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ABSTRACT

THE CONCEPT OF TRUTH IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

by

Bastian Ogon

Adviser: Laurențiu F. Moț

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE RESEARCH

Thesis

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: THE CONCEPT OF TRUTH IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

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Date completed: April 2020

Problem

The term ἀλήθεια, ‘truth’ is a frequently used term in the Gospel of John. The fundamental question of this paper is to discuss how truth is understood by John and if the Gospel of John conveys a specific concept of truth?

Method

The first part will briefly consider common philosophical concepts of truth, as well as epistemological issues connected to them. These approaches will be compared with John’s truth concept. In the second part the most important passages where ἀλήθεια is used will be carefully analyzed exegetically, in order to understand the concept of ἀλήθεια in Johannine thought. The third part will deal with implications from the previous discussion that are essential to Christianity in general.

Results

Ἀλήθεια was revealed to John, which is why he testified to it, in order to encourage others to believe. Truth is the basis on which the Trinity is founded and from where it operates from.

Conclusions

John sees ἀλήθεια as an absolute concept, incompatible with relativism or pluralism. It is deeply Christocentric (John 14:6), but also Trinitarian. This means that it is intellectual and factual, but at the same time deeply personal, relational and active.

Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

THE CONCEPT OF TRUTH IN
THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

A Thesis
Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements of the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Bastian Ogon

2020

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THE CONCEPT OF TRUTH IN
THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

A thesis
presented in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
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Bastian Ogon

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

HCM – Historical-Critical Method

HGM – Historical-Grammatical Method

LXX – Septuagint

NT – New Testament

OT – Old Testament

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Topic

During his encounter with Pilate, Jesus affirmed that he came into the world to testify “truth” (John 18:37). Pilate reacts to this question with quite a philosophical counterquestion: “What is truth?” (John 18:38).¹ It is striking to notice that Pilate does not receive an answer. Moreover, the reader finds out that this is the last time the Greek word for truth, ἀλήθεια, appears in the Gospel of John. It seems likely that in order to understand the meaning of the term ‘truth’ in Johannine thought, and also its meaning in Pilate’s inquiry, one needs to go through the previous 24 occurrences of ἀλήθεια in the Gospel of John.

Statement of the Problem

The usage of ἀλήθεια by John reveals that the word bears a multifaceted meaning. Different aspects of ἀλήθεια seem to be developed during the progress of John’s Gospel. Following the question about the concept of truth in the Gospel of John, it is essential to evaluate all different aspects of truth in order to receive a homogenous view of John’s understanding of ἀλήθεια. At the center lies the question: How is the term ‘truth’ explained and understood by John? This fundamental question can be seen as the

¹ Unless otherwise stated, all Bible quotations are taken from *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Standard Bible Society, 2001).

heartbeat of this research and will occupy the principal focus. Does the Gospel of John convey a specific concept of truth? Is ἀλήθεια absolute or relative? What are the implications of truth being defined in the Bible as a person (John 14:6)? Does it mean that truth, being considered in its essence as something intellectual, factual and objective, has a relational dimension?

Importance of the Study

The question about truth has preoccupied thinkers throughout western history. Up to this day, Pilate's question has lost nothing of its relevance, tension and intensity. As a matter of fact, the question about truth is of greater relevance to the present than ever before. In ancient times truth was considered as something irrevocably and absolute. Nowadays it seems that society has given up a specific position while fostering a myriad of different attempts, concepts, suggestions and skepticisms.² In this whirl of different philosophical currents the democratic societies have replaced their search for truth with the search for consensus. Consequently, the only constant seems to be subjectivity and relativity.³ These constants, which can be summarized with the generic term 'pluralism', have reached the status of an ideology by which everything is assessed.⁴ Theology itself has not been spared of this trend, for pluralistic ideas have crept into theology. Due to these developments, it is even more necessary to understand the concept of truth in the Gospel of John, which is at the same time representative of biblical theology in general.

² Peter Janich, *Was ist Wahrheit? Eine Philosophische Einführung*, 2nd ed. (München: Beck, 2000), 2.

³ Hanns-Gregor Nissing, ed., *Was ist Wahrheit: Zur Kontroverse um die Diktatur des Relativismus* (München: Pneuma Verlag, 2011), 7.

⁴ Frank M. Hasel, "Die Herausforderung des Religiösen Pluralismus," trans. Heinz Hopf, *Adventistische Theologische Gesellschaft*, no. 10 (2011): 6.

Definition of Keywords

At this point two central key terms, *intellectual truth* and *relational truth*, will be defined, since they are important to the discussion that follows. Together, the terms portray two characteristics that are inherent to the concept of truth. *Intellectual truth* describes what the believer understands rationally as truth. It is knowledge that is basic for faith, as it lays its foundations. *Relational truth* operates on the basis of relationship, since Jesus is truth. Thus, the believer is able to experience truth and relate to it, which leads him into a deeper understanding of truth in turn.

Delimitations

To examine the topic of truth in the entire Bible would go beyond the scope of this research. The use of ἀλήθεια in the NT and LXX in general, as well as the OT concept of truth, will only be dealt with if it provides background information for the topic of this study. The same principle goes for related topics, which will be minimally discussed only, if they are indispensable to the principal topics that will be covered.

Methodology

The research consists of three main parts. The first part will briefly consider common philosophical concepts of truth, as well as epistemological issues connected to them. It is not intended to illuminate all different approaches, but to emphasize the most important ideas. These approaches will be compared with John's view on truth, after his theory has been defined. Then, biblical hermeneutical principles will be provided in order to demarcate from historical-critical and pluralistic approaches towards theology. In doing so, the basics for the exegetical discussion are clarified. Then, a short critical

reflection on pluralism will be made. The objective of this part is to challenge the predominant and widespread framework of pluralism.

The second part embodies the heart of the paper. Here, the most important passages where ἀλήθεια is used will be carefully analyzed exegetically. The main theme of this chapter is to understand what John's concept of truth is in detail. By means of the exegetical examination of the most important passages, the questions that are connected to that topic will be answered throughout the second chapter.

Based on the previous discussions, the third part will briefly deal with implications from the previous discussion that are essential to Christianity in general.

Claim

The claim of this research is that John understands truth as an absolute concept, incompatible with relativism or pluralism. Moreover, truth not only reaches the believers mind and heart at an intellectual level, but also at an interpersonal level. Since the Gospel of John proclaims the Trinitarian God to be the truth, truth itself has to have a relational dimension, for God is a person who believers can relate to. Furthermore, if the intellectual level is properly understood, truth reaches the believer on a relational basis. Finally, the relational aspect of truth is leading the believer into a closer relationship with God and helps him to understand truth more fully.

CHAPTER 2

PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACHES AND HERMENEUTICS

Overview on Theories about Truth

Gottlob Frege said that the purpose of all science is truth.¹ In the field of philosophy, truth is one of the central subjects and is seen differently within various frameworks and theories.² The most significant theories in contemporary literature are correspondence, coherence and pragmatist theories of truth.³ They belong to the realm of substantial truth theories, which see truth as a central concept for all science and want to solve the question what kind of nature truth has.⁴ Thus, it is not their direct object to define truth, but to provide an epistemological prerequisite to truth. Below, a short descriptive overview about these significant truth theories will be provided.

Although it has been said that this section does not include a historical outline, one has to consider Aristotle's famous quote, which is often mentioned as the first version of correspondence theory: "To say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it

¹ Gottlob Frege, *Logische Untersuchungen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 58.

² "The aim of philosophy is to seek a criterion to distinguish between truth and error. Whereas science focuses on objects, Richard Schaeffler says, 'More than any knowledge of objects, it [philosophy] seeks knowledge of how sensible [illusory] knowledge is to be distinguished from real knowledge.'" Norman R. Gulley, *Systematic Theology: Prolegomena* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2003), 41.

³ Michael Glanzberg, "Truth," ed. Edward N. Zalta, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2016, accessed March 11, 2020, <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/truth/>>.

⁴ Herbert Huber, "'Was ist Wahrheit?': Überblick zu aktuellen Wahrheitstheorien," *Aufklärung und Kritik*, no. 1 (2002): 96.

is, is false, while to say of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not, is true.”⁵ The predominant theory of truth in the history of philosophy, correspondence theory, proceeds similarly. Blackburn defines correspondence theory as follows: “This is the idea that truth can be understood and explained in terms of correspondence with the facts.”⁶ Glanzberg adds: “What is key to truth is a relation between propositions and the world, which obtains when the world contains a fact that is structurally similar to the proposition.”⁷ In other words, correspondence theory is an ontological thesis grounded in a language-world relationship. In its essence correspondence theory is based on empirical knowledge.

In contrast to the correspondence theory, coherence theory should be understood as a test of validity.⁸ It is not measuring truth by a comparison between a fact in the world and a proposition, but is rather measuring truth in “how beliefs are related to each other”.⁹ In doing so, the coherence theory strives to put a proposition into an already existing pool of true propositions.¹⁰ Therefore, coherence theory looks for a correspondence with an already existing truth-tradition.

Pragmatist theories of truth see the “test of truth in its utility, workability, or satisfactory consequence.”¹¹ In contrast to correspondence theory and its language-world

⁵ Aristoteles, *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation - One Volume Digital Edition*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, Bollingen Series 71:2 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 3438.

⁶ Simon Blackburn, *Truth: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Penguin, 2005), 56.

⁷ Glanzberg, “Truth,” 5.

⁸ George R. Knight, *Philosophy & Education: An Introduction in Christian Perspective* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2006), 26.

⁹ Glanzberg, “Truth,” 6.

¹⁰ Huber adds: “Ein Satz ist wahr, wenn er sich widerspruchsfrei in das Netz der bestehenden wahren Aussagen einordnen lässt.” See Huber, ““Was ist Wahrheit?: Überblick zu Aktuellen Wahrheitstheorien,” 98.

¹¹ Knight, *Philosophy & Education: An Introduction in Christian Perspective*, 26.

relationship, pragmatist theories of truth see truth not as static but dynamic, as truth has to be proved worthwhile in daily life.¹² In doing so, pragmatist theories bear a relative understanding of truth in itself, as something true could be wrong for someone in a specific situation. Therefore, its approach is personal/emotional, while being pragmatic.

Apparently, these three theories do not touch upon the question of how truth can be known, which is part of epistemology.¹³ There are five sources in epistemology¹⁴, which are empirical knowledge, revelation, authority, reason and intuition.¹⁵ The predominant source of knowledge in epistemology, empirical knowledge, is acquired by deriving conclusions from observations. These conclusions build the foundation for empirical science.¹⁶ However, this process is done with a mindset that excludes any form of transcendental concepts, which transcend naturalistic views.¹⁷ Thus, empirical science works within an inner-worldly system. Besides that, it also excludes absolute truth.¹⁸ Close inspection reveals that such position assumes a metaphysical¹⁹ attitude as Lennox notes: “For many, science is practically inseparable from a metaphysical commitment to

¹² Huber, “‘Was ist Wahrheit?’: Überblick zu Aktuellen Wahrheitstheorien,” 99.

¹³ Volker Gadenne, “Philosophische Perspektiven zur Wahrheit” (presented at the Meine, Deine, keine Wahrheit: Die Rolle der Wahrheit in der Religionspluralen Gesellschaft, Arnoldsheim, 2014), 5, accessed March 11, 2020, http://www.evangelische-akademie.de/files/gadenne_wahrheit_philosophie_2014.pdf.

¹⁴ Epistemology studies the nature, sources and validity of knowledge. Knight, *Philosophy & Education: An Introduction in Christian Perspective*, 20.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 22–24.

¹⁶ Gadenne, “Philosophische Perspektive zur Wahrheit,” 6.

¹⁷ Ruse argues that science “by definition deals only with the natural, the repeatable, that which is governed by law”. Ruse Michael, *Darwinism Defended* (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1982), 322.

¹⁸ “It is probably fair to say that many, if not most, scientists are ‘critical realists’, believing in an objective world which can be studied and who hold that their theories, though not amounting to ‘truth’ in any final or absolute sense, give them an increasingly firm handle on reality, as exemplified, say, in the development of the understanding of the universe, from Galileo via Newton to Einstein.” John C. Lennox, *God’s Undertaker: Has Science Buried God?* (Oxford: Lion, 2009), 32.

¹⁹ Metaphysics asks questions relating to the nature of reality.

an agnostic or atheistic viewpoint.”²⁰ That creates a problem, called the “metaphysical-epistemological dilemma”, which is explained by Knight in the following words:

At this point it is evident that humanity is suspended, so to speak, in midair both metaphysically and epistemologically. Our problem is that it is not possible to make statements about reality without first having a theory for arriving at truth; and, on the other hand, a theory of truth cannot be developed without first having a concept of reality. We are caught in the web of circularity.²¹

Having said that, the acceptance or rejection of the natural or the supernatural, defines the outcome of any search for truth. Following the observations of Lennox and Knight, it is appropriate to conclude that the outcome of such exploration leads to a decision of faith, since everyone has to take a certain position towards metaphysics.

The Johannine View on Truth

After having briefly touched on epistemology and truth theories, one has to take a look at the epistemology as represented in the Gospel of John.²² Taking up the thoughts

²⁰ Lennox, *God's Undertaker: Has Science Buried God?*, 33.

²¹ Knight, *Philosophy & Education: An Introduction in Christian Perspective*, 27.

²² A lot of modern scholars do not hold the opinion anymore that John the Apostle is the author of the Gospel and even argue for the three Epistles and the Revelation as not being Johannine. Harris states: “Although ancient traditions attributed to the Apostle John the Fourth Gospel, the Book of Revelation, and the three Epistles of John, modern scholars believe that he wrote none of them.” Stephen L. Harris, *Understanding the Bible: A Reader's Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Palo Alto, CA: Mayfield, 1985), 355. Instead of John the Apostle, they argue for “apostle Thomas, Mary Magdalene, Lazarus, James the son of Zebedee, and even the Samaritan woman, among others.” Andreas J. Köstenberger and Steven O. Stout, “‘The Disciple Jesus Loved’: Witness, Author, Apostle – A Response to Richard Bauckham’s Jesus and the Eyewitnesses,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 18, no. 2 (2008): 209. See also Basil S. Davis, “The Identity of the Disciple Whom Jesus Loved,” *The Expository Times* 113, no. 7 (2002): 230–231. Against these modern attempts, the text itself leaves no doubt that the writer of the Gospel was John the Apostle. John 20:2 identifies the ‘other disciple’, as “the one whom Jesus loved”. The ‘one whom Jesus loved’ is the author of the Gospel, as John 21:24 emphasizes in connecting with 21:20-23. Eusebius among other early church historians, identified the one whom Jesus loved as John the Apostle. Eusebius of Caesarea, “The Church History of Eusebius,” in *Eusebius: Church History, Life of Constantine the Great, and Oration in Praise of Constantine*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, A Selected Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1890), 1:150. Gangel also names Theophilus, Tertullian and Clemens of Alexandria as examples. Kenneth O. Gangel, *John*, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2000), 4:1. See also St. Jerome on the ‘other disciple’ in John 18:15 in St. Jerome, “The Letters of St. Jerome,” in *St. Jerome*:

of the previous section, there exists a strong connection between epistemology and a certain metaphysical attitude. As was shown, the search for truth (epistemology) always leads to a decision of faith (metaphysics). This is why one has to take a look at the role of faith in the process of knowing truth in the Gospel of John.

