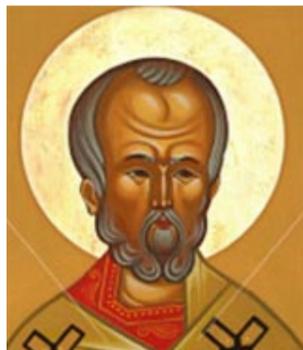


Prolegomena In The Studies Of St.Papias, Bishop Of Hierapolis

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1.0 PAPIAS, THE APOSTOLIC FATHER OF THE CHURCH



The Apostolic Fathers are the leaders of the Christian Church who lived in the second century AD. The relation of the Apostolic Fathers with either the apostles or the elders who knew Christ personally, gave them a special status of respect in the faith community. Among the Apostolic Fathers, there are two saints of the Church who lived in the Aegean region of Asia Minor and who were both friends and partners in ministry: Sts.

Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna and Papias, bishop of Hierapolis.

Papias, who lived in the second half of the second century AD, has been mentioned in the work of many Church fathers. St. Irenaeus of Lyons calls him a hearer of St. John the Apostle, and considers him an authentic teacher of the traditional ecclesial kerygma (Ag. Her. v. 33, 4). Eusebius, in contrast to Irenaeus, believes that Papias is not a disciple of John the Apostle and considers him “a man of extremely small intelligence” misconceiving the apostolic narratives (Hist. Ecc., iii. 39, 11-13).

This disagreement about Papias' personality and theological importance continues throughout the ages until present times. Contemporary theologians also disagree about Papias' place among the Apostolic Fathers. Hall (p.3) claims that Papias is “the first after the death of the Apostle Paul to present any marked individuality”. He also remarks that Papias was the first Christian leader who made an effort to study or collect the records of the past (p.4). Skouteris (p.210) includes Papias in a subgroup of Apostolic Fathers (together with Polycarp of Smyrna and Ignatius of Antioch) who

follow the theological thought of St. John the Apostle. They represent, Skouteris claims, the mystical tradition of Christianity which was cultivated in Asia Minor. Papadopoulos (p.187), on the other hand, calls Papias a strange and problematic character who does not represent either St. John's tradition or the apostolic tradition at large. Papias, for Papadopoulos (p.188), was a member of a Judeo-Christian sect and a supporter of the heresy of Chiliasm.

In order to appreciate Papias' contribution to patristic theology, we must respond to the aforementioned academic disagreements, examining if Papias was an Ebionite or a heretic, and whether or not he represents the Johannean tradition.

2.0 PAPIAS, THE JUDEO-CHRISTIAN FAITH AND THE HERESY OF GNOSTICISM

Many scholars (e.g. Hall, Harnack, Stefanidis) have made efforts to discover whether Papias was a disciple of John the Apostle (as Irenaeus claims: *Ag. Her.* v. 33, 4) or of John the presbyter (as Eusebius claims: *His. Ecc.* iii. 39,6). The existence of two persons in Ephesus with the same name (John the Apostle and John the Presbyter) is a theme that has been discussed by theologians who offer a variety of opinions. However, there is a general agreement among the majority, that these two persons coexisted in Asia Minor. Stefanidis (p.40) remarks that there were two tombs in Ephesus with the name John. Papias himself mentions that his work is a reflection of what John, and John the presbyter "have to say", confirming that there existed two distinct individuals.

Eusebius and Dionysios of Alexandria (see: *Hist. Ecc.* vii. 25, 12, 26; iii. 28, 3, 4), as well as Harnack (p.357) in modern times, believe that John the presbyter is the author of the Apocalypse and that Papias eschatological views have been influenced by the presbyter. Harnack goes even further, claiming that John the presbyter is the author of the Gospel according to John and of John's epistles. Indeed, there exists also the ecclesial opinion that John the Apostle is the author of all the books of the New Testament that bear his name.

The theological debate about the two Johns, while interesting, is beyond the scope of this study. Regardless of who the actual author of the Gospel is, the Epistles and the Apocalypse of St. John, the essential point remains their ecclesial acceptance. In Asia Minor, there were not two but only one Johannean tradition. Papias was aware of this tradition and he is one of its representatives (along with Polycarp of Smyrna and Ignatius of Antioch).

