

BLACK'S
NEW TESTAMENT COMMENTARIES

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO SAINT JOHN

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the present by the coming of Christ exposes people's deeds in their true light, so here this final judgement will again be on the basis of people's deeds – whether they have done good or evil. The final verdict functions as a full and visible exhibition of the present verdict. If justice has to be seen to have been done, its public and open demonstration remains important; hence no doubt the notion, found in Dan. 12.2 and familiar in the thought of second temple Judaism, of a resurrection even for condemnation. The mention of Jesus' voice as the agent of resurrection anticipates in the narrative sequence his cry 'with a loud voice' outside Lazarus' tomb resulting in the appearance of Lazarus still wrapped in his grave-clothes (11.43-4), and this in turn anticipates the eschatological resurrection of which this discourse speaks.

30 The first part of Jesus' defence speech ends on an *inclusio* which stresses his dependence on his Father in a similar fashion to his first words – **I am able to do nothing by myself** (cf. v. 19). This time the notion of dependence supports what has become the main claim in his defence, namely, that he is in fact his accusers' judge. Just as his perspective on the deeds that provoked the charge was that they were done in imitation of what he saw the Father doing (v. 19), now his view of his judging is that it is in imitation of what he hears the Father saying – **I judge as I hear**. Such judgement can be said to be **just, because I do not seek my own will but the will of him who sent me**. His will is so fully dependent on, and therefore identified with, the will of the one who has sent him that his judgement is bound to be just – it is God's judgement.

31-2 On the basis of the first part of this trial scene, it could be alleged that Jesus was appearing as the sole witness in his own defence. In terms of Jewish legal conventions this would of course make his testimony invalid. It is in this sense that Jesus' words – **If I witness about myself, my testimony is not true** – are to be understood. Deut. 19.15 rules that three, or at least two, witnesses are needed for valid testimony. For this reason Jesus claims that **There is another who witnesses about me, and I know that the testimony he gives about me is true**. It is not immediately clear to whom he is referring. He will go on to mention a number of types of witness – John the Baptist (vv. 33-5), his own works (v. 36), the Father himself (vv. 37-8), and the Scriptures (vv. 39-40). But these four do not have the same status as witness, and by vv. 36-7 it becomes apparent that the other witness is in all probability the Father (cf. also 8.17-18, where the two witnesses required are Jesus and the Father). Jesus' works, which are given him by the Father, and the Scriptures, which are the Father's word, can then both be seen as the visible aspects of the Father's testimony. Although in this way the requirement for two witnesses is fulfilled, this would not, of course, have actually satisfied the law, where an appeal to a divine witness was not in view.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST JOHN

33–5 This divine testimony is contrasted to the human testimony of the Baptist. Jesus does not directly appeal to this testimony but reminds his accusers that they had instigated the interrogation of John (cf. 1.19) and thereby had provided themselves with a further testimony, because **he has borne witness to the truth**. Having recalled the witness that the opposition has already heard, Jesus then makes clear that this is not the other witness to whom he has referred – **I do not accept witness from a human, but I say these things to you so that you may be saved**. He has only mentioned John's witness by way of concession, to accommodate to the need for human salvation. The thought is that Jesus' relationship with the Father is such that his testimony is really self-authenticating, but, in the same way as the narrative as a whole has John as its first witness, he enlists human witnesses in conformity to human legal conventions so that all means will be employed to enable people to experience the intended outcome of the judgement process and be saved. Indeed John's testimony appeared to have served that purpose – **for a while you were willing to rejoice in his light**. But it is also made clear that John's witness was not the light itself but a derivative brightness. He is described as **a burning and shining lamp** that helps to disseminate the light, reminding readers of the language of the prologue – 'he was not himself the light, but came in order that he might testify about the light' (1.8).