What is True Belief?

Starting with the words of the unbelieving Thomas, who was not present at Jesus' appearance among the disciples, in John 20:25: "Unless I [Thomas] see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe." The power of the statement is supported by the emphatic negation οὐ μή.²³ In order to accept the truth of Jesus' resurrection, Thomas demands empirical knowledge. In terms of the language-world relationship he demands correspondence between claim and reality. It should be highlighted in that context that "God never asks us to believe, without giving sufficient evidence upon which to base our faith. [...] Yet God has never removed the possibility of doubt. Our faith must rest upon

Letters and Selected Works, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, A Selected Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1893), 6:255. Despite of a lot of assumptions concerning the authorship of the Gospel of John, there are a lot of internal evidences that prove John the Apostle as being the author. The author seems to be an eyewitness (John 1:14; 19:35; 21:24). See also Bennema who argues for such an understanding in Cornelis Bennema, "The Historical Reliability of the Gospel of John," *Foundations*, no. 67 (November 2014): 13. It is reasonable that he was part of the inner circle of Jesus, which can be derived from the close relationship between Jesus and the Beloved Disciple (John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7.20). The inner circle consisted of Peter, James and John. This gets evident by the important scenes at Jairus' daughter (Mark 5:37), the transfiguration (Matt 17:1) and in Gethsemane (Matt 26:36-37). Additionally, James cannot be the author, as he died too early (Acts 12:2) and Peter has a different style of writing. Therefore, it is consequent to display the writer of the Gospel as the Beloved Disciple – John the Apostle, the Son of Zebedee (Matt 10:2). For more arguments see Köstenberger's and Stout's response to Bauckham's view, who regards John the Elder as the writer of the Gospel, where they provide good arguments. Köstenberger and Stout, "The Disciple Jesus Loved': Witness, Author, Apostle – A Response to Richard Bauckham's Jesus and the Eyewitnesses." See also Bennema, "The Historical Reliability of the Gospel of John," 12–15.

²³ "The semantic value of this construction is to intensify the strength of the negation." Jimmy Parks, "Emphatic Negation," in *Greek Grammatical Constructions Documentation* (Bellingham, WA: Faithlife, 2015), Logos 7 Electronic Version.

evidence, not demonstration.”²⁴ In the case of Thomas this would mean that he should have been satisfied by the evidence that was available through the congruent testimony of the other disciples who saw Jesus, instead of pressing for a demonstration.²⁵ Especially, since he had witnessed demonstrations of Jesus’ divinity for three and a half years throughout Jesus’ ministry. The most impressive demonstration must have been the resurrection of Lazarus. This sign should have helped Thomas to believe in the resurrection of Christ, since he had witnessed Jesus’ power over death already (John 11:1-46).²⁶ This is why Jesus gently criticizes when he revealed himself to Thomas, since Thomas only accepted the truthfulness of the resurrection when he saw it demonstrated in the person of Christ (John 20:29).

Obviously, Jesus defines true belief as accepting supernatural realities, without having demonstration (John 20:29; cf. Heb 11:1.6). In doing so, he stresses the need of a metaphysics that includes faith in general, in order to accept truth that cannot be fully proven scientifically. On these grounds, it is tenable to draw a connection between Thomas’ mindset, as presented in the setting of John 20:24-29, and today’s society: Basically, both groups demand demonstration, in order to accept truth, which means that

²⁴ Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1892), 105.

²⁵ In accordance with Lennox’s observation, the term ‘proof’ is rarely used in this paper. Lennox says that “‘proof’ has a rigorous meaning, so that when one mathematician says to another ‘Prove it’, they expect to be presented with a watertight argument proceeding from accepted axioms via accepted rules of logic to a conclusion that she can expect also to be accepted by all mathematicians.” See John C. Lennox, *Gunning for God: Why the New Atheists Are Missing the Target* (Oxford: Lion, 2011), 50. For this reason, the term ‘evidence’ is used to speak of facts that are “strong enough to convince a reasonable person that a certain claim is true.” *Ibid.*, 51. However, the term ‘demonstration’ should be understood in the sense of ‘proof’, since Jesus’ demonstrations of divinity were incontestable.

²⁶ John speaks in his Gospel of several demonstrations of Jesus’s divinity: Water turned into wine (John 2), Jesus healed an Official’s Son (John 4:46-54), Jesus healed at the pool of Bethesda (John 5:1-16), Jesus healed the blind (John 9:8-41). The other Gospels report even more signs.

they reject the existing evidence. In the discussion to follow the question how knowledge of truth is generated, according to the Johannine view on truth, will be shown more fully.

Seeing and Believing

The combination of seeing and believing is a recurrent theme that runs through the whole Gospel of John.²⁷ It starts in John 1:14: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” Two words are of importance in that context: ‘to see’ and ‘glory’. To begin with δόξα, meaning ‘glory’, Jesus is described as having the same divine qualities as the Father, since δόξα in John “is derived from the Old Testament idea of God’s *kābōd*, which implies the mighty power of God evidenced in epiphanies or perceived manifestations of that power.”²⁸ This does not mean that Jesus’ glory was permanently visible in the sense that he “went around Galilee and Judea with a kind of luminescence that marked him out as no ordinary man”.²⁹ Jesus’ visible glory is displayed in his supernatural sign at the wedding of Cana (John 2:11) or at the resurrection of Lazarus from the dead (John 11:4.40-45).³⁰ These signs can be described as an objective visible revelation.³¹ It is objective, as these events were a physical manifestation that had their

²⁷ See also Gerald L. Borchert, *John 12–21*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2002), 295.

²⁸ Gerald L. Borchert, *John 1–11*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 157–58. Such manifestations can be seen in Exod 16:6–10; 24:15–17; 33:18–23; 40:34.” Kittel adds that “NT usage itself takes a decisive step by using in relation to Christ a word which was used in relation to God.” Gerhard Kittel, “Δοκέω, Δόξα, Δοξάζω, Συνδοξάζω, Ἐνδοξος, Ἐνδοξάζω, Παράδοξος,” ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 2:248. See the whole article on p. 233-53.

²⁹ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 130.

³⁰ It will be shown later that Jesus’ divine glory not only depicts his visible glory, but also the quality of his character.

³¹ The terms ‘sign’, ‘objective visible revelation’ and ‘demonstration’ are interchangeably.

origin in Christ and could not be denied in their supernatural character even by non-believers, for they were a demonstration of the supernatural.³² They were empirical truth.

Going a step further, both passages (2:11; 11:34) present the demonstration of Jesus' divine character and power, his δόξα, as the cause for believing.³³ This gets evident when one takes a look at John 1:14. It appears that the self-revelation of Jesus' is the reason why the collective 'we' understood theological truth.³⁴ John 1:14 says: "we have *seen* his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." Looking at θεάομαι, meaning 'to see', 'to behold' or 'to look at', reveals that it is used in 1:14 to describe something that goes "above and beyond what is merely seen with the eye".³⁵ Two important aspects are inherent to θεάομαι: (1) Θεάομαι marks the experience of supernatural realities, because it refers to the encounter with Jesus' divine δόξα. (2) At the same time, θεάομαι refers to the understanding of theological truth that came through seeing. The verb transports the idea of acknowledgement of Christ's δόξα as being "from the Father, full of grace and truth" (1:14).³⁶ In other words: The collective 'we'

³² Although the Bible describes many events where God intervened in supernatural ways, two instances have to be seen as crucial in that context, where the objective/physical manifestation of the divine was hardly deniable, as it was clearly visible over a long period of time: The wilderness experience of Israel, where God hid himself in the cloud (Exod 13:21; 40:36-38; Num 9:15-23) and Jesus' ministry on earth.

³³ The same goes for 11:4.40, where 'glory' is used in the context of Lazarus' resurrection. Another relevant instance of Jesus' glory as a synonym for supernatural events, which lead to faith in Christ, is Jesus' transfiguration described by Peter in 2 Pet 1:16-18. As such Jesus' glory includes signs.

³⁴ Theological truth has to be understood as being different from empirical truth. Empirical truth is truth that is achieved by deriving conclusions from observations. Theological truth is revealed knowledge that is revealed by Jesus and the Spirit of truth. The collective 'we' understood theological truth by experiencing Jesus' δόξα. This observation gets clarified in the discussion above. Further information on 'theological truth' is found on p. 17-20.

³⁵ Arndt William et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 445–446. Peisker adds: "In the majority of Johannine occurrences (John 1:14, 32; 11:45; 1 John 1:1; 4:14) recognition of Jesus' glory and decision for faith in him follows the seeing of him, his person, and his works." C. H. Peisker, "Θεάομαι," ed. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 2:136.

³⁶ If one connects δόξα with παρὰ πατρός, the meaning is "the glory such as the only Son receives from his Father." See J. H. Bernard, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St*

recognized the theological truth that was inherent to the demonstration of Jesus' glory they experienced, which is Christ's divinity.³⁷

Accordingly, John 1:14 is a declaration of faith in Christ and God the Father. It is proper to state that seeing supernatural events causes faith in supernatural realities. Therefore, Thompson is correct when she states that "Jesus' signs lead to faith when one discerns in them the manifestation of the character of God as life-giving and responds to Jesus as mediating that life."³⁸ So, it got evident that Jesus' visible glory/objective visible revelation is as a demonstration of theological truth that proves Jesus being God. Experiencing demonstration causes faith in the theological truth in turn, which is Jesus' divine nature.

Reactions to Jesus' δόξα

However, belief in Jesus is not a natural condition, since the significance of his signs could have been dismissed. This observation is manifested in the strong dualism between belief and disbelief that exists in the Gospel of John.³⁹ John 2:23-24 points to the fact that "many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people". Both sentences use the verb πιστεύω to make their point, but instead of arguing for two distinct

John, ed. Alan Hugh McNeile, International Critical Commentary (New York: C. Scribner' Sons, 1929), 1:23.

³⁷ A detailed discussion on John 1:14 is found on p. 41-50.

³⁸ Marianne Meye Thompson, "Signs and Faith in the Fourth Gospel," ed. Bruce Chilton, *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 1, no. 1 (1990): 96-97.

³⁹ The verb for 'to believe' portrays the center of the conflict. There is no other book in the NT, which uses πιστεύω so many times like the Gospel of John. From 241 usages in total, it is used 98 times in the Gospel of John, whereas the three other Gospels only get on for 34 usages altogether, which is a strong argument for the importance of that word.

types of believing, “the real point is that *Jesus did not believe their believing*”,⁴⁰ because he knew all people. Generally speaking, Jesus’ revealed δόξα, his signs, had the function to create belief (John 10:37⁴¹; 11:45), to teach theological truth (Mark 2:9-11; John 6:26-35) and to prove his divine authority and Messiahship (John 5:36).⁴² As such, Jesus’ revealed δόξα was an objective visible revelation of divine truth that pointed to divine teachings and realities.

The Gospel of John shows that the response to Jesus’ miracles turned out differently: Either people believed (John 11:45), or they did not believe (John 12:37). Consequently, seeing does not cause belief naturally, as it is not a natural condition, but a decision. For concluding from supernatural signs or events that Jesus is God, is a decision of faith that has to be taken individually. In other words: Even when demonstration is given the form of an objective visible revelation, there is no automatism that inevitably leads to faith in Christ. This is recognizable when one takes a look at the Jewish authorities in the Gospel of John. The reason why the Jewish authorities rejected Jesus as Messiah was not because of his signs, but because of the truth that he taught and the truth that was displayed in his signs. This truth was contrary to their theological ideas (John 8:45-46; 10:33). As such, disbelief, in the case of Jesus’ contemporaries, is a conscious rejection of theological truth that was inherent to the objective visible revelation of Jesus, which is sin (John 16:9).

⁴⁰ Borchert, *John 1-11*, 168. See also Bernard, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St John*, 1:98–99.

⁴¹ ἔργον, which is used in John 10:37 refers to miracles (e.g. 5:36; 10:25; 14:10-11).

⁴² Compare with Francis D. Nichol, ed., *Matthew to John*, The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1980), 5:209.

What about John?

Taking a look at John, it was already mentioned that he includes himself as an eyewitness and believer, for he uses the collective ‘we’ in John 1:14. It is self-evident that John was convinced by the objective visible revelation of Jesus’ δόξα (1:14). This is why he says in 19:35: “He who saw it has borne witness – his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth – that you also may believe.” But the biblical text suggests that John also struggled regarding his faith in Christ. In John 20:8-9 it is written: “Then the other disciple [John], who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead.” When it says that he believed,⁴³ it signifies that John believed the testimony of Mary Magdalene, who said that someone took Jesus’ body (John 20:1-3).⁴⁴ The author’s comment in John 20:9 has to be seen as a clear reference to OT predictions of the resurrection like Ps 16:10 (cf. Acts 2:24-28),⁴⁵ but also to Jesus’ own predictions concerning his death and resurrection (e.g. John 2:19-22; Luke 24:46). Thereby, it is implied that if the Apostles had fully understood the Scriptures, their hopes would not have been shattered.

⁴³ Most of the modern commentators hold to the view that John took the empty tomb as an evidence for Jesus’ prediction to rise from the dead. E.g. Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John (XIII-XXI): Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, Anchor Yale Bible 29A (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 987. Andrew T. Lincoln, *The Gospel According to Saint John.*, Black’s New Testament Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2005), 491. For a detailed list of more supporters see Ronald Trail, *An Exegetical Summary of John 10-21*, Exegetical Summaries (Dallas, TX: SIL International, 2018), 441. However, this view is not hold by the author of this paper.

⁴⁴ Such reading of the text was popularized by Luther via Augustine. St. Augustine, “Tractate CXX,” in *St. Augustine: Homilies on the Gospel of John, Homilies on the First Epistle of John, Soliloquies*, ed. Philip Schaff, A Selected Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1888), 7:436. Christopher Boyd Brown, *Sermons of the Gospel of St. John*, Luther’s Work 69 (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2009), 297. John Wesley, *John*, Wesley’s Notes (Albany, OR: Ages Software, 1999), Electronic Edition. Adam Clarke, *John* (Albany, OR: Ages Software, 1999), Electronic Edition.

⁴⁵ Nichol, *Matthew to John*, 1066.

This leads to the following question: What did Peter and John think of Jesus' ministry when they saw the empty tomb? It is reasonable to suppose that they had the same mindset like the disciples on their way to Emmaus: "But we hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel" (Luke 24:21). Accordingly, they were ignorant concerning the predictions of Jesus and needed an experience with the divine, in order to grasp the meaning of Jesus' theology. Such being the case, John and the others were fully convinced of the truthfulness of Jesus' resurrection and its theological implications, after Jesus showed himself to the Apostles and explained Scriptures to them (see Acts 1:3).⁴⁶ With this undeniable fact, meaning the demonstration of Jesus' resurrection that attested his claims to rise from the dead, John had undeniable arguments towards Jesus divinity. As a consequence, John gave testimony of empirical and theological truth that he witnessed in the person of Jesus Christ, while being guided by the Holy Spirit (2 Pet 1:21). Being a trustworthy eyewitness, the pre-Johannine generations are called to build their faith upon John's truthful testimony (John 20:30-31).

