

JUSTIN MARTYR AND THE FOURTH GOSPEL

In the Introduction to his recent book *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel* (1964) Dr C. H. Dodd briefly surveys the question of this Gospel's authorship by John son of Zebedee and leaves it an open one. He readily admits that the external evidence in favour 'is relatively strong; from the closing decades of the second century the tradition is firm . . . Anyone who should take the view that in the absence of any cogent evidence to the contrary it is reasonable to accept Irenaeus's testimony is on strong ground.' He rejects for lack of cogency some recently popular evidence of John's martyrdom thirty years or so before the traditional date of the gospel's composition at the end of the first century and accepts this latter date as correct. 'Yet there are weaknesses in the external evidence', he continues. These, however, only 'leave it, as a whole, something short of full certainty.' Almost decisive admissions seemingly, but in Dr Dodd's view the internal evidence is strong enough to swing the balance of probabilities the other way. He sums it up in these words: 'It is not impossible to imagine that a Galilean fisherman may have grown into the accomplished theologian whom one meets in the Fourth Gospel, but I find it difficult.'

So far as the external evidence is concerned Dr Dodd says that 'try as we will, it does not seem possible to go behind Irenaeus. His evidence is formidable, even if it is not conclusive.' The main weakness, as he sees it, in this part of the evidence is that the eighty-year gap between the closing decades of the second century and the end of the first cannot be bridged. He pinpoints the chief of these 'weaknesses' in these words: 'The earlier the composition of the gospel is placed, the more surprising it becomes that, if it were indeed known to be the work of an apostle, Justin (who almost certainly quotes from it) should not have included it in the 'Memoirs of the Apostles', the title under which he cites the Synoptic Gospels' (p. 15). It is proposed to show here that this sentence does not reflect the facts. Justin (c. 114-165), so summarily dismissed from the debate by Dr Dodd, must be recalled to the witness stand and heard anew. The issue is not difficult to settle; one need but re-examine his every mention of the 'Memoirs' or their equivalent and see what he says. The English version to be quoted is that of the Ante-Nicene Library (Vol. 2, Edinburgh, 1867) which happens to be conveniently to hand, and the books are the (First) *Apology* (c. 138) and the *Dialogue with Trypho* (c. 139), almost exactly half-way across Dr Dodd's supposedly unbridgeable gap.

A preliminary point to be made in questioning Dr Dodd's unhappy sentence is that Justin, not 'almost certainly' but, *quite* certainly

quotes from the Fourth Gospel. Citations which Dr Dodd has in mind are presumably such slightly uncertain ones as : 'Jesus Christ is the *only* proper Son who has been *begotten* by God, being *His Word* and *first-begotten*' (Apol., 23) ; 'who being the *first-begotten* of God is *even God*' (id, 44) ; 'the food . . . from which our blood and flesh by transmutation are nourished is the flesh and blood of that Jesus who *was made flesh*' (id, 66) ; 'we are happy to die for the name of the good rock which causes *living water* to burst forth for . . . those who are willing to *drink of the water of life*' (Dial., 114) ; 'they call Him *the Word* because He *carries a message from the Father* to men' (id, 128) ; 'scoff not at *the King of Israel* as the rulers of your synagogues teach you' (id, 138) ; '*the eighth day* wherein Christ appeared when He rose from the dead' (id, 138). Though one need not claim that such citations as these, even in aggregate, are more than 'almost certain' references to the Fourth Gospel, it is not possible to accept the following as anything less than a fully certain quotation from it : 'Catechumens are regenerated in the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit and receive the washing with water. *For Christ also said : "except ye be born again ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven"*' (Apol., i, 61). This is a plain word-for-word quotation from John, 3:3, which appears nowhere in the Synoptic Gospels. Justin immediately follows it with : 'Now, that it is impossible for those *who have once been born to enter their mother's wombs* is manifest to all' (ibid). This is equally plainly a reference to the query raised by Nicodemus in the following verse (John 3:4), also found in no other gospel. After a short parenthetical reference to the saying of Isaias about scarlet sins being made white as snow Justin then adds : '*This we have learned from the apostles.*' Even if we have not yet an explicit mention of the *Memoirs* at this point (there is none in either *Apology*), it is difficult to see how the baptismal rite, so closely associated with a Fourth Gospel *ipse dixit* of the institutor of that rite, both being *indivisibly referred to the apostles*, can be anything less than the ascription of a Fourth Gospel quotation to an apostle's *Memoirs*. At any rate, the first part of Dr Dodd's objection falls to the ground, and the second part is already seriously undermined, even if it has not yet fallen.

