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Volume 4

The Gospel of John

Francis J. Moloney, S.D.B.

Daniel J. Harrington, S. J.
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c) *Witness and Accusation* (5:31-47)

31. "If I bear witness to myself, my testimony cannot be verified; 32. there is another who bears witness to me, and I know that the testimony that he bears to me is true.

33. You sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. 34. Not that I accept such human testimony, but I say this that you may be saved. 35. He was a lamp that was kindled and shining, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light.

36. But the testimony that I have is greater than that of John; for the works that the Father has granted me to accomplish, these very works that I am doing, bear me witness that the Father has sent me.

37. And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness to me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen; 38. and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe him whom he has sent. 39. You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me; 40. yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.

41. I do not accept glory from human beings. 42. But I know that you have not the love of God within you. 43. I have come in my Father's name, and you do not receive me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive. 44. How can you believe, who receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the one who alone is God?

45. Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; it is Moses who accuses you, on whom you set your hope. 46. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote of me. 47. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?"

INTERPRETATION

Introduction to 5:31-47. The trial continues in vv. 31-47, but Jesus' defense of his own Sabbath activity (vv. 19-30) needs witnesses. As in vv.

19-30 only the voice of Jesus is heard, but "the Jews" of vv. 5-18 are addressed throughout (*hymeis*: vv. 33, 34, 35, 38, 39, 42, 44, 45. Second person plural verbs are used in vv. 37, 40, 43, 46, 47). Jesus accepts the need for witnesses (vv. 31-32) and supplies them (vv. 33-40), but as the discourse closes he points to the inability of "the Jews" to recognize the revelation of God (vv. 41-44), and threateningly tells them that their own writings accuse them (vv. 45-47). The discourse unfolds in the following fashion:

- (a) Vv. 31-32: Jesus raises the problem of an acceptable witness.
- (b) Vv. 33-40: Witnesses are presented to "the Jews."
 - i. Vv. 33-35: John the Baptist
 - ii. V. 36: The works of Jesus
 - iii. Vv. 37-40: The word of the unseen Father.
- (c) Vv. 41-44: Jesus presents contrasting understandings of *doxa*.
- (d) Vv. 45-47: "The Jews" are accused by the writings of Moses.

A trial that began as Jesus' defense of his Sabbath actions (vv. 19-30; cf. vv. 16-18) closes with an accusation that "the Jews" are accused by their own Scriptures. The accusers have become the accused.

An acceptable witness (vv. 31-32). Jesus points out that the witness he has borne to himself cannot be verified (v. 31: *ouk estin alēthēs*). In Jewish practice it was not enough for the accused to prove the *truth* of certain facts; witnesses whose word could be trusted had to be brought forward (cf. Deut 19:15; m. *Roš Haš.* 3:1; m. *Ketub.* 2:9; Josephus, *Ant.* 4:219). Jesus accepts this situation, and points enigmatically toward "another" (*allos*) whom he knows bears a continuous witness (present tense: *martyrei*) of lasting value to him (v. 32). Jesus rests in the confidence of his knowledge, but more is needed for "the Jews." Although the reader might understand that the "other" is the Father of Jesus, this is not the case for "the Jews." Jesus thus turns to witnesses they have seen and heard: John the Baptist (vv. 33-35) and the works of Jesus (v. 36).

The witness of John the Baptist (vv. 33-35). Jesus reminds "the Jews" that they sent messengers to John the Baptist (cf. 1:19). That moment of witness is in the past (v. 33: *memartyrēken*: perfect tense). John witnessed to Jesus as the *Lamb of God* (1:19, 35) and the *Son of God* (1:34). Because of the never-failing witness of the "other" (cf. 5:32) Jesus needs no human witness, but "the Jews" do (v. 34a). Jesus is prepared to submit himself to the messiness of the human situation, including the trial now in process, so that his interrogators might be saved (v. 34b; cf. 1:14; 3:16-17). There may be conflict, and even a trial that seeks the death of Jesus (vv. 16-18), but Jesus does not exclude "the Jews" from his saving mission (*hina hymeis sōthēte*). Jesus' description of the Baptist as "a lamp that is kindled and shining" summons up primitive ideas of a lamp that becomes a wit-

