

# There and Back Again

by J. S. King

*Under this enigmatic title Mr. King, lecturer in Avery Hill College, offers us a study of the development of C. H. Dodd's ideas on the character of the Fourth Gospel.*

In 1932 C. H. Dodd published a book for children with this title but it also seems an appropriate description for much of his work on the Fourth Gospel. He has a deserved reputation for being prepared to change his mind yet it also seems true that ideas formed early on in his career were held until the end. By then, they often appeared strange and out of step with his later writings. This review of his work on the Gospel of John attempts to see where Dodd changed his mind, which of his ideas did not change, where his work reflected 'current orthodoxy' and where he set Johannine studies in a larger room.

Generally speaking the scholarly world recognised Dodd as a significant Johannine scholar only after the publication of his two magisterial volumes: *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (1953) and *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel* (1963)<sup>1</sup> but his writings on this Gospel began with an article in 1911, 'Eucharistic symbolism in the Fourth Gospel'.<sup>2</sup> His last published comment was a review of Raymond Brown's commentary in 1972.<sup>3</sup> The importance of his Johannine work to Dodd himself can be seen in his Cambridge inaugural lecture where he said, 'I am disposed to think that the understanding of this Gospel is not only one of the outstanding tasks of our time, but the crucial test of our success or failure in solving the problems of the New Testament as a whole'.<sup>4</sup>

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## DEADLOCK IN JOHANNINE STUDIES

Dodd described the situation in Johannine scholarship at the end of the nineteenth century as one of deadlock.<sup>5</sup> In Britain it was still possible to hold the traditional view that the Fourth Gospel was the work of the Apostle John, that it was the most Hebraic book in the New Testament and that it could *most certainly* be used as a reconstruction of the life and teaching of Jesus.<sup>6</sup> Generally speaking the opposite view on these questions

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<sup>1</sup> A. M. Hunter, *Interpreting the N. T. 1900-1950* (London 1951) did not mention Dodd on the Fourth Gospel.

<sup>2</sup> *Expositor*, 8th series, II, 530-546.

<sup>3</sup> *The Ampleforth Journal*, 6, 17-23.

<sup>4</sup> *The Present Task in New Testament Studies*, (Cambridge, 1936), 29.

<sup>5</sup> E.g. 'Present tendencies in the criticism of the Gospels', *Expository Times*, XLIII, (1932), 246-251.

<sup>6</sup> E.g. J. B. Lightfoot, *The Fourth Gospel*, (London, 1892); W. Sanday, *The Authorship and Historical Character of the Fourth Gospel*, (London, 1872). B. F. Westcott, *The Gospel according to St. John, 1881* (London, 1958).

was held in Germany.<sup>7</sup> The confidence of the cautious, conservative yet constructive British criticism was rudely shattered by E. F. Scott's *The Criticism of the Fourth Gospel*, published in 1905.<sup>8</sup> Scott argued that the Fourth Gospel was a work of transition in which Christianity was carried over into a different age, into a different world of thought. Further he stressed the importance of the personal experience and faith of the evangelist; that revelation was given not so much in the world of outward fact, but in the world of inward experience. Finally, the Fourth Gospel was not to be used for any reconstruction of the life and teaching of Jesus but recognised for what it is, a profound interpretation of the significance for the Logos Christ for faith. Scott's argument did not completely win the day. In *Essays on some Biblical Questions of the day* by members of the University of Cambridge,<sup>9</sup> W. R. Inge, then Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity, summarised Scott's position in an essay on 'The Theology of the Fourth Gospel', but A. E. Brooke writing about 'The Historical Value of the Fourth Gospel' pointed to its Jewish character and called for a 'modification of the present tendency to ignore the historical value of the Fourth Gospel for the reconstruction of the history of the ministry'. Ten years later he wrote, 'If there is interpretation there is history as well and the history is not derived from synoptic accounts. It is often needed to explain them'.<sup>10</sup>

#### DODD'S REVIEW OF BERNARD'S COMMENTARY

Dodd's attitude to the principal issues involved can be seen in his review of J. H. Bernard's commentary in the International Critical Commentary series.<sup>11</sup> On the question of sources Dodd applauded Bernard for not accepting 'Burney's alluring theory of an Aramaic original'<sup>12</sup> though he noted without comment that Bernard accepted the generally held view that there is 'Aramaic thinking somewhere behind the Gospel'.<sup>13</sup> Further Dodd observed Bernard's departure from the once commonly accepted axiom that the Fourth Gospel was a 'seamless robe'. Dodd suggested, and for a while continued to hold to the idea, that 'The confusion of order goes deeper than a mere displacement of sheets of a completed work, and belongs partly at least to the process of composition from sources'.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>7</sup> E.g. P. W. Schmiedel, *Encyclopedia Biblica*, II, col 2542.

