

speaking on this subject, 'When you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, while you are driven outside; and they shall come from east and west and north and south and sit down in the kingdom of God; and behold *they are last who were first and first who were last*' (Luke xiii, 28). It is in this way that the younger brother has taken away the first place from the elder brother and transferred it to himself. Well then, since such great truths are being signified, and so truly, can anything said or done in this story be fairly considered a lie?



TRUTH IN THE GOSPEL OF ST JOHN

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TO the people St John addresses, the question 'What is truth?' (xviii, 38) was not simply a matter of intellectual curiosity or scepticism. The gospel offers an answer to the deepest needs of a sophisticated society, in search of 'life', 'light' and 'truth'. Although we are pressed by questions of a similar kind, yet John's answers are not immediately understandable to us. The problem what the meaning is of the concept 'truth' in the fourth gospel is best approached along three separate ways: in what contexts does it appear in the gospel, what were the connotations attached to it in the contemporary world, and how far is all this relevant to us?

As for the first point, it is most helpful to return to the context of Pilate's question; because the account of our Lord's trial before the Roman procurator has a far greater importance in the evangelist's mind than just that of a chronicle of certain juridical facts. He gives such prominence to the scene because he is depicting at the same time the trial of Christianity by the secular authorities. The whole scene has to be read in the light of the Johannine 'irony'. Whereas at face-value it is Pilate who judges, the believing reader of the gospel knows that in point of fact it is the Lord who is King and Judge. 'I am king. For this I was born and came into this world, to give testimony to the truth.' This solemn royal declaration brings us into the heart of this gospel and into its favourite themes. Its dramatic message is that now already,

during his earthly mission, Jesus' function as eschatological¹ judge is being fulfilled. The separations the final judgment will make are being drawn across mankind by the very coming of the Light which reveals the inner motives of man's deeds (iii, 18-21).² However, this judging function of Jesus is but the dark counterpart of his saving work: 'He who is of the truth hears my voice' (xviii 37), and it is his Father's love which sent him into this world (iii, 16). The truth to which our Lord gives witness as judge is therefore the revelation of God's love in Jesus which requires the final decisions in man's life.

Is however this witnessing to the truth not going to be discontinued by Jesus' death? Is darkness going to overcome the light after all? If Jesus' cause is left to the disciples it is in feeble hands. No more than in the other gospels is their lack of understanding veiled or excused by St John (xvi, 12). This is one of the main themes of our Lord's farewell discourses, and at the same time a new 'dimension' is added to the concept of 'truth'. There is no break in the work of Jesus: both aspects of it, saving and judging, will be continued by the Spirit he will send to them. This Spirit is himself the Spirit of truth (xvi, 17), who will lead them into the whole truth (xv, 26; xvi, 13). Both descriptions correspond even in detail: Jesus is the way, the truth and the life, that is, according to the context, the way leading to truth and life (xiv, 6), and also the Spirit 'leads them along the way to the truth' (xvi, 13) as the Greek expression has it. The Spirit will also judge and convince the world of sin and of justice and of judgment (xvi, 8). Although this judgment comes also through the Church (xv, 26-27) it cannot be said to be a *human* judgment. Only in so far as Christ's disciples can be said to be born again, to live through divine force, can they be said to be in touch with the Spirit, who upholds to the world the norms of justice. They can be sure that their judgment, being 'pneumatic', will be much more of a plea in favour, a vital appeal to sanctity rather than a damning accusation. Although a superficial approach to this gospel might convey a black-and-white picture of mankind, its

1 Eschatological—concerning the last things; the eschatological judge is the judge at the last judgment.

2 That the expression refers to judgment is now confirmed by the first extra-biblical parallel: in the *Manual of Discipline* of the Community of Qumrân (1Q S 8, 6). There however the final judgment belongs to the future, whereas in St John 'now is the judgment of this world' (xii, 31).

basic message is in accordance with the other gospels, where it is emphasized that no man can claim a right to judgment about his fellow-men. (Matt. vii, 1 etc.)

It is not to be wondered at that for such an exacting mission Jesus prays the Father to sanctify his disciples, to set them apart, to consecrate them, as Jeremiah was sanctified (Jer. i, 5). 'Sanctify them in the truth' (xvii, 17). Since their message has the same double aspect as Jesus' preaching, and since the message 'the truth will make you free' (viii, 32) will meet with refusal and hostility again, they must be prepared to consecrate themselves also as victims, following their Lord's example (xvii, 19).

