testament scholars who have been accustomed since their student days to regard the fourth Gospel as non-Johannine and non-Apostolic, we still find in textbooks and even in scientific theological works the outworn doubts regarding the authenticity of this Gospel.

It was Evanson, an Englishman, who in 1792 stated his doubts concerning the Apostolic origin of the fourth Gospel. In that year Evanson published a work entitled *The Dissonance of the Four Generally Received Evangelists.* He supported his argument, as the title of the book implies, by recourse to the alleged contradictions and differences between the first three Gospels and the fourth. He maintained that an Apostle and eyewitness could not have written the Gospel, but that it must have been some philosopher of the Platonic school of the second century. Evanson was followed by other English and German theologians. The work which may be regarded as the real beginning of the attack on the fourth Gospel, which reached its climax in the nineteenth century, was the German Superintendent Bretschneider's thesis in Latin: *Probabilia de evangelii et epistolarum Johannis apostoli indole et origine* (Probabilities concerning the characteristics and origin of the Gospel and the Epistles of the Apostle John), which he, as the title says, "modestly submits to the judgment of the learned"

(eruditorum judiciis modeste). He asserted, moreover, that the Gospel was not written by John, but by a converted Gentile, who probably came from Alexandria in Egypt and lived in the first half of the second century. He took his Alexandrian origin for granted because he thought that the author of the Gospel must have been schooled in Alexandrian philosophy. Bretschneider indeed confessed in later years that his position was untenable. His book became typical, however, of a negative attitude toward the Gospel, because his principal objection was directed against the Christology of John's Gospel, which, he maintained, proved the Gospel to be a post-Apostolic writing.

The zenith of attack on the authenticity of the Gospel of John was reached by the theories which were put forward by that giant in so-called critical exegesis, Ferdinand Christian Baur, professor at Tuebingen and leader of the theological persuasion known as the Tuebingen School. Baur published his first critical remarks in 1844 in Zeller's *Theological Yearbook* and later, in 1847, in *Critical Studies in the Canonical Gospels.*

Although Baur's whole theory has been proved false, he is the past master among all modern critics in the ability of logical and cogent demonstration. The reason that his presentation is false is that he built his whole fabric on a shaky basis. His foundation was his reconstruction of early Christianity. Baur accepted the dialectic philosophy of the German philosopher Hegel and reconstructed church history in accordance with Hegel's dialectic: thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. He believed this dialectic to be the ruling principle in historical development.

In Christianity and the growth of the Christian Church the thesis, according to Baur, is a Jewish-Christian point of view; the antithesis is the reaction against everything Jewish, the direct opposition of Christianity to Judaism. This antithesis, so Baur believed, was initiated and supported by the ministry and theology of the Apostle Paul. The synthesis came later in the settling of the strife which had arisen. In Baur's historical reconstruction there is no room for the Gospel of John before the latter half of the second century, and consequently he places the origin of the Gospel about A.D. 170. The Gospel which is presented as an account of the life and work of Christ is therefore for Baur, in

reality, a paraphrase and reinterpretation of the teaching of Christ and a doctrine about Him adapted to the needs of a later time. It does not reflect the period which was contemporary with Jesus, but its own period with its opinions and problems.

It may, with good reason, be said that all subsequent criticisms of the fourth Gospel are in reality only modifications of Baur's theories, modifications which have most often been caused by the unreasonableness of placing the origin of the Gospel too far forward in time. In general, however, critics have held to Baur's fundamental theory, that the Gospel does not reflect the real circumstances and events of the period which it professes to portray, but the theology and the demands of a later time.

Naturally enough, throughout the whole period in which the Gospel has been so freely criticized there have always been some students who defended the genuine character of John's Gospel and who therefore looked for historical proofs and other arguments which would refute the critics and justify the traditional position. These efforts had a positive value: the necessity of refuting the critical position brought to light new and valuable material. But these efforts also had a negative aspect: conservative theologians often became the victims of those whom they were seeking to refute, and so it happened that the critical approach dominated also the work of those who were opposed to negative criticism.

Finally, efforts at reconciliation were made. Some tried to find good points on both sides and to discover theories which would in a measure justify both interpretations. In this category we must place the suggestion which claimed that the "core" of the Gospel is historical, although it obviously reflects the theology of a later period. Here we must mention also the whimsical notion that the Gospel was not written by the Apostle John, but by one who was named John and who stood in some relation to the Apostle, a so-called "Presbyter" John of Ephesus. In the same category are the attempts to divide the Gospel into various "sources," the so-called "divided-source" hypothesis, according to which the Gospel as we now have it came into existence in different stages: an ancient, possibly historical record, a later theological revision, and a final carefully edited composition.