<sup>8</sup> (Edinburgh).

<sup>9</sup> (London, 1909).

<sup>10</sup> A. S. Peake (ed.), *A Commentary on the Bible*, (London, 1929), 743.

<sup>11</sup> *St. John*, (Edinburgh, 1928), 2 vols.

<sup>12</sup> Dodd's review of Bernard, *Congregational Quarterly*, 7, (1929), 369.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 370.

Secondly, Dodd seemed to welcome Bernard's abandonment of strict apostolic authorship. Bernard argued that the author of the Fourth Gospel was 'John the Presbyter' who for the most part was dependent on the reminiscences of John, son of Zebedee who was the Beloved Disciple. While Dodd was not particularly impressed with this theory, he was convinced of the significance of Bernard's concession. 'Actually the adoption of such a theory by so cautious a scholar may well be taken as marking the definite victory of criticism over tradition in one of its most strongly entrenched positions and it is not likely that a permanent halt will be made at the point where Doctor Bernard takes his stand.'<sup>15</sup> Yet Dodd argued that Bernard's concession was virtually illusory for John, son of Zebedee, is so responsible for the narrative and the substance of the discourses that 'the strict historicity of the record is hardly affected by the intervention of the evangelist'.<sup>16</sup>

In his discussion of authorship Dodd noted that the non-synoptic material 'is a piece of very ancient tradition',<sup>17</sup> even if it was not such as to suggest any 'derivation from the Galilean group'.<sup>18</sup> There is then, already, the stress on *ancient tradition* but at this stage Dodd was not over impressed by the historical value of the Fourth Gospel. 'As usually happens, insistence on the historical value of the Fourth Gospel tends to a depreciation of the Synoptics (which can *only* end in a far-reaching distrust of all our sources).'<sup>19</sup> Similarly Dodd argued that while Bernard was correct to reject the more fanciful allegorical interpretations, in his 'insisting on a bald literalism he surely raises a barrier against the true understanding of a writer who, on any showing, well understood the value of symbolism'.<sup>20</sup> Bernard was further criticised for his understanding of the discourses, 'the attempt to fit as much as possible of the discourses by hook or by crook into the historical conditions of the ministry, while admitting the necessity of attributing various portions of them to the reflections of the evangelist, tends to hinder the full appreciation of them as the expression of a consistent and massive theology in which history and experience are fused'.<sup>21</sup> We note in passing the insistence on *both* history *and* experience.

Sir Edwyn Hoskyns in his review expressed his approval of the fact that Bernard confined discussion of the background of the Gospel to the

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 371.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

Biblical and Patristic aspects, but Dodd argued, 'The most serious limitation of the commentary, however, is its almost total neglect of the Hellenistic background'.<sup>22</sup> It was not that Bernard was unaware of, for example, the alleged points of contact with the Hermetica, but he was not convinced that the Fourth Gospel was indebted to the parallels cited.<sup>23</sup> Bernard was as well equipped as Dodd himself to fulfil the role of a Johannine interpreter as Dodd was to outline it. 'The ideal interpreter would be one who has entered into that strange first century world, has felt its strangeness, has sojourned in it until he has lived himself into it, thinking and feeling as one of those to whom the Gospel first came; and who will then return into our world and give to the truth that he has discovered a body out of the stuff of our own thought.'<sup>24</sup> The point at issue was a different understanding of the background and purpose of the Fourth Gospel.

148 Dodd's final verdict was, 'The commentary ... is in many respects a fine piece of work ... (but) we still want a good *modern* commentary on the Gospel according to John'.<sup>25</sup> G. H. C. Macgregor was about to offer such a commentary reflecting the position of E. F. Scott.<sup>26</sup> While Dodd seemed to favour the modern position, his view of an ancient tradition of some historical value in the Fourth Gospel could not easily be accommodated within that position.

