LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

AN ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION OF THE PATRISTIC TESTIMONY
FROM THE SECOND CENTURY CONCERNING
THE AUTHORSHIP OF THE FOURTH GOSPEL

REFERENCE
DO NOT CIRCULATE

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THESIS ABSTRACT

The testimony of the second century church fathers to the authorship of the Fourth Gospel provides a strong testimony for the Apostolic authorship of the Fourth Gospel. The earliest of these fathers--Ignatius and Polycarp--provide little information of value. This is due to both the nature of their writings and the recipients of their writings, as well as the lack of extant works. The primary testimony, however, comes from Justin Martyr, Papias and Irenaeus.

Justin's works display a great familiarity with Johannine phraseology. In fact, in Apology 1. 61 he makes a direct reference to John 3:3-5. Further, Justin's theology shows a remarkable affinity with the Gospel. There, in fact, exists strong arguments that Justin depended much upon the Fourth Gospel. More significantly, there are valid reasons to believe that Justin intended to include the Fourth Gospel in his "Memoirs of the Apostles"--his distinctive means of referring to the four Gospels. The title, "Memoirs of the Apostles"--which he on one occasion clarifies by adding "and those who followed them"--alone indicates that two of the Gospel authors were Apostles and two were not.

Papias' testimony is perhaps the key component to the discussion regarding the testimony of the second century fathers to the authorship of John. He is consulted especially by those who contend for the existence of a second John in Ephesus of whom authorship of the Fourth Gospel can be conferred. His testimony, however, leads also to the conclusion that his two Johns are, in fact, the same person. This follows from the understanding that the first
reference was to those who were Apostles. The second reference, however, was to those whom Papias had personally contacted, and yet were not necessarily Apostles. John the Apostle was listed twice because he qualified for both lists. The designation of the second John as “elder” also supports the Apostolicity of John from the simple observation that all of the apostles listed by Papias are titled “elders.”

Irenaeus’ testimony weighs heavily in favor of the Apostolic origin of the Gospel. First, he indicates that the author is an Apostle in three citations of the Fourth Gospel. Further, his styling of John as one of the “disciples of the Lord” conforms to the Johannine manner of reference to the Apostles and provides no evidence that Irenaeus did not equate the Apostle John with the author of the Gospel. In fact, this designation can also be seen in Eusebius’ reference to the Apostle John and his bath-house experience with Cerinthus. Also, the testimony of Irenaeus regarding his having learned from Polycarp displays numerous features of trustworthiness, and, according to Irenaeus, Polycarp testifies that the Apostle John taught him.

In all, there is strong evidence that the second century church fathers accepted the Fourth Gospel as the work of the Apostle John. The lack of polemics to the contrary strengthens this conclusion. This is especially true with regard to the existence of a second John in Ephesus. If such a person existed, then why is there such a silence from the second century fathers? Further, even if there were such a person, there is no testimony attributing the Fourth Gospel to him during the second century. Thus, the second century
fathers' testimony favors the view that the Fourth Gospel was indeed the product of the Apostle John, the son of Zebedee.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

"The vitality of our faith is based upon the truth of our belief that Jesus is the kind of person the Gospels say he is."\(^1\)

The testimony from the church fathers of the second century concerning the authorship of the Fourth Gospel leads to a fairly high recognition that it was indeed the product of an apostle. F. F. Bruce notes, "As early as the ascription of this Gospel of 'John' can be traced back, it is regularly assumed that the John in question was John the son of Zebedee, one of the twelve."\(^2\) Those who deny the apostolic origin of the Fourth Gospel tend to do so because they have concluded that either the internal evidence does not warrant the consideration that the Apostle John was the Beloved Disciple, or the manuscript evidence does not correlate with the known (or

hypothesized) chronology of the Apostle’s life\textsuperscript{3}, or because they have \textit{a priori} assumed that the work was not that of an Apostle.

The denial of the apostolic authorship of the Fourth Gospel, however, contradicts the testimonies of the early church fathers. This dilemma has been dealt with either by ignoring the patristic testimony,\textsuperscript{4} by reinterpreting their testimony, or by concluding that such testimony was prejudicially motivated and, consequently, is inherently unreliable.

The objectives of this research are straightforward. The writings of the second century fathers through Irenaeus will be probed in order both to ascertain what their testimonies reveal as to their beliefs regarding the authorship of the Fourth Gospel, and to determine the validity of their conclusions.

This research will endeavor to show that the Fourth Gospel had been widely accepted as the work of John the Apostle by the time of Irenaeus (c. 170), if not earlier. In fact, the only dissenters in the

\textsuperscript{3}Prior to the discovery of P52 (written c. 125-130) and other notable discoveries, the Fourth Gospel was regularly dated between A. D. 135-170; e.g.: Luteelberger A.D. 135-140; Baur A.D. 160-170; Taylor A.D. 135-163. It is obvious that with these dates the Apostle John could not have penned the Gospel that bears his name. Today, most scholars assign a date of c. A.D. 100 for the publication of the Gospel (if not the final manuscript, then at least a version quite similar to that which would become known as the Gospel of John). This date would allow for the possibility that the Apostle John penned it.

\textsuperscript{4}Martin Hengel comments, “The criticism usual today, which is abstract and historically removed from real life in history, is only possible because it dismisses all too lightly what is clearly stated in the tradition of the early church.” Martin Hengel, \textit{The Johannine Question}, (London: SCM Press International, 1989, 144, note 30).
second century to this view were those outside the Church. Most notable among these were Marcion and his gnostic followers and those whom many scorned as the "witless ones". This study will also show that the Fourth Gospel was not only widely accepted by the Church as the product of the Apostle John, but it was done without debate. It will be contended here that the only sufficient explanation for this phenomenon is that the Church recognized immediately that the Gospel of John was the product of one of the most revered apostles. Thus, Irenaeus did not become the establisher of Johannine acceptance, but merely relayed what had already been established.

One of the critical responses to the fathers' testimony is their alleged silence, especially in the first half of the second century, in regard to the Gospel itself and more significantly to the question of the authorship of the Johannine corpus. This "silence" is used to confirm the hypotheses that the Gospel was not in existence and/or that it was not the product of the Apostle John. Otherwise, the critics contend, the fathers would have simply stated emphatically that John the son of Zebedee was indeed the author.

Regarding this "silence," this study will attempt to show that second century church fathers, including those of the first half of the century, display not just an awareness of the existence of the Gospel but a strong familiarity with it. Certainly, some of the earliest fathers' use of the Gospel is relatively limited, but this can be explained by noting the purpose and recipients of their writings as well as by the lack of extant works available.
Further, arguments from the silence of the fathers may be used to support the traditional Johannine authorship. The conclusion of modern higher critical scholars is not that of total silence, as one might assume from their arguments, but one of "insufficient use." They conclude that this insufficient use of John is due to either its tenuous acceptance by the early church or its non-existence. Otherwise, they contend, there would have arisen various polemics for its acceptability.

This thesis will attempt to show that if the fathers of the first half of the second century doubted the authority and authenticity of the Fourth Gospel, one would have difficulty explaining the sudden universal acceptance of the Gospel by A.D. 170. It will also be demonstrated that their use of the Fourth Gospel was, in many cases, far greater than some acknowledge. Thus, the "silence" (more accurately, limited use) of the Fourth Gospel in the early church can be explained both because many of the writers of this period were writing to secular audiences, who would not have accepted citations from the Gospel or appeals to its author as valid, and because inside the church there was no need for polemics, since the Gospel was widely acknowledged to be the work of the Apostle John, and, therefore, was accepted based on his authority.

Further, it must be understood that a group does not clarify or define their beliefs if such is not necessary. Thus, it may be argued that the second century church had its beliefs clearly and firmly established in what would become known as the New Testament as well as the already accepted Old Testament. No explicit statements
clarifying Paul’s eucharist teachings or Matthew’s baptismal formula are needed if all have a common understanding of the texts. Thus, the church does not need to delineate all that it deems acceptable until the unacceptable appears,\textsuperscript{5} that is, when those beliefs are challenged. Consequently, the silence of the earliest fathers on the question of the authorship of the Fourth Gospel speaks loudly to the effect that there existed no objections to what was accepted. If, therefore, this research can demonstrate that the early fathers understood the Apostle John to be the author of the Fourth Gospel, then a sufficient explanation exists for their relative silence on the issue. In fact, one could contend that the objectors to the apostolic authorship of John not only cannot use the early fathers’ silence, but they cannot explain it either.

Also, the establishment of the “rules” by modern historians must consider the context of the time and the guidelines that those past individuals adhered to, and must not be guided by a strict criterion that in many cases can be shown not to have bound the writers of the time under investigation. For example, one of the more consistent arguments against the earliest fathers’ testimonies is that they do not quote verbatim the Gospel of John. Hence, it is assumed, they did not do so because they were not aware of its existence. Such a claim, however, fails to note that the earliest fathers rarely quoted anything verbatim; rather, they preferred to

\textsuperscript{5}There may, of course, be instances in which individuals cannot comprehend a particular belief, and thus, require an elaboration of a teaching. There may also be instances in which an orator expounds upon a theme for the sake of preaching or teaching.
use loose paraphrases and inexact citations. When, therefore, one is examining a second century document one must be cautious not to impose anachronistic criteria. The early church fathers should not be expected to use the styles and phraseology of today; rather they conveyed their information in the form in which it would have been best understood by their contemporaries.
CHAPTER 2
THE TESTIMONY OF IGNATIUS

Ignatius led one of the most prominent churches in all of Christendom at the very beginning of the second century. By the end of the first century Antioch was the third largest city in the Roman Empire. Little is known of Ignatius, the Bishop of Antioch, apart from the seven letters that he penned enroute to his martyrdom in Rome (c. 107). Providing that the Fourth Gospel was written c. 100, Ignatius, whom some consider to have been a fellow disciple with Polycarp of John, furnishes the earliest testimony to the question of the authorship of the Fourth Gospel.

