



The Priority of John

J.F. Coakley, John A. T. Robinson

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"It has been the fate of many books on John to be left unfinished, for its interpretation naturally forms the crowning of a lifetime. I have myself been intending to write a book on the Fourth Gospel since the 'fifties, before I broke off (reluctantly) to be Bishop of Woolwich, though I am grateful now that I did not produce it prematurely at that time. It means however that I shall be compelled to refer to and often recapitulate material directly or indirectly related to the Johannine literature, which I have written over the years (some of it indeed while I was bishop)." Many scholars in fact, if not most now, think that the author of the Gospel himself never lived to finish it and have seen the work as the product of numerous hands and redactors. As will become clear, I prefer to believe that the ancient testimony of the church is correct that John wrote it 'while still in the body' and that its roughnesses, self-corrections and failures of connection, real or imagined, are the result of its not having been smoothly or finally edited. If so I am in good company. At any rate who could wish for a better last testimony from his friends than that 'his witness is true' (John 21.24)? In other words, he got it right--historically and theologically."--from the Introduction

At the time of his death in December 1983, John Robinson had completed the text of the book on which his 1984 Bampton lectures were to be based, so that it is possible to see the full details of his extremely controversial argument that the Gospel of John was the first Gospel to be written. Dr. Robinson himself once described the dawning of his conviction that this was the case as a 'Damascus Road experience', and his presentation of the evidence is made with all the customary vigor with which he would argue for something in which he dee

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