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ness to the Messiah (LXX Ps 131:16b-17; cf. Sir 48:1). This shining (*phainōn*) lamp brought joy. "The Jews" were prepared (*ēthelēsate*) to be joyful (*agalliathēnai*) but, as the present trial against Jesus shows, their joy stopped there (v. 35). "The Jews" joyfully accepted that the light of the Baptist gave witness to the coming Messiah, but they are now unable to accept the one to whom he gave witness (cf. 1:11). They were unable to look beyond the reflected light of the Baptist, to see him to whom he bore witness.

The witness of the works of Jesus (v. 36). Jesus has an even greater witness (v. 36a). He has a task (*to ergon*) to do that has its origins in God (cf. 4:34), and that task is performed through his continual response to the one who sent him. This response is seen in the many works (*ta erga*) that Jesus accomplishes (v. 36b; cf. v. 20). Jesus does not simply perform these works; he does them perfectly (*teleioun*). This is not to be regarded as self-witness (cf. v. 31). Jesus' perfect accomplishment of his tasks witnesses to the truth that he is the Sent One of the Father (v. 36c).

The witness of the word of the unseen Father (vv. 37-40). After the enigmatic summoning of the witness of the *allos* in v. 32 Jesus has called upon the Baptist (vv. 33-35) and his own works (v. 36). In the turn to the witness of the Father (vv. 37-40), the "other" of v. 32 is clarified. A marked difference is evident between the witnesses summoned in vv. 33-36 and that of the Father. The Baptist and the works of Jesus could be seen and heard, but this is not the case with the *martyria* of the Father who sent Jesus (v. 37a). "The Jews" have never heard his voice (*phōnēn autou*) and they have never seen his form (*eidos autou*). There is accusation, as Jesus spells out what is meant by "voice" and "form" in v. 38b: "for you do not believe him whom he has sent." "The Jews" take it for granted that they have the word of God abiding in them (v. 38a), but their rejection of the one whom God has sent makes such a belief presumptuous. Jesus is the *phōnē* and the *eidos* of God, but they do not hear or see him as such. Jesus is not the Father, but he is the one sent by the Father, and he tells the story of God in and through his story (cf. 1:18). The *phōnē* of God is the *logos* of Jesus.

Jesus continues to point to the failures of his accusers in vv. 39-40. The Jewish practice of study and reflection on the Scriptures is regarded as lifegiving (v. 39), but "the Jews" miss the lifegiving power that comes from a recognition that the biblical word bears witness to Jesus. Their decision to put Jesus on trial in an attempt to kill him is based on their scrutiny of the Scriptures and their interpretation of the Sabbath laws (cf. v. 18). But the Scriptures, where one finds the witness that the Father gives to Jesus (v. 37; cf. v. 31), and that are the witness of the unseen God to Jesus (cf. v. 37), are being abused by those who seek to kill him. They point to Jesus as the voice and form of God, and belief in him leads to the

presence of the word of God dwelling in the believers, but their lack of belief disqualifies them from this presence (v. 38). "The Jews" mistakenly believe that they have life from their tradition and their reflection on Scripture (v. 39). They refuse to come to Jesus (v. 40a). Indeed, their decision to put Jesus on trial and attempt to kill him on the grounds of his blasphemous behavior on a Sabbath (vv. 16-18) excludes them from his lifegiving presence (v. 40b). The tables are being turned as the one on trial begins his accusation of the accusers.