#### *How Dodd's ideas developed*

We can progress to Dodd's major studies by noting where he stood throughout his career, on topics which would normally be found in an introduction to a commentary on the Fourth Gospel.

As far as I can see Dodd never changed his fundamental position on the date of the Fourth Gospel. He put his view neatly in *The Apostolic Preaching and its developments*: 'It is in the Fourth Gospel, which in form and expression, as probably in date, stands farthest from the original tradition of the teaching, that we have the most penetrating expression of its central message'.<sup>27</sup> Elsewhere he puts dates to it concluding that the latest was 120.<sup>28</sup> He moved slightly on this in *Historical Tradi-*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> In 1913 he had published an edition of The Odes of Solomon in the Cambridge Texts and Studies series. In his commentary on John he noted the work of Lidzbarski, Reitzenstein and Bauer.

<sup>24</sup> *Present Task*, 40.

<sup>25</sup> Review of Bernard, 371.

<sup>26</sup> *The Moffatt New Testament Commentary: John*, (London, 1928).

<sup>27</sup> (London, 1936), 181.

<sup>28</sup> *History and the Gospel*, (London, 1938).

tion in the *Fourth Gospel* where he was prepared to consider a date close to 100, or even a little earlier.<sup>29</sup>

Dodd argued consistently throughout his career for the Ephesian origin of the *Fourth Gospel*. In 1926 he wrote, 'The writer was probably himself not of the first Christian generation, but in the communal life of the Church at Ephesus, to which he belonged. He stood in the centre of a living tradition going back to very early days and very likely preserving much authentic reminiscence of the first witnesses of Christ'.<sup>30</sup> Essentially the same position is held in *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel* and later still in *The Founder of Christianity*. The Gospel is considered then, to come from a Hellenistic environment either very late in the first century or early in the second.

We have seen how Dodd welcomed the 'victory of criticism over tradition' on the question of authorship. In fact, by 1931 Dodd could observe, 'The questions of authorship and date have lost much of their interest'.<sup>31</sup> So much had changed since the beginning of the century. Dodd held that Apostolic authorship was most unlikely,<sup>32</sup> it was incompatible with his view of the evangelist as The Master Propagator of Christianity to the Hellenistic world<sup>33</sup> and Dodd never changed his view that this was the role of the fourth evangelist.

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On the question of the sources the evangelist used Dodd did change his mind. Early on he accepted that the author had used at least Mark of the Synoptics. In 'The Close of the Galilean Ministry', having noted the possibility of an independent tradition, he argued, 'Nothing which has come out in the course of this discussion is contrary to the natural and generally received assumption that the author of the *Fourth Gospel* made use of Mark'.<sup>34</sup> Throughout the thirties Dodd held to this conclusion but in 1953 he offered as a tentative conclusion in *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* 'the prima facie impression is that John is, in large measure at any rate, working independently of the other written Gospels'.<sup>35</sup> Similarly while he had initially welcomed the search for sources behind the Gospel and the possibility of re-ordering the allegedly confused text<sup>36</sup> he abandoned both quests and treated the Gospel as a unity, the work of

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<sup>29</sup> *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel*, (Cambridge, 1963), 424.

<sup>30</sup> *The Gospel in the New Testament*, (London, 1926), 75.

<sup>31</sup> 'Present tendencies', 250.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, (Cambridge, 1953), 449f.

<sup>33</sup> E.g. *The Bible and its Background*, (London, 1931), 41.

<sup>34</sup> 'The Close of the Galilaean Ministry', *Expositor*, 8th series, 28, (1921), 288.

<sup>35</sup> *IFG*, 449.

<sup>36</sup> 'Present tendencies', 248.

an original and profound mind.<sup>37</sup> It is easy to see this later stance developing within the period of the Cambridge Inaugural: 'The kind of interpretation that I have in mind will in one sense reverse the main direction in which New Testament studies moved for a century. Our principal aim has hitherto been to discriminate as clearly as possible between various books and strata, so as to isolate for intensive study the problems connected with each part ... this process of analysis should now be balanced by a movement in the opposite direction'.<sup>38</sup> The centrifugal movement needed to be balanced by one that was centripetal. Hoskyns' commentary was a brilliant example of this latter tendency and Dodd applauded him for it.<sup>39</sup> *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* is another even more brilliant example.