Some who deny the apostolic authorship of the Fourth Gospel attempt to show from the writings of Ignatius, Justin and Polycarp that these men did not know of a published Gospel of John. Since Ignatius never mentions the Fourth Gospel nor its author, much speculation exists as to the value of his testimony regarding the Gospel. Ernst Haenchen fails to see any connection between Ignatius and John. He notes, that there are "no verbatim quotes of John who was his contemporary." Occasionally an ecclesiastical formula
simulates contact with the Gospel of John.”¹ The failure of the fathers, especially the second century fathers to quote the Gospel of John or to name its author is one of the primary criticisms relating to the use of the fathers’ testimony for the verification of the authorship of the Fourth Gospel.

The question then arises as to whether Ignatius even knew of the existence of the Gospel of John. For if Ignatius was a student of John, wouldn’t he have noted and quoted the Johannine corpus? W. J. Burghardt replies, “that there exists between Ignatius and John a remarkably deep affinity of thought, of ideas ... is beyond dispute. . . . Von der Goltz, a confirmed advocatus diaboli of literary dependence, has found in Ignatius the complete cast of thought and almost all the characteristics of the Fourth Gospel.”²

Parallels in Ignatius to Johannine literature have been discussed by a number of twentieth century scholars. Rudolf Schnackenburg notes, “Maurer has reinforced the position that Ignatius knew John. He finds three quotations that have the force of proofs.”³ One of those passages regards Ignatius’ eucharist teachings. This component of Ignatius’ writings displays numerous affinities to the Fourth Gospel.⁴ In his epistle to the Romans, Ignatius says, “I desire the bread of God, the heavenly bread, the

⁴Cf; Eph. 5:2; 20:2; Rom. 7:3; Syrn. 7:1; Trall. 8:1; with John 6:26-59.
bread of life, which is the flesh of Jesus Christ.”

The only canonical parallel to this is John 6:33, “For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven.”

Other notable relationships exist with Ignatius’ use of the Logos; his emphasis on the subordination of the son (Magn. 7:1 is virtually a direct quote of John 5:30); his doctrine of the Spirit, of which J. H. Bardsley proclaims, “The Ignatian doctrine of the Spirit is thoroughly Johannine”; and his doctrine of the Resurrection. It should be noted that the seven letters of Ignatius that are accepted as authentic works of the Bishop are filled with Johannine allusions. The question must still be raised as to what value Ignatius plays in determining the authorship of the Gospel of John.

The affinity of thought and doctrine between Ignatius and John does not provide any necessary conclusions as to the authorship of the Fourth Gospel. It cannot be proven from these parallels, although the likelihood of such would seem to be high, that the Fourth Gospel had already been written. Other explanations for these commonalities possess some merit. For example, it has been proposed that Ignatius had significant contact with the Johannine school in Ephesus. Or, perhaps, Ignatius was merely relying upon the same oral traditions that led to the Fourth Gospel.

\[5\text{Ignatius, Romans, 7:3.}\
\[6\text{All English Scripture quotations are taken from the New International Version (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Bible Publishers), 1985.}\

Others, including Haenchen, have noted that Ignatius never alluded to the author of the Fourth Gospel. This is strange in light of the fact that Ignatius appears to have had a connection with John. This point, however, may serve as a double-edged sword. For one could easily infer that the question of authorship, assuming that the Gospel preceded Ignatius’ writings, was a non-question. If this were so, then Ignatius’ silence is understandable.

There would be three likely scenarios. One, Ignatius knew that the Fourth Gospel had not been written by the Apostle, and yet was in support of it. In this case, one may reasonably have expected him to supply some polemics in its advancement. For certainly a series of letters enroute to his death would have been an excellent occasion for disseminating such information. Two, Ignatius knew that the Fourth Gospel had not been written by the Apostle, and he was not in support of it. In this instance, there is good reason to expect Ignatius only to have used it as a source for his teachings with qualifications. In fact, one would expect him not to have used it at all, as is his general pattern. Finally, the third possibility is that Ignatius was aware that the Apostle John, the son of Zebedee, had penned it. In this case Ignatius’ silence as to who the author was, and ready acceptance of it, is not an oddity at all. For one could hardly doubt that such information may well have been common knowledge to Ignatius’ audience. Add to this the limited purposes of Ignatius' writings, and his failure to comment on a matter of common knowledge is understandable. This third option seems to explain the fact that Ignatius makes numerous allusions to the Fourth Gospel, and yet, never mentions its author by name.
There is good reason to believe that the Fourth Gospel had been published at least several years prior to Ignatius' martyrdom. His theological commonalities with the Gospel lead to the conclusion that he had high regard for it. Although many of his allusions to the Fourth Gospel may be explained without the existence of the Gospel, there appear too many to discount the probable existence of the Fourth Gospel by the time of Ignatius' writings. Finally, Ignatius' silence as to the question of authorship is not uncommon among the early church fathers.
CHAPTER 3
THE TESTIMONY OF POLYCARP

Polycarp was the bishop of Smyrna, one of the seven churches of Asia mentioned in the Revelation of John. He is perhaps more renowned for his tragic martyrdom than for anything else. This, perhaps, is due to the fact that only one of his literary accomplishments, his "letter to the Philippians" (c. A.D. 110), has survived. According to the account of his martyrdom he claimed that he had served Christ 86 years. Most scholars agree that the death of Polycarp occurred in 155/156. If it is assumed that Polycarp was referring to his actual age and not to the number of years that he had been a Christian, his birth would fall in the years 69/70.

The significance of this is that according to the testimony of

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1Although chronologically Papias should follow Ignatius, both Polycarp and Justin will be presented first because Papias' testimony leads naturally into that of Irenaeus.
3See ibid., ch. 11. It is here noted that Polycarp's death occurred during the reign of Herod while "Philip the Trallian being high priest, [and] Stastius Quadratus being proconsul. . . ."
Irenaeus⁴, Polycarp was an eyewitness to the Apostle John. This chronology would allow, assuming that John lived until the time of Trajan,⁵ an overlap of 30 years between the lives of the two great leaders. Much speculation has arisen over the veracity of this proposition.⁶ Ernst Haenchen comments, “Irenaeus is admittedly an unreliable witness; . . . he even holds that he [Polycarp] was a disciple of John, who was a disciple of the Lord.”⁷ Martin Hengel voices what is perhaps the opinion of the majority of scholars that, “Irenaeus stresses—in my view rightly—that Polycarp knew John of Ephesus.”⁸ If the latter opinion is indeed correct, and much evidence exists to support it,⁹ then the testimony of Polycarp for the authorship of the Fourth Gospel becomes of paramount importance.

The problem, of course, is the lack of extant works of Polycarp. Although he never refers to it by name, there is good evidence from his letter to the Philippians to suggest that Polycarp may well have been aware of the Fourth Gospel. There exists between the Gospel and this letter of Polycarp, as there is with Ignatius' writings and the Gospel, an unquestionable stylistic and

⁴Irenaeus, Florinus 1.
⁵Irenaeus, Against Heresies 3. 3. 4. Irenaeus notes here that “John remain[ed] among them permanently until the times of Trajan.”
⁶See the dialogue below in chapter 6, “Irenaeus”.
⁷Haenchen, John, Vol. 1, 8.
⁸Hengel, Question, 16. It should be pointed out that Hengel only deems the testimony of Irenaeus to be accurate in the sense that Polycarp did know a John of Ephesus. Hengel does not agree that this John was the Apostle John. This thesis will attempt to show that Irenaeus’ testimony is very likely correct to the degree that this John of Polycarp’s acquaintance was the Apostle John.
⁹See chapter 6.
linguistic similarity. Because of this fact the Oxford Committee of the New Testament commented, "The numerous coincidences of language render it probable that Polycarp either used John or was personally acquainted with its author."\textsuperscript{10} This same conclusion is reached by James Donaldson and Robert Alexander who conclude, "It [the letter of Polycarp] reflects the spirit of St. John, alike in its lamb-like and its aquiline features: he is as loving as the beloved disciple himself when he speaks of Christ and his church, but 'the son of thunder' is echoed in his rebuke of threatened corruptions in faith and morals."\textsuperscript{11} Also, regarding the evidence that comes from Polycarp's use of the Johannine language, H. J. Bardsley contends that "Polycarp . . . quotes him [John] as he would quote the apostles and their companions."\textsuperscript{12}

In opposition to the notion that Polycarp was aware of the Fourth Gospel, C. H. Dodd states that it was "odd that Polycarp who shows acquaintance with almost every other book of the New Testament, has no clear reminiscence of the Fourth Gospel."\textsuperscript{13} However, how does one understand, in Dodd's terminology, exactly what constitutes a "clear reminiscence"? As Hengel points out,\textsuperscript{14} Polycarp "unmistakably" exudes a Johannine influence. The criterion that requires a "clear reminiscence" is manifestly unreasonable,

\textsuperscript{12}Bardsley, "Testimony," 489.
\textsuperscript{14}See quotation below.
especially when so little of Polycarp’s works have survived.