Citations from the gospels are many in the two books of Justin being quoted ; about sixty-five appear in the Edinburgh Index of Texts and this list is not exhaustive. The '*Memoirs*', however, (or an equivalent expression) are mentioned only ten times, all in the Dialogue, so that it is exceptional for citations to be referred to them as their source. In five of these ten cases there need be no hesitation in agreeing with Dr Dodd that the Synoptic Gospels only are so described. But in the other five, especially if they be taken cumulatively, it must be

held that Dr Dodd has no solid ground for the assertion we quoted in our second paragraph. But before we come to these five cases, some consideration of the term 'Memoirs of the/His Apostles' should precede. The term lacks precision; not more than two of the four evangelists were also apostles. That distinction was not clearly made in these early times any more than bishops were clearly differentiated from presbyters some four decades earlier. Justin however, does make a distinction of the kind just once, though it would be precarious to claim that he makes much practical use of it. On that one occasion he seems to be aware that his expression is somewhat loose, and he has instead: 'the *Memoirs* which I say were drawn up by *his apostles and those who followed them*' (Dial., 103). Neither in the two Apologies nor in the Dialogue till Chapter 100 is reached are gospels plainly referred to as such, and then quite suddenly we get the word 'Memoirs' nine times within the space of Chapters 100 to 106 and never again afterwards. Some chapters back and before he used the word, Justin made do with the cumbersome phrase 'as the Apostles of this very Christ of ours wrote' (id, 88). This phrase is clearly synonymous with 'Memoirs' and will be reckoned as such presently. But in the meantime, one may note that since Justin *never* cites apocryphal gospels ascribed to apostles or their followers, it might be argued that by 'those who followed them' he can only mean Mark and Luke and that by 'His Apostles' he can only mean Matthew and John. An interpretation of this sort would have been a godsend to the debate in the last century but an argument based on it now could hardly be called cogent. Justin does not in fact name any evangelist (as such) and the reason for this emerges from his method of quoting: so much is alike in all four gospels and he knew them so well from memory that he could not readily remember which of them had what; time and again one finds quotations from different gospels strung together indiscriminately in a single passage, and it is not unlikely that Justin's pupil Tatian got his idea for the *Diatessaron* (or Harmony of the Gospels) from this very idiosyncrasy of his master's.

But let us come to the five special cases referred to just now:

(a) About a dozen lines before Justin makes his distinction (between 'His Apostles' and 'those who followed them') and in the same chapter of the Dialogue (103), there is the following reference to the baptism of Jesus: 'The voice that spoke to him: "Thou art my son; this day have I begotten thee" is recorded in the *Memoirs* of the Apostles to have come to him.' The actual incident does not appear in the Fourth Gospel, though there is a plain reference to it when the Baptist speaks of seeing the dove alighting on Jesus (John 1:32). But

a peculiar feature of the citation is that Justin substitutes 'this day have I begotten thee' for the 'in whom I am well pleased' of the Synoptic Gospels. We have here something more than a purely accidental misquotation deriving from Psalm 2:7 and from his preoccupation with the word 'begotten' (which as noted earlier appears a number of times in Justin), for he makes the same mistake a second time: in Chapter 88, in the space of the last four lines, he twice quotes 'this day have I begotten thee', attributing it in the one case to David speaking in God's name and in the other to the voice at Christ's baptism. It is obvious therefore that this repeated mistake is no mere slip of the pen but a genuine fault of memory. The citation as misquoted is typically Johannine in texture and one must maintain that, 'recorded in the Memoirs' thus, it 'almost certainly' derives as much from the Fourth Gospel as it does from the Synoptics. This is the weakest of the cases which one cannot grant to Dr Dodd, but what it may lack in cogency by itself it gains in weight cumulatively from what follows.

(b) Now take the following: 'He kept silence and chose to return no answer to anyone in the presence of Pilate, as has been declared in the Memoirs of his apostles' (id, 102). The words 'no answer to anyone' here might give us pause but have in fact no bearing on the question under discussion. Matthew and Mark imply that Jesus gave no answer to Pilate in the presence of others, but none of the gospels has anything about Jesus refusing to answer others in the presence of Pilate; Luke, for his part, only mentions the silence before Herod. The words 'no answer to anyone' being irrelevant to the issue, one may well wonder in precisely what way Dr Dodd would say that this citation is less a reference to John 19:9-10 than it is to Matthew 27:13 or to Mark 15:5.

(c) Or take the prophecy in Psalm 22:19, cited by Justin as follows: "They parted my garments among them and cast lots upon my vesture" was a prediction . . . of the death to which the synagogue of the wicked would . . . condemn him. And this is recorded to have happened in the Memoirs of his apostles' (id, 104). Again one is compelled to ask whether this is not just as plain a reference to John 19:24 as it is to Matt. 27:35. It is without question more plainly a reference to either Matthew or John or both than it is to Mark 15:24 or to Luke 23:34, where neither of the two evangelists who were not apostles cites the prophecy nor mentions its fulfilment. It may not be pointless to observe in passing that this citation of Justin follows by less than two dozen lines the distinction he made between 'his apostles' and 'those who followed them.' One would not urge that there is anything more here than a rather striking coincidence when one finds that 'his apostles' (if the author of the Fourth Gospel be one) both

quote the prophecy and its fulfilment (as does Justin), while 'those who followed them' do not. At any rate, one may still ask on what principle Dr Dodd would say in this case that the Synoptic Gospels are quoted as 'Memoirs' by Justin and the Fourth Gospel not.