It had once been axiomatic to describe Pauline theology as the pre-supposition of Johannine theology. The fourth evangelist was seen as 'the greatest of the followers of Paul'.<sup>40</sup> Dodd accepted a measure of Pauline influence but maintained as early as 1932 'It now looks as if the dependence of John on Paul has been greatly exaggerated'.<sup>41</sup>

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To summarise the discussion so far: while Dodd can be shown to have changed his mind, particularly on sources; on date, origin and purpose he did not change. These unchanging principles need to be reviewed in the light of Dodd's understanding of the Hellenistic background of the Fourth Gospel and the way his thought about the historical tradition developed. For background and historical tradition we turn to his major contributions to Johannine studies.

### *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*

Of this book it may fairly be said, never before has a book been so well received by so many. Here he set the Fourth Gospel clearly in its Hellenistic environment. He was following the procedure which he had noted in his Cambridge Inaugural: 'Our science moved from anatomy to oecology, the study of the organism in its habitat'.<sup>42</sup> It was not a question of the mere juxtaposition of Jewish and Hellenistic ideas that characterised the Fourth Gospel. So significant was the impact of the Incarnation that, to use an analogy which Dodd employed on at least four occasions, 'we are

<sup>37</sup> Dodd's reviews of: E. C. Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel*, (London, 1940) 2 vols. in *Theology*, XLI, (1940), 305-10; R. H. Strachan, *The Fourth Gospel*, (London, 1943) and W. F. Howard, *Christianity according to St. John*, (London, 1943) in *JTS*, XLIV, (1943), 206-12.

<sup>38</sup> *Present Task*, 35.

<sup>39</sup> Review of Hoskyns, 306.

<sup>40</sup> 'Present tendencies', 249.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *Present Task*, 13.

concerned with something going far beyond a mere fusion of Hellenic and Hebraic ideas. Like Abt Vogler, who in his music made “of three sounds not a fourth sound but a star”, John has made out of the two hemispheres of thought and experience, joined in a single term, a category to comprehend a new and unique fact.<sup>43</sup> Dodd was referring here to the term ‘Logos’ which needed to be understood both with its Hellenic implications and the Hebrew experience of ‘Hearing the word of the Lord’. That is his position briefly expressed. A few years earlier in the Introduction to *The Johannine Epistles* he had argued for the necessity of Greek thought to express the Gospel: ‘The religious quest of the Hellenistic world was not in vain. It attained some genuine religious insight and it provided early Christian thinkers with an intellectual apparatus for interpreting Christianity to the wider world, and, in doing so, penetrating *more deeply* into the meaning of the Gospel’.<sup>44</sup> In the light of this we must ask whether or not Dodd *could* do justice to the Hebraic elements.

Dodd’s early position on this may be seen most clearly in *The Authority of the Bible*. ‘This Gospel is in fact one of the most remarkable examples in all the literature of the period, of the profound interpenetration of Greek and Semitic thought. Some critics, approaching it from the side of Judaism, have pronounced it the most Jewish of the Gospels, while others, approaching it from the other side, see in it a thoroughly Hellenistic book. Nowhere more evidently than here does Christianity take its place as the natural leader in new ways of thought, uniting in itself the main tendencies of the time, yet exercising its authority over them by virtue of the creative impulse proceeding from its Founder.’<sup>45</sup> This view was a commonplace in his thought. In the late thirties in the face of a trend that was emphasising the Jewish background again Dodd seems to have emphasised much more the Hellenistic part of that perfect fusion of Hellenistic and Hebraic ideas. This can be seen in his contribution to the Harvard Tercentenary volume where he argued that the original Jewish formulation of the Gospel was no longer adequate and suggested that by virtue of the Incarnation ‘the age-long adventure of Greek thought proceeds with richer data and in a larger universe of discourse’.<sup>46</sup> The Pastorals and Colossians show that problems sometimes occurred when Christianity was expressed in Hellenistic terms but ‘the Fourth Gospel can best be understood as a brilliant attempt to undercut the whole process by

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<sup>43</sup> ‘The Prologue to the Fourth Gospel and Christian Worship’, F. L. Cross (ed.), *Studies in the Fourth Gospel*, (Oxford, 1957), 12.

<sup>44</sup> (London, 1946), xxf.

<sup>45</sup> (London, 1929), 200f.