Two different understandings of *doxa* (vv. 41-44). The trial scene is coming to an end, and Jesus now presents the two cases. The Greek word *doxa* has a secular and a biblical meaning. In common usage it refers to the esteem, praise, and glory that come from human achievement. Jesus indicates that he has no interest in "glory from human beings" (v. 41: *doxa tōn anthrōpōn*), but he is certain that "the Jews" do not have the love of God in them. From his intimate knowledge of God (*egnōka*) Jesus reproaches "the Jews" because, whatever their claims to life from the Scriptures, they show no sign of loving God (v. 42). Jesus, the accused, does not seek human recognition (v. 41) while "the Jews," the accusers, do not love God (v. 42). This leads them to the rejection of the one sent in the Father's name (v. 43a) and the easy acceptance of those who come in their own name (v. 43b). Jesus' authority comes from the Father as the one who sent him, but this is rejected as "the Jews" accept all those who might come with nothing more than the authority of their own name (v. 43a: *en tō onomati tou patros mou* . . .; v. 43b: *en tō onomati tō idiō*).

Two radically different perspectives emerge: Jesus looks to God while "the Jews" judge by external appearances. Jesus has rejected the *doxa* of human beings, but the opposite is the case with "the Jews." In the end, their inability to believe comes from settling for the esteem and honor they receive from one another, the *doxa* of human beings (v. 44a: *doxan para allēlōn*). Locked in the world they can understand and control, they are unable to seek and find the *doxa* that comes from God (v. 44b: *tēn doxan tēn para tou monou theou*). Jesus, Lord of the Sabbath, makes known the *doxa* of the only true God who has shown the Son all that he does so that the Son might show these, and even greater works (v. 20). In rejecting the revelation of the one and only God in the Son, "the Jews" have rejected the Sabbath God they claim to be defending (cf. vv. 16-18). "The failure to accept Jesus is really a preference of self" (Brown, *Gospel* 1:228).

Moses accuses "the Jews" (vv. 45-47). According to Jewish thought Moses was regarded as the mediator between God and Israel, the one who intercedes before God for Jews (cf. Exod 32:11-14, 30-33; Deut 9:18-29; Exod. Rab. 18:3; T. Mos. 11:17; Jub. 1:19-21; Josephus, *Ant.* 4:194-195). The Law, God's first great gift, had come to Israel through Moses (cf. 1:17a), but God's gifts have continued and been perfected in and through

Jesus Christ (1:17b). There is no conflict between the two gifts, as one takes the place of the other in God's design. But "the Jews" are rejecting Jesus Christ, and therefore Moses accuses them (v. 45). Jesus has earlier claimed that the Scriptures bear witness to him (v. 39b). This affirmation returns as an accusation in vv. 46-47. If they believed in Moses, they would believe Jesus, as the writings of Moses were about him (v. 46). But they have not believed in Moses. On the basis of their interpretation of the Mosaic Torah "the Jews" condemn Jesus (v. 18), but they are wrong. This is a misinterpretation of the Mosaic tradition. Thus Israel's great intercessor must turn against "the Jews" and condemn them. There is continuity between the writings of Moses (v. 47a: *ekeinou grammasin*) and the words of Jesus (v. 47b: *emois rhēmasin*) which perfect all that Moses said (cf. 1:16-17). But if "the Jews" are unable to believe the writings of Moses they cannot believe the words of Jesus, the revelation of God (v. 47).

Conclusion to 5:1-47. The celebration of the Sabbath is essential literary and theological background for John 5. A miracle worked on a Sabbath creates difficulties (vv. 1-13). After an encounter between Jesus and the cured man that suggests that Jesus cannot be limited to expected Sabbath behavior (v. 14) a trial opens (vv. 15-16) and a verdict is taken, that Jesus must die (vv. 17-18). Jesus defends himself by claiming that his lifegiving and judging activity on the Sabbath flows from his dependence upon his Father, who is still working (vv. 19-30). He next introduces his witnesses (vv. 31-32): John the Baptist (vv. 33-35), the works of Jesus (v. 36), and the Father (vv. 37-40). The inability of "the Jews" to accept these witnesses leads to an ironic change in the direction of the trial: the accusers become the accused (vv. 41-44). Their search for human praise and esteem cannot match Jesus' authority as the revelation of the one and only Sabbath God (v. 44: *ho monos theos*; cf. 2 Kgs 19:15, 19; Ps 85:10; Isa 37:20; Dan 3:25). They stand condemned, unable to read and understand rightly the writings of their great intercessor, Moses (vv. 45-47).

