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## "THE DISCIPLE WHOM JESUS LOVED"

### WITNESSES TO CHRIST. III. ST JOHN THE APOSTLE

"That which existed from the beginning—that which we have seen with our eyes, what we have watched, what our hands have handled . . . we are speaking of the Word of Life . . . yes, that Life was manifested and we have seen it and are bearing witness to it and are proclaiming to you that Eternal Life . . . what we have seen and what we have heard, that we are proclaiming to you too !" (I John i, 1-3).

With these words, almost breathless in his earnestness, St. John begins his First Epistle. He is determined to bear witness to a fact—a physical fact, not only a mystical experience ; his eyes have seen—his ears have heard—his hands have touched That which was eternal and yet as truly man as he himself was. There were already those who were "anti-Christ,"

who denied either the divine sonship of our Lord, or, what seems strange to us, the truth of his humanity (iv, 2, 3) : but *we*, he repeats (iv, 14), have seen and are bearing witness that the Father has sent the Son as Saviour of the world. True, he agrees that there is another sort of "witness," that which God himself bears to his Son by sending his Spirit into the hearts of believers, so that they know the truth also because of a direct experience : but it is not of this, precisely, that *we* shall be writing, but of the fact that John regards himself as, first and foremost, a *witness* to the truth concerning Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup>

So too in the Apocalypse, John bears witness to the word of God, and the witnesses given by Jesus Christ himself (i, 2), and tells how he is bidden write down his visions and make them known to all (ii) : again, he is told he must "prophesy" to many peoples and nations and languages and kings (x, 11) : and the book ends with the intertwined testimony of our Lord, his Angel-messenger, and St. John himself.

The Gospel according to St. John has "witness" as a constantly recurring theme. The witness of the Baptist—"he came for a *witness*" (i, 7) : "this is the witness of John" (19) : "And John bare witness—'I have beheld . . . I have seen . . . I have borne witness'" (32-4). "He who was with thee, to whom thou didst bear witness . . . he is baptizing!" " (But) you yourselves bore *me* witness that I said: 'I am not the Christ!'" (iii, 26-8). Soon, once more, our Lord himself passes into a higher witness—"You sent to John, and he bore witness to the truth; but (now) the witness which I receive is not (merely) from man!" (vv. 33, 34, 36). However, I repeat, we are not to think, here, of the *divine* witness to our Lord, but of that given by the Evangelist. And after his remembrance of how our Lord himself was "witness to the Truth" (xviii, 37), what can be more emphatic than his declaration that what he had written was written "that you might believe" (xx, 31), followed by either his own, or his "Secretary's" attestation (xxi, 24) : "This is the disciple who bears witness of these things and wrote these things, and we know that his witness is true," echoing thus John's witness after the piercing of our Lord's side : "He who saw has borne witness and his witness is true; and he *knows* that he says what is true" (xix, 35). No one could be more emphatic that the writer is not inventing, but witnessing : the writer is witnessing to *facts* of *experience*; you might almost think that he foresees the time when men would say that he was constructing pious allegories out of his own head and he is insisting that he was doing nothing of the sort. He *said* what he had *seen* : he is a witness to Christ, and Christ to God, and God to Christ.

So far I have wished only to underline the fact that St. John regarded

<sup>1</sup> The notion of "witnessing" haunts him in these three letters of his; and in the third, he rejoices that the love of those to whom he writes is borne public witness to; and he mentions a Demetrius to whom "all" bear witness, and he adds his own witness, "and thou knowest that our witness is true" (6, 12).

himself, in so far as he was writing (and doubtless when he was speaking) as an eye-witness to our Lord. Now we ought to ask whether St. John was likely to be a good and trustworthy witness. In the Synoptic Gospels all we hear about him is that he came with his brother James asking for the two top places in the Kingdom they expected (Matt. xx; Mark x); and again, when our Lord was refused leave to enter a small town, John and James demanded that lightning should strike the place and were called a couple of thunderbolts themselves . . . ambitious, then, and hot-headed. From his own document, we see that John showed more courage during the Passion than any of the other Apostles: we have more than his own testimony that he was "the disciple whom Jesus loved"—what greater proof of this could we ask than that our Lord should entrust his own Mother to him from the Cross?