But it is not only in regard to our Lord and the disciples that the concept of 'truth' appears in crucial contexts of the gospel. Also the believers, those who will believe through the apostles' words (xvii, 20), are related to this heavenly truth. The word expresses both their new being, their rebirth from 'above' (iii, 3), and the moral effort this new life asks of them. For it is only those who *are* of the truth that hear Jesus' voice (xviii, 37). *We* are of the truth, as we are born of God (i, 13). But the result of that new birth is that we 'do the truth', as John's Semitic expression has it (iii, 21). Nothing could show more clearly that 'truth' claims the whole personality and is anything but a mere philosophical notion.³ Also their worship is comprised in the same truth: the true worshippers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth (iv, 23). Their worship is an act of their new God-given life and needs no longer to have recourse to foreshadowing figures. To all believers Christ can be said to be *the* Truth (xiv, 6). As is clear from the context, this saying is not meant to express any philosophical definition of Jesus' nature. He is the only way *leading to* the Father where life and truth is found.⁴ The many texts about 'truth' to which this last one forms in a sense the crown, cover all aspects of the revelation made in Christ. Truth is the message which the Son heard from the Father in both its aspects: saving and judging; it gives the very name to the Spirit who continues his task, it sanctifies the apostles to be preachers of God's Word — 'Thy word is truth' (xvii, 17)—it describes the rebirth, the new life and worship of Christ's flock.

3 It is clear however that Bultmann's description of this aspect (Kittel. *Theol. Wört.z.N.T.* B.P, p. 246), detaching it apparently from any doctrinal context (*mysteriöse oder rationale Belehrung*), is preconditioned by his opinions on faith and revelation.

4. cf. J. Dupont: *Essais sur la Christologie de S. Jean*. Bruges 1951, p. 214.

After this broad outline of the concept of 'truth' in this gospel, the question becomes more pressing; why did the evangelist choose exactly this term to express such important thoughts? As part of the general background of the gospel the question is subject to the most lively discussion. In the interpretation of the other gospels something is reached among the scholars which can cautiously be called a lesser degree of disagreement than that which still surrounds the most general questions about the fourth gospel: purpose, destination, authorship. As for the concept of 'truth', an eminent paper was presented to the International Congress on the Four Gospels in Oxford in 1957.⁵ I. de la Potterie first outlined the opinions current on this topic. The idea of truth seems to be a reflection of gnostic dualistic concepts (Bultmann), or of platonic ideas of reality and its revelation (Dodd). He then points out how all the literary evidence available points in another direction, viz. the late Jewish tradition formed by sapiential and apocalyptic literature. In the books of Wisdom 'truth' is the revelation of God's providential plans for the salvation of mankind. In the apocalyptic writings we find both the moral sense of 'truth' and 'truth' as the revelation of God committed to a privileged messenger. The Johannine terms 'to do the truth', 'witness to the truth', 'Spirit of truth' find their natural place in this tradition. The word is listened to, it is the Father's Word. 'I have told you the truth which I heard from God' (viii, 40). As de la Potterie rightly points out, truth in St John is *heard* from the Father, *spoken* by Christ, *heard* by the believers, whereas the hellenistic notion of divine reality would rather have suggested the use of the terms 'seeing' and 'vision',⁶ if it actually had formed the background of the Johannine usage.

If however the Johannine vocabulary is so largely determined by biblical and extra-biblical Jewish writers, the question cannot be avoided to what audience he addresses his gospel.⁷ It is almost a dogma among commentators that 'the Jews' in the fourth gospel belong to the past, are a lost entity and outside the scope of the

5 I. de la Potterie: *L'arrière-fond du thème johannique de vérité*. In: *Studia Evangelica* . . . Int. Congr. . . . ed. Aland, Cross e.a. Berlin 1959, p. 277-294.

6 cf. however iii, 11; viii, 38; v, 19; iii, 32.