Conclusion

In this section, seven important aspects were developed: (1) Thomas can be compared to our modern society that makes belief and acceptance of truth conditional upon demonstration (i.e. empirical knowledge), which is criticized by Jesus; (2) true belief is that, which believes truth without having demonstration, but trusting the

⁴⁶ There is discussion on Mark 16:9-20, as the earliest manuscripts do not mention this passage, wherefore the majority of scholars do not count the passage as authentic. See e.g. James A. Brooks, *Mark*, The New American Commentary 23 (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1991), 271–74. However that be, the passage in Mark 16:9-11 is only quoted as a further indication. For if this passage was authentic, it would prove that John was a doubter as well, since he had to be present when it happened: "Now when he rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons. She went and told those who had been with him, as they mourned and wept. But when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they would not believe it."

evidence; (3) Jesus' signs functioned as a demonstration of his divinity and laid the fundament for belief in the theological truth he testified to; (4) signs do not cause faith automatically, since it is not a natural condition but a decision; (5) the disbelief of Jesus' contemporaries is a conscious rejection of theological truth that was inherent to the demonstration (i.e. empirical truth); (6) Based on the empirical truth that John witnessed, he accepted the theological truth that was inherent to Jesus' supernatural demonstration and testified to it; (7) John's experience with the supernatural functions as the evidence, on which the belief of the Christian generations to follow is built.

Definition of John's Truth Concept

First of all, one has to differentiate between John's truth theory and his epistemology and the one that he demands from his readers and Christianity in general. This is necessary, as the conditions for both parties are different.

John's concept of truth can be categorized most likely as correspondence theory, combined with an epistemology that consists of empiricism and revelation. Correspondence with the facts, meaning a language-world relationship (e.g. Jesus' claim being God), was empirically proven by knowledge obtained through the senses. It was gained through the self-revelation of Jesus, since his divine δόξα uncovered itself visibly in John's natural order.⁴⁷

One has to see revelation as an epistemological source in a twofold way: (1) In the case of John, it is an objective visible revelation that offers empirical knowledge,

⁴⁷ In fact, these supernatural demonstrations, especially the resurrection, are the fundament for the Christian belief. The empty tomb is the ultimate proof for Jesus being God. Apostle Paul writes in 1 Cor 15:17: "And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins." O'Collins adds: "In a profound sense, Christianity without the resurrection is not simply Christianity without its final chapter. It is not Christianity at all." Gerald O'Collins, *The Easter Jesus* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1973), 134.

addressing Jesus' revealed glory. John testified to this empirical truth, because it was provable. (2) But John also testified to theological truth that was inherent to Jesus' self-revelation. This theological truth can be described as revealed knowledge. Knight makes an important statement regarding revealed knowledge:

Revealed knowledge has been of prime importance in the field of religion. It differs from all other sources of knowledge by presupposing a transcendent supernatural reality [Jesus] that breaks into the natural order. Revelation is God's communication concerning the divine will. Believers in revelation hold that this form of knowledge has the distinct advantage of being an omniscient source of information that is not obtainable through other epistemological methods. The truth gained through this source is believed to be absolute and uncontaminated.⁴⁸

First, it is important to notice that revealed knowledge/theological truth is understood as being "absolute and uncontaminated", since its source is absolute truth (John 14:6; 16:13; 2 Pet 1:21). Gulley observes in that context:

Christ promised that the 'Spirit of truth' will come and 'will guide you into all truth' (John 16:13). This same Spirit authored the Scriptures, for 'prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit' (2 Pet. 1:21). Clearly, theological truth originates with the Spirit of truth, rather than in humans – even Christians.⁴⁹

This observation is important. It means that the textualization of John's experience in the Gospel was guided by the Holy Spirit. Thus, it proves the correctness of the theological truth John testified to. In other words: The theological truth that John understood and recorded in his Gospel is reliable. Therefore, it is self-evident that the Gospel of John is not a subjective faith interpretation of John, but theological truth that is

⁴⁸ Knight, *Philosophy & Education: An Introduction in Christian Perspective*, 23.

⁴⁹ Gulley, *Systematic Theology: Prolegomena*, 171.

“absolute and uncontaminated”. Nevertheless, John had to have faith as well. He could not prove every theological truth that was taught by Jesus, be it through his δόξα or his words. Like today’s Christianity, John had to believe that Jesus would build heavenly mansion for his children and that he would come again to take his followers home at the Second Coming (John 14:1-3). However, John had the strongest arguments to trust Jesus’ theological truth, for it was based on the empirical truth he witnessed.

The second group, John’s readers and Christianity in general, is called to have a different approach than John. Correspondence with facts is possible to some degree, as theology in combination with scientific results offer strong evidences (e.g. archeology). But the supernatural self-revelation of Jesus that points to theological truth (i.e. Jesus being God), cannot be proven in the same way as it was possible for John during his experience with Jesus.⁵⁰ Here lies the major difference, which is the absence of objective visible revelation/demonstration and the shift from visible revelation (empirical truth) to written revelation (theological truth). In other words: The proof of the existence of God, as physical manifestation in Jesus Christ, has been given to John, the Apostles and many others (1 Cor 15:6). But Christianity is called to accept Jesus and his teachings by faith, on the account of the eyewitness.⁵¹

Although “some people hold that a major disadvantage of revealed knowledge [theological truth] is that it must be accepted by faith and cannot be proved or disproved

⁵⁰ A good study for beginning to dive into the topic of the reliability of the NT, the question of extra biblical evidences for the existence of Jesus and the resurrection as a historical event is found in Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ: A Journalist’s Personal Investigation of the Evidence for Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998).

⁵¹ At this point, it is true though that the individual experience of a Christian with the divine is possible. This can be an individual proof of the existence of God, but such individual experience would touch the realm of subjective revelation that cannot be proven empirically. Furthermore, to accept such experience assumes that such experience has to be in accordance with Scripture. It presupposes faith as the testimony of the one who experienced the divine.

empirically”,⁵² trust in theological truth is not blind. John 20:30-31 underlines once more that John’s account is reliable: “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”⁵³ Thus, the believer is called to build his faith upon the account of the eyewitness. He is called to derive theological knowledge from theological truth (i.e. Scripture), while being guided by the Holy Spirit in the process of learning and understanding (John 16:13).⁵⁴

In conclusion, John and his readers assume belief fundamental to the Christian experience, from which a supernatural metaphysics can be derived, although John had different prerequisites than the pre-Johannine community.

Common Features and Differences

Philosophical approaches compared with John’s approach have common features and differences, but it is only important to mention the most compelling ones. Both approaches assume a specific metaphysics, as previously mentioned. This fact reveals that both systems are built upon the fundament of belief in order to understand truth, may it be natural or supernatural. The position they choose is unimportant for now, but what is critical is that both systems are equal, as they argue on the same basis. Consequently, there is no supremacy of one over the other. Nevertheless, this common feature is at the same time the greatest difference between both approaches, namely the dualism between naturalism and supernaturalism or scientific theory and revelation. Modern science

⁵² Knight, *Philosophy & Education: An Introduction in Christian Perspective*, 23.

⁵³ See also Lennox, *Gunning for God: Why the New Atheists Are Missing the Target*, 43–45.

⁵⁴ Prerequisites for understanding theological truth are in the section on hermeneutics.

argues from a naturalistic standpoint, as it is “left to what is discoverable within nature and human existence.”⁵⁵ Pigliucci states: “The basic assumption of science is that the world can be explained entirely in physical terms, without recourse to godlike entities.”⁵⁶ In doing so it considers the cosmos as “the beginning and end of all questions; matter is all that matters. Hopes and beliefs that go beyond the physical realm are illusory.”⁵⁷ In contrary, John’s approach includes the supernatural, meaning that all knowledge has to be tested in the basic framework of revelation. For that reason, philosophical and biblical truth theories could not be more diametrically opposed to each other, as they have a different foundation. Accordingly, they come to different conclusions.

To sum it up, John had the proof of absolute truth and believed it, wherefore Christianity believes in this absolute truth without having an objective visible revelation like John, but strong evidences.⁵⁸ Philosophy and science, which “still depends on

⁵⁵ Gulley, *Systematic Theology: Prolegomena*, 395. “Everything arises from natural properties and causes, and supernatural or spiritual explanations are excluded or discounted.” Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson, eds., “Naturalism,” *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), Logos 7 Electronic Version.

⁵⁶ See Massimo Pigliucci, *Darwinism, Design and Public Education*, ed. John Angus Campbell and Stephen C. Meyer (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2003), 195.

⁵⁷ Gary W. Phillips and William E. Brown, *Making Sense of Your World from a Biblical Viewpoint* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1991), 51. Knight quoting Schumacher adds that “supernaturalism finds no place on philosophic maps developed upon naturalistic presuppositions by ‘scientific imperialists.’ In other words, much of the world treats a great deal of Christian reality as if it doesn’t even exist.” Knight, *Philosophy & Education: An Introduction in Christian Perspective*, 36.

⁵⁸ This does not exclude the personal experience of the Christian that he may do on a subjective level. Since the Spirit of truth guides into all truth (John 16:13) it is accurate to say that the personal/subjective experience of the divine is also a proof. Yet, the word ‘subjective’ clarifies that this experience cannot be proved although it may be true for the individual.

philosophical ideas and produces philosophical constructions”,⁵⁹ rather reject the concept of absolute truth.⁶⁰

Hermeneutical Principles

When it comes to hermeneutics, two major methods to interpret Scripture can be extracted from naturalism and supernaturalism, which is the historical-critical method/HCM (excluding the supernatural) or the historical-grammatical method/HGM (including the supernatural). The choice of one or the other will determine the theological outcome.

To start with HCM, there is general agreement that its roots can be found in the Enlightenment.⁶¹ Therewith associated is the high standing of reason.⁶² Naturally, reason is understood as naturalistic in the context of the Enlightenment, which reveals that the HCM is strongly influenced by philosophy.⁶³ As a logical consequence, metaphysics and

⁵⁹ Fernando Canale, *Creation, Evolution and Theology: The Role of Method in Theological Accommodation* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University LithoTech, 2005), 19. He adds later: “Scientific method was supposed to produce what traditional philosophy could not, the absolute universal truth about reality. Yet, what becomes evident when we study scientific methodology is that even modern philosophers of science, who defend its rationality and are staunch proponents of the theory of evolution, concede that scientific methodology does not produce absolute, infallible truth, but only partial approximations.” *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ “Existentialism and pragmatism mirror truth only in the subjective realm. Neither has a true correspondence to truth; at best, both present only the subjective part of reality. Analytical and functional philosophy look away from truth to meaning, just as pragmatism does not attempt to present ultimate truth but considers how it works for humans. Process philosophy truncates truth.” Gulley, *Systematic Theology: Prolegomena*, 93. For a discussion on postmodern philosophy that rejects absolute and universal truth see Gary Aylesworth, “Postmodernism,” ed. Edward N. Zalta, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2015, accessed March 11, 2020, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2015/entries/postmodernism/>.

⁶¹ Gerhard Maier, *Biblische Hermeneutik*, 8th ed. (Witten: SCM R. Brockhaus, 2013), 236.

⁶² „Bis Descartes hatte sich die Philosophie vor der Theologie zu verantworten. Nach Descartes hatte sich umgekehrt die Theologie vor der Philosophie zu verantworten – jedenfalls im Bewusstsein der Aufklärung.“ *Ibid.* For a detailed discussion on the roots of HCM see *Ibid.*, 236–44. For a historical survey on the role of Scripture in Theology see also Frank M. Hasel, *Scripture in the Theologies of W. Pannenberg and D.G. Bloesch: An Investigation and Assessment of Its Origin, Nature and Use*, vol. 555, European University Studies 23 (Bern: Peter Lang, 1996), 31–94.

⁶³ The principles and methods of secular historical sciences, which rest upon philosophy are set as norm and are adapted to the Bible. See Ekkehardt Müller, *Der Erste und der Letzte: Studien zum Buch der Offenbarung*, Adventistica: Forschungen zur Geschichte und Theologie der Siebenten-Tags-Adventisten 11 (Bern: Peter Lang, 2011), 31.

the supernatural were neglected. Troeltsch later became known for his classical formulation that determines the presuppositions for HCM. Although he calls it his “own theological Method”⁶⁴, his opinion is generally accepted and used to this day. According to Troeltsch, the HCM is based on three major principles: critique, analogy and correlation.⁶⁵ These principles will be shortly described.⁶⁶ (1) The principle of critique can be declared as the Cartesian doubt, which questions everything. Human reason becomes the standard by which Scripture is judged.⁶⁷ (2) Analogy means that the present experience functions as the standard to assess the past, for it is assumed that all events are similar. As a result, events that are described in Scripture, but have no correspondence in the present, are non-historical. (3) Correlation is the law of cause and effect, which postulates that everything that happens in the world has a cause in the world. In other words, historical events cannot have a supernatural cause, but are understood as natural/inner-worldly. Troeltsch left no doubt that the HCM destroys the credibility of the Bible and its authority in general.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Ernst Troeltsch, *Gesammelte Schriften von Ernst Troeltsch: Zur Religiösen Lage, Religionsphilosophie und Ethik*, (Aalen: Scientia, 1962), 2:729.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 2:731.

⁶⁶ Compare with Müller, *Der Erste und der Letzte: Studien zum Buch der Offenbarung*, 31–32.

⁶⁷ Hasel, quoting Van Harvey mentions: “‘Our judgments about the past cannot simply be classified as true or false but must be seen as claiming only a greater or lesser degree of probability and as always open to revision.’ Inherent in this is the relativity of our knowledge and therefore the tentativeness of judgments and convictions.” Gerhard F. Hasel, *Biblical Interpretation Today: An Analysis of Modern Methods of Biblical Interpretation and Proposals for the Interpretation of the Bible as the Word of God* (Washington, D.C: Biblical Research Institute, 1985), 56. For a more detailed discussion on these three major principles see *Ibid.*, 53–56.

⁶⁸ “Die historische Methode, einmal auf die biblische Wissenschaft und auf die Kirchengeschichte angewandt, ist ein Sauerteig, der alles verwandelt und der schließlich die ganze bisherige Form theologischer Methode zersprengt.“ Troeltsch, *Gesammelte Schriften von Ernst Troeltsch: Zur Religiösen Lage, Religionsphilosophie und Ethik*, 2:730. For a critical reflection on HCM see Eta Linnemann, *Historical Criticism of the Bible: Methodology or Ideology?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1990).

In contrary, the HGM works with four basic principles: *sola scriptura*, *tota scriptura*, *analogia scriptura* and *spiritalia spiritualiter examinatur*.⁶⁹ (1) *sola scriptura* states that all religious knowledge and faith has to be proven by the Bible, for it is the highest standard of truth. Thus, any form of philosophy or tradition is subordinate to Scripture. In addition, this principle must not be confused with *solo scriptura*, which states that all religious knowledge and faith emerges exclusively from Scriptures.⁷⁰ This is vital, because *sola scriptura* does not condemn reason, but demands that reason has to be judged by Scriptures. (2) *tota scriptura* upholds the unity of Scripture and its authority. The Bible is the word of God, where the human and the divine are inseparably connected (2 Pet 1:19-21). (3) *analogia scriptura* says that Scripture is its own interpreter, analogy in Scripture is given, wherefore plain text passages help to understand difficult ones. (4) *spiritalia spiritualiter examinatur* means that spiritual things have to be discerned spiritually. Therefore, two basic requirements have to be fulfilled: Faith (metaphysics) and spirituality of the one who studies the Scripture and the inclusion of the Holy Spirit throughout the process of understanding Scripture (John 16:13).