NOTE.—It is a consistent tradition that he lived to be very old; but John xxi, 22 makes it clear that this was *not* to be founded on what our Lord said to St. Peter. Peter, who had been told, not obscurely, the manner of death that awaited him, asked what would happen to John. Our Lord said: "Suppose that I should will him to go on living till I come . . . (to that far-off Second Coming), that is not *your* affair!" Our Lord, if I may say so, not seldom used startling "exaggerations"—such as the grain that should produce a hundred-fold: the officer who had embezzled 10,000 talents (Matt. xviii, 24), almost the revenue of a whole province, and was "forgiven." Our Lord practically said to St. Peter: "*You* are going to be martyred: but suppose I decide that John shall go on living till the end of the world—that is no business of yours! Your vocation is *your* vocation and nobody else's is."

John's vigour was different from Peter's impetuosity: they both ran to the Sepulchre: John got there first, but a certain awe checked him—but not Peter—from going in. No one can fail to see that vigour in the Apocalypse (a book which, to my feeling, positively vibrates with passion—not least in his description of the Fall of Rome and his Dirge over the wanton city), and yet, what self-restraint! Even if his First Epistle may seem (as it does to me) the work of a very old man, that too is forceful as well as gentle.

The theme of "love" recurs so constantly in his writings, and his mystical intuition is so sublime that his clear-sighted realism, his artistic sense and, if I may so put it, his almost caustic humour are not always noticed. Evidently we have no space to give examples of this: enough to refer to his "letters" to the Asiatic churches, each of which contains vivid little allusions to local circumstances: and again, his frequent adoption and *simplification* of ancient imagery: and re-read the whole of chapter ix of his Gospel about the man born blind; and indeed chapter iv, about the woman of Samaria!

St. John ends his "book" (save for its "appendix") with the words: "Many other signs therefore Jesus did in the presence of the disciples [John associates them with himself as witnesses] which are not written in this book: but these *are* written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his

Name" (xx, 30-1). So what John's purpose is, is clear; and his method, so to put it, normally is to relate some episode and then to develop its spiritual significance by means of a discourse. Thus the miracle of the multiplication of the bread is followed by the discourse on the Bread of Life and the Holy Eucharist in particular: that of the paralyzed man "restored to life" and activity, is preface to that marvellous discourse in which our Lord speaks of his Father's "working" and his own "work" and the issue of these into a New Life for men. I feel that I must, against the grain (for I would rather be descriptive than argumentative and disagreeing with what I think false and even foolish), interpolate two considerations. First, if (as some critics have said) John invented his incidents, they "prove" nothing whatsoever. He offers them, throughout, as *signs* because *facts*. An "allegory" would have been no use to him. His discourses, however, are "authentic" in a different way. You can read e.g. the Discourse with Nicodemus in three minutes, even going slowly. But our Lord certainly spent long when talking to Nicodemus, or to the woman by the well, nor was St John present on either of these or similar occasions, nor, if he had been, would he have been a stenographer . . . He could not have learnt what was said save because our Lord told him, and he then worked down to the essential points, always "in function" of his *own* point—"Life in His Name." True, you cannot always be quite sure where John's "reporting" shades off into his own comment on what he has reported; but however much his "style" is noticeable in his "report," his whole aim would have been missed had he been merely inventing: he would have been horrified had you said he was substituting *his* doctrine for our Lord's: he is telling us what Jesus *said* and *meant*. But since John's aim *is* to report a "message," it is only unconsciously, so to say, that he pictures for us the "character" of our Lord. Yet he does so picture it, and most vividly, as we see if we look for, precisely, those tiny touches which we should expect in a brief document which does not profess to be a "word-portrait."