Doubt as to whether Polycarp knew of the Fourth Gospel, however, is certainly cast by the contention that, as with Ignatius’ writings, Johannine parallels do not necessarily support the existence of a published Johannine volume, but instead, as Hengel queries, may only support the notion that Polycarp was familiar with the Johannine community. Hengel notes,

Nevertheless it is unmistakable at the point where he addresses a ‘dogmatic problem’: ‘For anyone who does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is an Antichrist.’ That sounds like a well-tried battle-cry which comes from the Johannine school, though we may of course assume that Polycarp knew the letters (and the Gospel). The next clause, ‘and anyone who does not acknowledge the testimony of the cross is of the devil’, is also a Johannine formulation.\(^{15}\)

Here a stalemate has arisen. The lack of extant works of Polycarp make it very difficult to ascertain whether he knew of the Gospel or only of the Community.

Finally, the assertion that Polycarp was unfamilar with the Fourth Gospel because he only mentions Paul has little merit.\(^{16}\) It is, of course, obvious why Polycarp would focus on Paul and not John or Peter in his letter to the Philippians. After all, is not the “Epistle of Joy” Paul’s letter to Philippi? It is clear that Paul’s relationship to the church in Philippi remained special even after his martyrdom. Hence, Polycarp is merely attributing the respect to Paul that the Philippians felt he duly deserved.

To whom Polycarp attributed the Fourth Gospel, assuming that it was in circulation, has also not survived. That does not mean that

\(^{15}\)Hengel, *Question*, 15, 16.

Polycarp is totally useless in this present endeavor. For one must note that two strengths of Polycarp are pertinent. First, if it can be demonstrated that he was indeed a disciple of the Apostle John, then that would serve to heighten the testimony of Irenaeus, in so far as he can be shown to have been a student of Polycarp.

Second, if the Fourth Gospel had been written by the time of Polycarp’s writing, and if the Apostle John were not the author, then one may well ask why Polycarp apparently says nothing. One may assume that if he supports it he would have been making some contentions for its acceptance. On the other hand, if he did not support it, then shouldn’t he be cautioning the Philippians regarding it? The problem here, of course, is that this line of argumentation is purely speculative. And again the lack of extant works of Polycarp makes it difficult to verify such a claim. For indeed, maybe Polycarp did make such polemical comments, vying for its acceptance or contending against it. In all, Polycarp provides little information of value to this thesis.
CHAPTER 4
THE TESTIMONY OF JUSTIN MARTYR

Justin was born in Samaria to Greek parents about the beginning of the second century. Raised as a student of philosophy, he was converted by an elderly Christian (c. A.D. 133). Justin continued to study philosophy, but now he incorporated it into his Christian world view. Of his writings only three are extant—his two Apologies and a debate with a Jew named Trypho (Dialogue). His first Apology appears to have been written around A.D. 140\(^1\) and was addressed to the emperor Antoninus Pius and the Senate. In it Justin pleads to the emperor for toleration towards Christians. His second Apology was similarly addressed to the Roman Senate and was probably written around A.D. 160. The Dialogue With Trypho, written sometime after the year A.D. 160, represents a reproduction of a debate that Justin apparently had a number of years earlier in Ephesus with a notable Jewish adherent.

The first question, as with Ignatius, regards Justin's knowledge of the existence of the Fourth Gospel. Today most scholars acknowledge the sometimes heavy Johannine influence upon

Justin. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries such was not the opinion. This resulted, however, not from a lack of scholarly reviews upon the work of Justin, but from a higher critical bent that saw the Fourth Gospel as a mid-to-late second century work.

The language parallels between John and Justin demonstrate a dependence of the latter upon the former far more conclusively than for Ignatius. Rudolf Schnackenburg notes, "Knowledge of John may be affirmed more confidently in Justin." 2 Ezra Abbot adds, "Justin's language, therefore, in the thought which it expresses, in the selection of words, and in its connection, is closely related to John's, and has no other parallel in the New Testament." 3 Lightfoot goes one step further proposing that in "the Dialogue with Trypho we find numerous expressions, which cannot well be explained except on the supposition that [Justin] had the Fourth Gospel before him." 4

Perhaps the most explicit Johannine statement is found in Apology 1. 61. Justin states, "For Christ also said, 'Except ye be born again, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.' Now, that it is impossible for those who have once been born to enter into their mothers' wombs, is manifest to all." 5 D. M. Davey asserts, "This is a plain word-for-word quotation from John 3:3, which appears nowhere in the Synoptic Gospels." 6

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2Schnackenburg, John, Vol. 1, 199.
4Lightfoot, Essays, 88.
5Justin, Apology 1. 61.
Also, the works of Justin display an abundant use of the phraseology of John. In the Dialogue Justin’s reference to John the Baptist displays features of the Johannine account. “But he cried to them, ‘I am not the Christ, but the voice of one crying; for he that is stronger than I shall come, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear.’”

John Romanides notes that “Justin’s theology concerning the preexistent Logos and Son of God is basically the same as that of the Fourth Gospel and it is quite clear how he takes great pains to develop this line of thought, (Dia. 87, 88). The Gospel of John is the one writing which is so much in conformity with Justin’s own thinking.”

Some, however, disagree with the conclusion that Justin was aware of the Fourth Gospel and instead point to the differences in terminology between John and Justin. Ernst Haenchen remarks that the “differences . . . are great.” Haenchen (as well as many others who deny the relationship between Justin—and many of the other fathers—and John) acknowledges that similarities exist between the writings of the fathers and John. He contends, however, that the variations within the vocabularies of Justin and John provides the chief rebuttal to the linguistic arguments. G. Volkmar and W. Bousset have voiced similar objections. Although there exists a great conformity between John and Justin, because of the failure of Justin to quote John, Volkmar rules out entirely the possibility that

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7 Justin, Dialogue With Trypho, 88. 7; cf. John 1:20, 23.
Justin was aware of the Fourth Gospel.\textsuperscript{10} Bousset similarly states,

\ldots on the other hand, however, the meagerness of these reminiscences shows, that memory-wise Justin is governed by the Johannine gospel only very weakly, and that it is therefore highly improbable, where he is conscious of drawing from the memoires [sic] of following the synoptic gospel tradition--especially since he does not use the Johannine gospel principally as an historical source--that Johannine reminiscences intruded themselves upon him in an unconscious manner.\textsuperscript{11}

This objection, however, carries little weight because it fails to notice that loose paraphrases were the common form of quotation.\textsuperscript{12} If this argument were valid, then one could easily conclude that none of the fathers of the first several centuries had an awareness of the Fourth Gospel and most were unaware of the Synoptics. Such an assertion, as will be seen, would be hard to reconcile with the empirical facts. Thus, when Haenchen contends that Justin did not know of John because he fails to quote "his contemporary verbatim,"\textsuperscript{13} he is asking Justin to do something that was not Justin's style (nor the style of any of the second century apologists). On this point Donovan asserts,

Next, it should not escape notice that Justin cites passages from all four Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. This is absolutely certain; \ldots He does not, of course, quote from our Gospel canon in the verbatim slavish fashion that controversy rendered indispensable to later generations. His is more the fashion of a literary man quoting from memory the sense rather than the words of the sacred books he has studied. And although exact phrases and sentences are reproduced at times, his general habit is that of loose quotation.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{10}Volkmar, G., cited in Romanides, \textit{Justin}, 116.
\textsuperscript{11}Bousset, W., cited in Romanides, \textit{Justin}, 116.
\textsuperscript{12}Also, serious objections, some of which will be noted below, exist with regards to the contention that the parallels are meager.
\textsuperscript{13}Heanchen, \textit{John}, Vol. 1, 7.
Abbot adds, "It is beyond all dispute that the Fathers often quote very loosely, from memory, abridging, transposing, paraphrasing, amplifying, substituting synonymous words or equivalent expressions, combining different passages together, and occasionally mingling their own inferences with their citations."\textsuperscript{15}

Further, when Bousset contends that the reminiscences are "meager" it is partly due to the result that many of Justin's corollaries with John are not counted by Bousset because of the inappropriate criteria--such as his search for verbatim quotes--that he has placed for categorizing them as such. Consequently, this common line of reasoning is more anachronistic than it is valid. Of course, this does not entitle the scholar to find mere associations and conclude that literary dependency is present. It merely points out that verbatim quotes from the early church fathers of canonical works is too stringent a criterion. Haenchen, therefore, is asking too much when he asserts, "Justin's doctrine of the sacrament (\textit{First Apology} 66. 2) is reminiscent of John 6:34, 52, but the two are by no means identical."\textsuperscript{16} Actually, the high and consistent level of Johannine influence upon Justin makes for a strong case that he was indeed well aware of the Fourth Gospel at the time of his writing.

The next question, however, is a bit more difficult to answer: to whom did Justin attribute the authorship of this Gospel? It has been argued that Justin never refers to the author of the Fourth Gospel. If so, this would be odd in light of the observations that

\textsuperscript{15}Abbot, \textit{Authorship}, 1888, 16.

\textsuperscript{16}Haenchen, \textit{John}, 13.
Justin leans so heavily upon John for his thoughts and the fact that Justin does not shy away from listing John as the author of the “Revelation”.¹⁷

Several factors need to be examined in light of this argument. First, the nature of both of Justin’s writings and of the recipients of those writings rules out any such mention of the authorities behind his citations. To proclaim that such and such is the testimony of John or Mark--people who are totally unknown and obscure individuals--to a Roman emperor or Trypho, would add no weight to Justin’s arguments.