The question at hand is, if it is accurate to adapt philosophical presuppositions to hermeneutics. The answer is, it is not. The Bible has to be studied within its own framework in order to be fair to the object.⁷¹ This is why Maier says that the object under

⁶⁹ Found in Müller, *Der Erste und der Letzte: Studien zum Buch der Offenbarung*, 35–36. For a deeper study on the same principles see Richard M. Davidson, “Biblical Interpretation,” in *Handbook of Seventh-Day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 60–68.

⁷⁰ Nicholas P. Miller, *RE:FORMATION: Neue Antworten aus der Kirchengeschichte* (Lüneburg: Advent-Verlag, 2017), 27.

⁷¹ “The difference between scientific and theological methodologies appears at the material level when scientists and theologians give concrete content to the conditions and activities of method. Scientific methodology has nature as its intended formal object or cognitive goal, while theological methodology has God as its intended formal object or cognitive goal. These goals, in turn, require different sources of data. Due to its object of study, scientific method works from empirical data. Christian theology, on the other

study determines the method that should be used.⁷² In other words: A method that is contradictory to the method the Bible provides, misses the point. Therefore, the object under study, cannot be subjected to human reason in a naturalistic sense, because human reason, as understood in HCM, excludes the divine. Theologically speaking, human reason is fallible and affected by sin, which is why it should not have such a high stance.⁷³ There is no room for speculation in the Bible on its origin, as it is the inspired word of God (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:19-21).⁷⁴

Consequently, theological knowledge that is based on God's self-revelation in Scriptures cannot be understood, when God is excluded from his own revelation (i.e. theological truth). To do so would make the Bible a book without content. Instead of using a method that judges the object, theological knowledge is acquired through interaction with God. Szallós-Farkas points out: "Because God is the Subjective Object of theological knowledge, the importance of the contribution of *Theos* to the achievement of theological knowledge cannot be overstated."⁷⁵ This is why the human being has to be guided by the Holy Spirit in the process of biblical studies (John 16:13), because the Holy

hand, works from data believed to be supernaturally revealed." Canale, *Creation, Evolution and Theology: The Role of Method in Theological Accommodation*, 91.

⁷² "Auch an dieser Stelle ist ja zu bedenken, daß die Offenbarung (der »Gegenstand«) die Methode bestimmen muß und nicht umgekehrt. Erweist sich die historische Kritik als im Widerspruch mit der Offenbarung befindlich, dann kann sie nicht mehr als »die« wissenschaftliche Methode ausgegeben werden." Maier, *Biblische Hermeneutik*, 269.

⁷³ Maier adds to that: "Der Vernunftglaube der Aufklärung beging also einen doppelten Fehler: Er vergaß, daß auch die Vernunft durch den Sündenfall pervertiert wurde; und er verwechselt die primär rezipierende und reproduzierende Funktion der Vernunft mit selbstständigen Vernunft-Inhalten." *Ibid.*, 243.

⁷⁴ For an extensive discussion on inspiration and revelation see Peter M. Van Bemmelen, "Revelation and Inspiration," in *Handbook of Seventh-Day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 22–57. Canale says in this context: "Scripture is the reliable source of information about God, His actions, His teachings, and His salvific will for us. Since in Scripture God explicitly reveals His thoughts and His actions about everything, Scripture is to judge every thought and to be judged by nobody (1 Cor 2:15; 2 Cor 10:5)." Fernando Canale, "Revelation and Inspiration," in *Understanding Scripture: An Adventist Approach*, ed. George W. Reid, Biblical Research Institute Studies 1 (Silver Springs, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2006), 70.

⁷⁵ Zoltán Szallós-Farkas, *A Search for God: Understanding Apocalyptic Spirituality* (Bucuresti: Editura Universitara, 2010), 25.

Spirit authored the Scriptures (2 Pet 1:21). “Clearly, theological truth originates with the Spirit of truth”,⁷⁶ which is encapsulated in the fourth point of HGM. As such, human reason is not condemned by HGM, but is subjected to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

To sum it up, the one who sees the Bible as the inspired word of God will never “attempt to understand Scripture from hermeneutical presuppositions based on human sciences and philosophies.”⁷⁷ Instead, he will use the HGM to understand Scripture, because it includes the supernatural as an essential tool to understand it. As such, the incompatibility of both systems is obvious. HGM leaves no other possibility than accepting the Bible as absolute, whereas HCM presupposes its relativity and fallibility.

The Postmodern Approach towards Theology

Another approach towards theology that gains more influence is the postmodern interpretation of biblical text. There will be no extensive study of postmodern influences on theology and its consequences, as this would go beyond the scope of this research.⁷⁸ Only some fundamental thoughts are going to be discussed. To start with, postmodern ideology has to be characterized first:

The modern worldview was influenced by the scientific method, reason, and universal objectivity, but postmodernity rejects these things. The collapse of a unified, rational, and meaningful worldview has thrown the human race into a period of unprecedented pluralism and polyvalence,

⁷⁶ Gulley, *Systematic Theology: Prolegomena*, 171.

⁷⁷ Canale, “Revelation and Inspiration,” 70–71.

⁷⁸ An excellent reflection on pluralism is found in Frank M. Hasel, “The Challenge of Religious Pluralism,” in *Parochialism, Pluralism, and Contextualization: Challenges to Adventists Mission in Europe (19th - 21st Centuries)*, ed. David J. B. Trimm and Daniel Heinz, *Adventistica: Forschungen zur Geschichte und Theologie der Siebenten-Tags-Adventisten* 9 (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010), 187–197.

where perspectival views dominate. There is no worldview to provide meaningful assessment of reality.⁷⁹

According to Gulley's definition above, postmodernism is best understood as antimodernism. In other words, Gulley describes a philosophical paradigm shift that takes place, where the modern understanding of truth shifts to a postmodern understanding. While the modern conception of truth, differentiates between truth claims and truth itself, the postmodern approach makes no distinction.⁸⁰ Every individual has its own individual conception of truth in postmodernism, which leads to pluralism. This alludes in some way to the pragmatic theories of truth.

Looking to modern democratic societies, pluralism is a predominant characteristic that is present at every level. On these grounds, it is not surprising that it affects theology as well. The relativistic understanding of truth in postmodernism is the most compelling argument for accepting religious and theological pluralism.⁸¹ While HCM, a child of the Enlightenment, does not work pluralistically, for the method tries to get as close as possible to truth by ruling out wrong theories and ideas, the postmodern approach towards theology allows to reinterpret Scripture in such a way that the particular interpreter is not only a passive recipient of knowledge, but also the shaper of the meaning of the text.⁸² All attained interpretations coexist with each other and are seen as

⁷⁹ Gulley, *Systematic Theology: Prolegomena*, 479. For a profound study on postmodernity see *Ibid.*, 453–517.

⁸⁰ Heinzpeter Hempelmann, "Dialog unter Ausschluß der Wahrheit? Die Postmoderne Demontage des Wahrheitsbegriffs als Rahmen Gegenwärtiger Dialog-Konzepte," OJC Anstiftungen zu gemeinsamem Christenleben. Freundesbrief der ökumenischen Kommunität Offensive Junger Christen in Reichelsheim i.ODW. 161, no. 2 (1996): 65.

⁸¹ Hasel, "Die Herausforderung des Religiösen Pluralismus," 7.

⁸² The Enlightenment with HCM as its result, can be seen to some degree as the fundament that made pluralism possible, for it destroyed the biblical standard of truth. Once the biblical standard of truth got buried, humanity got lost on its search for truth, for it had no foundation. Finally, the search for truth has been replaced by the search for consensus.

equally right.⁸³ As a result, truth gets completely devalued, which is why it is harmful for biblical theology.

It seems to be forgotten that the word ‘truth’ bears an absolute meaning in itself.⁸⁴ Truth “refers to that Truth which is eternally and universally true irrespective of time or place.”⁸⁵ However, using ‘truth’ in a pluralistic way empties the word of its meaning and degenerates it to a personal opinion.⁸⁶ Consequently, it is misleading to use the word ‘truth’ in a pluralistic context. Adler points out that in the case of taste, pluralism always existed, but that this use of pluralism cannot be transferred to the context of truth.⁸⁷ When pluralism is transferred to biblical truth, it fails to acknowledge biblical hermeneutics and destroys biblical truths. In fact, it makes the same mistake as HCM, as it neglects the *sola scriptura* principle. Thereby it is incompatible with biblical theology, for the object under study, the Bible, has to define the method by which it should be interpreted.

⁸³ Müller, *Der Erste und der Letzte: Studien zum Buch der Offenbarung*, 34.

⁸⁴ Actually, the term “absolute truth” itself is superfluous, as it is nothing more than a vain attempt to hold something against the flood of “truths”.

⁸⁵ Knight, *Philosophy & Education: An Introduction in Christian Perspective*, 21.

⁸⁶ Hempelmann, “Dialog unter Ausschluß Der Wahrheit? Die Postmoderne Demontage des Wahrheitsbegriffs als Rahmen Gegenwärtiger Dialog-Konzepte,” 67.

⁸⁷ Mortimer J. Adler, *Truth in Religion: The Plurality of Religions and the Unity of Truth, An Essay in the Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1990), 2–4.

CHAPTER 3

THE JOHANNINE CONCEPT OF TRUTH

In the course of the second chapter different attempts, philosophies and ideas on the matter of truth were demonstrated. It was held that worldly truth systems and the biblical perspective are incompatible. The discussion to follow, will illuminate the concept of truth in the Gospel of John exegetically by looking on all important passages, where ἀλήθεια is used. If necessary, adjectives and adverbs that belong to the ‘truth’ word group will be part of the exegetical examination.

Significant passages that address the same topic are put together in individual subchapters. Therefore, the discussion on ἀλήθεια is not chronological but thematical. Such an approach is meaningful, since the Gospel of John talks in different passages about the same subjects. Taking all passages together that belong to the same subject, helps the reader to get a better understanding of ἀλήθεια. Three main topics evolve from this categorization of ἀλήθεια: ‘Truth within the Trinity’, ‘Sanctification, Truth and the Trinity’ and ‘Humans and Truth’. The first chapter, ‘Truth within the Trinity’, deals with every part of the Godhead and its relation to truth, since they are inseparably connected to ἀλήθεια. Truth is the very fundament on which the Trinity is founded and from where it operates. The second chapter, ‘Sanctification, Truth and the Trinity’, is the logical consequence of the first chapter. The fundament of the Trinity, has to become the fundament of the believer, since sanctification, which is inseparably connected with

salvation (Heb 12:14), is achieved by knowledge of truth. The last chapter, ‘Humans and Truth’, is more practical, because it shows how truth should be integrated into daily life.

Following this arrangement, the reader will get familiar with theological ideas and concepts that are linked to ἀλήθεια in the Gospel of John. Additionally, questions on the absoluteness of truth and its relational aspects, will be discovered throughout this progress. By considering the context of each occurrence of ἀλήθεια the concept of truth as represented in the Gospel of John, will be discovered more thoroughly.

Semantic Examination

Before starting with the discussion, a short semantic study needs to be undertaken. Ἀλήθεια appears for 109 times in the NT and is used for 45 times in the writings of John and 47 times in the writings of Paul.¹ Therefore, it is apparent that truth is a key term in John’s writings. Ἀλήθεια is a feminine noun and signifies literally ‘not concealed’.² It always appears in the Gospel of John in singular, which already tells the reader a lot about its absolute quality. Etymologically, the word has its roots in λήθω, which means ‘to conceal’ or ‘be hidden’.³ Ἀλήθεια itself describes facts that are in correspondence to a visible and verifiable reality, “whether historical (in the time/space continuum) (Luke 4:25; Acts 4:27), or an eternal reality not limited to historical fact.”⁴ Truth reveals itself by words and actions, “but can also be an inner quality of sincerity of mind or heart.”⁵ Related terms are ἀληθής ‘true’, ἀληθινός ‘true’ or ‘real’, ἀληθεύω ‘to tell the truth’ and

¹ Counted according to conservative counting of Paul’s writings, which counts 13 letters.

² Ceslas Spicq and James D. Ernest, “Ἀλήθεια, Ἀληθεύω, Ἀληθής, Ἀληθινός, Ἀληθῶς,” *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 66.

³ Douglas Mangum, “Conscience,” ed. Douglas Mangum et al., *Lexham Theological Wordbook* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).

⁴ James Swanson, “Ἀλήθεια,” *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament)* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

⁵ Mangum, “Conscience.”

ἀληθῶς ‘truly’.⁶ Consequently, the concept of ἀλήθεια and its derivatives is most of all an intellectual one.

As in judicial language the ἀλήθεια is the actual state of affairs to be maintained against different statements, so historians use it to denote real events as distinct from myths, and philosophers to indicate real being in the absolute sense.⁷

The absoluteness of ἀλήθεια is also reflected by its singular use throughout the whole Gospel of John. It never appears in plural.

In the LXX ἀλήθεια is mostly used to translate Πᾶς, denoting factuality, validity, faithfulness, firmness and reliability.⁸ As such it covers a wide range of meaning. In the OT, Πᾶς denotes “a reality which is to be regarded as ἰσχυρὸς ‘firm,’ and therefore ‘solid,’ ‘valid,’ or ‘binding.’ It thus signifies what is ‘true.’”⁹ However, the OT sees the concept of truth considerably more in a reliable person than in mere facts. Ps 31:5 functions here as perfect example, when God is called the Πᾶς ἰσχυρὸς, the faithful God, which reveals that God unites all qualities of Πᾶς in his person.¹⁰ This is why Πᾶς is rarely applied to humans, as humans fail to fulfill its demands, a fact which is criticized by God.¹¹

⁶ Ritzema argues for the use of these words in three senses: As factuality, as faithfulness and reliability and as reality. For more information towards these subdivision see Elliot Ritzema, “Truth,” ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), Logos 7 Electronic Version.

⁷ Gottfried Quell, Gerhard Kittel, and Rudolf Bultmann, “Ἀλήθεια, Ἀληθής, Ἀληθινός, Ἀληθεύω,” ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 238.

⁸ Ritzema, “LBD.”

⁹ Quell, Kittel, and Bultmann, “Ἀλήθεια, Ἀληθής, Ἀληθινός, Ἀληθεύω,” 232. Koehler defines it as ‘trustworthiness’, ‘constancy’, ‘duration’, ‘faithfulness’, ‘truth’. See Ludwig Koehler et al., eds., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994), 68.

¹⁰ Looking at Ps 119:142.151.160 demonstrates that God’s law is true, which underlines the moral quality of Πᾶς.

¹¹ For more information on that topic see A. Jepsen, “ἰσχυρὸς,” ed. Johannes G. Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, *Theologisches Wörterbuch Zum Alten Testament* (Stuttgart; Berlin; Köln; Mainz: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1970), 335–337.