Is there not a gentle, respectful (for our Lord was after all much younger than Nicodemus), yet almost humorous rebuke in the words: "Art thou 'the Master in Israel' and knowest not these things?" (iii, 10): is there not a delicacy of approach in his asking the Samaritan woman to give him water to drink—knowing exactly how she would reply and how, as always, he could pass on from the more "material" to the transcendent? And though he had begun by feeling so tired (*sedebat sic*: iv, 6), and though in the disciples' absence he had had neither food nor drink, how the vision of fields golden for the harvesting had uplifted his soul till all the weariness had left him! And, at once, his unselfishness . . . if it be he who has sown, it is they who shall reap, "that he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice *together*" (iv, 36). Notice too his seeking for the once blind man who had been excommunicated, until he found him and completed his spiritual cure; his tender

guidance of St. Martha towards the full understanding of himself as Lord of Life: his sending of Magdalen as messenger to the Apostles after the Resurrection. As for the chapters xiii to xvi, they contain, in reality, all the tenderness, the sublimity, the serenity in pain that go to compose that "character" of Christ to which history shows no parallel.

St. John, beginning his Gospel, sends us back to the origins of the world, and now our Lord tells Nicodemus of the new and heavenly creation—the new world, the new self, that are still more wonderfully to be brought into being by water and the Spirit. Then to the woman by the well he tells how he himself can give that life, because he possesses it: and the life is to be nourished by mysteriously feeding upon him—nothing but himself *could* be the adequate sustenance and increasing of that life. And in fine, owing to his oneness with the Father, he can say to St. Martha that he *is* that life—"I *am* the Resurrection and the Life." It is to this doctrine that St. John bears witness, and, in telling us of the doctrine, it is essentially of our Lord that he is speaking.

Volat avis sine meta  
Quo nec vates nec propheta  
Evolavit altius :

Tam implenda quam impleta  
Numquam vidit tot secreta  
Purus homo purius.<sup>1</sup>  
C. C. MARTINDALE, S.J.

## THE SCROLLS NEWLY DISCOVERED IN PALESTINE

### FURTHER COMMENT

**W**HILE we live indeed in an age of great discoveries, certainly the most important for biblical studies, and perhaps even the most sensational of all, has been the finding of new, in the main Hebrew, manuscripts in the summer of 1947, in a cave at the north-western end of the Dead Sea, a bit below the latitude of Jerusalem. Details of the discovery, description of the documents and initial studies of them have already begun to appear, predominantly in America.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "So high, so limitless his flight—That never prophet, never seer—Winged a more lofty way :—Never pure-hearted man more purely contemplated—Mysteries accomplished and yet to be fulfilled.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. G. E. Wright, "A Phenomenal Discovery," *The B(biblical) A(rchaeologist)* XI (1948), pp. 21-3; John C. Trever, "The Discovery of the Scrolls," *ibid.* pp., 45-57; "Preliminary Observations on the Jerusalem Scrolls," *Bulletin of the (American) S(chools of) O(riental) R(esearch)* III (1948), pp. 3-16; Millar Burrows, "The Contents and Significance of the Manuscripts," *BA*, l. c., pp. 57-61; "Variant Readings in the Isaiah Manuscript," *BASOR*, l. c., pp. 16-24; W. H. Brownlee, "The Jerusalem Habakkuk Scroll," *BASOR* 112 (1948), Op. 8-18; A. Bea, "Nova Manuscripta Hebraica," *Biblica* 29 (1948), pp. 446-8; J.-M. Paul Bauchet, "A Newly Discovered Hebrew Manuscript," *SCRIPTURE* IV (1949), pp. 21-2; cf. also pp. 2-3. Further discussion is found in *L'ami du clergé* 59 (1949), pp. 49-52.