As regards Justin’s statement about John the author of the “Revelation,” it must first be understood that Justin presents him as a stranger, which he undoubtably was. For, he says, “And further, there was a certain man with us, whose name was John, one of the apostles of Christ, who prophesied, by a revelation. ...”¹⁸ Justin’s citation of John as the author of “Revelation” appears to be a deviation from his customary practices, and presents no reasons to believe that such was his normative practice; and therefore presents no reason to suppose that such was lacking with his references to the Fourth Gospel.

This serves also to substantiate the fact that there was no motivation or inherent value to the listing of the author of the Fourth Gospel. Abbot, in fact, asserts,

That Justin under such circumstances should quote the Evangelists by

¹⁷See Justin Martyr, Dialogue, 81. Note also that Justin refers to John as the “Apostle”.
¹⁸Ibid.
name, assigning this saying or incident to "the Gospel according to Matthew," that to "Luke," and the other to "the Gospel according to John," as if he were addressing a Christian community familiar with the books, would have been preposterous. Justin has described the books in his First Apology as Memoirs of Christ, resting on the authority of the Apostles, and received by the Christians of his time as authentic records. That was all his purpose required: the names of four unknown persons would have added no weight to his citations.  

This reasoning becomes even more significant in his "Dialogue." Justin doesn't hesitate to cite the Old Testament books that he uses in his debate with this Jew, but it would have been meaningless for him to cite a New Testament source in the same manner, and thus, put them on a par with the Old Testament books, when Trypho would not have recognized them as such.

Does John, however, ever refer to the author of the Fourth Gospel? In order to answer this one must first ascertain whether the Fourth Gospel was included in Justin's "Memoirs." This title is used exclusively by Justin of the Gospels; he says: "For the apostles, in the memoirs composed by them, which are called Gospels, have thus delivered unto us what was enjoined upon them." This term itself was a common Graeco-Roman phrase and it exhibits Justin's philosophical training. It was used similarly by Xenophon in reference to the memorabilia of Socrates.

Justin calls the Gospels "Memoirs by the Apostles" ten times (although on one of these occasions he adds "and their companions"); four times he calls them "the Memoirs"; once he refers to "those who have written Memoirs"; and finally he says "the apostles wrote." Most of these occur in the "Dialogue." Two questions must

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19 Abbot, Authorship, 1888, 75-76. emphasis original.
20 Justin, Apology 1, 66.
be explored regarding them for the purpose of this present study. First, does Justin include the Fourth Gospel as a part of the Memoirs? Secondly, if so, what does Justin say regarding its authorship?

The evidence cited above has led to the conclusion that there exists strong reason to believe that Justin was well acquainted with the Gospel of John. But does he include John in his Memoirs? This question, as noted above, has been the focus of much debate.\footnote{The strongest objections to the inclusion of John in the Memoirs, as with Ignatius, were made by scholars prior to the discovery of P52 and the reassigning of an earlier date to the Gospel of John. Many of the scholars that objected to the notion that Justin included the Fourth Gospel were those who adhered to a later date for John.}

There are several passages under the heading “Memoirs” in which features found only in John’s Gospel are included, and thus, lead to a strong presumption that the Fourth Gospel was intended by Justin to be included in his references to the Memoirs of the Apostles. D. M. Davey contends that there are five passages included in the Memoirs in which the Johannine account is as likely included as is any of the synoptics.\footnote{See Davey, “Justin”, 119-121.} To say, however, that Justin was intending the title “Memoirs” to include aspects from the Fourth Gospel begs the question. He may have intended only the features of the Synoptics found in those passages to be considered part of the Memoirs. Nonetheless, he may well have meant to include the Johannine features.

One of the strongest points in favor of Johannine inclusion comes from a simple elaboration upon the phrase, “For in the
Memoirs which I say were drawn up by his apostles and those who followed them, . . .” 23 If Justin were only aware of the Synoptics, then this phrase should read “the apostle and those who followed the apostles.” Thus Justin’s “those who followed” must include Mark and Luke, and “the apostles” must by necessity refer to Matthew and John! One may rebut that the apostles could include Matthew and Peter. Although this is plausible, the cumulative evidence points to the fact that Justin was well aware of the Fourth Gospel, that he used it, that it was included in the Memoirs, and therefore, that it is John that is intended here. Further, Justin’s phrase, “as the apostles of this very Christ of ours wrote” 24 cannot include Peter, since he never personally wrote a Gospel, yet this passage refers to an event contained in all four Gospels.

This leads to the clear identification by Justin that the Apostle John was the writer of the Fourth Gospel, which conforms to his identification of the Apostle John as the author of Revelation. 25 This also aligns with his direct reference to John 3 in Apology 1. 61. 26 In fact, in the entire 61st chapter the only allusion Justin makes to any New Testament work is to John 3:3-5 cited earlier. Yet, in reference to it Justin states, “And for this [rite] we have

23 Justin, Dialogue, 103.
24 Ibid., 88.
25 Since Justin nowhere indicates that another John exists, one on whom some may confer the authorship of either the Revelation or the Fourth Gospel, one may safely assume that Justin is not aware of any such person.
26 Even Bousset, as noted by Romanides, “accepted as undoubted the relationship between 1 Apol. 61, 4-5 and John 3, 3-5.” Romanides, Justin, 116.
learned from the apostles this reason. 27

In summary, Justin shows abundant familiarity with the Fourth Gospel. His language and theology show a remarkable affinity with the Gospel of John. As it was argued above, the contentions that Justin should have named John directly or quoted the Gospel verbatim have been found wanting. Both the apologetic nature of his writings and the pagan audiences to whom he was writing render such highly improbable. Also, it should be noted that Justin's failure to quote verbatim any of the Gospels or to name any of the evangelists, when writing to unbelievers, sets a precedent for all of the apologists of the second century. In fact, most of them abstained from mentioning the evangelists even when addressing a Christian audience. And despite the fact that Justin specifically says that the "Revelation" was from the pen of the Apostle, he never quotes it. Thus, one should not be taken aback by his failure to do so with the Fourth Gospel.

Justin, thus, becomes a solid witness both for the evidence of the existence of the Fourth Gospel by the middle of the second century and for a valid testimony to the Apostolic authorship of it. Finally, Justin's probable inclusion of John in the "Memoirs of the apostles" serves also to indicate that the Fourth Gospel was not only accepted, but that it was held as an equal authority with the Synoptics.

27 Justin, Apology 1, 61.
CHAPTER 5
THE TESTIMONY OF PAPIAS

The testimony of Papias is without question the most significant of the second century church fathers in regard to the question of the existence of a second John, to whom many scholars have attributed the authorship of the Fourth Gospel. Papias was a highly respected bishop of Hierapolis, in Phrygia, in the early part of the second century. Though the actual date of his birth is the subject of much disagreement,¹ there is no doubt that Papias was a contemporary of Ignatius, Justin and Polycarp. Donovan sets the date of Papias’ birth at c. 61 by arguing that “from Eusebius’

references to these three bishops [Ignatius, Papias and Polycarp] and his order of treatment, one can safely assume that Ignatius was the senior, Papias next and Polycarp the youngest. Hence the date of Papias’ birth is approximately fixed at 61 A.D.”

Papias’ greatest influence came from his writing, “An Exposition of the Oracles of the Lord.” Though often referred to as his “five books,” the contents are only the equal of about five chapters. Unfortunately, no copies of them have survived beyond that which has been cited by other writers. Of them Brown comments, “His principle work was entitled An Interpretation of the Sayings of the Lord, for which he drew, not on the written Gospels, but on oral traditions which could, he thought, be traced to the Apostles.” These writings influenced nearly all of the fathers of the second century including Irenaeus. If it can be established that Papias was a hearer of the Apostle John, as many believe that he claimed, then one may surmise that this was a cause of his notoriety in the early church.

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2John Donovan, “The Papias Presbyteri Puzzle,” Irish Ecclesiastical Record, 37 (1931): 126. He is not clear on how he exactly arrives at the date of 61. But his conclusion is a reasonable inference which would place the birth of Papias at prior to 69/70 due to the following: Polycarp, at his martyrdom, which is acknowledged by nearly all scholars as occurring in the year 155/156, stated, “Eighty and six years have I served Him” (“Martyrdom of Polycarp,” ANE, Vol. 1. 9). Thus, he must have been born c. 69. However, some have concluded that Polycarp was referring not to his age, but to the number of years since his conversion. If this were true, then Polycarp’s birth was at least several years earlier. Thus, one can reasonably date Papias’ birth in the mid 60’s.

3F. J. Brown, “Papias”, 440.
Papias, however, is the primary source used by scholars today who deny the Apostolic authorship of the Fourth Gospel,\(^4\) concluding that there were two Johns in Ephesus, John the Apostle and John the Elder, the latter of which penned the Fourth Gospel.\(^5\) They point to the following quotation to verify the notion that two Johns of importance existed in the first century of the Church. Papias notes,

But I shall not be unwilling to put down, along with my interpretations, whatever instructions I received with care at any time from the elders, and stored up with care in my memory, assuring you at the same time of their truth. For I did not, like the multitude, take pleasure in those who spoke much, but in those who taught the truth; nor in those who related strange commandments given by the Lord to faith, and proceeding from truth itself. If, then, any one who had attended on the elders came, I asked minutely after their sayings,-- what Andrew or Peter said, or what was said by Philip, or by Thomas, or by James, or by John, or by Matthew, or by any other of the Lord's disciples: which things Aristion and the presbyter John, the disciples of the Lord, say. For I imagined that what was to be got from books was not so profitable to me as what came from the living and abiding voice.\(^6\)


\(^5\)There are, of course, a number of variations of opinions as to which of the John’s wrote which of the books of the Johannine corpus.