The Johannine community had been cast out of the synagogue (cf. 9:22; 12:42; 16:2), and its members struggled to understand how they were to relate to the God of Israel, the Father of Jesus, worshiped as the one and only creator God through the Jewish celebration of the Sabbath. Their ex-friends and fellow Jews were also coming to grips with a changed situation, without a priesthood, a holy city, or a Temple. The Johannine community was asked to believe that Jesus was the Son of God (vv. 19, 30), the perfection of the Mosaic tradition (1:16-17) who made God known (1:18). What had once been done in the Jewish Temple on the Sabbath was but a sign and a shadow of the perfection of the gift of God in the person of Jesus Christ (1:16-17), lifegiver and judge (5:19-30), the bringer of eternal life to all who would believe in his name (5:24). It was

impossible to honor the traditional Sabbath God without honoring his Son (5:23).

Those who would use the Mosaic tradition to exact a judgment that could lead to the death of Jesus (vv. 16-18) are found wanting. Indeed, Moses accuses "the Jews" (v. 47). Like Jesus, the Johannine Christians have been condemned and expelled from the place where the traditions of Moses were celebrated on the Sabbath (cf. 9:22; 12:42; 16:2), but the author of the Fourth Gospel tells them that it is "the Jews" who have lost their way and are judged. "The Jews" who do not honor the Son do not honor the Father (v. 23). They do not accept Jesus' offer: to pass from death to life (v. 24). But as Jesus perfects the signs and shadows of the Jewish celebration of the Sabbath he enters into a conflict with "the Jews" that will prove to be fatal. Already there is an indication that the conflict between the Johannine Christians and "the Jews" will also lead to the death of Christians (cf. 16:2).

NOTES

31. *I bear witness to myself*: The legal nature of the ongoing discourse is widely recognized. On the literary form see Becker, *Evangelium* 1:249-251, and on its possible rabbinic background see Thomas, "Fourth Gospel" 174-177. It is often pointed out that there is a contradiction between 5:31 and 8:14, where Jesus speaks of the truthfulness of the witness that he bears himself (e.g., Barrett, *Gospel* 264). The interpretation of each of these passages is strongly determined by their contexts, and they are not as contradictory as might at first appear.
cannot be verified. A number of translations are possible for *ouk estin alēthēs*. The forensic nature of the discourse leads to the translation given. See Brown, *Gospel* 1:222. On the Jewish legal process that called upon witnesses who could be trusted see Harvey, *Trial* 19-20.
32. *there is another*: It is generally agreed that this "another" (*allos*) is the Father of Jesus, although this will not become clear until v. 37a. John Chrysostom interpreted the *allos* as John the Baptist, but this "makes havoc of the argument that follows" (Bernard, *Commentary* 1:248).
I know: Jesus' use of the verb *egnōka* claims certain knowledge that the witness of the *allos* is true (Beutler, *Martyria* 256-257). Some textual evidence (Western readings of Original Sinaiticus, Bezae, Old Latin, Curetonian Syriac, Armenian, and Georgian) reads "you know" rather than "I know." This tradition reflects a scribal tendency to heighten the conflict between Jesus and "the Jews" and should be rejected.
33. *he has borne witness*: The perfect tense of the verb (*memartyrēken*) indicates that the witnessing took place in the past, but its significance endures.
35. *a lamp that was kindled and shining*: The passive participle, "kindled" (*hokaïomenos*) indicates that the light the Baptist bears is the result of the initial

tive of God, who sent him into the world to bear witness (cf. 1:6). The messianic ideas behind a lamp that would usher in the time of the Messiah come from Jewish interpretation of LXX Ps 131:16b-17: "Her faithful will shout for joy (*agalliasai agalliasontai*). For I will cause a horn to sprout up for David; I have prepared a lamp for my anointed one (*lychnon tē christō mou*). On this, see Neugebauer, "Miszelle" 130; Beutler, *Martyria* 258. It is rejected by some (e.g., Becker, *Evangelium* 1:253).

