

INERRANCY AND THE GOSPELS

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This is a continuation of a series on the inerrancy of Scripture. So far we have looked at the inerrancy of (1) the books of Moses, (2) the historic books, (3) the poetry books, and (4) the major prophetic writings. In future articles we'll deal with the inerrancy of (1) the Pauline epistles, (2) the general epistles, (3) the book of Hebrews, and (5) the book of Revelation.

REVIEW OF THE DOCTRINE OF INERRANCY

The doctrine of inerrancy is actually an extension of the doctrine of inspiration. If the Holy Spirit has inspired the writers of Scripture and superintending their message, then it stands to reason that the message is without error. The written revelation reflects the thoughts of a holy God who would speak to us only what is true.

Inerrancy extends only to the original autographs of the prophets and apostles. It does not cover the transmission and copying of the text. The following describes both inspiration and inerrancy:

Inspiration may be defined as the inward work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts and minds of chosen men who then wrote the Scriptures so that God got written what He wanted. The Bible in all of its parts constitutes the written Word of God to man. This Word is free from all error in its original autographs. It is wholly trustworthy in matters of history and doctrine. However limited may have been their knowledge, and however much they may have erred when they were not writing sacred Scripture, the authors of Scripture, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, were preserved from making factual, historical, scientific, or other errors.¹

THE GOSPELS AND INERRANCY

The issue of the inerrancy of the Gospels has been clouded by liberal attempts to say that the Gospels are composed of a patchwork of myth, rumors, and tradition. Liberals argue for a Two-Document Hypothesis and even up to a Four-Document Hypothesis as a base for the Gospels.

¹ Harold Lindell, *The Battle For The Bible*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), pp. 30-31

They contend for a very late writing period for most of the books; although, they try to argue for the primacy of Mark and the early penning of that Gospel.

Reading the arguments of the critics leads to conclusions that do not make sense to a thinking person. It is clear that the critics have a destructive mentality and a naturalistic orientation. To them the Bible is simply the thoughts of a mere man. There is no inspiration of Scripture, much less, the concept of inerrancy. As stated in previous articles in this series, there are thousands of verses throughout the entire Bible that attest to inerrancy. We do not have to shrink back and let the deficiency of liberalism take the lead!

THE DIATESSARON

After the death of Justin (A.D. 165), an influential churchman named Tatian returned to his home in Assyria. He edited a piece of literature concerning the gospels that would last for centuries. *Diatessaron* is a musical term meaning the harmony of four. In this he created a continuous narrative in which he stitched the four gospels together forming a chronology. The gospels could be seen as a whole. The churches throughout the Bible world had already accepted the four gospels as inspired and without error. These books were seen on an equal footing with the Old Testament prophets. Justin had earlier written that the apostolic memoirs were called gospels, "and they are read in church along with the 'compositions of the prophets.'"

These things tell us the church had accepted the gospels as the first part of a new canon. At these early dates, no arguments can be found that attempt to deny the fact that the writers had acted as inspired prophets.

THE ARGUMENTS OF HARRISON

Everett F. Harrison produced an excellent standard work, *Introduction To The New Testament*.² For years he was the senior conservative New Testament professor at Fuller Seminary. What he writes about the synoptic Gospel problem is worth quoting at length. Concerning Mark being the first Gospel he says:

It may well be that Synoptic Criticism has too readily relegated Matthew and Luke to the position of editors who are at times quite unimaginatively dull in their following of sources, at other times quite perverse in their attempted originality. [The disciples] ought rather to be thought of as men who had a keen interest in the material that passed through their hands and a full knowledge of the

² *Introduction To The New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974)

extent of the tradition, from which they were drawing what served their purpose to best advantage.³

Form criticism either forgets or minimizes the regulating influence of the apostles and other witnesses of the life of Jesus. In their desire to honor the Lord, these leaders would not be a party to the habit of ascribing to Jesus what in fact did not originate with him at all.⁴