<sup>46</sup> ‘Hellenism and Christianity’, *Independence, Convergence and Borrowing in Institutions, Thought and Art*, (Cambridge, 1937), 131.

a genuine and thoroughgoing reinterpretation, in which alien categories are completely mastered and transformed by the Gospel, and constrained to express the central truth of Christianity in universal terms. It was along the lines laid down in the Fourth Gospel that the problem was in the end successfully solved'.<sup>47</sup> Dodd was aware that his view of the necessity of Greek thought for the expression of the Gospel was putting him out of step with other Johannine scholars.

The reviews of *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* fairly consistently claim that Dodd had overestimated the Hellenistic generally and the Platonic specifically.<sup>48</sup> When Dodd came to review Brown's commentary in his last published writing on the Fourth Gospel he claimed that Brown had overemphasised the Jewish at the expense of the Hellenistic and continued, 'if we set the Fourth Gospel in its place within the New Testament canon as a whole, the features which plainly set it apart from the rest are surely not those based on the Old Testament, which is part of the common heritage, but those which can be shown to have Hellenistic affinities. And what type of reader was likely to be attracted to the work? History has given the answer. Augustine was certainly not the first to find the Fourth Gospel a natural bridge from neo-platonism to Christianity. The mainstream course of early Christian theology was (for good or ill) strongly hellenised and the Fourth Gospel was its inspiration more than any other canonical writing'.<sup>49</sup>

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Fairly we may say, 'There and back again'. Dodd's insistence on the necessity of Greek thought for the deeper understanding of the Gospel made it hard for him to see the Jewish influence in its proper place in the Johannine writings. It is this which made Dodd's position within the 'New Look' in Johannine studies so awkward although he did so much to undergird that development. Dodd never came to terms with the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. They receive one footnote in *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel* and his neglect of sectarian Judaism perhaps deserves the same rebuke he had delivered to Bernard for refusing to consider the wider Hellenistic background.

Dodd's primary understanding of the role of the fourth evangelist then, was that of Master Propagator of Christianity to the wide Hellenistic world. 'It seems that he has composed his work in such a way that it could be read with understanding by those who had no more than a superficial acquaintance with Christianity'.<sup>50</sup> In fact Dodd does not always claim for the reader even a superficial acquaintance with Christianity.<sup>51</sup> He

<sup>47</sup> *The Johannine Epistles*, (London, 1946), xvii.

<sup>48</sup> E.g. F. J. McCool, *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 17 (1953).

<sup>49</sup> *The Ampleforth Journal*, 6, (1972), 22.

<sup>50</sup> 'The background of the Fourth Gospel', *BJRL*, XIX, (1935), 332.

<sup>51</sup> *IFG*, 296.

maintained this idea to the end of his career. It may be clearly seen in *The Founder of Christianity*. It comes as something of a shock then, to read, 'that the evangelist was not conscious of a duality of his thought we may probably assume',<sup>52</sup> especially as the whole thesis in part two of *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* depends on a very delicate balance of the Hebraic and Hellenistic features and the whole so thoroughly informed by what is specifically Christian. Even allowing for that interpenetration of Jewish and Hellenistic thought which Dodd had so massively demonstrated in *The Bible and the Greeks*, I suggest that Dodd's insistent stress on the success of the fourth evangelist in expressing the truth of the Gospel in universal terms depends on the evangelist being one who was conscious of his standing in what Dodd described as the two hemispheres of thought. I think the same is implied by the analogy with Abt Vogler. Hooke wondered whether the Gospel could be as Dodd envisaged. 'The question presents itself whether at this stage of the Church's history a Christian writer would have addressed himself on such a subject as the inner meaning of the incarnation to any audience but a Christian one. The age of the Apologists had hardly arrived, unless we are to consider this treatise as its precursor.'<sup>53</sup> It seems that Dodd's dating of the Gospel makes it difficult to accept his understanding of its purpose.

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There is in *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* the suggestion that a secondary purpose of the Gospel, or at least of the tradition behind it, was to encourage those threatened with expulsion from the synagogue. 'It may well be that he wrote with recollections in his mind of such proceedings against the minim in his own time.'<sup>54</sup> This cannot however distract attention from Dodd's view of the primary purpose of the Fourth Gospel.

#### *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel*

For some *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel* is Dodd's crowning triumph,<sup>55</sup> yet in it he demonstrated a theme which was implicit in much of his earlier work — the ancient tradition behind the Fourth Gospel — and characterised that tradition in such a way that brought it into tension, if not conflict, with his understanding of the role and purpose of the evangelist. Further, in view of Dodd's emphasis on the historical character of Christianity it is surprising that he limited his aim in *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel* to the recovery and description of a

<sup>52</sup> IFG, 159.