Both the negative criticism and the attempts at reconciliation

were, however, dependent on one essential presupposition: that the Gospel did not come into existence before the end of the second century. Behind this lay the theological concern to be able to support a theory of historical development in which there was no place for a Gospel which had an Apostle and an intimate eyewitness as its author. All these attempts are futile if it can be proved that the Gospel must have been written in the first century when some of the first eyewitnesses were still alive. For it was clear, even to the logical critics, perhaps especially to them, that a Gospel claiming to be the testimony of an eyewitness who was so personally acquainted with Jesus and His work as the disciple whom Jesus loved, could not have come into being during that disciple's lifetime and not be written by him.

That negative criticism could command such wide attention as it did was due to the fact that it was not the fruit of pure research, but resulted from a concern which was interwoven with the widely accepted opinions of contemporary thinkers. It seemed unreasonable and undesirable that one of Jesus Christ's Apostles should have expressed such lofty thoughts as those found in the Gospel of John. The statement that the Gospel was not by John, but came from another period was no more than wishful thinking. Typical examples of such thinking are easy to find. Weizsaecker, for instance, says in his book on the Apostolic Era *(Apostolisches Zeitalter):* "It is in no wise thinkable that any of the Apostles could unite his belief in Christ with the belief that Christ was that Word which was in the beginning with God and was God." In his *Handcommentar,* Holtzmann maintains that it is impossible to believe that Christ, as He does in the Gospel of John, would speak of His divine and His human nature. Other critics bluntly declared that Jesus could not possibly have been preexistent as God. No one who had actually seen and heard Jesus and even been His intimate friend could possibly, so they reasoned, have arrived at the conclusion that the Jesus whom he had seen with his own eyes was the Christ, the Son of God. The Gospel of John, therefore, must have been written by some other than an eyewitness and an Apostle, and, besides, it must have originated, at the earliest, in the second century when every firsthand recollection of Jesus had died out.

The fact that such reasoning was considered enlightening and clear did not depend on its intrinsic value, but rather upon its correspondence with views of life then prevalent. It is obvious that, given other premises, it is possible to argue in the opposite direction, and to do so with greater cogency. It is possible to say: It is unbelievable that anyone could conceive the idea of attributing to a man whom he had never seen, but only heard of, divine attributes or so unique a position as the one Jesus holds in the Gospels. The conception of Jesus which we find in the Gospels cannot reasonably be explained in any other way than that it is derived from men who had lived under the immediate influence of an overwhelming personality. What is said of Jesus in the Gospel of John is inexplicable if we are to regard it as an imaginative creation. We can account for it only on the assumption that it comes from one who, as the declared author claims to do, speaks of that which he himself has heard, which his own eyes have seen and beheld, and which he has handled with his hands. Only one who was present himself and who therefore cannot doubt the testimony of his own eyes and ears, and of years of personal experience, can tell such unique things about another as the Gospel of John does about Jesus. Such an argument is on rational grounds at least as valid as its opposite.

Papyrus Discoveries Which Throw Light on the Date of the Gospel

Students who recognized the groundless nature of the criticism against the Gospel of John naturally endeavored to check and refute each point of the arguments that had been brought forward against the genuineness of the Gospel. It will be readily understood that the critics did not content themselves with propounding their chief argument, the decisive reason for rejecting the genuineness of the Gospel, but they looked for proofs independent of the bias which lay behind the main argument. Secondary arguments of this kind were, for instance, that John's Gospel differs from the other three Gospels in its record of the life and words of Jesus and that John's Gospel is colored by Hellenism and is not Palestinian. These secondary arguments, however, were so loosely conceived that they were exceedingly easy to refute by means of

study and research into the contemporary literature and history of the early Christian period. They all proved to be without evidence if it was not first assumed that the Gospel was not written until late in the second century. Yet this was the fact which needed to be demonstrated, for the entire argument which denies the Apostolic origin of the Gospel hung upon it.

This was true, for instance, with regard to the statement that the Gospel was thoroughly permeated by Hellenistic thought and must therefore have been written in a period when the Christian Church was under Hellenistic influences. It was possible to maintain the probability of such a statement only as long as the student limited his search for parallel examples and proofs to Greek literature which threw light upon conditions prevailing in the second century.

If the student took the trouble to study the extensive Jewish literature, he soon found that far from being exclusively familiar with Hellenistic thought, the writer of the Gospel of John was at least equally familiar with Palestinian conditions and Jewish terminology. It is, in fact, possible to make discoveries in Jewish and Samaritan literature and in Oriental literature generally which throw light on John's Gospel and which are equally rewarding and to the point. This could be refuted by no other argument than that John's Gospel was, after all, a production of the second century, which no longer had any connection with the Palestinian tradition. It was clear, then, that the only real support for the denial of the genuineness of the Gospel was the statement that the Gospel originated in the second century. If it could be demonstrated that the date of the origin of John's Gospel could not be placed so late as A.D. 120 or thereafter, the whole fabric of criticism was completely shattered.