The notion that much of the material in the Gospels is the result of random selection of isolated bits of tradition does not satisfy. It ignores the existence of the Gospel pattern with its common outline running through all the accounts.⁵

It is utterly fanciful to see in the choice of materials for our Gospels simply those things that had an existential interest for Christians. Jesus himself was the greatest interest they had, as the Acts and the Epistles abundantly attest.⁶

The theory of form criticism is not substantiated by the Prologue of Luke. This theory makes the community the creator, custodian, and transmitter of the tradition. Individual authorship and influence upon the tradition are reduced almost to the vanishing point as factors to be considered. But in Luke's opening words we find that there was a certain group, much smaller than the church as a whole, that preserved the tradition and made it available to those who wrote.⁷

FORM CRITICISM AND THE GOSPELS

To understand the view of inspiration and the Gospels, one has to briefly address the issue of Form Criticism (FC). Even some Evangelicals are currently embracing FC, but its origins are from liberalism. Evangelicals accepting at least some of the methods of FC still attempt to cling to inspiration and inerrancy, but most outside observers argue strongly that, in time, these doctrines will be jettisoned as well.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 153

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 158

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 159

⁷ *Ibid.*

Farnell has an excellent discussion of FC in his co-authored book, *The Jesus Crisis*.⁸ Citing F.F. Bruce, FC represents an attempt to find the oral history of written sources, and then, to systematize that material by various "forms" or categories of narrative, discourse, etc.⁹

The expression "Form Criticism" comes from the German word *Formgeschichte* (English, "form history"). The German name reveals its negative philosophical underpinnings through usage of the term *eschichte* instead of the *Historie*. *Historie* refers to objective facts of history (external and verifiable), while *Geschichte* dichotomizes the concept of history into interpretations of history, namely, history as significant, internal and non-verifiable. According to this distinction, that Jesus was a man who lived in the first century is an objective statement of historical fact, or *Historie*, that may be verified by canons of "historical reason." But, the assertion that Jesus was the Son of God is an interpretative statement and belongs to the realm of *Geschichte* in that an assumption of faith is its only verification. ... the "Risen Christ" is a mythological concept of the early church that creatively thought of the dead Jesus as the risen "Son of Man."¹⁰

Kelber notes, FC actually has its origins in a supposed oral synoptic tradition that goes from a natural, evolutionary, biological process, or from simplicity to complexity, from an evolutionary transition from the pre-gospel stream of tradition, to the written gospel. Without any proof FC goes on and creates a huge scenario of history of Jesus came about. The argument goes, the church went through an oral period of passing on traditions through teachers and storytellers. The assumption is that the Gospels were from the Church, by the Church, and for the Church.¹¹ The Church added fabrications and accretions, and the Gospels took on various fixed forms over time. The various Christian communities then locked in these forms. "Eventually, anonymous gospel writers collected and arranged the individual stories into written narratives that reflected the needs and interests of their particular communities."¹²

Rudolf Bultmann wanted to "modernize" the Gospels by demythologizing them. He felt they were outdated with popular but unscientific ideas. Miraculous thoughts of the Divine, the Son of God, demon pos-

⁸ Robert L. Thomas, F. David Farnell. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1998, pp. 198-232

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 187

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 190

¹² *Ibid.*

session, angels, resurrection, voices from heaven, and so on, "are first-century man's primitive understanding of the world that needs to be demythologized and put in twentieth century terms."¹³

Farnell further maintains

Form Criticism has a predilection toward allowing for errors in the Gospels; grammatico-historical exegesis presupposes inerrancy and has for centuries supplied genre descriptions without negative conclusions regarding historicity and the miraculous therein.¹⁴

Finally, he well states:

One can learn what Jesus taught and understand the Gospels without FC, for the Gospels are not reinterpretations of the life of Christ to fit later historical circumstances in the Christian community. They present one life situation, that of Jesus Himself. To go beyond that and hypothesize an additional one impugns the text and courts hermeneutical disaster.¹⁵

As one can see, it is small leap from such a naturalistic, evolutionary application to history, to a denial or a certain downplaying of the doctrines of inspiration and inerrancy. Many Evangelical schools are progressively making the move. These biblical institutions do not just suddenly publish a denial of the inspiration and inerrancy doctrines, but the shift is there. The final results will be seen down the road in a younger group of scholars.