7 This question predetermines the one of vocabulary, e.g. in Dodd: *The Fourth Gospel*, Cambridge 1956, p. 176: This sense can hardly be supposed to come through to Greek readers of the words *kharis kai aletheia* (grace and truth). . . . Thus, while the mould of the expression is determined by Hebrew usage, the actual sense of the words must be determined by Greek usage. Cf. also p. 174.

gospel. Their very name is already a symbol for anyone who refuses to accept Christ.

In a brilliant study J. A. T. Robinson recently challenged this assumption.⁸ He maintains that the gospel addresses the Greek-speaking Jews of the dispersion. 'The Jews said to one another: Does he intend to go to the dispersion among the Greek-speaking (Jews) and teach the Greek-speaking (Jews)?' (vii, 35). A question which John—'ironically'—wants to be answered affirmatively by his readers. The gospel is in fact a passionate attempt to prevent a repetition of the dramatic refusal of Christ by the Judean Jews, and pleads to the Jewish brethren in the *diaspora* that they at least may accept the fulfilment of Jewish destiny. In this hypothesis John i, 17, gets an almost dramatic impact: 'The law was given through Moses but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ'.

This brings us to the third and final point of this note, viz. the relevance of John's 'truth'-sayings to our own situation. The polemical tone of many passages (e.g. viii, 39-59) might be misleading. If Robinson is right, these debates with Palestinian Jews do not reflect the real purpose of the work, which is to win for Christ the remaining parts of Jewry. If therefore both in the Qumrân-writings and in St John the term 'Spirit of truth' occurs, the meaning is basically different. The Spirit of truth does not seclude Christians from their fellow men and fellow Jews, whereas on the contrary in the barren wilderness of Qumrân lived those who had saved themselves from the Sons of Darkness. John's gospel is a moving plea to the sheep of the same fold, and he wants his readers to adopt the same attitude both to the Jews and to our fellow men in general. Nowhere in the gospel does the expression occur: 'those who *have* the truth' or 'who *possess* the truth', and neither is it a set of norms by means of which one would be able to draw lines of division across mankind. Truth is both more heavenly and more merciful. Since it is the innermost motives of men's deeds which are revealed by the Light, the lines across mankind of which we spoke above may well defy the standard norms of human wisdom. The disciples are therefore said to be *led* to the truth themselves along the only way, Christ. If it is said that the Father *seeks* such to worship him in Spirit and

8 J. A. T. Robinson: *Destination and Purpose of St John's Gospel*. New Test. Studies 6, 1960, 117-131.

truth (iv, 23), this does not mean that those worshippers have come to do so by their own efforts. That the Father *seeks*, means that he brings it about, as he *seeks* Christ's glory (viii, 50). Is this truth not close to the notion of the kingdom of God of the other gospels, the kingdom of sanctifying and liberating love?



SHAMING THE DEVIL: OR TELLING THE TRUTH

THOMAS GILBY, O.P.

OF truthfulness it is much less than courage of heart and holiness'—this adaptation of Belloc might be prompted by some hack moralists of the day before yesterday, who instead of riding the downs with God's first gift to man, *subtle, eloquent, sure, sweet, more beautiful than the sun, whose company is without tediousness but with gladness*,¹ land us in a bog of mental restrictions and verbal circumlocutions. True, they carry some sort of apparatus for extricating us, but their effect is one of casuistry rather than candour, and they irked Newman who was formed by another tradition: it was ironical that he, who in all conscience had a delicate sense of honour, should have been exposed to Kingsley's bluff. Not that Anglo-Saxons anyhow have cause for complaint against the slippery Latins, for they themselves, though they may not go in for *suggestio falsi*—the half-lie—are adept at *suppressio veri*—the half-truth—and of all nations the frankness on which they pride themselves seems most baffling to others. In any case truthfulness is not just a matter of bluntness, for though it will have nothing to do with white lies, it does call for tact and a cultivated spirit of fair play.

Let us look at how it is described in the *Summa Theologiae*. For somebody so charged with obedience to the truth of God and things, it may come as a surprise that St Thomas tucks veracity in between two of the satellites to the cardinal virtue of justice, namely between punitive justice and friendliness which govern its severe and agreeable functions respectively,² a suitable position between the bleak and the bland—but surely rather a minor one? Is St Thomas perhaps like us, most offhand sometimes about what

¹ cf. Wisdom vi-xi.

² 2a-2ae. cix-ciii.