To conclude, Πᾶσι also contains the intellectual element like its Greek equivalent but has an existential and ethical meaning at the same time, as it functions as the attribute of a person as well.¹²

Truth and the Persons of the Trinity

A close look at the biblical text reveals that ἀλήθεια is central to the theology of the Trinity in the Gospel of John. Every person of the Trinity is addressed with ἀλήθεια. Therefore, it is inevitable to start with the Trinity, as God, the creator of everything and giver of all life, is the most important topic under study.¹³ He is the reason for human existence. It appears best to start with God the Father and his relation to truth, as Jesus refers to him as the one who has sent him (John 3:34; 7:29) and legitimizes his ministry (John 5:32; 8:18). Since God the Father is never directly addressed with ἀλήθεια, its derivatives have to be considered. In the next step, Jesus relation to truth will be analyzed, for he forms the very center within the discussion of truth in the Gospel of John. Finally, the Holy Spirit and truth will be examined, as his coming is initiated by the ministry of Christ.¹⁴

¹² F.H. Palmer, “Wahrheit,” ed. Helmut Burkhard et al., *Das Grosse Bibellexikon* (Witten: SCM R. Brockhaus, 2009), 1670. When it comes to the use of ἀλήθεια in the Gospel of John, one has to consider that John used Greek as the lingua franca of his time, but was still a Hebrew-thinking man. For that reason, it is possible to conclude that his use of ἀλήθεια was influenced to some degree by the Hebrew concept of Πᾶσι. See Quell, Kittel, and Bultmann, “Ἀλήθεια, Ἀληθής, Ἀληθινός, Ἀληθεύω,” 238–39.

¹³ A thorough study on the Trinity is found in Woodrow Whidden, Jerry Moon, and John W. Reeve, *The Trinity: Understanding God’s Love, His Plan of Salvation and Christian Relationship* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2002).

¹⁴ Although Porters work has been a valuable resource for this research, it has to be noted that the body of this section is not copied from him, as found in Stanley E. Porter, *John, His Gospel, and Jesus: In Pursuit of the Johannine Voice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 174–197. The similar body originates in the structure of the Gospel and was independently developed.

God the Father: The True God

John 3:33 – God is true

In John 3:32 John the Baptist hyperbolically criticizes the rejection of Jesus' testimony by saying that "no one receives his testimony."¹⁵ Naturally, people accepted Jesus, but compared to the great disbelieving multitude they were few. In John 3:33 he goes on to say: "Whoever receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is *true*." Taking a look at 'to receive' in John 3:33, the aorist participle points to a decision that is not continuous, but rather fundamental.¹⁶ It describes the decision to believe or not to believe in Jesus. This is supported by σφραγίζω, which means to attest, certify or acknowledge something,¹⁷ that is true.¹⁸ In ancient times the verb was used for the sealing of documents. This picture is now applied to the sealing of God's testimony as embodied in Christ. By receiving Jesus' testimony, the believer testifies that God is ἀληθής, which is used to describe someone as being truthful and honest.¹⁹ Following the logic of John 3:33 it says that receiving the testimony of Jesus is to accept God the Father as being true, because Jesus is God's representative on earth.²⁰ On the other hand, rejecting Jesus

¹⁵ See also Ronald Trail, *An Exegetical Summary of John 1-9*, Exegetical Summaries (Dallas, TX: SIL International, 2013), 150.

¹⁶ Compare with Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John, Rev. Ed.*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 217.

¹⁷ Arndt William et al., eds., "Σφραγίζω," *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 980.

¹⁸ "The verb σφραγίζω (sphragizō, confirm) literally means "to seal," in the sense of certifying or authenticating something to be true." See Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004), 139.

¹⁹ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, eds., "Αληθής," *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996).

²⁰ John 8:26 describes a similar situation where it says: "I have much to say about you and much to judge, but he who sent me is *true*, and I declare to the world what I have heard from him." Porter adds: "God, who is true or truthful, has told him many things to tell to the world, and hence God's truthfulness validates or guarantees Jesus' message." Porter, *John, His Gospel, and Jesus: In Pursuit of the Johannine Voice*, 179.

means to make God a liar. This is what John expresses in 1 John 5:10 by saying: “Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son.”

It became evident that ἀληθής points to the quality of God’s character. God is true. But there is more to that. The content of Jesus’ testimony is in accordance with and approved by the true God, since Jesus is God’s representative on earth. Such being the case, one can conclude from God’s character to the content of Jesus’ testimony and vice versa. This means that Jesus’ communicates God’s truth, for the one who accepts it testifies that God is true. Addressing the question on intellectual and relational truth, the context shows that ἀληθής describes an intellectual affirmation of the truthfulness of God by accepting the testimony of Christ. Thus, ἀληθής describes intellectual truth in the context of John 3:33.

John 7:28 – He is true

The setting of John 7:28 ties to the saying of John the Baptist in John 3:33, as Jesus is confronted with those who are not receiving his testimony. The level of the dispute is even so serious that Jesus questions the Jews, why they want to kill him (7:19). However, to comment on the whole discussion between Jesus and Jews in 7:14-39 would go too far. Instead the focus should be on John 7:27-28.

John 7:25 describes that the inhabitants of Jerusalem are surprised that Jesus is freely teaching in their city, although the authorities desire to kill him. Astonished they raise the question in John 7:26 if “the authorities really know that this is the Christ?” Then they go on to say that they know where Jesus is from, but no one knows where the

Christ comes from (7:27). Thus, these people do exactly what Jesus warned them not to do, namely to judge on the basis of appearance (7:24). However, Jesus takes up their thoughts in John 7:28 and confirms what they know about his earthly origin. Next, he goes on to say that “I have not come of my own accord. He who sent me is *true*, and him you do not know.” This situation is ironic. Tragically, they are right when they say that they do not know where he is from, for they do not know the Father (8:19).

Taking a look at the Johannine writings reveals that ἀληθινός is a term that is frequently used for God, describing his being, nature and works.²¹ In the setting of John 7:28, various commentators see ἀληθινός best translated as “real or existent as opposed to imagined or non-existent”.²² Whereas others would say that it is not about being real or existent, but that ἀληθινός points to YHWH who “really is the one who sent Jesus, regardless of what the Jerusalemites might think of Jesus’ origins.”²³ It is not important to struggle with the term at this point, since both views are true. God is real and he is the one who really sent Jesus. Beasley-Murray puts it perfectly together: “Not only did Jesus not venture forth from Nazareth on his own volition; the starting point of his mission to Israel was elsewhere. He came from ‘the Faithful and True One,’ ‘Someone who is very real, whom you do not know.’”²⁴

Talking about ἀληθινός in the context of John 7:28, it can be concluded that the adjective conveys the idea of God being existent and unique.²⁵ Thus, ἀληθινός describes

²¹ 1 John 5:20; Rev 3:7.14; 6:10; 15:3; 16:7; 19:2.9.11; 21:5; 22:6.

²² Trail, *An Exegetical Summary of John 1-9*, 376.

²³ Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 318.

²⁴ George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas, TX: Word, 1999), 111.

²⁵ To argue that ἀληθινός also describes God’s quality of character would be wrong, since ἀληθινός does not seem to bear this meaning in this context.

intellectual truth, for Jesus tells his audience about supernatural realities that are true (i.e. the existence of God).

John 17:3 – Knowing the only true God

Up to this point, it was shown that ἀληθής and ἀληθινός are used to make basic statements, as they define God as being true in the sense of his existence, uniqueness and character. At first sight it seems that John 17:3 does the same. Shortly before his arrest, Jesus prays the prayer, which is known as the High Priestly Prayer. In John 17:1 he asks God the Father to glorify the “Son that the Son may glorify you.” Jesus glorified the Father by executing the plan of redemption (17:4), while Jesus asks the Father to glorify him with the glory that he had before the world existed (17:5). Therefore, John 17:1 clearly points to Jesus’ vicarious death and his glorious resurrection. In 17:2 Jesus says that the Father provided him with authority over all people, so that he may give eternal life to all of those, who the Father has given him. John 17:3 takes up this thought and clarifies what eternal life is all about: “And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only *true* God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” Ἀληθινός is “used of God in the sense of ‘real’ or ‘true’ in contrast to the vanity of idols.”²⁶ Bernard emphasizes in that context that “the adjectives μόνος and ἀληθινός express the central truth of Monotheism.”²⁷ Put in another way: There is only one God and this God is true, which is reminiscent of John 7:28. “This is the basis for belief that what God reveals has veracity.”²⁸ Up to this point one can conclude that ἀληθινός describes intellectual truth in

²⁶ Quell, Kittel, and Bultmann, “Ἀλήθεια, Ἀληθής, Ἀληθινός, Ἀληθεύω,” 249. Compare with John 4:23.37; 8:16; 15:1.

²⁷ Bernard, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St John*, 2:562.

²⁸ Porter, *John, His Gospel, and Jesus: In Pursuit of the Johannine Voice*, 180.

John 17:3. The adjective supports the fundamental claim that God is the only existing God. This observation is crucial for the reader, since it is vital to acknowledge the God of the Bible as being true. But there is even more to ἀληθινός in the setting of John 17:3.

Taking a closer look at John 17:3 suggests that ἀληθινός does not only emphasize intellectual truth but relational truth as well. It says that salvation is only accessible by knowing the only true God. This knowledge builds the foundation for knowing Christ in turn, since the knowledge of God lays the foundation for a correct understanding of Jesus' ministry.²⁹ However, when it says that knowing the only true God is conditional for salvation, it means that the individual has to know truth itself. For truth is inseparably intertwined into the very being of God. The examination of Πῶς already proved that claim. But the question is: How is knowing the only *true* God understood in that passage? Is it only a compulsory exercise that is exclusively intellectual, or does Jesus assume a relationship with God/truth that is basic for knowing truth relationally? The analysis of γινώσκω will bring light to that question.

Γινώσκω, meaning 'to know', is a general verb for knowing and shows up more than 225 times in the NT.³⁰ For the Greeks "knowledge was based upon reason and

²⁹ In John 14:9b Jesus already widened this concept by telling his disciples: "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?" Jesus explains to his disciples that everyone can get to know the Father through him, for he and the Father are one (17:22). Hence, there exists an interaction between both concepts. Knowing one helps to know the other and vice versa. Talking about the majority of the Jews at Jesus' time, Jesus' statement is critical for their salvation, for they rejected him. Keeping John 7:28 in mind, the reason for Jesus' rejection is found in the lack of knowledge of God the Father. Obviously, the ignorant Jews are caught in a vicious circle. They do not know God the Father, wherefore they reject Jesus and cannot get to know the Father, for they reject Jesus who wants to introduce them to the Father.

³⁰ One has to realize that γινώσκω is a key term in the Gospel of John, as it appears 56 times. Yet, to analyze its entire use would go beyond the scope of this thesis.

philosophy, often seeking to understand the ultimate reality or principle that lay behind events as observed or experienced in the world.”³¹ Bultmann adds:

γινώσκειν (older form: γιγνώσκειν) in ordinary Greek the intelligent comprehension of an object or matter, whether this comes for the first time, or comes afresh, into the consideration of the one who grasps it (“to come to know,” “to experience,” “to perceive [again]”) or whether it is already present (“to perceive”).³²

For the Greek γινώσκω denotes an approach towards truth that is purely intellectual. For the NT writers, the use of γινώσκω is to some degree similar to that, as it refers to “having knowledge or understanding regarding a subject.”³³ However, such metaphysical approach towards knowledge as found in Greek thinking, is mostly alien to Hebrew thinking. The Hebrew equivalent to γινώσκω, יָדָע, primarily describes experiential knowledge, meaning knowledge that is based on experience. “In addition to experiential knowledge, other types of knowledge in the OT include cognition, skill, intimacy, acknowledgement, and intuition (Gen 4:1; 25:27; Deut 4:39; 2 Sam 19:36; 24:13).”³⁴ Keener mentions in that context that knowledge of God is “always dependent on his prior self-revelation”.³⁵ Moreover, it indicates a covenant relationship that includes the expression of “genuine piety”.³⁶ This is why the OT laments about the perishing of the Israelites as a result of their missing knowledge of God (Hos 4:6). This is an

³¹ G. D. Taylor, “Testimony,” ed. Douglas Mangum et al., *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014), Logos 7 Electronic Version.

³² Rudolf Bultmann, “Γινώσκω, Γνώσις, Ἐπιγινώσκω, Ἐπίγνωσις, Καταγινώσκω, Ακατάγνωστος, Προγινώσκω, Πρόγνωσις, Συγγνώμη, Γνώμη, Γνωρίζω, Γνωστός,” ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 689.

³³ Garrett, “Knowledge.”

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003), 243.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

important element, because knowing God in the OT context means to be transformed and to be led into a relationship with God. Evidently, this is not possible with a lack of knowledge of God.

Keeping this in mind, one has to go back to the Gospel of John, because there are some reasons to argue that γινώσκω not only has an intellectual meaning in Johannine writings. For example: A look at John's Gospel uncovers that γινώσκω is used almost identically to 'believe' in some instances (John 8:32; 10:38; 17:8).³⁷ From other passages in John's writings it gets evident that knowing God also includes a life of obedience to his commandments (1 John 2:3-5; implied in John 3:21), as well as having a loving relationship with others (e.g. 1 John 4:8).³⁸ Therefore, knowing God is not something static or merely intellectual, but also practical at the same time. It has to be unfolded in the life of the believer. Regarding this issue, Brown states that such reading of γινώσκω is "in agreement with the Hebrew use of the verb 'to know' with its connotation of immediate experience and intimacy."³⁹ In regards to John 17:3, Brodie, following Schnackenburg, adds that knowing God is equal to having communion with him:

³⁷ See in Thomas L. Brodie, *The Gospel According to John: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 512.

³⁸ Marshall mentions to that: "What is distinctive in Johannine teaching is that the knowledge of believers is similar to the mutual knowledge of the Father and the Son (10:14f.). Believers know the Father (8:19; 14:7; 17:3; 1 Jn. 2:3, 13; 4:6; 5:20), they know the Son (Jn. 10:14; 1 Jn. 2:13f.; cf. 3:6) and are known by Him (Jn. 10:14), and they know the Spirit (14:17; cf. 1 Jn. 4:2, 6). Such knowledge is not a higher stage in Christian experience than faith (this is clear from the parallelism between the two concepts), but is the expression of the cognitive element in faith. The person who believes has personal fellowship with God (cf. 1 Jn. 1:3-7)." See I. H. Marshall, "Johannine Theology," ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Revised* (Eerdmans, 1988 1979), 1089.

³⁹ Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John (XIII-XXI): Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 752.

[...] it uses the verb, “to know [ginōskō] ... God”, a word which is to be interpreted, first, through the immediate context – the idea in chaps. 13-17 of advancing discipleship and union – and, second, through the literature which stands directly in the background, the OT, wherein “‘knowing God’ has the ... meaning of ‘having communion with God’” (Schnackenburg, 3:172).⁴⁰

To conclude, γινώσκω is not only an intellectual term, but also a relational one, because it includes faith, trust, obedience and fellowship. This observation is crucial for the discussion of ἀληθινός in John 17:3. Accordingly, eternal life is to believe in the existence of the only true God and to know the only true God relationally.⁴¹ Moreover, if this God is the only true God (cf. John 7:28) it means that he has to be everything that encompasses truth, which implies that God is truth. So, if one can know the true and truthful God only relationally, truth itself cannot be known only intellectually, for truth is inherent to a relational being (i.e. God).

