

3. St. John's Literary Activity

by Daniel Steele

Daniel Steele explores St. John's literary activity, emphasizing his contributions to early Christian theology through his writings.

Scripture: John 1:1, 1 John 4:1, 2 John 1:5, 3 John 1:9, Revelation 1:1

Topics: "Biblical Authorship", "Divinity Of Christ"

Description

Daniel Steele delves into the authorship and characteristics of the writings of St. John in the Bible. St. John's first book, the Apocalypse, was written in the early seventh decade of the first century, while his Gospel and Epistles were penned later, showcasing his development in style and purpose. The Gospel emphasizes the divinity of Jesus Christ, while the Epistles address doctrinal errors and encourage love, obedience, and discernment among believers.

Transcript

His authorship is a striking characteristic of his old age. Sacred scholars now quite generally agree that his first book, the Apocalypse, was written early in the seventh decade of the first century, at about 64 to 67 A. D., describing the events of the following few years ending with the destruction of the Holy City and the subversion of the Jewish polity in A. D. 70. The style is that of one familiar with the Hebrew attempting to write Greek for the first time. There are many deviations from accurate Greek composition. This is one of the proofs that the Revelation is St John's first essay in the Greek language.

In the tenth decade, at about 96 or 97 A. D., he wrote his Gospel, it is supposed, at the urgent solicitation of his hearers, to whom he had often rehearsed it in his preaching. His style after a residence of probably twenty years in the Greek-speaking city of Antioch is much improved. Though still using Hebrew idioms he writes with grammatical accuracy and simplicity. His Gospel is rather polemic than narrative. He begins by stating a proposition to be proven -- the supreme divinity of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Thus we have one dogmatic Gospel.

His FIRST EPISTLE was written probably in the same year, to meet the error of the denial of the real humanity of Christ through the prevalence of the Gnostic philosophy. Modern Biblical scholars, with the exception of Alford, now believe this to be the purpose of this Epistle, or treatise, as it might be styled. For a more extended account of this philosophy see the note on Gnosticism at the end of the comments on Chapter I.

His SECOND EPISTLE, second in arrangement in the New Testament volume, not necessarily in the order of time, is enigmatic in its address. It may have been entitled either "to an elect Lady" or "to the elect Kyria," or "to Electa Kyria" The general tenor of the letter inclines us to believe that it was sent not to one believer, but to a community of saints, here metaphorically addressed as a Lady just as elsewhere the church is styled "the Bride of Christ." It is hortatory rather than doctrinal, and in John's style, and is filled with his idioms respecting love, the commandments, deceivers and antichrist, Paraclete, darkness, light, life, witness, world and Word.

His THIRD EPISTLE has the appearance of a brief, private and confidential note addressed to an individual in some local church, severely denouncing by name a second individual and highly naming and highly commending a third. We cannot think that John ever intended that a letter so filled with personalities should be published. But the Providence which presided over the formation of the Holy Scriptures has for some good ends permitted its incorporation into the Sacred Canon. These purposes may have been (1) the inculcation of respect, honor and love for preachers who "for His name's sake" proclaim saving and fundamental truths, and (2) a needful safeguard of the pastor against discouragement because some ambitious brother Longpurse has assumed to dictate who shall be received as members or workers, and who shall be excommunicated, and (3) the need of a general superintendent to commend the humiliated pastor, and to teach such an usurper better manners.

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