THE ARAMAIC MATTHEW

There are various theories as to how Matthew came about. Some Evangelicals accept these theories while others do not. The Q theory argues that a source outside the Gospels gives various stories about the life of Christ. Then there is the M document theory and the Ur-Markus, theory, besides many others. These approaches argue that the Gospels were penned much later than we now believe. The writers drew from such early oracles or "notes" and then compiled their own books by picking and choosing what they wanted to highlight.

Another theory called the Logia approach has to do with Matthew specifically. This comes about because of two statements made by the church fathers Papias and Irenaeus. Papias wrote "Matthew composed the Logia in the Hebrew tongue; and each one interpreted them as he was able." (Most believe "Hebrew tongue" refers to the Aramaic language

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 194-95

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 217

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 216

that is related to Hebrew.) Irenaeus said "Matthew also issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect." Irenaeus' statement carries weight because he knew Polycarp in his early age, and Polycarp said he taught what he had learned from the apostles.

Several questions arise: (1) Did Matthew write first an Aramaic version and then translate this into Greek? (2) Did Matthew write a Greek version apart from the Aramaic copy?

Other questions: (1) Does "Logia" mean the "sayings" of Jesus, or "oracles"? If "Logia" means "sayings," it could simply be referring to a collection of what Jesus said and not the complete Gospel of Matthew. If it means "oracles," as it does in almost all of its New Testament usage, then it may be referring to Matthew's Gospel.

If there was an entire edition of Matthew's Gospel in Aramaic, it is never again referred to. The only edition that the early church acknowledged and that has come down to us in history is the Greek version. Being a multi-lingual government official, it would have been no problem for Matthew to produce both versions. He would not have had to "translate" what he previously wrote in the way we normally think. In fact, many argue it would have been easier for him to simply write both versions independently, though that is not necessary to maintain a strong view of inspiration. "It is evident that when the Greek Matthew had once become current in the Church, the Aramaic edition of it dropped out. ... without the assistance of Greek writers, Matthew reproduced his Gospel in Greek."¹⁶

From all the evidence, including important internal statements, inspiration and inerrancy is a sovereign work of God's Spirit. Matthew wrote his Gospel to meet a definite need. Thus, "he formed a definite purpose for his Gospel; and that he [then] selected his materials, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, with that object in view."¹⁷

THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

As already shown by this extended study in past Journal issues, inerrancy says that inspiration extends to every sentence and every word in Scripture. The Holy Spirit inspired each word. One of the tests for the inspiration and inerrancy of Matthew would be his extensive quoting from the Old Testament. Does he do this with accuracy? Are the events in Christ's life actually fulfillments of what was prophesied centuries before?

The book of Matthew teaches loud and clear that the life of Christ was a detailed fulfillment of prophecies made in the past. Seventeen

¹⁶ Henry Clarence Thiessen, *Introduction To The New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1958, p. 134

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 135

times the apostle Matthew writes "It is fulfilled" or "fulfills." Nine times he says Christ fulfills what "is written." Fifty-nine times Matthew writes about other fulfillments without using "written" or "fulfilled" to introduce the Old Testament quote. Matthew takes for granted that his reading audience knows from what book in the Old Testament he is quoting. There are dozens of other allusions of happenings that point back to other ancient prophecies.