36 The other testimony to which Jesus is willing to appeal is **greater than John's**. It is the testimony of the Father himself (vv. 36–40), and in the first instance this witness consists of **the works that the Father has given me to complete, the very works that I am doing**, works such as the healing of vv. 1–9 which had provoked this particular controversy in the first place. The signs Jesus does are included in the testimony of his works and are properly understood when they are seen as bearing witness to the divine origin of Jesus' mission, to his commissioning as the Father's representative. Their witness about him is **that the Father has sent me**. Jesus will repeat the emphasis on the witness of his works in 10.25 and will then point out in 15.24 that they also play a condemnatory role for those who do not believe.

37–8 **And this Father who sent me has borne witness about me**. The main clause employs the perfect tense of the verb, indicating that this witness has taken place in the past but has continuing significance. To what, in addition to the works given to Jesus, does this witness refer? The answer becomes clear through the charges Jesus now makes. His accusers would claim that God had provided such testimony, if anywhere, in revealing the law and in its inscription. This was when Israel had heard God's voice (cf. e.g. Exod. 19.9; Deut. 4.33; Sir. 17.13) and had seen God (cf. e.g. Exod. 19.11; Deut. 5.4; Sir. 17.13), and Torah was God's word

that remained in their hearts (cf. e.g. Deut. 6.6; 30.14; Ps. 119.11, 34). At the same time, however, Deut. 4.12, 15-18 could also say that Israel had not seen God's form. But whatever his accusers' claims in regard to this revelation, Jesus asserts that none of them are true – **You have never heard his voice or seen his form, and you do not have his word remaining in you.** The first part of his accusation echoes that of Yahweh against Israel in Isa. 48.8 ('you have never heard'), and the reason given for the charges is **you do not believe the one he has sent.** As the Father's commissioned representative, Jesus is now the repository of God's self-revelation. As the narrative as a whole makes clear, hearing God's voice, seeing God and having God's word remain in one are all now associated with Jesus (cf. e.g. 3.34; 14.9; 15.7).

39-40 The Scriptures constitute the Father's continuing witness, but, from Jesus' perspective, because they **are not willing to come to me to have life**, his Jewish opponents fail to see that these Scriptures **witness about me.** Jesus recognizes that **You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life**, but he holds such study to be in vain when it refuses the hermeneutical key provided by God's present revelation in him and thereby misses out on the verdict of life which he as judge now renders (cf. vv. 21, 24).

41-4 The clash between Jesus and his accusers is presented as a clash of perspectives about glory, a topic that had surfaced briefly earlier in the mention of honour in v. 23. There is also a connection with Jesus' earlier statement in v. 34. There Jesus had said that he does not accept human testimony, while here he says, **I do not accept glory from humans.** To accept the testimony of another about oneself is to be dependent on the opinion of another for one's reputation or honour. Human honour or glory is precisely the reputation one has in the eyes of others, and in refusing such usual human evaluation Jesus is calling into question this basic cultural value. Because of his relationship with the Father, the only testimony other than his own that Jesus would accept was that of the Father. In the same way the only glory he will accept is that which the Father gives him in vindicating his claims (cf. also 7.18; 8.50; 17.1, 5, 24). In the context of this discussion, the charge Jesus lays against his accusers is **you do not have the love of God in you.** If they had, they too would seek God's glory above all else. Instead they remain on the merely human level of concern about their honour and reputation in the eyes of each other – **you receive glory from one another.** Jesus charges that because they are caught up in the human system of assessing reputation, **if another comes in his own name, you will receive him.** Such a person is dependent on human testimony and thereby colludes with the system. This system of human glory prevents the opposition from

accepting Jesus – **I have come in my Father's name and you do not receive me.** As the tables begin to be turned and the defendant becomes the prosecutor, the whole criterion for his accusers' judgement is indicated. They purport to be accusing Jesus out of a concern for the reputation of the only God, which they see threatened by Jesus' claims, and they interpret these claims as an attempt by Jesus to make himself equal with the one God. But Jesus' defence questions their deepest motivations and loyalty. If they were truly concerned about **the glory that comes from the only God** rather than human glory, they would believe in the one whose coming in the Father's name and whose total dependence on the Father demonstrate that he seeks only the Father's glory.