you were willing to rejoice: In the Fourth Gospel there is no rejection of the Baptist, no account of his death at the hands of Herod Antipas, and no report of his arrest. He fades from the scene because he regards it as necessary for Jesus to increase and for himself to decrease (3:30). On John the Baptist in 5:33-36 see Stowasser, *Johannes der Täufer* 221-231.

36. *the works that the Father has granted me to accomplish*: A distinction must be maintained between the singular "work" (*to ergon*) and the plural "works" (*ta erga*), although some commentators collapse them into one (e.g., Bultmann, *Gospel* 265; Becker, *Evangelium* 1:253-254). The singular is a more theological concept that refers to the whole of Jesus' mission, consummated on the cross (cf. 4:34; 17:4; 19:30). The plural refers to the many deeds of Jesus that lead to Jesus' consummation of the *ergon*. They do show forth the *doxa* (cf. 2:11; 11:4, 40) and reflect Jesus' being the sent one of the Father. See Beutler, *Martyria* 259-260, and especially Vanhoye, "L'oeuvre du Christ" 415-419.

these very works . . . witness that the Father has sent me: Jesus does not witness to himself, but his perfect accomplishment of *ta erga* witnesses to the truth that he is the sent one of the Father. This point is made strongly in the Greek syntax, where the subject is repeated after a relative: *ta gar erga . . . auta ta erga ha poiō*. Never in the Fourth Gospel does Jesus speak of "my works." See Vanhoye, "Oeuvre du Christ" 394-408; Bernard, "Témoignage" 21-26.

37. *And the Father . . . has himself borne witness to me*: The progression from the Baptist (vv. 33-35) to the works of Jesus (v. 36) and the witness of the Father adopted in the interpretation is not accepted by all. In light of the discussion of the Scriptures in vv. 46-47 some would claim that vv. 37-40 refer to the OT with special reference to Sinai. See especially Pancaro, *The Law in the Fourth Gospel* 216-231.

his voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen: The interpretation sees the use of *phōnē* ("voice") and *eidos* ("form") as referring to "the Jews'" inability to recognize the revelation of God in Jesus (cf. Stimpfle, *Blinde Sehen* 102-103). Pancaro (*The Law in the Fourth Gospel* 216-226) argues that the two expressions refer to Sinai, and thus in vv. 37-38 Jesus presents the testimony given by the Father to Moses and Israel at Sinai, that is, the OT revelation. There is indeed a hint of the OT tradition of the inaccessibility of God (see Deut 4:12, 15), which is only overcome by the Son (cf. Segalla, *Giovanni* 219). For the christological interpretation adopted in the interpretation see von Wahlde, "The Witnesses to Jesus" 385-395; Painter, *Quest* 240-241; Thompson, "God's Voice" 177-204.