A definite proof of this nature came to light in 1935 with the discovery of a fragment of a transcription of the Gospel of John found among the papyri in the John Ryland's Library in Manchester. It had been brought there from Egypt.

Little by little an almost numberless quantity of different kinds of papyrus dating from different centuries has been discovered in the sands of Egypt. The study of these papyri has become a science of its own, and the students of this science have succeeded

in finding exact methods by means of which they can determine the date and nature of each papyrus. Since there is such a vast quantity of material to compare and classify, it has become possible to determine the date of a papyrus by its appearance (the texture and the construction of the papyrus sheet), the shape of the writing, the letters, abbreviations, etc. Theoretically, therefore, it is possible to determine the date of a papyrus to within a decade by its external character, without any reference to its content.

The contents of these papyri vary. There are business letters, letters from moneylenders requesting payment, tailors' bills, and transcriptions of books and pamphlets which belonged to some private library or to the archives of a society. We also find among these papyri fragments of the writings of Greek philosophers and historians and of religious writings and classical poems. It is not surprising that among these papyri, fragments of copies of Christian writings have been found, and among them fragments of copies of Old Testament and New Testament books. These transcriptions date from different centuries, of course, as the papyri in general do.

The oldest fragment of a copy of a New Testament Scripture which has so far been discovered is the fragment of the Gospel of John found in 1935. This fragment was in a group of papyrus which had been classified under the nineties of the first century A. D., and could not be placed later than the very beginning of the second century. But let us remember that this papyrus is only a *copy*. This proves that the Gospel of John was known and that copies of it had been spread as far as Egypt by about A. D. 100. Clearly then, the original, the Gospel of John itself, must have been in existence before any copies of it could be made. All theories about the Gospel which rest on the assumption that the Gospel originally dates from some decade in the second century, long after the death of the Apostle John, have therefore become entirely unhistorical.

Quite obviously, then, the basis for a historical view of the Gospel are the statements of the Gospel itself and the testimony of tradition with regard to its authorship and the date of its origin. This point of departure claims that the author was an eyewitness; and among all the eyewitnesses he was an Apostle; and among the

Apostles he was the Apostle John, the son of Zebedee. Working from this basis, moreover, we find the least difficulty in understanding how the Gospel could come into existence and possess its own peculiar character.

The Theory of the "Presbyter" John

This theory belongs into the same category as the above-named theories which all take for granted that the Gospel of John came into existence after the death of the Apostle John, during the second century. The justification of the theory, moreover, stands and falls with the supposition that the Gospel was written toward the middle or close of the second century, for only if the Gospel came into existence after the death of the Apostle John, is there any cause to look for another John who might have been its author. The theory of a "Presbyter" John as author is related to the effort to explain and defend the fact that the Gospel had been issued in John's name, especially in the name of a John of Ephesus.

This theory is so vaguely grounded that it is mentioned only as a classic example of the unsatisfactory or, in reality, non-existent foundations which have been used to support a theory by those who had to defend a theological concern.

First of all, we must point out that nowhere in literature do we find any reference to a "Presbyter" John who was said to have written the Gospel until this theory was brought forward in the last century. None of the Fathers or other writers in the whole history of the Church have mentioned or even hinted at such a thing.

Dionysius of Alexandria put forward his guess, about A. D. 250, that the Book of Revelation was written by another John than the Apostle John. Dionysius noted that Revelation was written in a style different from the Gospel of John, and having been trained in philosophical thought and expressions, he had little understanding of the symbolism of Revelation. It was therefore his theological concern to attribute that book to another author. Since he was altogether persuaded that the Gospel of John had been written by the Apostle John, he supposed that Revelation must have been written by another John. But he says explicitly that this is only a guess. He quotes no sources which say that Revelation was by another John, nor did he have any authority for this state-

ment that there had lived another John of such prominence that his authority was sufficient to authenticate a canonical Scripture. His conclusion that there was another John was a guess which he founded on the fact that at Ephesus there were two memorials bearing the name John. Dionysius does not mention a "Presbyter" John.

Eusebius (A. D. 325), who also takes it for granted that the fourth Gospel was written by the Apostle John, quotes Dionysius of Alexandria and also suggests that Revelation might have been written by another John. The ground of his guess is a quotation from Bishop Papias of Hierapolis, who, according to Eusebius' supposition, had known both the Apostle John and another John. The title "Presbyter" John derives, falsely, from this quotation. We see therefore that Eusebius had no reliable authority on which to ground his supposition. He builds on his own conclusions.