It is not an overstatement to say that Matthew the apostle weaves verses in fulfillment throughout this Gospel. In fact the very framework of this writing is based on Old Testament prophecies. It would not be too extreme to say that most references are literal fulfillment. Many argue that some of Matthew's quotes are "cheap" inerrancy or illustration fulfillment. That they say this weakens or "cheapens" parable or illustration Matthew forces fulfillment on some verses. In other words, he simply "reaches" back into the Old Testament and tries to make some event in Christ's life be a fulfillment of prophecy. Thus, Matthew is accused of forcing an interpretation.

Two of the most cited Old Testament quotes are Matthew 2:15 and 2:18. Verse 2:15 quotes Hosea 11:1. "Out of Egypt did I call My Son." Verse 2:18 quotes Jeremiah 31:15. "A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children; and she refused to be comforted, because they were no more." First, the 2:18 passage:

Right off, it must be noted that Rachel certainly stands out in the passage as a figure of Jewish motherhood. Rachel was the beloved wife of Jacob who bore his favorite sons Joseph and Benjamin (Gen. 35:24). But, as Matthew quotes it, is the rest of the prophecy to be taken in a poetic or figurative sense? Looking at the prophecy as given in Jeremiah 31:15, it is cited as a historic event. The Rachel, even by Jeremiah scholars, is that "the voice heard in Ramah, Rachel weeping" has to do with the Babylonian captivity. Jewish mothers were crying for their dead children as they were leaving the place called Ramah for exile in Babylon. Ramah was a staging area used by the Babylonians for deportation, five miles north of Jerusalem. This seems to be confirmed by Jeremiah 40:1: "Nebuzaradan captain of the bodyguard had released [Jeremiah] from Ramah, when he had taken him bound in chains, among all the exiles of Jerusalem and Judah, who were being exiled to Babylon."

In rabbinical hermeneutics a passage "fulfilled" could be seen as a (1) literal fulfillment, (2) a parallel circumstance, or (3) a type that illustrates a specific idea or passage.

The slaying of the children by Herod as recorded in Matthew would be either (2) or (3). This in no way destroys Matthew's use of the word "fulfilled." Matthew the apostle was smart enough to understand how he was using the Jeremiah 31:15 passage. And Jewish readers also understood perfectly well how he was quoting the passage.

Here again we have an example of St. Matthew's application of a passage that had a direct bearing upon the events of the time when it was delivered to those that his narrative had brought before him.¹⁸

Matthew felt for the mothers of Jeremiah's day as the children were dragged away to death.

St. Matthew felt, history had been reproduced once again. The tomb of Rachel was as familiar to the people of Bethlehem (it stands about one mile to the north of the town) as it had been in the time of Jeremiah, and the imagery was therefore as natural in the one case as the other.¹⁹

Matthew 2:15 is a partial quote of Hosea 11:1: "When Israel was a youth I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son." Matthew probably uses this passage as a type of the family, Joseph, Mary, and Jesus, coming out from their stay in Egypt. An angel had instructed Joseph to take the family there because of the intense searching of Herod who wanted the Messiah killed (v. 13). At the death of Herod a year later, "what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet (Hosea) [was] fulfilled, saying, 'Out of Egypt ...'"

Israel was called God's son (Exod. 4:22-23). Collectively, as a people, they were called forth from the Egypt of Judaism. Matthew sees a higher representative in the person of the only begotten Son. He goes from the more common meaning to the higher application that is given to Christ as the Son of God in a far greater way. Again, was Matthew simply doing his interpretations, or did he not know what he was doing? And, did his readers understand? It is easy to become the judge of far off history and assume that no one was smart enough to catch the error that we were able to spot! How assuming we can often be!