Papias also lived at a time when Christianity was still under the influence of Judaic principles. The Old Testament was considered, by the faith community, a validation of the New Testament. Christ fulfilled, through his salvific work, all prophecies of the Hebrew Scriptures. However, the Judaic influences in the Christian community were balanced by the ecumenical theology of St. Paul. Only heretical groups, like the Ebionites allowed Judaic teachings to be more important than the Christian revelation, thus rejecting Paul's theology. Papias was not an Ebionite despite the fact that he does not mention Paul's epistles in the fragments of his work that survive. Papias does refer to the epistle of St. Peter which nonetheless represents Paul's thought.

Papias' Judeo-Christian thought was an apologetic reaction to the heresy of Marcionism. Marcion, misinterpreting Paul's theology, rejected the Jewish Scriptures, characterizing the God of Jews as an inferior god. The Church reacted to Marcion's position as one that threatened the unity of the Old and the New Testament. Hall (pp.83-98) describes extensively how Papias and his contemporaries defended Christian Orthodoxy against the Marcian teachings. Papadopoulos (p.189) does not agree with Hall [without mentioning Hall's name]. He claims that Papias wrote between 120 and 130 AD while Marcion started his teaching in Rome around 140 AD. However, Papadopoulos' opinion is not shared by others. Balanos (p.115) believes that Papias wrote around 150 AD. Harnack (p.357) remarks that Papias wrote after the death of Adrianos (140 AD) even close to 160 AD.

Papias also reacted to the heresy of Gnosticism. Gnostics, like Marcion, claimed that the Jewish god was an inferior, evil god who ignores the supreme God. Gnostics taught that everything material is evil and that salvation belongs only to pneumatic men. The pneumatics were able to participate in the Divine Pleroma, thus escaping their material self which destined to destruction.

Papias is critical of the Gnostics and their "strange commandments". Papias' eschatological views –which shocked many contemporary readers due to their materialistic context– is a reaction to the anti-hylical teachings of the Gnostics. Papias, like many other Church fathers was influenced by the book of Revelation and by the Jewish apocalyptic literature. Nevertheless, it must be noted, that he never wrote that Christ will reign for a thousand years on earth; that is to say he cannot be called a Chiliast. Hall (pp.130-131) successfully describes how Papias' eschatological conception is that of the New Testament itself, and how Papias represented all the accepted writers, "...all the Christian Fathers of his time".

3.0 PAPIAS' REFERENCES TO THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

The Holy Scriptures for Papias, and for all the Apostolic Fathers, are part of the ecclesial oral tradition. Papias believed that the tradition deriving from the teachings of the apostles and the presbyters is larger and more important than any written document, produced for catechetical purposes. Papias teaching was based on memory and not on a text. On the other hand, the study of Papias writings reveals that he was aware of the Christian gospels, although it is unclear if these gospels were known to him in their final form.

As a follower of the Johannean tradition, Papias was familiar with St. John's writings. The first epistle of St. John is referenced by Papias, as is the term "Alithea" (the Truth) that Papias uses for Christ, therefore revealing his knowledge of the Gospel according to John. Also, Papias' eschatological views seem to imply that he was familiar with the book of Revelation.

Papias awareness of St. Luke's writings (Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles) is evidenced by his reference to Justus Barsabas and to Judas' death. Indeed, Papias believed that the Gospel of St. Luke presents the story of Christ in the correct chronological order and in a superior fashion to that of the Gospel of St. Mark.

St. Mark, for Papias, is a presenter of St. Peter's witness and theology (see: Papadopoulos, p.188). Hall (p.13) for example points out that Papias refers to Peter's "narrations presented by Mark" and not specifically to the "Gospel of Mark". There exists also the possibility that Papias was familiar with the book "The Kerygma of Peter" used also by St. Clement of Alexandria (Strom. i. 29; vi 5, 6, 15).

Finally, Papias mentions the Words of the Lord (Logia), written in Hebrew by St. Matthew. This text is either a Hebrew translation of St. Matthew's Gospel, or according to Baur (p.535 and p.572) the notes out of which Matthew wrote his gospel. However, Eusebius (iii. 25, 5; 27, 4; iv. 22, 8; vi. 25, 4) believes that Papias is distinctly referring to the Gospel according to Hebrews, a text similar but not identical to the Gospel of St. Matthew.

4.0 BIBLIOGRAPHIC NOTES

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