Now, we must observe that Papias in the passage which Eusebius quotes, and which we have only in his quotation, cannot with any certainty be said to mention two distinct Johns. Furthermore, it should be noted that the quotation does not refer to any John at all called "Presbyter" to be distinguished from other prominent men. In this quotation, which is the *only* so-called ground for the theory that there was a "Presbyter" John, several individuals are mentioned under the title "Presbyter." This word is best rendered in the passage given as "the aged" or "the Elder." The quotation from Papias must be given here in translation in order to make this matter clear, and the word "Presbyter" will, wherever it occurs, be translated "Elder," since this is its meaning. For this quotation has often been strangely falsified by the defenders of the theory of another John, who employed the word "Presbyter" only in one place — the place where it suited the theory — and in every other place where the word occurs they translated it "aged" or "Elder" or used a similar term, so that the false impression is created that Papias speaks of a John who, in contradistinction to all others, even the Apostle John, was called "Presbyter." The quotation reads:

"I will not hesitate to cite and compare the things of which I was given sure knowledge by *the Elders* and which I ascertained . . . wherever (and whenever) I met anyone who had companied with *the Elders*, I sought after the words of *the Elders*, what Andrew and

what Peter had said, what Philip or Thomas or James or John or Matthew or what some *other* of the Lord's disciples had said, so also what Aristion or *the Elder* John, the Lord's disciples, say."

It should be noted that Papias does not say a word about John's Gospel or about any other Johannine Scripture. He is speaking of the tradition handed down by word of mouth from the Lord's disciples which he collected, tradition, that is to say, outside the written Gospels which were already in existence.

The remarkable differentiation between what certain of the disciples of Jesus *had said* and what two disciples *say* may most simply be explained if one interprets, without preconceived ideas, in this way: When Papias collected his information, a large number of the Lord's disciples were no longer alive, and he can find out only what they *had said*. But the Apostle John was still alive, and with regard to him he can note both what he *had said* and what he *was still saying*. And since most of the Lord's disciples had already died, he found it of value to note what another disciple of Jesus who was still living, Aristion, was saying. It would appear most natural therefore to conclude that the designation "the Elders" is applied to the Apostles. Those who are given the title "the Elders" are the Apostles, among them John. That the word "the Elder" is used a second time before John's name distinguishes him as an Apostle from Aristion, who was only a disciple.

This statement by Papias in no wise therefore suggests that he is speaking of two different Johns. Probability leans toward the conclusion that he knew of only one John, the Elder, or *the Presbyter, John*, that is to say, *the Apostle John*, just as he clearly speaks of the *Presbyter Andrew*, the *Presbyter Peter*, the *Presbyter Philip*, the *Presbyter Thomas*, and so forth, all of them *Apostles*.

If it is true, however, that Papias is speaking of two Johns, of whom one was not an Apostle, then he is only one of several people he calls Presbyters. Not a single word of Papias says or even remotely suggests that he had any connection with the authorship of John's Gospel.

There is, however, one more factor which makes it probable that Papias is using an expression which was common toward the close of the Apostolic Era and immediately after it, thus honoring the Apostles with the title "the Elders," or "Presbyters."

The Second and Third Epistles of John begin with a greeting simply from "the Elder," or "the Presbyter," without the addition of a name. Obviously this means that when these Letters were written, their recipients knew only of one who bore the honored title. This is only natural if we assume that it is the Apostle John, who, after the death of all the other Apostles, was the only one living of *"the Elders"* and would, therefore, immediately be recognized by the name "the Elder," or "the Presbyter."

It may also be remarked that it was natural for Papias and his generation to refer to the Apostles by the name "the Elders." Papias belonged to the generation which immediately followed the generation of the Apostles. Papias was a contemporary of Polycarp, and, according to Irenaeus, both had been disciples of the Apostle John. It is highly improbable, on the other hand, that Papias would call the disciples of the Apostles, the outstanding men of the generation after the Apostles, that is, of his own generation, "the Elders." To his generation it would be natural to call the prominent men of the generation before their own "the Elders." It is obvious that those whom a later generation called "the Elders" would not be given that title by the men of their own generation. It is therefore natural that Papias (70—145) called those who had followed the Lord, that is, His Apostles, "the Elders," and that, in a later generation, those who had heard the Lord's Apostles and who carried on their work, were called "the Elders," as they were, for instance, by Irenaeus (142—202). It is, then, most probable, in fact as good as certain, that Papias, when he uses the word "Elders" refers to the men whose names he mentions, that is, the Apostles Peter, Andrew, Philip, James, John, Matthew. And so it is perfectly clear that the title "the Elder," when applied to John, has the same significance which it has when it is applied to Peter or Andrew. Presbyter John, or the Elder John, is therefore the same as the Apostle John. Papias, then, does not mention or know of any special "Presbyter" John. But Papias' statement is the only ground for the hypothesis that there was a "Presbyter" John who was distinct from the Apostle John. This "Presbyter" John is a fiction of the imagination as chimeric and little connected with history as any character in a fairy tale.

Lund, Sweden