Conclusion

Throughout the discussion on the relationship between God the Father and truth, it became apparent that truth builds the fundamental level of relationship and communication between Jesus and God the Father. Jesus communicates God’s truth to sinful humans. From this one can conclude that every characteristic of God has to be founded in truth, as without truth, everything is unstable and worthless. Furthermore, the fact that God is the only true God, gives Jesus the authority to claim being truth, which will be discussed in the following section. As such, God the Father builds the fundament for Jesus authoritative ministry on earth. Moreover, the discussion on γινώσκω has shown

⁴⁰ Brodie, *The Gospel According to John: A Literary and Theological Commentary*, 512.

⁴¹ Beasley-Murray adds: “Such knowledge advances beyond the intellect to include relationship and communion; its revelation by the Son entails entry into the *koinonia* (fellowship) of the Father and the Son, which is the heart of life in the saving sovereignty.” Beasley-Murray, *John*, 297.

that having a relationship with God assumes that the only true God and thereby the Johannine concept of truth itself has to be both, intellectual and relational. This observation will be also discussed more thoroughly throughout the following section.

Jesus: Setting the Stage in John 1:14.17

After God the Father and his relation to truth has been explored, it is time to look at his Son, Jesus Christ. At the beginning of the Gospel, the Son is introduced in the prologue. John 1:1-18 sets the stage for the chapters to follow. It also “reveals something of the author’s purpose, intentions and interest.”⁴² Keener mentions:

Like speeches of praise, Greco-Roman biography might mention among virtues, when relevant, one’s noble family background. Greco-Roman biographies frequently opened with accounts of ancestry, birth, or predictions of greatness, though such details were not essential to all biographies. Whereas these features appear in the Matthean and Lukan infancy narratives, John goes back farther, emphasizing Christ’s preexistent glory with the Father.⁴³

Not only does the prologue emphasize Christ’s preexisting glory, but it makes two crucial statements about the relation between Jesus and truth in its fourth part (John 1:14-18).⁴⁴ These statements are important for the theology of the Gospel. It is appropriate to say that John lays the foundation for the correct understanding of Jesus and his relation to truth in John 1:14.17 and expands the meaning of truth in the instances to follow.

⁴² Eldon Jay Epp, “Wisdom, Torah, Word: The Johannine Prologue and the Purpose of the Fourth Gospel,” in *Current Issues in Biblical and Patristic Interpretation: Studies in Honor of Merrill C. Tenney Preceded by His Former Students*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975), 128–29.

⁴³ Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003), 338.

⁴⁴ The prologue can be subdivided in four parts: 1:1-5 describes Jesus preexistence and divine power, 1:6-8 compares him to John the Baptist, 1:9-13 describes human respond to Christ and 1:14-18 tells about his incarnation and its results. Compare with Tom Shepherd, “Has the Law of Moses Been Replaced by the Grace of Jesus?,” in *Interpreting Scripture: Bible Questions and Answers*, ed. Gerhard Pfandl, Biblical Research Institute Studies 2 (Silver Springs, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2010), 316.

Moreover, the whole purpose of his Gospel is to make everyone understand that “Jesus is the Christ” (John 20:31). Thus, these fundamentals are laid in the prologue.

In John 1:14 Jesus, the Logos, is mentioned in connection with grace and truth, χάρις καὶ ἀλήθεια. There is discussion on the correct meaning of χάρις,⁴⁵ but it is best translated with “‘good will,’ ‘loving-kindness,’ ‘[undeserved] favor,’ ‘mercy.’”⁴⁶ The fact that ‘grace’ is used only four times in the Gospel of John and all occurrences are found in John 1:14.17, shows its theological importance in that instance. However, grace and truth, are used to refer to the revelation of the Logos, which is his visible glory, “glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”⁴⁷ Accordingly, they explain the characteristics of Jesus’ glory, which features are grace and truth. Therefore, ‘glory’ not only refers to miracles that proved the divine authority of Jesus (see discussion above), but also describes Jesus’ character. This is why the connection of John 1:14 and Exod 34:6 is key to understand the full meaning of that phrase, as ‘grace and truth’ is a reference to Exod 34:6, where the Hebrew equivalent for truth, אֱמֻנָה, is used. In the following paragraph the connection between John 1:14 and Exod 34:6 will be shown more detailed.

⁴⁵ For an overview of different perspectives see Trail, *An Exegetical Summary of John 1-9*, 35.

⁴⁶ Nichol, *Matthew to John*, 903. See also in Arndt William et al., eds., “Χάρις,” *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1079–80. The Hebrew equivalent for grace, חַסְדִּים, is best translated with “loving-kindness” or “gracious-mercy”. See Borchert, *John 1-11*, 121. For a another study see Francis D. Nichol, ed., *Chronicles to Song of Solomon*, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary 3* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1977), 719–20.

⁴⁷ “Here the word denotes the result of the revelation of the Logos.” Hans Conzelmann and Walther Zimmerli, “Χαίρω, Χαρά, Συγχαίρω, Χάρις, Χαρίζομαι, Χαριτόω, Ἀχάριστος, Χάρισμα, Εὐχαριστέω, Εὐχαριστία, Εὐχάριστος,” ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 9:399.

Short Examination of Grace and Truth in Exod 34:6

The passage of Exod 34:6 is known as the Israelite Credo. Besides its own prominence in OT writings,⁴⁸ it also helps to understand John 1:14 more fully, which will be shown in the next section. However, Exod 34:6 describes God as the Faithful One who holds to his covenant with Israel, after Israel betrayed him at Mount Sinai through the worship of the golden calf. After the apostasy (Exod 32:1-10), Moses intervened for his people and the transgressors were punished, but the covenant was not yet renewed (Exod 32:11-33:23). In the midst of this conflict Moses desires to see God's glory (Exod 33:18), which God allows (Exod 33:19-23). The fulfilment of Moses' wish coincides with the renewal of the covenant, where God declares himself being "merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" (Exod 34:6).

The Hebrew חֶסֶד is best translated with 'lovingkindness' or 'grace'. It is mainly used when it comes to God's nature and his gracious treatment of humankind.⁴⁹ Moreover, God's grace is not only an attitude, but reveals itself in actions,⁵⁰ and operates mostly within God's covenant relationship with Israel, which is the reason for God's interaction at the same time.⁵¹ Moreover, God says in Exod 20:6 that he shows "steadfast love [חֶסֶד] to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments". Therefore, the share in God's grace is subject to the keeping of his commandments. First and

⁴⁸ Jan P. Bosman, "The Paradoxical Presence of Exodus 34:6-7 in the Book of the Twelve," *Scriptura* 87 (2004): 233–243. See also John I. Durham, *Exodus*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1987), 453–54.

⁴⁹ William A. VanGemeren, *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 2:211.

⁵⁰ H-J. Zobel, " חֶסֶד ," ed. Johannes G. Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry Fabry, *Theologisches Wörterbuch Zum Alten Testament* (Stuttgart; Berlin; Köln; Mainz: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1982), 55.

⁵¹ VanGemeren, *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, 2:211. For further elements of God's *chesed* see *Ibid.*, 2:213–217.

foremost, grace is a free gift that has nothing to do with human achievement or credit. It is even available if the human part of God’s covenant breaks the covenant (compare Isa 54:8-10; Exod 33-34).^{52 53}

Looking at Exod 34:6 and its use of אֱמֻנָה⁵⁴, God shows Moses by using אֱמֻנָה that he will not forsake his people, as his steadfast faithfulness is absolutely true.⁵⁵ By this means he proclaims that “whatever he says is correct and reliable and may be trusted even to the extent of life and death issues, or indeed *eternal* life and death issues.”⁵⁶ For that reason, YHWH is the God of truth.⁵⁷

Connection between John 1:14 and Exod 34:6

Having clarified the main aspects of Exod 34:6, one can continue with John 1:14. It is interesting to notice that John uses this text to impart the same ideas through his use

⁵² Stoebe calls it “Güte oder Freundlichkeit . . . , die außerhalb dessen steht, was man erwarten kann oder verdient hat und die ihren Grund allein in großherziger Bereitschaft für den andern hat”. See Zobel, “אֱמֻנָה,” 58.

⁵³ In the LXX “χάρις is not the transl. of אֱמֻנָה” Conzelmann and Zimmerli, “Χαίρω, Χαρά, Συγχαίρω, Χάρις, Χαρίζομαι, Χαριτώ, Αγάριστος, Χάρισμα, Εὐχαριστέω, Εὐχαριστία, Εὐχάριστος,” 389. It is ἔλεος, which is best translated with “mercy, compassion, pity, clemency”. See William et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 316. Does this mean that the linguistic connection between John 1:14 and Exod 34:6 is invalid? Not really, as “*charis* is an excellent translation for *hesed*”. Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John (I-XII): Introduction, Translation and Notes*, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 14. Lindsay adds that “John does not rigorously follow the LXX in his use of the OT. Judging from the direct quotes in John it is very difficult to maintain any large degree of dependency upon the LXX.” Dennis R. Lindsay, “What Is Truth? Alētheia in the Gospel of John,” *Restoration Quarterly* 35, no. 3 (1993): 131.

⁵⁴ For a more detailed study on אֱמֻנָה read the semantic examination above.

⁵⁵ The LXX uses ἀληθινός in Exod 34:6, an adjective, instead of ἀλήθεια, which is used in John 1:14.17. This is not irritating, as ἀληθινός depicts a divine attribute in the writings of John as well (John 17:3; Rev 3:7; 6:10; 19:11).

⁵⁶ Douglas Stuart, *Exodus*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 716.

⁵⁷ “It is this same unchanging character of God that gives poor, helpless sinners hope of eternal life today (Ps. 103:8–14; 145:8; Jer. 29:11; 31:3). Inasmuch as there can be no trust in one who is not true, God qualifies for our trust by being ‘abundant’ in ‘truth.’ Truth lies at the root of moral character; it is the precise opposite of hypocrisy (Ps. 108:4; 117:2; John 14:6; James 3:14).” See Francis D. Nichol, ed., *Genesis to Deuteronomy*, The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary 3 (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1978), 675.

of χάρις καὶ ἀλήθεια in John 1:14. As already mentioned, these words function as characteristics of Jesus' glory.⁵⁸ Taking the information from the preceding subchapter, one will notice, that both Hebrew terms are highly relational. They describe God's character and his way of dealing with humans. So are the Greek words within the framework of John 1:14.17 as well.

Σκηνώω seems to support this observation. It appears only in the Johannine writings (John 1:14; Rev 7:15; 12:12; 13:6; 21:3.), and signifies to “live, dwell, take up residence”⁵⁹, but is better translated with to “dwell in a tent”⁶⁰ or “to tabernacle”⁶¹. By using the verb σκηνώω, John connects the Exodus experience of Israel with Jesus. It is even more interesting to notice that God revealed his glory at the tabernacle/tent of meeting: “Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.” (Exod 40:34).

⁵⁸ Hanson argues that the phrase “full of grace and truth” (John 1:14) is a translation of “abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness” (Exod 34:6). See Anthony T. Hanson, “John 1:14-18 and Exodus 34,” *New Testament Studies* 23, no. 1 (1976): 90–101. Köstenberger also notices that “John 1:14–18 displays numerous parallels to Exod. 33–34.” In Köstenberger, *John*, 45. See also Henry Mowvley, “John 1:14-18 in the Light of Exodus 33:7-34:35,” *The Expository Times* 95, no. 5 (1984): 135–137. Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003), 417. Lindsay, “What Is Truth? Alētheia in the Gospel of John,” 131.

⁵⁹ William et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 929.

⁶⁰ J.-A. Bühner, “Σκηνώω,” ed. Gerhard Schneider and Horst Balz, *The Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 252.

⁶¹ Why is that? In the OT God demanded his people to build the tabernacle (Exod 25:8-9) so that he may dwell in their midst. The LXX translates tent in Exod 25:8 with σκηνή and Carson points to the fact that “for Greek-speaking Jews and other readers of the Greek Old Testament, the term would call to mind the *skēnē*, the tabernacle where God met with Israel before the temple was built.” Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 127. This is why the tent is also “called the tent of meeting” (Exod 27:21). Witherington adds to the discussion on the sounds of Greek and Hebrew, in regards to Rev 21:3, that it “is striking in several respects. It literally reads, ‘behold the tent of God is with humanity, and he will tent with us and we will be his peoples.’ The Greek word *skene* is regularly used to render the Hebrew *mishkan*, which means tent (it is a derivation of *shakan*, ‘to dwell,’ from which the word *Shekinah*, referring to God’s glorious presence, comes). Our text is a paraphrase of such texts as Lev. 26:11 ff. and Ezek. 37:27. By a stroke of sheer luck, the Greek and Hebrew words for tent have the same consonants, so the allusions to Hebrew are more obvious, and the similar sound would conjure up various meanings for Jewish Christians listening to this being read”. Found in Paige Patterson, *Revelation: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman & Holman, 2012), 363.

Comparing John 1:14 with the wilderness experience two main things are made obvious: (1) Jesus ‘tabernacled’ during his ministry among Israel like YHWH did in the tabernacle and (2) Jesus revealed his glory during his ministry like God did at the tabernacle. In other words, in the same way God tented among his people and revealed his glory, John characterizes Jesus as the living tent of meeting, the living tabernacle, who reveals his glory, which is “full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).⁶² This leads back to Exod 34:6, as John testifies through this connection that Jesus is “full of grace and truth” in a divine sense. Jesus has the same divine quality that is found in God himself, for he has the same glory like YHWH.⁶³ On top of that, Jesus is not only identified as being true, in the sense of his quality of character, but as the one who is truth. In doing so, John equates Jesus with YHWH, which does not promote an overlap of personality, but rather highlights the quality of nature both have. Thereby he supports the whole argumentation of John 1, namely Jesus being God in flesh.⁶⁴

John 1:17 in the Context of the Law

John 1:17 goes one step further than v. 14. Here, John provides a commentary on v. 14, while contrasting the law that was given by Moses with grace and truth that comes through Jesus. To find a satisfying answer to John 1:17, one has to start with John 1:16 first: “For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.” Ὅτι at the beginning of v. 16 connects to v. 14, while πληρώματος, ‘fullness’, points back to πλήρης in v. 1:14

⁶² Drawing such a connection is appropriate, as Jesus depicts his body as temple (John 2:21).

⁶³ Bauer adds to John 1:14 that πλήρης means to be complete and having lack of nothing. See William et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 827.