\(^6\)Papias, Fragments 1. 1.
From this many have concluded, as Eusebius did, that there were two Johns in Ephesus at the close of the first century. They have inferred that the second John listed, John the presbyter or elder, is indeed a disciple of the Lord, yet not the Apostle John, but a separate individual. Eusebius realizes the importance of this conclusion when he states, "He thus confirms the truth of the story that two men in Asia had the same name, and that there were two tombs in Ephesus, each of which is still called John's."  

With regard to this passage it is essential to ascertain what Papias' practical objective in these dialogues was. Although often overlooked, the answer to this question is relatively straightforward. Simply stated, he endeavored to determine those things that the Lord (i.e., "the truth"; "truth itself"; and the "living and abiding voice") himself had said (i.e., those "commandments given by the Lord"). If, however, the Gospels were in circulation, why did Papias not consult them?

There should, however, be no doubt that Papias was quite familiar with the narratives of the four Gospels, as can be evidenced from his writings. Papias, it appears, was looking for information that would lead him to find that which the Lord had said and yet was not recorded in any of the Gospels. For him oral

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8That he used all four Gospels will be shown below.
9There is some merit to the conclusion that Papias was looking for oral sources to discern what the sayings of the Lord were because he held oral sources as being more credible than written sources including the canonical Gospels. His use of the Gospels in his writings, however, leave this conclusion as speculative at best.
sources were the most reliable. This explains why neither the Apostle Paul nor any of his disciples (e.g., Timothy or Titus) were listed by Papias. Paul had not been an earwitness to any of the sayings of the Lord during His ministry years, and therefore, was not a disciple of the Lord in the sense that Papias used the phrase.

Three questions arise that will help determine the proper understanding of Papias and what his contribution to the question of Johannine authorship is. First, why is the name John listed twice? Second, why is the second John called the "presbyter" or "elder"? Finally, why is Aristion's name listed before that of the second John?

In answering the initial question as to why the name "John" appears twice, it should be noted that there are two basic responses. There is the position, first taken by Eusebius, who appealed to the testimony of Dionysius of Alexandria, that Papias was indicating the existence of two separate Johns. Hengel provides the classic explanation of this position: "Here Papias distinguishes between two Johns, John the son of Zebedee, who was one of the twelve, and the presbyter John, who was also a disciple of the lord, but is separated from the first group of seven disciples."\(^{10}\) There is also the traditional view that sees Papias as separating his list into two classes of persons: those who were Apostles (i.e., Elders past or predecessors) and those who were eyewitnesses of the Lord (but not

\(^{10}\)Hengel, Question, 17. It is worth noting that most of Hengels conclusions are in agreement with this thesis and that it is only upon this statement of Papias that any significant differences reside.
necessarily Apostles), with whom Papias had had personal contact.

According to the latter view, John’s name is listed twice (both
times referring to the same person) because he belongs in both
classes. That is, John, as an Apostle, deserves mention with his
fellow Apostles; and John, as the Elder of Ephesus, was one of the
two contacts that Papias had enjoyed who were eyewitnesses of the
Lord. Therefore, he is listed again. The distinction then is drawn
between those who were in the past (note Papias’ use of the past
tense, “said”), from those who were in the present (“say”). F. J.
Brown comments, “The change of the tense doubtless has a real
significance.”

Second, why then is John called the “elder” or “presbyter”? The
fact that the second John in Papias is called the Elder or
Presbyter is said to show a discongruity between the list of
Apostles and the second John. This point, however, proves little.
First, it should be noted that the group of apostles listed (Andrew
through Matthew), Aristion, and John are all classified as “disciples
of the Lord.” Therefore, there is no point of demarcation between
the two groups on account of this designation, since all, including
Aristion, are disciples of the Lord. Second, the only distinction
among any of the individuals is the failure to name Aristion as an
elder. Based on this it is impossible to argue that the second John is
not an Apostle. If this were so, then neither would any of the
Apostles listed be Apostles, since they are referred to as “Elders”
as well! For Papias says, “If, then, any one who had attended on the

\[11\] F. J. Brown, “Papias,” 441.
elders came, I asked minutely after their sayings,—what Andrew or Peter said, or what was said by Philip, or by Thomas, or by James, or by John, or by Matthew, or by any other of the Lord's disciples.”

Further, Donovan explains, “It will be observed that the term presbyteri occurs twice in this sentence; and unless Papias can be shown to indulge in topsy turvy Greek, it bears each time the same meaning.” Therefore, whatever conclusion is reached pertaining to the use of the term elders in regard to the Apostles must also be applied to the second John.

Also, much debate lingers as to the appropriate definition of the term “presbyter” or “elder.” The term can be correctly understood to mean “predecessor, ancient, or elder.” The term “elder” can also be used to refer to the Apostles. In fact, Streeter, a proponent of the “two Johns school,” acknowledges that the term “elder” can be used of the Apostles. This designation gains more merit when it is recalled that only Aristion is not cited as an “elder”. Donovan, a Greek scholar, is convinced that the term should be rendered in the Papias account “predecessors.” He argues,

Accordingly we may dismiss as wholly beside the issue the question raised by certain critics, whether Apostles could be referred to as presbyteri or ancients. Moreover, the question becomes absurd when one is convinced that predecessors may be a correct rendering of presbyteri. Papias seems to be using the word in its primary and literal sense to designate persons of a former generation or epoch, his predecessors in fact. Both Apostles and Disciples of the Lord and their personal followers, senior and junior, all belonged to the age prior to that into which the future Bishop of Hierapolis was born. . . . To him

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12Papias, Fragments 1 (emphasis added).
13Donovan, “Puzzle,” 126.
14Streeter, Primitive, 93. In fairness it should be noted that Streeter does not believe the term "elder" can refer to an Apostle (singular), but only Apostles (plural).
they were his predecessors, seniors, men of another epoch, not a remote and long past epoch, only the one just prior to his own.\textsuperscript{15}

Streeter, who is in agreement with this conclusion, notes, “The word Elder was until the third century used as a general title of respect for the great men of a previous generation.”\textsuperscript{16} One cannot prove a second John--unique from the apostle--exists in Papias from the fact that the second John is referred to as the “elder.”

Finally, a more substantial question is why Aristion’s name precedes that of the second John. If, in fact, this second John is the Apostle, then it is strange that a relatively unknown Aristion would be listed ahead of the Apostle John. This argument, although valid, proves too much. For if the second John were not the Apostle, but only a disciple of the Lord named John, then he, as Hengel notes, “must have been a significant teacher in the generation before Papias, i.e., in the decade before the turn of the century.”\textsuperscript{17} Streeter summarizes that this second John “was held in special veneration as a ‘disciple of the Lord,’ and was so notable that he could be spoken of simply as ‘the elder,’ as one to whom the title belonged \textit{par excellence}.”\textsuperscript{18} The importance of this other John cannot be underscored. For he would have to have been noteworthy enough that Papias didn’t have to clarify who he was with regard to his namesake; he was known as no more than the Elder John.

Further, if, as some theorize,\textsuperscript{19} this elder John was also the

\textsuperscript{15}Donovan, “Puzzle,” 128.
\textsuperscript{16}Streeter, \textit{Primitive}, 93.
\textsuperscript{17}Hengel, \textit{Question}, 22.
\textsuperscript{18}Streeter, \textit{Primitive}, 94.
\textsuperscript{19}See Bauckham, “Beloved,” 21-44.
author of the Fourth Gospel, then he was a very prominent disciple because such a designation would align him with the "Beloved Disciple" of Christ. One may then just as reasonably ask why Aristion's name appears before the name of John the Elder, the Beloved Disciple of Christ? Therefore, although the listing of Aristion before John is hard to comprehend, this fact cannot be used to argue against the conclusion that the second John is also the Apostle.²⁰

A further evidence for the view that Papias mentions only one John is the silence of the rest of the church fathers on the existence of a second John. Surely, assuming such a man of high acclaim existed, then one should expect to find repeated mention of him among the writers of the second century. Also, one would expect to find some clarifications as to the distinctions between the two Johns. There is, however, no such testimony.