What God said about the nation of Israel in Hosea was brought to a more complete realization through Messiah, who typically represented all that the nation was to God. Along this same line of reasoning, Jesus referred to Himself as the "true vine" (John 15:1), whereas that analogy was used of Israel in Isaiah 5:1-7.²⁰

¹⁸ Charles John Elliott, *Elliott's Commentary On The Whole Bible*, 8 Volumes. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1959, VI:8

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Ed Glasscock, *Matthew*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1997, p. 59

The accuracy of Matthew is on the line. Over and over in his narration, he makes historic and chronological references. Though the book is not written in 100% chronology, Matthew places the stamp of literal history on the events surrounding the life of Jesus. He makes it quite clear that the reader understands he is giving to him the events just as they happened. He writes "now and," "now when," "and having heard," "then when," "but when," "now in those days," "while He was saying," "and behold," "now there was," "then He began," "at that time," etc.

And with other books of the Bible, the burden of proving the Scriptures wrong or in error lies in the lap of the doubter, and that doubt must be proven objectively. So far, those who deny inspiration and inerrancy can only move the target by coming up with naturalistic theories by which they attempt to destroy the Bible.

The early church accepted Matthew as the first Gospel and never challenged its truthfulness. It stands supreme and foremost in the New Testament.

MARK

As we continue to look at the doctrine of inspiration and the adjunct or resultant doctrine, the doctrine of inerrancy, it must be noted that in the early church, and for centuries thereafter, the four gospels were seen as given from God. The writers were not the same par as the prophets of the Old Testament. This point was hardly disputed in early church history, and the accuracy of their work was rarely if ever questioned.

Eusebius (263-339) the great early church scholar quotes Papias (circa 140), bishop of Hierapolis, who in quoting John the apostle, gives an extremely strong endorsement of Mark and its accuracy. He wrote:

The Elder [John] said this also: Mark, who became Peter's interpreter, wrote accurately, though not in order, all that he remembered of the things said or done by the Lord. For he afterwards heard the Lord nor been one of his followers, but he had, as I said, he had followed Peter, who used to compose his discourses with a view to the needs of his hearers, but not as though he were drawing up a connected account of the Lord's sayings. So Mark made no mistake in thus recording some things just as he remembered them. For he was careful of this one thing, to omit none of the things he had heard and to make no untrue statements therein.²¹

Some have rightly noted that the Papias tradition, with its insistence on the apostolic, eyewitness source of Mark's Gospel, runs counter to liberal criticism as to how the Gospels came about. Another important

²¹ Ecclesiastical History 3.39.15

tradition is the Anti-Marcionite Prologue to Mark (A.D. 160-80), that mentions Mark as a Gospel writer and connects him with Peter. It notes "He was Peter's interpreter. After the death of Peter himself he wrote down this same gospel in the regions of Italy."

On this Bruce adds:

On Mark's record Papias speaks somewhat defensively, as though he knew of criticisms that had been voiced against it, especially on the ground that its order was defective. To this Papias replies that Mark did not set out to write an orderly account: his aim was to record in writing whatever Peter had to tell of the words and sayings of Jesus; and Peter simply mentioned from time to time those things which the circumstances of the moment required. In what he wrote down Mark made no mistake: in order, as in matter, he adhered to what Peter said.²²

Finally, "The tradition of the Markan authorship, though called in question from time to time, remains secure."²³

LUKE & ACTS

Luke and Acts are often seen as two parts of just one book. Most believe that the apostle Luke wrote the life of Christ and then just kept going as he penned the story of the early church in the volume we call "the Acts of the apostles." Both books begin with almost the same wording. But as well, the statements place the accuracy of Luke on the line. And as we've written many times in this series on inerrancy, often the burden of denial of the doctrine lies with those who are attempting to destroy the Bible.

Luke 1:1-4

1:1 Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, 2 just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word have handed them down to us, 3 it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; 4 so that you might know the exact truth about the things you have been taught.