(d) Justin now goes on to quote from the same Psalm (22:20-22) as follows: 'He was the *only-begotten of the Father* of all things, being *begotten as word* and Power who afterwards became man through the Virgin, as we have learned from the Memoirs. Moreover . . .' (id, 105). It cannot be anything but hazardous to claim, as Dr Dodd is committed to claim, that the 'Memoirs' here attest the virgin birth (Luke only) but not that the Word is the only-begotten Son (John only). One could almost add at this point that with successive later mentions of 'Memoirs' Justin gradually allows an inner meaning to emerge from his distinction; 'Memoirs' here, not qualified as usual by adding 'of His Apostles' would conveniently apply to a citation compounded of references to the writings of one 'Apostle' (if it be John) and of one 'follower' (Luke). But, in fairness to Dr Dodd, if for no better reason, one must admit that an argument of that sort is not altogether cogent.

(e) Finally (in this context), we come to a block of four closely connected *dicta* which appear in the Fourth Gospel, *but in none of the Synoptics*, ascribed by Justin to apostolic writings; one may claim that this fact even if taken alone decides the issue. He writes: 'When Jesus had come to the river Jordan *where John was baptizing . . . as the apostles of this very Christ of ours wrote . . . men supposed him (the Baptist) to be Christ; but he cried to them: I am not the Christ but the voice of one crying; . . . When Jesus came to the Jordan he was considered to be the son of Joseph*' (id, 88). Only in the Fourth Gospel do we find the phrase 'where John was baptizing' (John 1:28). There only do we get the Baptist's answer 'I am not the Christ' (John 1:20). The prophecy about 'the voice of one crying in the wilderness' (Is. 40:3) appears in all four gospels, but only the Fourth adapts it to read 'I am the voice . . .' (John 1:23). Luke alone tells us that Jesus was supposed to be the son of Joseph (3:23), but only in the Fourth Gospel was Jesus said to be the son of Joseph *when He came to the Jordan* (by Philip to Nathanael, John 1, 45). In short, we have here four items exclusive to the Fourth Gospel, all from the passage John 1:20-45, and all ascribed by Justin to the source 'as the Apostles . . . wrote.' Even if the word 'Memoirs' had not yet made its appearance in Justin at this point, we have here something which is nothing less than synonymous. Dr Dodd begs the question when he suggests that the gospels are always referred to by Justin as 'Memoirs'. Taken cumulatively with what has gone before, this passage is the final stroke of the axe

which brings Dr Dodd's unfortunate sentence to the ground. The verdict must be that he is seriously mistaken when he says that 'try as we will, it does not seem possible to go behind Irenaeus' to find cogent external evidence that the Fourth Gospel is ascribed to an apostle between the end of the first century and the closing decades of the second. Justin, so roundly dismissed from the debate, certainly bridges the so-called gap in the external evidence.

A word in conclusion on Dr Dodd's view of the internal evidence: one need not make too much of his leaving out of account that the 'Galilean fisherman' had had for *didascalos* a theologian beyond compare, in whose company for two or three years, more was likely to be learned than in any divinity course. There is a more tangible point to be made. Justin was undoubtedly even at the age of twenty-five the most accomplished theologian, Scripture scholar and philosopher of the primitive church till long after Nicaea. Though but a Samaritan (*Dial.*, 120), he could well assess the qualifications of someone else. He would not have 'found it difficult' to accept the theological accomplishments of the 'Galilean fisherman' when he could recognise him (rightly or wrongly is immaterial here) as the author of *Apocalypse-Revelation* (as accepted by Dr Farrer in *The Revelation of St John the Divine*.) Justin says: 'There was a certain man with us whose name was John, one of the apostles of Christ, who prophesied by a revelation made to him that those who believed in our Christ would dwell a thousand years in Jerusalem and that thereafter the general and, in short, the eternal resurrection and judgment of all men would likewise take place' (*Dial.*, 81). This obviously refers to *Rev.* 20:4-5. Dr Dodd sets so much store on Justin's evidence, or rather on the lack of it as he sees it, that it is surprising to find him ignoring a testimony from a witness only forty years away from the facts as to the 'Galilean fisherman's' theological competence.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Joseph Blenkinsopp S.D.B., *The Corinthian Mirror*. Sheed & Ward, London 1965. pp. 244. 13s 6d

In his foreword, the author states that this book is not intended as a commentary on St. Paul's First Letter to the Church at Corinth, nor is it meant to be a systematic explanation of the text in the manner of a verse-by-verse exposition. It is rather an attempt to present the basic themes or concepts of I Corinthians in such a way as to enable the student to read the Epistle intelligibly and profitably.