The first reference to a second John comes from Dionysius of Alexandria (martyred A. D. 265). All that he notes, however, is that there were two tombs in Ephesus bearing the name John.²¹ The second mention comes from Eusebius, who notes,

Here it should be observed that he twice includes the name of John. The first John he puts in the same list as Peter, James, Matthew, and the rest of the apostles, obviously with the evangelist in mind; the second, with a changed form of expression, he places in a second group outside the number of the apostles,

²⁰This fact (the listing of Aristion before John) could, however, be used to show the existence of two Johns in Papias, but the second John cannot be equated with the authorship of the Fourth Gospel for the said reason. This point alone, however, does not make a strong case for the existence of two Johns.
²¹Eusebius, History 3. 36.
giving precedence to Aristion and clearly calling John a presbyter.²²

The key here is that neither of these references associates the second John with the authorship of the Fourth Gospel. Much criticism, in fact, has been leveled at Eusebius’ inference of a second John because his motivation for this conclusion stems from his dislike for the book of Revelation, and his desire to attribute it to someone other than the Apostle, more than from a sound exegesis. For he concludes, “This is highly significant, for it is likely that the second--if we cannot accept the first--saw the Revelation that bears the name John.”²³

Moreover, the silence of the rest of the church fathers,²⁴ especially those of the second century, is remarkable and unexplainable. Why do the writings of Ignatius, Polycarp and Irenaeus display not even a trace of such a person? Brown states,

The more this is realized, the more difficult it is to accept Eusebius’s [sic] idea of two Johns. It is incredible that the Christian writers of the second century who mention--some of them in much detail--a famous John living at Ephesus about the end of the first century or the beginning of the second, should fail to mention the striking fact that there were two of them.²⁵

It must then be asked: if Eusebius were aware of a second John, and if this John were the author of the Fourth Gospel, then why did Eusebius not also know this? Why then does Eusebius not provide

²²Ibid.
²³Ibid.
²⁴It should be noted that there is some appeal to the “Apostolic Constitutions” (c. A. D. 370) which lists two John’s as Bishops of Ephesus (ANE, Vol. 7). B. H. Streeter makes a substantively argument that this testimony is reliable (Streeter, Primitive, 95-100).
this information? Bauckham has an elaborate theory to explain exactly how this second John fits into the second century of the Church. He first contends that Eusebius was well aware of Papias’ attribution of the Fourth Gospel to the Elder John, but refrained from disseminating any information regarding it. He claims,

There may be two reasons why Eusebius did not report this. In the first place, if (as we shall argue later) Papias ascribed the Fourth Gospel to John the Elder, Eusebius, who emphatically draws attention to Papias’ distinction between John the son of Zebedee and John the Elder, in order to suggest the latter may be the author of the Apocalypse, could not have missed or disguised the fact that according to Papias the author of the Fourth Gospel was not the son of Zebedee.

But secondly, Eusebius would not have liked Papias’ own solution to the problem of the differences of order between the Gospels: that John’s is correct and the others unreliable in this respect... Clearly Eusebius did not record everything his sources said about the origins of the Gospels, but only what he liked.26

Hengel similarly concludes, “We must therefore reckon with the possibility that Eusebius sometimes concealed information which seemed disagreeable to him or omitted it through carelessness. Why should he not have kept quiet about a--hypothetical--notice of Papias that the presbyter John had written the Fourth Gospel?”27

This contention certainly carries some force. For indeed only fragments of Papias are extant. The explanation of Eusebius’ silence, although it remains fairly speculative, has some merit, but amounts to only an argument from silence. This hypothesis still fails, nonetheless, to deal with the overwhelming silence of the second century Church. It is this silence, where one expects otherwise, that leads to the logical conclusion that Papias was

26Richard Bauckham, ”Papias,” 52,53.
27Hengel, Question, 21.
unaware of a second John who had authored the Fourth Gospel. Even Dionysius in the third century and Eusebius in the fourth say nothing of an elder John as author of the Fourth Gospel. Therefore, there appears to be insufficient evidence for the postulation of two Johns from the writings of Papias.

The bearing of Papias' testimony, then, on the present study is weighty. First, he verifies the existence of the Apostle John near the close of the first century, for the date of Papias' personal conversation(s) with John can hardly be dated much earlier. This is due to the simple fact that Papias' birth likely occurred in the mid 60's, and that he would likely have been too young to have conversed with and accumulated oral traditions of Christ much earlier than the early nineties.

Second, Papias lived in Asia Minor and was a careful researcher. Therefore he would have had a good awareness of the events of the early Asian Church. His writings, although not extant, can be seen through the writings of others. One of his most significant readers was Irenaeus.

Finally, if the conclusion given here, namely that there appears to be insufficient evidence for the postulating of two Johns from the writings of Papias, is accurate, then the majority of scholars are in fact acknowledging apostolic authorship of the Fourth Gospel when they attribute it to the hand of Papias' John the Elder.
CHAPTER 6
THE TESTIMONY OF IRENAEUS

The preeminent authority in the early church regarding the Johannine corpus and its authorship is undoubtedly Irenaeus. The famed Bishop of Lyon (southern Gaul) was born c. 125-130 in Asia Minor. Irenaeus was appointed successor to Pothinus (87-177), also a native of Asia Minor, after the latter’s martyrdom. Traditionally, he is acknowledged to have been a disciple of Polycarp, whom Irenaeus claims was a disciple of the Apostle John. If this can be verified, Irenaeus would have a direct link to the Apostolic age, being removed from the Apostle John by only one generation.

Irenaeus served Christendom as an able apologist. His magnum opus, “Against Heresies,” is no longer extant in the original Greek, but has survived in several Latin manuscripts. In this work Irenaeus defends the Fourth Gospel against Gaius. Gaius, a Roman presbyter, denied the authenticity of the Fourth Gospel, pointing to its apparent discrepancies with the Synoptics.1 Here Irenaeus’ testimony for

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1Gaius was a member of the Alogoi, a heretical group so named because of their rejection of the Gospel of John. Their rejection of John undoubtedly stemmed from an overzealous response to Gnosticism, which made heavy use of John.
Apostolic authorship is resounding. He states, "Afterwards, John, the disciple of the Lord, who also had leaned upon his breast, did himself publish a Gospel during his residence at Ephesus in Asia."\(^2\) Further he adds, "John remaining among them permanently until the times of Trajan, is a true witness of the tradition of the apostles."\(^3\)

Much debate has arisen over the validity of Irenaeus' testimony. Many have been quick to point out alleged errors in other parts of his testimony, and, thus, conjecture that he errs here as well. They have concluded that in this passage Irenaeus was only trying to bolster his own ecclesiastical heritage, and, thus, cannot be trusted.\(^4\) Others have questioned his interpretation of his great teacher, Polycarp, concluding that, although his testimony is valid, he has, honestly, mistaken Polycarp's references to the Elder John as referring to the Apostle John.\(^5\) Whereas Donovan has concluded that Irenaeus' testimony alone is evidence enough for demonstrating the Apostolic authorship of the Fourth Gospel.\(^6\)

Regardless of one's opinion of Irenaeus, there can be no doubt of his impact upon the second century Church. From Irenaeus onwards, until the modern critical scholars reversed things, there

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\(^2\)Irenaeus, Against Heresies 3. 1. 1.
\(^3\)Ibid., 3. 3. 4.
\(^4\)Haenchen, John, Vol. 1, 8.
\(^5\)Bacon, "Elder of Ephesus," 112-134; Bauckham, "Papias," 59, 68-69; Gunther, "Identifications," 418-420. Note that this conclusion hinges on their interpretation of two Johns in Papias. If they are in error there, then John must be the Apostle, and their conclusions here would, in effect, support Irenaeus.
was virtual unanimity on the Apostolic authorship of the Johannine corpus.

Opposition, however, has mounted against the testimony of Irenaeus. Hengel notes, “for modern ‘critical research’ the main culprit—is Irenaeus.”\(^7\) He adds, “In some modern introductions the testimony of Irenaeus is now completely disregarded.”\(^8\) An example of this opposition is seen in the conclusion of E. Schwartz: “Irenaeus was the first to set in motion, and perhaps even invented, the fable of the elderly John in Ephesus, the teacher of Polycarp in Smyrna, with refined untruthfulness, in order to place on his own head the halo of an indirect disciple of the apostle.”\(^9\) Bacon reiterates, although not as harshly, that,

Back of Dionysius is Irenaeus, who seeks to enhance the dignity of the line of apostolic tradition which ends with himself by identifying the John of Papias (and also the John referred to by Polycarp in the discourses Irenaeus boasts of remembering from his boyhood) with John the Apostle. Irenaeus had the additional incentive of a strong desire to vindicate the claims of the five Ephesian writings to Apostolic authorship.\(^10\)

In light of these contentions, it will first be necessary to examine some of the specific charges leveled against Irenaeus in order to determine the overall veracity of his testimony.

A simple example comes from Charles, as mentioned by Canon Nunn\(^11\). Charles claims that Irenaeus commits a serious error when

\(^7\)Hengel, Question, 2.
\(^8\)Ibid., 137, note 4.
\(^10\)Bacon, “Elder of Ephesus,” 117.
\(^11\)Canon Nunn, The Sons of Zebedee, 30.
he calls one of his sources a “disciple of Apostles,” and later “a disciple of disciples of Apostles.”\textsuperscript{12} This allegation, however, has little merit, for an investigation into the text reveals clearly that Irenaeus is identifying another person. Donovan, aware of Charles’ claim, notes, “Now anyone who can read Latin . . . can clearly see that there enters on the scene here a personage who must not be identified with the presbyter quoted in the preceding six chapters.”\textsuperscript{13}

Others have contended that Irenaeus errrs in that his chronology of the life of Christ has the death of Jesus occurring during the reign of Claudius.\textsuperscript{14} Since this conclusion opposes that of the Biblical account, Irenaeus is deemed unreliable. Further, since Irenaeus is accused of having obtained this information from the Asian elders, which likely includes Papias, it is determined that this source, or Irenaeus’ use of it, is untrustworthy. Certainly, Irenaeus errrs in his contention that Christ lived until 40-50 years of age. Nonetheless, one cannot necessarily infer that he understood Christ’s death to have occurred during the reign of Claudius. For one, Irenaeus never mentions Claudius or the year of Christ’s death. Further, there was no established year in the early Church for the date of Christ’s birth. Irenaeus appears to see Christ’s birth around the time of a census (c.9-7 B. C.). Thus, by A. D. 30-33, a common time frame in the early church for the death of Christ, Christ would have been between 37-42 years of age.