²² F. F. Bruce, *The Canon Of Scripture*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988, p. 125

²³ Frank E. Gaebelin, gen. ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 12 Volumes (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984, 8:607

Acts 1:1-3

1:1 The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, 2 until the day when He was taken up, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen. 3 To these He also presented Himself alive, after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days, and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God

These statements are extremely strong. They tie the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of Christ together with the apostles. Though Luke and Acts have not escaped the spotlights of the humanistic literary critics, these books have a certain stamp placed upon them that cannot be simply brushed off. Though certain details have from time to time been raised about the gospel of Luke, these have not brought into question Luke's authorship.

Because Luke was such a close follower of Paul, Irenaeus believed when Paul said "my gospel" in Romans 2:16, he had in mind Luke's gospel account. This view was also widely believed by many of the church fathers, though more than likely Paul was simply referring to the doctrine of the gospel as Paul presented it. But the fact that Irenaeus said it, tells us how respected the gospel of Luke was by the early Christians.

Both Origen and Jerome believed Paul's statement about a certain brother "whose praise is in the gospel throughout all the churches" (2 Cor. 8:18) was offering to praise Luke's gospel account. Harrison adds:

The Lukan writings themselves contain no explicit statement of authorship, yet they are not completely anonymous, for the writer refers to himself in the Prologue ("it seemed good to me also") and at the beginning of the Acts ("in the former treatise I made"). It goes without saying that he must have been known therefore to others as well. This conclusion is strengthened by the circumstance that the patristic writers make much of apostolicity as the criterion for the reception of books. In view of this tendency, the very fact that the third Gospel bears the name of Luke rather than some apostolic figure in the stricter sense speaks eloquently in favor of the tradition.²⁴

In the Prologue (1:1-4) of the gospel, there are strong, historic indicators that are compelling. For example, the apostle writes that "he compiled an account" of things "accomplished among us." By this he may mean that he was an observer on the side, or the "us" could simply

²⁴ Harrison, p. 196

refer to the larger body of the apostles before Luke arrived on the scene. Either way, it is saying that what he is writing was confirmed by a group and not simply by an individual. In addition, "they" (the facts) were handed down to "us" by "those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word."

Luke continues and notes that he "investigated every thing carefully." And then he adds "from the beginning." This would mean that he had to interview many witnesses. There must have been a certain comparison of stories, notes, and experiences. If there had been inaccuracies in Luke's compiled work, someone could have objected and called the account untrue. Thus, there are many checks and balances in what Luke is setting forth for examination.

Luke goes on and adds that he "wrote it out" in "consecutive order," or chronologically in order. He did it so that Theophilus would "know" the "exact truth" about "the things you have been taught." Obviously being an aristocrat, Theophilus would be so important that no one would want him to know that which is false. In fact, some speculate that Theophilus may have assisted in the publication of Luke's work. Thus, only the truth would be adequate! In all of this, there is a wide circle of people who knew people, etc. To falsify information about Jesus the Messiah would be virtually impossible.

THE MURATORIAN CANON

Written around 170 A.D., this gives one of the first references to the tradition of Lukan authorship. It reads:

The third book of the Gospel: According to Luke. This Luke was a physician. After the ascension of Christ, when Paul had taken him along with him as one devoted to letters, he wrote it under the Lord's own name from hearsay. For he himself has not seen the Lord in person, but, insofar as he was able to follow [it all], he thus began his account with the birth of John.

The second and third centuries produced a long list of endorsements for the book of Luke. There was little question about Luke, until the destructive work of form criticism began to do its dirty deed. Sir William Ramsay the great Oxford scholar opposed with factual accuracy the critical Tubingen School of criticism. With careful investigation he found the legendary historical and geographical date in Luke-Acts proved factual over and over again. He concluded:

[Luke's] statements of fact [are] trustworthy; he is possessed of the true historic sense; he fixes his mind on the idea and plan that rules in the evolution of history, and proportions the scale of his treatment to the importance of each incident. He seizes the important and critical events and shows their true nature at greater length, while he touches lightly or omits entirely much that was valueless for his purpose.²⁵

JOHN

Many scholars believe that the four gospels were named after their authors very early in history. Also, early on, they were also bound together and circulated as a "four chapter" book. One of the earliest fragments of John is dated from around A.D. 130, with a few words from chapter 18. Beginning in the third century, indeed, all four books were discovered bound together along with the book of Acts. One can well argue that the early church viewed these volumes as a unit. Together they painted a full picture of the ministry of Christ and then followed up with the aftermath of His resurrection, with the coming of the Holy Spirit, and the birth of the church.