⁶⁴ The preceding verses to John 1:14, already revealed the same. For studies on that topic see e.g. Whidden, Moon, and Reeve, *The Trinity: Understanding God’s Love, His Plan of Salvation and Christian Relationship*, 58–64. Raoul Dederen, “Christ: His Person and Work,” in *Handbook of Seventh-Day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 161–169. Köstenberger, *John*, 41–42.

as well. Πλήρης means to have lack of nothing, or being complete,⁶⁵ and clarifies Jesus' glory which is "full of grace and truth". Again, it is stated that Jesus' glory in John 1:14 is not only his visible glory, but also includes his grace and truth, that are God's characteristics (Exod 34:6). From this fullness/glory 'we', the believers, receive "grace upon grace" (John 1:16). There are various views on the correct denotation of "grace upon grace",⁶⁶ but the most satisfying rendering is to take "grace upon grace" as "grace piling up on grace"⁶⁷. That is God's grace which is continuous and comes in ever new streams.⁶⁸ This is a brilliant transition to John 1:17.

John 1:17 says that "the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." The Mosaic system never intended to solve the problem of sin once and for all. The solution for sin and salvation is eschatological grace, which is provided through the death of Jesus at the cross. Through his argumentation John places Moses in contrast to Jesus and points to the superiority of Jesus.⁶⁹ In this regard, ἐγένετο, meaning 'came', impressively underlines that something new has been established through Jesus. In fact, it is used in John 1:3.10 to describe the formation of heaven and earth. This newness is also reflected by the contrast of "the law *was given*" versus "grace and truth *came*". Moses was the agent through whom the law was given, but Jesus is the source of grace and truth.⁷⁰ Unmistakably, this revolutionary establishment of something

⁶⁵ William et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 827.

⁶⁶ Trail, *An Exegetical Summary of John 1-9*, 40.

⁶⁷ Shepherd, "Has the Law of Moses Been Replaced by the Grace of Jesus?," 318.

⁶⁸ William et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 88.

⁶⁹ John 1:18 states Jesus' superiority even clearer. Moses has never seen God face to face, although he wished so (Exod 33:18-20), but Jesus, the incarnate Word who is God, has seen him (John 6:46). Another fact is that Moses mediated God's grace in Ex 33-34, but Jesus is the perfect Mediator of grace, as he is grace.

⁷⁰ Bernard, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St John*, 1:30.

new is found in the grace and truth of Jesus. Moses gave the law, but through Jesus Christ, grace and truth was realized. Consequently, Jesus is the final stage of grace, while the law is subordinated to him, as it cannot save. In other words, the old was good, but the new is better. This is “grace piling up on grace”.⁷¹

Actually, the whole discussion on ‘grace’, points to a soteriological dimension that is new and established through Jesus Christ and only makes sense if ἀλήθεια is seen in connection with ἐγένετο. It is ἐγένετο that points out that truth came into being or stepped into human reality “through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17). The question at hand is what the text intends when it says that truth came into existence or being. As already mentioned, the text identifies Jesus as the source of grace and truth, but calling him the source means that he has to be grace and truth at the same time. Being the source without having these qualities inherent is not possible. Furthermore, before grace can be bestowed on humanity, truth has to become personified reality in Jesus in order to lay the foundation for grace.

This means that the historical coming of Jesus Christ, including his birth, ministry, death and resurrection, served as a game changer in salvific history. All types

⁷¹ Although John stresses Jesus’ superiority to Moses, it should not be concluded from this statement that the law is replaced by grace. Some theologians have concluded such from John 1:17, for they see the law as antagonistic to grace. Yet, such argumentation reveals fundamental theological errors and lacks of theological soundness. Rom 7:7 reveals that knowledge of sin comes through the law and shows the sinner his need, while Jesus’ grace offers absolution from sin. John 1:17 ties to that, because he supports the inability of the law to and stresses the sinner’s need of eschatological grace. As such, law and grace are not antagonistic, but complementary. For further study on the discussion on law and grace see LaRondelle, *Our Creator Redeemer: An Introduction to Biblical Covenant Theology*, 103–10. Borchert observes in that context: “For Christians who have been brought up with a negative view of the law of Moses derived from a misreading of Paul and an unnecessary bifurcating of law and grace, the temptation is to read this verse as a negative slap at the law. But such is hardly the intention of the evangelist. In the Gospel of John, Moses is regarded as a positive servant of God (e.g., 5:45–47; 6:32; 7:19–23). The problem for Jesus in this Gospel was not with Moses and the law; the problem was with the disobedient Jews who *misused* Moses and the law (e.g., 6:31–32; 9:28–29). Moses and the law were together viewed as a gracious gift from God.” Borchert, *John 1-11*, 123.

and ceremonies of the OT were fulfilled through the life and death of Jesus (Matt 5:17-18). “Type met antitype in Christ (Col 2:16.17)”.⁷² Therefore, ἀλήθεια comes in John 1:17 with the idea of realization and establishment of a new soteriological order, which is grace through Jesus’ life and death. In other words, truth makes grace possible, as it is its foundation.

Conclusion

John 1:14.17 offers deep insights into the correct understanding of the phrase ‘grace and truth’, but especially for ἀλήθεια, which is the subject under scrutiny. After having taken a closer look at both verses and comparing them with each other, it can be said that John describes Jesus’ character in John 1:14 with ‘grace and truth’, while he explains in John 1:17 what these characteristics achieve when they are put into practice. For when Jesus puts his grace and truth into action, salvation is the result.

Additionally, John illuminates the richness of meaning of ἀλήθεια by disclosing the various layers that are linked to the term. Put together, these different layers shape a more complete picture of the term truth: (1) truth is a characteristic of YHWH; (2) Jesus’ divine glory depicts not only his visible glory, but also the quality of his character, which includes truth; (3) consequently, Jesus is truth; (4) through the adaption of truth to Jesus he is equal to YHWH, which shows that he is God; (5) the truth as it is found in Jesus Christ fulfills OT types and ceremonies; (6) only realized truth, through Jesus’ life and death, makes grace possible; (7) truth is fundamental to salvation.

Considering the question on intellectual and relational truth, it can be stated that ἀλήθεια addresses both aspects in John 1:14.17. It is intellectual, because it transports

⁷² Nichol, *Matthew to John*, 905.

theological concepts and ideas that are linked to the term. However, ἀλήθεια is highly relational as well. It is strongly connected to the eschatological grace of God and describes Jesus' character, his being and personal effort by becoming human. Consequently, ἀλήθεια operates on the basis of relationship. The idea of relationship was already implied through the concept of Jesus' 'tabernacling' among humans.⁷³ Apart from this, the semantic examination has shown the same, since the Hebrew equivalent of ἀλήθεια, אֱמֶת, functions as the attribute of a person. The same goes for ἀλήθεια in John's usage. This is essential and the reader must keep that in mind throughout the whole discussion to follow.

Jesus: Truth as Freedom in John 8:31-36

Setting the Stage

The setting of John 8 slowly prepares the way for Jesus' statement in John 8:32, where he says: "and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." The story starts with Jesus being tried by the Pharisees in John 8:1-11, where he is confronted with a woman that was caught committing adultery and is about to be stoned. The story contains a lot of questions and insights, but these are not included in this study. What is important to know is that Jesus frees the woman from her miserable situation and tells her in John 8:11 not to condemn her. Then she is called not to sin anymore.

⁷³ This relational image becomes even more evident, when one considers Rev 21:3: "According to John 1:14, in Christ, the incarnate Word, God tabernacled temporarily among humans, and they beheld his glory. Now, at the consummation, the new Jerusalem is where God tabernacles with his people in 'ultimate unity,' and where his glory is manifested throughout eternity, as 'prefigured through the centuries by the tabernacle.'" Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, 2nd ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2009), 589.

John 8:12 seems to tie in this story of the woman. Jesus speaks again to the Jews and Pharisees, as they are the ones who answer in John 8:13 to him. However, Jesus proclaims in John 8:12: “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” This ties into the woman’s experience. The command not to sin anymore (8:11), is equal to Jesus’ command to follow him. He states that the one who follows him does not willfully walk any longer in darkness, as he knows God (1 John 2:3-6).

But what is even more interesting is the absolute “I am” statement Jesus makes.⁷⁴ Walking in darkness and not having the light of life versus having the light of life by following him, sharply contrasts to each other. Following Christ means life, rejecting him results in death. This is strengthened by the second absolute statement Jesus is making in John 8:24b: “I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins.” It is proper to say that Jesus indirectly claims divinity through both “I am” sayings, as salvation is only accessible in him. In John 8:58 his claim, being God, is finally expressed.⁷⁵ Up to this point two things became clear: (1) Salvation is only found in Jesus and (2) Jesus implies by his absolute statements that he is God.

⁷⁴ Although it is very interesting to dive in to the theology of the “I am” sayings in the Gospel of John, it would go far. For an extensive overview see Porter, *John, His Gospel, and Jesus: In Pursuit of the Johannine Voice*, 120–48. See also Richard Bauckham, *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple: Narrative, History, and Theology in the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007), 243–50; A. M. Okorie, “The Self-Revelation of Jesus in the ‘I Am’ Sayings of John’s Gospel,” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 28, no. 5 (2001): 486–490; Billy E. Simmons, “A Christology of the ‘I Am’ Sayings in the Gospel of John,” *The Theological Educator* 38, no. 3 (1988): 94–103.

⁷⁵ The flow of the text is already heading to John 8:58, where Jesus clearly reveals himself as being God. This is widely recognized among theologians. See for example Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, 768-74.

The last element that is added in John 8:12-20 to these two observations, is Jesus' debate with the Pharisees on his truthfulness. After Jesus called the attention of the Pharisees in John 8:12 they accuse him of being a liar in v. 13, saying: "You are bearing witness about yourself; your testimony is not true". They try to catch him with his own words spoken in John 5:31: "If I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not true".⁷⁶

The Greek word that is used in both accounts is ἀληθής and "describes something as credible, aligning with reality, reliable, or trustworthy."⁷⁷ However, the Pharisees seem to miss that Jesus already told them in John 5:32 that "there is another who bears witness about me, and I know that the testimony that he bears about me is true." That is exactly the same he goes on to declare in John 8:14-18. He begins in v. 14 to explain that he is able to testify truthfully of himself, for he knows his own origin and destination. He does so, because he knows who he is, which was already indicated in v. 12, namely God in flesh, who cannot lie (Titus 1:2). Then, Jesus criticizes that the Pharisees judge by earthly standards (John 8:15), while he judges righteous in accordance with his Father (v. 16). Finally, Jesus repeats that his testimony, being the light of the world, is true, because the Father who has sent him approves him (v. 17-18).

In both accounts, John 5:31-32 and 8:17-18, God is the validator of Jesus being true. This links to the previous discussion on how God the Father was identified as the truth. However, John 8:16 shows that God is not only the validator of Jesus' truthfulness, but the one who is closest to him. In this regard, John 8:28-29 confirms that the capability

⁷⁶ The principles for having more witnesses is found in Num 35:39; Deut 17:6 and is also found in the Mishna. "No one may testify concerning himself" (Kethuboth 2.9). Found in Nichol, *Matthew to John*, 987.

⁷⁷ See under ἀληθής in Ritzema, "LBD."

of giving a truthful testimony is based on Jesus' relationship with God the Father. Obviously, Jesus functions as the mediator between God and man. However, the Pharisees do not accept this message, since they do not have a relationship with the Father.

To sum it up, three characteristics of this passage, namely freedom, divinity and truthfulness, direct the reader to Jesus' final statement in John 8:31-36. There, he openly claims the right and capability to set humanity free. Jesus is able to do so, because he is authorized by God the Father.

True Freedom in John 8:31-36

Jesus' divinity is not a new concept in the Bible, as was discussed in John 1. The fact that Jesus is the truth was also introduced in the first chapter of the Gospel. What is a new concept, however, is the very fact that truth includes freedom. John 1:17 already implied this, but in 8:31-36 Jesus declares it himself. In the following paragraphs the most important aspects of John 8:31-36 will be determined.

First of all, one has to note that there are two different groups within the passage. In John 8:30 the text states that many believed in Jesus and v. 31 shows Jesus, talking to these believers.⁷⁸ In contrast to this group, Jesus' objectors appear in John 8:33, and question Jesus' statement that he made in v. 31-32. It is appropriate to differentiate between these two groups of believing and unbelieving Jews. The reason why is that it would appear unusual that those who believed in Jesus were the ones who tried to kill him (8:40) and were condemned by him (8:44). Be that as it may, Jesus speaks in John 8:31 to those who opened their hearts and wanted them to understand, what real

⁷⁸ For discussion on πιστεύω see Trail, *An Exegetical Summary of John 1-9*, 440-41.

discipleship means. Hence, Jesus states in John 8:31-32: “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

In John 8:31-32 Jesus issues an order that has to be examined. First of all, both καὶ conjunctions in John 8:32 are the inevitable result of Jesus’ statement in v. 31.⁷⁹ In this account the order appears as follows: Abiding in Jesus’ word leads to a knowledge of truth, which leads to freedom, as truth sets one free. Plainly, λόγος refers here to Jesus’ teachings in the previous verses. So, the one who abides in his teachings is truly a disciple. Μένω, ‘to abide’, involves a “continuation of a personal bond” and has a fundamental “local meaning in Greek”.⁸⁰ Thus, Jesus’ word is the subject of μένω ἐν in John 8:31. Therefore, Jesus’ audience is called to be anchored to Jesus’ word as it is essential to freedom. For perseverance leads to freedom in the end. Ridderbos notes: “The genuineness of their discipleship must prove itself in persevering continuance in the word of Jesus and in doing his word (cf. 13:35; 15:8).”⁸¹

But there is more to this. The connection between John 8:31 and John 15:4 suggests that abiding in Jesus’ word means to abide in him. Μείνατε, the aorist active imperative, is used in both instances. In John 15:4 Jesus says: “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.” Abiding in Christ points to “continuous abiding in a living

⁷⁹ Compare also with *Ibid.*, 441.

⁸⁰ H. Hübner, “Μένω,” ed. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 2:407.

⁸¹ Herman Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 308. In the context of this discussion Bernard adds: “The external token of a man’s “abiding” in Christ, is that he keeps His commandments (1 Jn. 3:24); and, as to love God and to love man are the great commandments, he that abides in love abides in God (1 Jn. 4:16) More generally, he that abides in Christ ought to walk after His example (1 Jn. 2:6); in other words, he “bears fruit” (15:2). Of one who has perfectly realised this “abiding,” it is said “he sinneth not” (1 Jn. 3:6). Such an one has the secret of efficacious prayer (15:7). He has *life* (6:57), and naturally will have confidence at the Great Parousia (1 Jn. 2:28).” See Bernard, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St John*, 1:212.

connection with Christ”⁸² and describes a reciprocal process at the same time. The one who abides in Christ, invites Christ to abide in him. The one who abides in Christ, will come to know ἀλήθεια and as a result he will find freedom. The reciprocal element in John 8:31-32 is knowledge of truth and freedom that becomes a reality for the believer, when the believer abides in Christ. Obviously, this process is conditional. First comes abidance, then truth and freedom follow.

The reason why Jesus calls those who abide in his word (i.e. his teachings) true disciples, has to do with the fact that he proclaims the true message of the one who has sent him (see discussion above). Accepting the true message, transforms the believer from an ordinary believer into an authentic/true believer. In other words, the believer becomes a partaker of truth if he acknowledges the truth. The verbs of John 8:32, ‘to know’ and ‘to set free’, which will be discussed in the following subparagraph, are used in future tense and support the idea that abiding in Jesus’ word is central to furthering spiritual progress. In this manner, Jesus indirectly warns his audience of the danger of not being a true disciple by rejecting his teachings.