39. *you search the Scriptures*: The lifegiving Jewish practice of study and reflection on the Scriptures (cf. Psalm 119; Deut 8:3; Sir 17:11; 45:5; *Pirke 'Abot* 2:8; 6:7 and further rabbinic material in Str-B 2:467) is behind the use of the Greek verb *eraunate* ("you search"). See Bernard, "Témoignage" 35–42. The verb corresponds to the Hebrew *dāraš*, the technical term for biblical study and exposition. Dodd, *Interpretation* 329–330 n. 1 shows that the verb is indicative, not imperative. Jesus is not telling "the Jews" to do something; he is chastising them for their incorrect use of the Scriptures.
40. *yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life*: The author of the Fourth Gospel is not denying the importance of the Scriptures but taking the early Christian position that they point to Jesus. "Being the witness of God to his Son, the Scriptures are prophetic, not life-giving" (Hoskyns, *Gospel* 273).
42. *you have not the love of God*: Scholars discuss whether the expression "the love of God" (*tēn agapēn tou theou*) means "you do not love God" (objective genitive) or "you are not people whom God loves" (subjective genitive). For a summary of the discussion see Lindars, *Gospel* 213. As "the Jews'" active reading of the Scriptures and their rejection of Jesus on the basis of that reading is at the center of the argument, it is being read as an objective genitive. Jesus reproaches "the Jews" because, whatever their claims to life from the Scriptures, their rejection of the Son shows that they do not love God (cf. v. 23). The Fourth Gospel argues that God so loved the world that he gave his only Son (3:16). This love also includes "the Jews." See Pancaro, *The Law in the Fourth Gospel* 239–240. Schnackenburg, *Gospel* 2:127 and Brodie, *Gospel* 254 attempt to marry both the subjective and objective meanings.
44. *the one who alone is God*: The strong insistence on the uniqueness of God (*tou monou theou*) maintains the focus on the Sabbath Lordship of Israel's one and only God. Some very good witnesses (P⁶⁶, P⁷⁵, Vaticanus, Freer Gospels, Origen, Eusebius) omit *theou*. It should be retained (cf. Barrett, *Gospel* 269).
45. *Moses . . . on whom you set your hope*: For rabbinic material on Moses as Israel's intercessor before God see Str-B 2:562. See also Jeremias, "Mōysēs" 848–873; Meeks, *The Prophet-King* 159–161.
it is Moses who accuses you: The use of the Greek verb *katēgoreō* ("to accuse") in this context keeps the discussion within the framework of a legal process. For the forensic background to this word see BAGD 422, s.v.; LSJ 926–927. On the rabbinic and legal use of the expression, and the derived words *katēgoros* and *katēgōr* see Barrett, *Gospel* 270.
46. *If you believed Moses, you would believe me*: The interpretation insists that there is no conflict between the former gift of God through Moses and the perfection of the gift of God in and through Jesus. See the interpretation of 1:16–17. The preposition *anti* in 1:16b should not be read as a rejection of the Law. It is not correct to argue that Jesus Christ replaces "that which Judaism meant to offer, but failed to provide" (Dodd, *Interpretation* 86).
47. *if you do not believe his writings*: The final accusation of "the Jews" in v. 47 presupposes the argument of 5:1–47. They are accused by Moses, whose tradi-

tions they claim to be using in their accusation of Jesus (v. 18). But they were warned earlier in the trial that anyone who wishes to honor God must honor the Son (v. 23), and that only those who hear the word of Jesus and believe in the one who sent him can come to eternal life (v. 24). In defense of his Sabbath activity (vv. 1-18) Jesus' words on life and judgment (vv. 19-30) guide the understanding of his further words on witness and accusation (vv. 31-47). See Lee, *Symbolic Narratives* 108-125.

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ii. Jesus and the Passover (6:1-71)

Introduction to 6:1-71. Matching 5:1, the expression *meta tauta* (6:1) introduces a new place (v. 1: the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias), a new set of characters (v. 2: a multitude; v. 3: the disciples), and a change of time (v. 4: the Passover). The reason for this gathering is also given: "because they saw the signs he did on those who were diseased" (v. 2). Many modern and contemporary scholars have suggested that the present location of chapter 6 creates geographical difficulties that can only be resolved by rearranging chapters 4-7. If 6:1-71 is placed immediately after 4:43-54 Jesus' presence in Galilee is explained. The following events of chapters 5, 7, 9, and 10 all take place in Jerusalem. This suggestion, which has no support from textual traditions, focuses too strongly on geography. The issue that determines the order of events in John 5-10 is the celebration of the feasts of "the Jews" (cf. 5:1). After the general indication of the theme of feasts in 5:1, the fundamental observance of the Sabbath follows logically (cf. 5:9b). Other Jewish feasts then follow in the correct