The first unambiguous quotation from the fourth gospel that ascribes the work to John comes from a Theophilus of Antioch (A.D. 181). But before this there are other quotes from Tatian (a student of Justin), Claudius Apollinaris (bishop of Hierapolis) and Athenagoras.

This pushes us back to Polycarp and Papias, information about whom derives primarily from Irenaeus (the early church (second century) and Eusebius the historian of the early church (fourth century). Polycarp was martyred in AD 156 at the age of eighty-six. There is no reason therefore to deny the truth of the claims that he associated with the apostles in Asia (John, Andrew, Philip) and was "entrusted with the oversight of the Church in Smyrna by those who were eye-witnesses and ministers of the Lord."²⁶

Irenaeus adds, that the author of the fourth gospel is "John the disciple of the Lord, who leaned back on His breast, published the Gospel while he was resident at Ephesus in Asia." (Against Heresies iii. 1.2) Another statement, which cannot be substantiated, is that Papias, one of John's close disciples, wrote down this gospel at John's dictation. One of Papias' works survived into the Middle Ages but was later lost to history. Clement of Alexandria in the second-century wrote:

But that of John, last of all, conscious that the outward facts had been set forth in the Gospels (the three synoptics), was urged on by his disciples, and, divinely moved by the Spirit, composed a spiritual Gospel.

²⁵ Cited by C. Marvin Pate, *Luke*, Chicago: Moody Press, 1995, pp. 25-26

²⁶ D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According To John*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991, p. 26

By "spiritual" he probably meant the obvious fact that John's work deals with deep meaning rather than just historical facts. Early, the church recognized this in his work. As well, the church recognized that the book did not follow the same, almost detailed chronology as the other Gospels. Its outline follows the sayings of the Lord, and with great sensitivity, notes the spiritual reaction of people around Him.

Certainly from the end of the second century, there is virtual agreement in the church as to the authority, canonicity and authorship of the Gospel of John. An argument from silence in this case proves impressive. [Because we would otherwise have expected the person in question to make a lot of noise!] "It is most significant that Eusebius, who had access to many works which are now lost, speaks without reserve of the fourth Gospel as the unquestioned work of St. John" ... The silence is "most significant" precisely because it was Eusebius' concern to discuss the doubtful cases [in his writings].²⁷

The argument of silence is compelling, and it is a good argument. The great literary thinkers of those early centuries surely had the opportunity to raise questions about John if there were reasons to do so. They were closer to the events, and they knew people, and they knew people, etc.

The last chapter of John has some interesting statements that catch our attention. Christ's statement about Peter, "If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you?" (v. 22), became a much discussed saying. John then comments on a historic fact: "Therefore this saying [about Peter] went out among the brethren that that disciple would not die" (v. 23). Then John grants his readers a definite statement about himself as the author. Though some believe the Ephesian elders added verse 24, in order to place a stamp of authenticity and accuracy on this gospel. They may have written:

This is the disciple [who has written this gospel] who is testifying of these things and who wrote these things, and we know that his testimony is true (v. 24).

No one could make this claim unless there were living witnesses, who could vouch for his honesty, and the fact, that what he wrote was indeed factual! As this gospel was copied and passed about, this next-to-the-last verse was like a guarantee of authenticity. Readers who knew John, or at least knew of him, could also verify the final verse of the book (v. 25). He writes:

²⁷ Carson, p. 28

And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that would be written.