<sup>53</sup> S. H. Hooke's review of IFG in *Church Quarterly Review*, (1959).

<sup>54</sup> IFG, 81.

<sup>55</sup> E.g. G. B. Caird, 'Charles Harold Dodd', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, LX, (1974), 9.

separate Johannine tradition without a full discussion of its historical accuracy.

In 1921 in 'The Close of the Galilean ministry' Dodd admitted that the Fourth Gospel was not to be treated with the same seriousness as the Synoptics in terms of historical accuracy but he noted a tendency to recognise an independent historical tradition behind the Fourth Gospel and he refused to write off its historical value.<sup>56</sup> In arguing in *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel* that the evangelist used a probably authentic and independent tradition centred in Ephesus Dodd was continuing a suggestion put forward as early as 1926.<sup>57</sup> Again we may say, 'There and back again'. At the same time we seem to find a strange antinomy in Dodd's argument. On the one hand he could say of the tradition, 'just because it was vitally related to the whole life of an active community, it has been shaped and coloured by the conditions, interests and needs of various groups within the community at different times. Among its other contents, statements about the life and teaching of Jesus Christ bear the stamp of the varying *Sitz im Leben* or "setting in life", within which the tradition was formed and had currency. We have to think of the life of the church as being nourished and its faith and fellowship maintained by a living tradition'.<sup>58</sup> On the other hand he argued for the primitive character of the tradition which reflected at so many points the conditions in Palestine before the war of 66-70 and had so few points of contact with the Ephesian community at the end of the first century.<sup>59</sup> This suggests the evangelist's relationship to the tradition was second-hand; to use Robinson's description, Dodd implies a fossilised tradition locked away for some long years.<sup>60</sup> I suggest the main reason for Dodd's unsatisfactory account of the evangelist's relationship to the tradition sprang from his view of the fourth evangelist as the Master Propagator of Christianity to the Hellenistic world, formed so many years before. Truly we may say, 'There and back again'. I think it is not unreasonable to suggest that Dodd found it difficult to hold together his conviction about the role of the evangelist and his later work on the tradition.

Dodd argued consistently for the importance of the historical nature of Christianity with an early and late departure from that stance. In *The Authority of the Bible* he wrote, 'it is characteristic of Christianity to find its Christ in history as well as above history. Those who neglect the gospels as mythical and obsolete and point us to the eternal "Christ within" as the

<sup>56</sup> E.g. 'The Close of the Galilaean Ministry', 284.

<sup>57</sup> E.g. *The Gospel in the New Testament*.

<sup>58</sup> *HTFG*, 7.

<sup>59</sup> Frequently in *HTFG*.

<sup>60</sup> J. A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament*, (London, 1976), 263-268.

only object of faith, no less that those who will allow us nothing but a "Jesus of history" are proposing an unrealistic simplification contrary to the genius of our religion, and missing in it that which makes it a unique interpretation of life — the unity of the eternal with the historical'.<sup>61</sup> Much of Dodd's working out the implications of Christianity as an historical religion was in conscious dialogue with Hoskyns. For Hoskyns the problem of history and its meaning was far more important than the problem of historicity.<sup>62</sup> For Dodd, 'the problem of "Historicity" has a place of its own within the larger "Problem of history" (to use Hoskyns' expressions) and it can never be without its importance for an historical religion such as Christianity notoriously, even "scandalously" (making use of one of Hoskyns' favourite expressions) claims to be'.<sup>63</sup> That this was a concern until the end of his career can be seen from his review of Brown's commentary. Dodd asked of the Fourth Gospel, 'Is it a work in which history is interpreted theologically, or a theological treatise given a misleading historical form?'<sup>64</sup> Characteristically Dodd opted for the former alternative.