\textsuperscript{12}Irenaeus, \textit{Heresies} 4. 27.
\textsuperscript{13}Donovan, “Unreliability,” 44.
\textsuperscript{14}Irenaeus, \textit{Heresies} 2. 22.
Of the other charges brought out against Irenaeus none are of such magnitude, even if they can be substantiated, that should cause a historian to be suspect of Irenaeus’ testimony. Also, assuming some minor details in Irenaeus are erroneous, it would be presumptuous to deny the rest of his testimony on such grounds. Finally, before some of the more significant issues in Irenaeus’ testimony are examined, it should be noted that some of the charges amount to nothing more than character accusations. Donovan responds to these charges.

In the work which we possess... he has left plenty of indirect evidence, showing what immense pains he took to collect accurate data for his work. He even acquired and read heretical books, and he assures us that he discussed their peculiar tenets with the heresiarchs themselves, whenever the opportunity came his way. Thus, he spared no pains to be accurate in exposition of false doctrine, while his refutation is highly logical and therefore forcible, nor is it wanting in flashes of wit and humour, despite his humble opinion of himself. As for his veracity, it leaps to the eyes in every chapter of the five books.15

While Donovan may have overstated his case, the general point has been made that one should be perhaps more hesitant before challenging the integrity of a well respected Bishop. The question remains as to what Irenaeus’ contributions are to the question of the authorship of the Fourth Gospel.

A more detailed look at the writing of Irenaeus shows how numerous his contributions are to the present study. As noted above, he informs his readers that a man named John wrote the Fourth Gospel from Ephesus at the time of Trajan (98-117). He adds that this John was the disciple who leaned upon the Lord’s breast. The

central question, however, is, does Irenaeus acknowledge this
disciple to be the Apostle John, the son of Zebedee? Richard
Bauckham answers,

It has been commonly assumed and sometimes argued that Irenaeus
identified the author of the Fourth Gospel with John the son of Zebedee, but this
has also been vigorously contested. Decisive evidence is surprisingly and
significantly elusive, despite Irenaeus’ frequent references to the Fourth Gospel
and its author.... He refers to John (regarding him as the author of all the
Johannine writings, including the Apocalypse) sixteen items [sic. times?] as
‘the disciple of the Lord’ (and thirty one times as just ‘John’), never as ‘John
the apostle.’

The failure to use the title “Apostle” for John has been used to
argue against Irenaeus’ identification of John the Apostle as author
of the Fourth Gospel. Without a doubt Irenaeus’ favorite title for
John is “the disciple of the Lord,” and it is true that he never says
“John the Apostle.” It should be noted that Irenaeus uses the title
“Apostle” sparingly, preferring most often the individual’s name. If, however, Irenaeus uses the title apostle for Matthew and Peter,
then why not for John, the one for whom he has the most affection?

There are two responses relating to Irenaeus’ use of the title
“apostle” that will help illuminate whether Irenaeus intended to
identify John the author of the Fourth Gospel with the Apostle John.
First, although he never explicitly calls him “John the Apostle,”
Irenaeus nonetheless clearly acknowledges him as such. Three
passages should suffice in demonstrating this: To begin with, in
“Against Heresies,” Irenaeus states, “But if the Word of the Father

17He uses it of Matthew and Peter only once. He does, however, use
it 39 times in relation to Paul.
18“John” is used 31 times by Irenaeus.
who descended is the same as also that ascended, He, namely, the Only-begotten Son of the only God, who, according to the good pleasure of the Father, became flesh for the sake of men, the apostle certainly does not speak of any other.”¹⁹ The allusion here is clearly to the first chapter of the Fourth Gospel and none other. And, according to Irenaeus, its author is an apostle who was named just prior as John.²⁰ Second, on two occasions Irenaeus clearly includes John in the category of Apostles. In Book 2 he notes, “Some of them, moreover, saw not only John, but the other apostles also.”²¹ Third, in Book 3 he adds, “Then, again, the Church in Ephesus, founded by Paul, and having John remaining among them permanently until the times of Trajan, is a true witness of the tradition of the apostles.”²² It is this testimony that causes J. J. Gunther to stutter. First he states, “There is evidence that Irenaeus did not identify the local John with John of Zebedee; or at least there is reserve and hesitancy.” Then, on the same page he comments, “Irenaeus called John of Ephesus an apostle (though rarely) and the Beloved Disciple and held that he wrote both the Gospel and Revelation in Asia.”²³

Why then, especially in light of the fact that Irenaeus’ leading

¹⁹Irenaeus, Heresies, 1. 9. 3.
²⁰Ibid., 1. 9. 2.
²¹Ibid., 2. 22. 5.
²²Ibid., 3. 3. 4.
²³Gunther, “Identifications,” 418. See Bauckham, “Papias,” 67f. Bauckham concludes that John the Beloved Disciple and Apostle was not the same person as John the son of Zebedee. Gunther, however, makes no such distinction, and therefore, apparently contradicts himself. Nonetheless, both agree with the point being argued here, that Irenaeus clearly distinguishes John as an Apostle.
argument against heretics was their nonconformity to apostolic teachings,\(^{24}\) does he not style John as "the Apostle"? The answer to this question could very well be hidden in Irenaeus' understanding of the significance of the designation "disciple of the Lord." Donovan contends that this title implies apostleship:

If he once virtually called him the Apostle, and equated him to Apostles, then an Apostle he cannot fail to be. And this inference is corroborated by the noteworthy fact that the disciples of the Lord is practically the only title under which the Apostles are spoken of in the Fourth Gospel itself.\(^{25}\)

This hypothesis could well be true. If it were, it would certainly be another explanation for Irenaeus' consistent use of "Disciple of the Lord" rather than "Apostle." This would also explain Irenaeus' failure to use this designation for Paul, instead calling him exclusively "Apostle," seeing that Paul never was a "disciple." This inference is also supported by the regular use of the title "disciple of the Lord"—in reference to the twelve apostles—by the second century churches, especially in Asia Minor between the years 100-150. This factor would best be explained by their high esteem of John and his Gospel.\(^{26}\) Not only did the early second century churches in Asia Minor understand this designation as synonymous with apostolicity, but apparently so did Eusebius

\(^{24}\)See Irenaeus, Heresies 3. 2.

\(^{25}\)Donovan, "John, the Disciple of the Lord," Irish Ecclesiastical Record 41 (1933): 40.

\(^{26}\)This last conclusion could well offer credibilidad to Irenaeus’ belief that the Fourth Gospel was composed in Ephesus. For an Ephesian Gospel would have been highly esteemed by those in Asia Minor, and one should not be surprised that Johannine traditions were repeated by Papias and others.
more than 200 years later. For Irenaeus, in his account of John’s leaving the bath-house in Ephesus after discerning that Cerinthus was inside, says, “There are also those who heard from him that John, the disciple of the Lord, going to bathe at Ephesus, . . .”

Eusebius, however, in relating the same account comments, “He states on the authority of Polycarp that one day John the Apostle went into a bath-house. . . .” Eusebius, thus, seems to understand Irenaeus’ use of “disciple of the Lord,” as it relates to John, as being equal to “Apostle.” Thus, Donovan’s inference seems quite reasonable. Therefore, since he substitutes unhesitatingly Apostle for Disciple of the Lord, the point that Irenaeus acknowledges his John, to whom he attributes authorship of the Fourth Gospel, to be none other than the Apostle John, appears to be well attested. Hengel, in fact, agrees, noting, “For him, this John is identical with one of the Twelve, the apostle and son of Zebedee.” Irenaeus’ testimony impacts the Church so significantly that this conclusion gains universal acceptance. From this point on (c. 170), all in the early Churches agreed that the author of the Fourth Gospel was unequivocally John.

Irenaeus, however, provides more information relevant to this study. In a letter to his boyhood friend Florinus, who had since

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27Irenaeus, Heresies 3. 3. 4 (emphasis added).
28Eusebius, History 3. 28. 4 (emphasis added).
29Hengel, Question, 3.
30This present research tends to favor the view that there had always been universal acceptance of the Fourth Gospel in the early Churches. This point, however, is hard to verify in the earliest fathers, as has already been noted, due primarily to a lack of evidence on both sides.
become apostate and was leading a heretical band in Rome, he recalled their former days in which they studied under Polycarp. Regarding them he noted,

For, while I was yet a boy, I saw thee in Lower Asia with Polycarp, distinguishing thyself in the royal court, and endeavoring to gain his approbation. For I have a more vivid recollection of what occurred at that time than of recent events (inasmuch as the experiences of childhood, keeping pace with the growth of the soul, becoming incorporated with it); so that I can even describe the place where the blessed Polycarp used to sit and discourse—his going out, too, and his coming in—his general mode of life and personal appearance, together with the discourses which he delivered to the people; also how he would speak of his familiar intercourse with John, and with the rest of those who had seen the Lord; and how he would call their words to remembrance. Whatsoever things he had heard from them respecting the Lord, both with regard to his miracles and His teaching, Polycarp having thus received from the eye-witnesses of the Word of life, would recount them all in harmony with the Scriptures. These things, through God's mercy which was upon me, I then listened to attentively, and treasured them up not on paper, but in my heart; and I am continually, by God's grace, revolving these things accurately in my mind. And I can bear witness... [of] that blessed and apostolic presbyter.31

Here Irenaeus makes several claims that have not escaped scrutiny. In fact, this may be one of the most highly contested components of Irenaeus' works. He makes two statements of importance here, First, he notes that he personally sat under the teaching of Polycarp. Secondly, He claims that Polycarp likewise studied at the feet of John and is therefore an apostolic presbyter.32 Ernst Haenchens contends, "Irenaeus is admittedly an unreliable witness; he has Polycarp installed by the Apostle as Bishop of Smyrna, he even holds that he was a disciple of John, who was a disciple of the Lord."33

31Irenaeus, Florinus 1.
32Based on the arguments above, one may reasonably conclude that this John was the same John who appears throughout Irenaeus' writings, namely John the Apostle.
33Haenchen, John, Vol. 1, 8.
Although most scholars accept the first proposition as plausible, the second claim, that Polycarp was a disciple of the Apostle John, has aroused much debate. This debate is natural in the sense that if this statement went uncontested it would then be very difficult to argue away the testimony of Irenaeus, for he would be but one generation from the Apostles. The counter to Irenaeus comes in two forms. First, there are those who contend that Irenaeus was honestly mistaken. He simply was confused at the words of Polycarp and mistook Polycarp’s references to John (i.e., the Elder) as references to John the Apostle. Second, others believe that Irenaeus distorted the facts intentionally, so as to make himself an indirect disciple of an apostle. He allegedly did this, it is claimed, for apologetic and, perhaps, egotistical motives.