45–7 The turning of the tables is now taken further: **Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; the one who accuses you is Moses, on whom you have set your hope.** Jesus will not need to serve as accuser of his opponents. Contrary to all expectations, Moses has that role. The one on whom they have set their hope, as demonstrated in their observance of the law, the one whose disciples they will later claim to be (cf. 9.28), turns out to be the accusing counsel (ὁ κατηγορῶν) rather than the defending counsel (ὁ παράκλητος). Both Greek terms had specific legal connotations and also became loan words in Hebrew juridical usage. Moses was viewed as Israel's great defender, intercessor and advocate (cf. e.g. *Jub.* 1.20–1; *Test. Mos.* 11.17). But here, in an ironic role reversal, Moses becomes the counsel for the prosecution. The controversy had been fuelled by 'the Jews' using Moses as an accuser against Jesus, charging that he had broken the sabbath law (cf. vv. 10, 16). It finishes with Jesus using Moses as an accuser against unbelieving Jews. And Jesus' presupposition for this latter use of Moses is that **he wrote about me.** This is a point of view that pervades the narrative – that Jesus is the fulfilment of everything in the law, a view that shades over into Jesus being the replacement of everything in the law. The reason for the unbelief of Jesus' opponents can now be portrayed, despite their own avowals, as a lack of true belief in Moses – **if you believed Moses, you would believe me.** The formulation of the final question not simply in terms of Moses but also in terms of his writings – **If you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?** – links the final element of Jesus' defence with the main thrust of its second part – the Father's witness to Jesus in Scripture. The writings of Moses, like the rest of the Scriptures (cf. v. 39), testify about Jesus. The narrative will provide its own extended illustration of just how they do so in the immediately following chapter with its discourse on the bread of life that is at the same time a midrashic treatment of Exod. 16 (cf. 6.25–59).

Through this discourse the claims of the evangelist and his community about the relationship of Jesus to God, claims that caused so much dispute with the synagogue, are linked with the controversy of Jesus' healing on

the sabbath and framed in terms of a trial scene in which Jesus is at one with and fully represents God the judge. The issues are who is to be the judge of such claims and what are the criteria of judgement. The point of view of this Gospel's narrative emerges through the device of a defence speech in which the defendant is shown to be the judge who at the same time calls for a re-evaluation of the traditional criteria for judgement. For the Fourth Gospel what makes the difference is whether one starts with Jesus and his relationship to God or insists on one's own categories – Moses, Scripture, human glory and human conventions about testimony. Jesus himself has to become the criterion of judgement to which these other categories are subordinated and by which they are transformed. In the light of the divine testimony merely human assessment is to be rejected, but the earlier witness of the Scriptures and of Moses remains significant as long as both are interpreted in terms of God's present and decisive witness in Jesus.

(iii) *THE FEEDING OF THE FIVE THOUSAND*

6.1-15

(1) After this Jesus went across the Sea of Galilee, or of Tiberias.¹ (2) A great crowd followed him, because they saw the signs he was doing for the sick. (3) Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. (4) Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. (5) When Jesus looked up and saw that a great crowd was coming towards him, he said to Philip, 'Where are we to buy bread so that these people may eat?' (6) He said this to test him, because he himself knew what he was going to do. (7) Philip answered him, 'Two hundred denarii worth of bread would not be enough for each of them to have a little.' (8) One of his disciples, Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, said to him, (9) 'There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they for so many?' (10) Jesus said, 'Make the people sit down.' Now there was a great deal of grass in the place, so the men sat down, about five thousand in number. (11) Then Jesus took the loaves, and having given thanks, he distributed them to those who were sitting, so also the fish, as much as they wanted. (12) When they had had their fill, he said to his disciples, 'Gather up the pieces left over, so that nothing is lost.' (13) So they gathered them up, and they filled twelve baskets from the pieces of the five barley loaves which those who

¹ The most difficult but also best-attested reading has two successive genitives for the name of the sea – 'of Galilee of Tiberias'. Variants have attempted to deal with the difficulty either by omitting 'of Galilee' or by inserting between the genitives an 'and' or the phrase 'to the regions of'. The translation adopted here deals with the awkwardness by inserting an 'or'. The alternative name for the sea will be found later in 21.1.