Another characteristic was to argue that the tradition was a factual tradition.<sup>65</sup> Dodd was not sparing in his use of the word 'facts' and he asked historical questions. While I think it unwise to draw too many conclusions from *The Founder of Christianity*, there seems to be a strange withdrawal from this characteristic position. 'This use of symbolism is fundamentally poetical. It is not a flight into fantasy. It means that facts are being viewed in depth, not superficially. This must be taken into account when we consider the stories of the miracles. In the Fourth Gospel these are treated frankly as "signs", that is symbols. Not that John thought they did not happen but their happening to him was of less interest than their meaning ... If anyone chooses to read the miracle stories of the Gospels as pictorial symbols of the power of spiritual renewal which the first Christians found in their encounter with Jesus, *without* raising the question whether it all happened just like that, he is not far from the intention of John at least, and possibly the others.'<sup>66</sup> This recalls an earlier impatience with Bernard whom Dodd suggested was too concerned with the factual nature of the miracles in the Fourth Gospel.<sup>67</sup> Opposed to this tendency I would suggest Dodd's usual view is expressed

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<sup>61</sup> (London, 1929), 232.

<sup>62</sup> *The Fourth Gospel*, 112.

<sup>63</sup> Dodd's review of Hoskyns, 309.

<sup>64</sup> *The Ampleforth Journal*, 6, (1972), 18.

<sup>65</sup> A distinctive feature of Dodd's understanding of the essential nature of a Christian tradition.

<sup>66</sup> *The Founder of Christianity*, (London, 1971), 31-32 (my emphasis).

<sup>67</sup> *Congregational Quarterly*, 7, (1929), 369-371.

when he writes of the Johannine Passion narrative: 'a straightforward story with only a minimum of intruded interpretative elements',<sup>68</sup> when he accepts a very unlikely reading at 19:29 (javelin for hyssop) and argues that the handing over of the Virgin Mary to the Beloved Disciple does not belong to the Passion narrative and was bereft of any deep theological significance.<sup>69</sup>

With all his insistence on Christianity as an historical religion it is surprising that he restricted his concern in *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel* to the modest aim of demonstrating the existence of an independent tradition rather than asking whether it was likely to be historically more accurate than the Synoptic tradition. He deliberately postponed this question so there is nothing in this book to take us beyond the apparent equation that traditional equals historically accurate. Dodd convinced the majority of his reviewers that the fourth evangelist had creatively used an ancient tradition. He was not so successful in persuading them of this ancient tradition's claim to historicity.<sup>70</sup> Thus in one sense he had not advanced beyond the implications of the position reached so early in his career. He has massively demonstrated the extent of this ancient tradition but he had still not asked the most important question of it. His own answer to that question can be seen in the use he made of the Fourth Gospel in the last three chapters of *The Founder of Christianity*. These chapters amount to a contribution to the 'new quest' in which Dodd was utterly discontinuous with his earliest statements on the subject.<sup>71</sup> Yet in this latest book Dodd was still operating with the picture of the evangelist he had held throughout his career.

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### Conclusion

This paper suggests that in effect Dodd's two major Johannine studies are in tension with each other in their principal conclusions. The determining factor is the picture of the fourth evangelist as the Master Propagator of Christianity to the Hellenistic world. This need not have implied the second-hand relationship of the evangelist to the tradition that Dodd exhibits consistently in *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel*. For example the relationship could have been as Brown suggests in his five stage theory of the composition of the Gospel; for four of these stages the evangelist was in an organic relationship to a living tradition.<sup>72</sup>

For all his meticulous scholarship, Dodd was not an innovator in

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<sup>68</sup> E.g. *IFG*, 431.

<sup>69</sup> *HTFG*, 128.

<sup>70</sup> E.g. F. W. Beare's review of *HTFG*, *NTS*, 10, 517-522.

<sup>71</sup> E.g. his review of Bernard, as note 67, 370.

<sup>72</sup> R. E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, (London, 1971).

Johannine studies. *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* was the classical expression of an approach that had long been standard in British scholarship and Dodd continued to hold to the importance of the Hellenistic background when many had come to reject it. Similarly *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel* was part of a movement burgeoning in British scholarship. The whole of this endeavour was indebted to the seminal work of Gardner-Smith.<sup>73</sup> Dodd's work was a definitive statement of this movement.

Dodd found in the Fourth Gospel the work of a kindred spirit. His long-standing interest in the sacrament of Holy Communion was an epitome both of his own theology and that which he found in the fourth evangelist. In this sacrament Dodd found the fusion of the historical and the experiential. The emphasis on the historical and incarnational and the fusion of the Greek and the Hebraic was as much part of Dodd's theology as that of the fourth evangelist.

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<sup>73</sup> *St. John and the Synoptic Gospels*, (Cambridge, 1938).