As to the first contention, that Polycarp was simply confused, Bacon comments,

For Irenaeus there is, of course, but one John at Ephesus, apostle, seer of Patmos, and... also “elder,” usage to the contrary notwithstanding. Polycarp and Papias must both be his direct disciples and appointees, because forsooth, Irenaeus could remember from his growing boyhood stories publicly related to Polycarp as from “John” about the sayings and mighty works of the Lord. The fact that Papias likewise in his Expositions cited “traditions of John” was for the eager credulity of Irenaeus proof positive that both men were immediate disciples and appointees of John the Apostle at Ephesus.35

Elsewhere Bacon is quick to note that these recollections of Irenaeus were ones in which he is “far removed in space and time.”36

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34There are, of course, many scholars who hold to a combination of the two basic conclusions.
35Bacon, “Mythical,” 322.
36Bacon, “Elder of Ephesus,” 126.
The proposition that Irenaeus errs in his recollections by confusing the Johns has some merit. However, it hangs on several assumptions and creates several unexplainable phenomena. The first retort is that this charge begs the question in that it assumes the existence of two Johns. Secondly, it is an instance of special pleading. For it must be considered incredible that such a confusion could actually have occurred. How could Irenaeus not have been aware of both the existence of a John the Elder, who is conspicuous by his absence from the writings of Irenaeus, and of the distinctions that Polycarp assuredly must have made between the two Johns?\textsuperscript{37} Moreover, this proposition also fails to notice that there are certain events in a person's life which he never forgets. From the testimony of Irenaeus, his encounters with Polycarp certainly appear to have been such for him.

Further the statements of Irenaeus are filled with historical nuances that beg for acceptance, such as the following: he has a "more vivid recollection"\textsuperscript{38} of these things than of some current events; he can describe the place "where the blessed Polycarp used to sit";\textsuperscript{39} he can even describe his "mode of life and personal

\textsuperscript{37}On this point many attempt to show that Irenaeus' young age and/or his inability to recall accurately the information led him astray. They fail to note, however, that although Polycarp's writings are not extant today they certainly were available to Irenaeus, who as a student of Polycarp, surely had read them. Therefore, if he was confused at all he could simply read up and find out what Polycarp had said.
\textsuperscript{38}Irenaeus, \textit{Florinus} 1. 1.
\textsuperscript{39}Ibid.
appearance”;⁴⁰ and he can describe “how he would speak.”⁴¹ All these incidental details lend credulity to Irenaeus’ testimony.

Further, his confession that he “then listened attentively, and treasured them up not on paper, but in my heart,”⁴² which would normally tend to lessen one’s credibility, in that his hearers must now rely on his recall abilities, also exudes authenticity. His recall, however, of what Polycarp would have thought had he been aware of the present state of Florinus’ faith, also bears the marks of legitimacy.

Further, scholars seem to overlook the important fact that Irenaeus was writing to an individual whom he acknowledges was present at the said events. The idea that Irenaeus’ recall was blurred must also presuppose Florinus’ recall to be equally blurred and falsely recalling the same distorted events! Finally, the contention that Irenaeus’ recall was blurred fails to consider the facts that he was not necessarily all that young when the said events occurred, and that they had occurred not an excessively long time earlier. For although he styles himself a “boy,”⁴³ he notes also that Florinus, as preserved by Eusebius, was “cutting a fine figure.”⁴⁴ Given the widely acknowledged date of A. D. 155/56 for the martyrdom of Polycarp, and the dates of 120-130 for the birth of Irenaeus, one can reasonably assume that Irenaeus may have been

⁴⁰Ibid.
⁴¹Ibid.
⁴²Ibid.
⁴³Ibid. See also Heresies 3. 3. 4, in which he says that he was a youth in the time of Polycarp.
⁴⁴Eusebius, History 5. 20.
conservatively at least 15 years of age when Irenaeus sat under Polycarp’s teachings. Thus, it is hard to accept that an educated youth would make such an obvious mistake. If the fault lies not in Irenaeus’ recall, then one must presume that Polycarp failed to make the proper distinctions. This is especially hard to accept when Irenaeus likely had access to Polycarp’s apparently extensive writings. As Donovan noted, “such a supposition is too utterly gratuitous and makes too many demands on one’s faith.”

This would place these meetings with Polycarp at c. 140. Given that his “Against Heresies” was written during the Episcopate of Eleutherus (182-188), it can be seen that Irenaeus is recalling events from no more than 40 years prior. This is not so great an amount of time, in light of the fact that the events were of such a great importance to Irenaeus, that one could reasonably contend that he was suffering from a faulty memory. Thus, the testimony of Irenaeus to his meetings with Polycarp display numerous features that suggest a considerable amount of historical trustworthiness. To contend otherwise becomes a case of special pleading, and begs the question in that the only alternative explanation (that Irenaeus confused the two Johns) is hypothetical.

The second contention against Irenaeus’ testimony of

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45Donovan, “Papias,” 484.
46It should be noted that Irenaeus’ meetings with Polycarp were those in which Florinus was also present. There is nothing to preclude the possibility that Irenaeus continued to meet with Polycarp after this time.
47Hengel (Question, 124) states, “Here of course we find ourselves on the thin ice of hypotheses which are difficult to prove.”
CHAPTER 7
CONCLUSION

The question of the authorship of the Fourth Gospel will not be answered by the external evidence alone. However, the external evidence presents a reasonably strong case for the apostolic origin of the Gospel. A detailed examination of the testimony of the early fathers lends favorably to their having attributed the authorship of the Fourth Gospel to the Apostle John, the son of Zebedee, whom they understood to be the Beloved Disciple as well.

The failure to find sufficient testimony in the writings of Ignatius and Polycarp should not be overstated. For with Ignatius only seven letters, all written under a similar circumstance and for similar purposes, exist, and these do not address the question of John and the Fourth Gospel. Polycarp’s writings, with one exception, have not survived at all. Therefore even fewer details of his full position are extant. There is, however, good reason to believe that Ignatius and Polycarp were both aware of the Gospel of John, but the limitations of the evidence leave the conclusions mostly as inferences drawn from arguments from silence.

Justin and Papias provide the next generation of testimony to the Fourth Gospel. Although a few scholars deny it, the writings of
Justin display a more definite familiarity with the Gospel of John. The parallels are significant and commonplace. There is also very convincing evidence that Justin includes the Fourth Gospel as one of the Memoirs of the Apostles, and that he explicitly refers to the author of the Gospel as the Apostle John. Although Papias does not refer to the authorship of the Gospel--at least according to the scant manuscripts of his writings still extant--he is a major source of debate on the issue. His possible listing of two Johns has created a variety of hypotheses, especially of late, as to who was the author of the Fourth Gospel.

It has been shown here that there is good reason to believe that Papias was not aware of any Elder John as a separate individual apart from the Apostle. The designation of the second John as "Elder" only serves to equate him with the Apostles mentioned by Papias, since they also are classified as Elders. The conclusion that Papias was a hearer of John appears to be valid according to the best understanding of Papias' text. If he had only addressed the question of authorship of the Fourth Gospel, then his testimony, being that of an eyewitness, would be of great usefulness.

The testimony of Irenaeus is without hesitation the most significant on the question of Johannine authorship. Naturally, Irenaeus has been the recipient of the greatest amount of scorn as well. His importance lies primarily in his claim to being separated from the Apostle only by his teacher Polycarp. Also, the weight of Irenaeus' influence can be seen from the fact that his view of Johannine authorship became that of nearly all others who followed. This research has endeavored to show that there are strong reasons
to believe this Bishop's claims were founded in fact. A number of the dimensions of his testimony contend for its historical veracity. Further, the very fact that Irenaeus was writing to an individual who could verify or destroy his claims also argues for the trustworthiness of his testimony.¹ Irenaeus' emphatic ascription of the Fourth Gospel to John the son of Zebedee and Apostle should be taken as an accurate reflection of the truth.

Thus, one may turn to the internal evidence to discern the authorship of the Fourth Gospel with a reasonable assurance that the early church ascribed its authorship to the apostle John. Certainly, no amount of external evidence can override the conclusions derived from the source itself. Nonetheless, the external evidence at best depicts the author as the son of Zebedee and at worst depicts the author as an eyewitness.

¹Inexplicably, this argument has apparently not been used before.
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