The aforementioned two verbs of John 8:32, ἐλευθερώω, ‘to set free’, and γινώσκω, ‘to know’, help to understand the meaning of ἀλήθεια in the setting of 8:32 more fully. First, ἐλευθερώω occurs only seven times in the NT (John 8:32.36; Rom 6:18.22; 8:2.21; Gal 5:1). It is always used in the context of slavery of sin and describes the deliverance from sin that comes through Christ. This is highly important. The truth which Jesus promises has the power to set the Sinner free from sin.⁸³ Secondly, it is

⁸² Nichol, *Matthew to John*, 1042.

⁸³ This ties to the two absolute statements in John 8:12.24, where Jesus declares himself as the only way to find freedom from sin. John 8:24 especially stresses the importance of believing in Jesus, as disbelief causes death.

interesting to notice that ἀλήθεια is combined with γινώσκω, “to know”. Γινώσκω was already discussed and it was shown that it can have a relational meaning. The same goes for John 8:32, where Jesus talks about knowing truth. A careful look at John 8:32.36 proves that Jesus indirectly equates himself with truth. The linguistic parallelism is unambiguous. In John 8:32 it is the *truth* that sets one free, but in v. 36 it is the *Son* who sets one free. This is of huge importance, for Jesus declares himself the truth. The nominative use of ἀλήθεια in John 8:32 supports this view, as truth gets personified. This ties to John 1:14.17, where John already declared Jesus as being the saving truth. However now, Jesus claims this very fact cleverly throughout his explanation on truth and tells his audience that knowing truth refers to a personal/relational knowledge of Christ.

There are several inferences that can be drawn from these observations so far. (1) When Jesus calls the believers to abide in him (8:31), in order to get to know the truth that sets them free (8:32), he actually calls them to get to know him personally. In other words: Jesus invites the believer to step into a relationship with him. (2) Jesus as the personified truth is the only source that is able to share the gift of salvation. As such, ἀλήθεια describes Jesus in John 8:32.36 as truth that has the power to deliver the sinner from sin. In other words: Truth is freedom, as it includes the Gospel. (3) Consequently, personified truth has to be active. It is impossible for personified truth to be passive, as truth or Jesus does something for the sinner. Kinghorn states:

And so the truth that Jesus proclaims is an active truth. It challenges one to interpret human history and to act accordingly. It is a compelling truth. Once heard and understood it does not leave anyone unaffected. It does

something to those who hear the words of Jesus. It puts them on the trajectory of liberation.⁸⁴

(4) Jesus Christ is able to break the chains of sin and to give eternal life. But he is only able to do so, if the sinner abides in him, and gets to know the truth. Besides that, knowing means more than to understand truth exclusively intellectually, but to believe and to act according to this truth. This was already implied by Jesus' statement in John 8:24b: "for unless you *believe* that I am he you will die in your sins." Here, Jesus calls his listeners to believe in him, while he calls the believers in 8:32 to know him. This carries a congruent meaning. (5) Truth is also intellectual and cannot be reduced to its relational component alone. Truth or Jesus has to be known and understood. If this is not the case, it cannot be relational, for it cannot unfold its power. In other words: Liberating truth requires acceptance and comprehension:

Liberating truth sets in only when one recognizes *who* Jesus is. Truth is indissolubly linked to the *person* of Christ. Understanding the person of Christ means falling in with his own explanation – i.e., interpreting Jesus as he wishes to be interpreted.⁸⁵

(6) There is only one who can save humanity and this is God himself. The very fact that Jesus describes himself as liberating truth, supports his divine claim. Jesus gives his audience a hint that he is God in flesh.

Apart from these important observations, it seems that Jesus' unbelieving audience does not understand the scope of his statement in John 8:32. They only see things on the earthly or horizontal level (8:33), while Jesus addresses the heavenly or

⁸⁴ Johann Kinghorn, "John 8:32 - The Freedom of Truth," *International Review of Mission* 79, no. 315 (1990): 319.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 315.

transcendental level (8:34-36). The Jews were proud being the descendent of Abraham and considered themselves being spiritually independent.⁸⁶ But Jesus shatters their proudness by revealing their inner condition. A condition that is worse than earthly slavery, as it is slavery to sin that causes eternal death. In his comment on sonship, Jesus underlines his claim: The one who commits sin, is a slave to sin (8:34).⁸⁷ Spiritually spoken, the Jews are not sons but slaves (8:35), while only Jesus is able to introduce sinners to sonship.⁸⁸ But to receive the title of a son presupposes the acceptance of Christ: “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12). This is a perpetual theme that runs through the whole Gospel: Salvation presupposes acceptance.

Conclusion

Freedom, divinity and truthfulness are elementary characteristics of Jesus’ identity and were presented to Jesus’ audience up to John 8:36. The ironic element of the passage is found in the very fact that the Jews are presented as those who suppose to know the truth, but do not know truth at all. True knowledge and freedom are only found in Christ. Still, Jesus leaves no doubts about being the personification of truth. Apart from this, the declaration of being the only truth that grants freedom and saves life, underlines the relational nature of ἀλήθεια. Only by knowing Christ, the sinner can

⁸⁶ Obviously, their declaration: “We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, ‘You will become free?’”, cannot address their national situation. It would be ignorant and absurd to claim national independency, although they were occupied by the Romans. Therefore, the only sensible interpretation of their words is to see it as a reference to their spiritual independency, which is implied by their reference to Abraham – the father of Judaism.

⁸⁷ Compare John 8:34 with Rom 7:14-25

⁸⁸ “The Jews boasted of their descent from Abraham (see on v. 33). But Abraham had two sons, the one of a bondwoman and the other of the freewoman (see the allegory of Gal. 4). The Jews were slaves (see on John 8:34), and hence in danger of being rejected. But the Son could emancipate them by altering their status (see on chs. 3:3, 4; 8:36).” Nichol, *Matthew to John*, 990.

experience soul saving truth. So, the main thought of John 8:31-36 is that Jesus is truth that sets one free. This is accomplished only by acknowledging who he is and having a relationship with him. Despite all that, the complete revelation of Jesus as the liberating truth, is reserved for a later stage in the Gospel of John.

Jesus: Truth, Lies and the Devil in John 8:37-47

Setting the Stage

John chapter 8 builds up to the climax on truth in the Gospel of John. On the one hand, this has to do with the frequency of ἀλήθεια, since it is used seven times in John 8. But on the other hand, the intensity of the dispute between Jesus and the Jews increases step by step, until it finally unloads itself in John 8:44.⁸⁹

The background of the discussion is the Abraham-motive that was brought up by the Jews as a defense against their spiritual bondage that Jesus addressed in John 8:33. After Jesus declared that only the Son is able to set sinners free, he goes on to take up the Abraham-motive. He knows that they are Abraham's descendants, but criticizes that his word is not in their hearts, which is why they want to kill him (8:37). This creates a sharp contrast between the Pharisees and Abraham who lived according to God's teachings. Actually, Jesus uses this contrast to point to an alarming circumstance: "I speak of what I have seen with *my Father*, and you do what you have heard from *your father*" (John 8:38). Obviously, there exists an antagonism between these two different fathers, which builds the framework for the discussion on ἀλήθεια that follows. However, the Pharisees do not understand the scope of Jesus' words. They protest that Abraham is their father

⁸⁹ The passage under study is limited to 8:47, as v. 48 introduces another unit. The focus is not laid on ἀλήθεια, but centers around Jesus' honor.

(8:39), what is bluntly denied by Jesus, since they do not really live according to the teachings of Abraham, but instead desire to kill Jesus (8:39-40).

The spiritual component of the discussion is already apparent, since Jesus states that their moral and ethical standards are corrupted. Consequently, he repeats that they have a different father, which turns out to be Satan. As a result, the Pharisees insult Jesus as being born out of wedlock and claim to have God as their father (8:41). Here, the inconsistency of their argumentation becomes concrete. Their slandering reveals their true spiritual condition, which is fully contradictory to the claim of being children of God. Without taking a note of their insult, Jesus argues on the relational element of knowing God in John 8:42: “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me.” Having God as Father assumes true knowledge of God. The fact that they do not know God is the reason why he is not really their Father. Additionally, Jesus’ statement is linked to Jesus’ divine mission that is authorized by God the Father, in order to reinforce his authority. However, with every repetition and statement on paternity, the intensity of the discussion rises and finally concludes in John 8:43-44:

Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

Jesus answers his own rhetorical question on their deafness in v. 43 by revealing to them in v. 44 their true father: the devil. This is dramatic irony, as the ones who presume themselves to be children of God, are actually children of the devil. In doing so, Jesus solves the question on paternity, which is a logical conclusion one can gather from

this chapter. It started with the discussion on Jesus' truthfulness and shifted to the discussion of what being a true disciple means in John 8:31. This shift is not a break, but a logical continuation of the previous discussion. True discipleship is inseparably intertwined with the truthfulness of Christ. Rejecting Jesus' truthfulness prevents true discipleship, which is obviously the case with the unbelieving Jews, since they cannot bear to hear his word (8:43). The λόγος, 'word', that Jesus addresses, also refers to his teachings.⁹⁰ John 8:47 concludes with this thought: "Whoever is of God hears the words [ρήματα] of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God."⁹¹

Truth in the Middle of the Conflict

After having clarified the framework of the passage, it is necessary to take a closer look at ἀλήθεια in John 8:37-47. The central question is, if ἀλήθεια is best understood as relational or intellectual? At first sight it does not seem that the discussion on ἀλήθεια points towards the relational concept, which was the case in the previous occurrences. Nevertheless, the discussion on relational truth builds the backbone for John 8:37-47.

To begin with, one has to take a look at John 8:40. The verb λαλέω, 'to talk', is used in the perfect tense which describes an action that occurred in the past but affects the present. Moreover, "the emphasis of the perfect is not the past action so much as it is as

⁹⁰ This is reflected by the use of λόγος, in connection with the possessive adjective ἐμόν that connects John 8:31 to v. 37.43. With every use of λόγος in the context of John 8:31-43, Jesus refers to 8:31, where λόγος is identified as his teachings. However, his λόγος is not really in their hearts (v. 37.43), for they have another spiritual father.

⁹¹ There is no difficulty with the use of ῥήματα, which is not the same word as λόγος, for John "always uses ῥήμα in a collective sense of Jesus' words, including in the sense that he speaks God's words (3:34; 8:47), which he receives and passes on (17:8)." W. Radl, "Ῥήμα," ed. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider, *The Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 3:211.

such but the present ‘state of affairs’ resulting from the past action.”⁹² The state of affairs is the Jewish animosity towards Jesus, because he told the truth. Here, ἀλήθεια is used by Jesus as a generic term for his teachings. This is strengthened by v. 43. There Jesus laments: “Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word.” He indirectly connects λόγος, a term for his teachings, with ἀλήθεια, for both words denote the same. In addition to that, γινώσκω favors the intellectual nuance of the verb in v. 43, for it is best understood as ‘to come to an understanding’. Consequently, Jesus’ teachings or his truth, represents an intellectual construct that is not understood by the Jews. In other words, they are not capable of understanding it, since the devil is their father (8:44). Accordingly, the passage leaves no doubts that Jesus represents an intellectual construct that in turn follows a certain lifestyle.

Moreover, λαλέω connects John 8:40 with v. 44 and contrasts Jesus with Satan. Jesus testifies about the devil: “He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.” Several times, the text underlines the very fact that the devil, the father of lies,⁹³ and truth and lies are totally opposed to each other (1 John 2:21). The word ἵστημι, ‘to stand’, is used to designate that someone is “firmly committed in conviction or belief.”⁹⁴ This is not the case with the devil and truth. In addition, it describes “that which lasts and is stable, not subject to change or decay.”⁹⁵

⁹² Michael S. Heiser and Vincent M. Setterholm, *Glossary of Morpho-Syntactic Database Terminology* (Lexham Press, 2013), Logos 7 Electronic Version.

⁹³ Actually, the plural of “lies” is not found in the text but the 3. Sg. pronoun αὐτοῦ. It is widespread understood as a reference to lies. See Trail, *An Exegetical Summary of John 1-9*, 459.

⁹⁴ Arndt William et al., eds., “Στήκω,” *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 944.

⁹⁵ Walter Grundmann, “Στήκω, Ἰστημι,” ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 7:651.

This may be true of God (2 Tim 2:19), but in combination with the devil ἵστημι suggests something else. Grundmann confirms this in Matt 12:25.26:

Jesus says that the household or city which is divided will not last, and He applies this to the kingdom of Satan, Mt. 12:25 f. Of Satan it is said: ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ οὐκ ἕστηκεν [...], Jn. 8:44. Because he is the father of lies he has no standing in the kingdom of truth and will inevitably perish.⁹⁶

By using ἵστημι in John 8:44, Jesus does two things: (1) He shows that Satan and truth are completely opposed to each other. This is strengthened by Jesus' categorical statement that "there is no truth in him", which is followed by the fact that he "speaks out of his own character". (2) Jesus reveals the fate that awaits Satan and his followers. Not standing in the kingdom of truth, signifies destruction and death.

The fact that there is no truth in the devil, makes lie his fundamental characteristic. Which is why it is necessary to take a closer look at ψεῦδος. The word appears only one time in the Gospel of John and ten times in the whole NT. It means 'lie' or 'falsehood'. Hence, it describes everything that is false or untrue.⁹⁷ Giesen goes on to explain that ψεῦδος is "never understood from a purely ethical perspective, but rather always as a sign of belonging."⁹⁸ This is reflected by Jesus in John 8:44, as he regards the Jews as the devil's children (see also 1 John 2:22). They even have the same desires as the devil, for they want to kill Jesus.⁹⁹ Their spiritual identification with the devil is described as being completed.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ Francesco Bianchi, "Deception," ed. Douglas Mangum, Rachel Klippenstein, and Rebekah Hurst, *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014), Logos 7 Electronic Version.

⁹⁸ H. Giesen, "Ψεῦδος," ed. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 498.

⁹⁹ Ἐπιθυμία, desire, is generally negative in the NT and describes sinful desires. Accordingly, every sinful desire has its origin in Satan, the author of sin. See also Francesco Bianchi, "Desire," ed.

Apart from this, lie illustrates in the Johannine setting “not just error but an active contesting of the truth, i.e., unbelief.”¹⁰⁰ This kind of active contesting is clearly revealed by the Jews. Nevertheless, Conzelmann writes on the profane Greek usage of ψεῦδος that lie “cannot be viewed merely as the opposite of truth.”¹⁰¹ This may be true to the profane Greek usage, but a look at the Gospel of John suggests the opposite. The personification of the devil with lies in John 8:44 identifies the devil as the father of lies, which leads to the conclusion that ψεῦδος is the antithesis to ἀλήθεια in the Gospel of John. This is underlined by the fact that both concepts are represented as opposites of each other. In other words, the passage contrasts the Father of truth with the father of lies.¹⁰² Further support is found in a broader comparison of the devil and Jesus that is primarily based on John 8:44, but includes previous elements of the discussion. The devil is (1) a murderer from the beginning,¹⁰³ (2) a liar and (3) the father of lies. But Jesus is (1) the giver of life,

Douglas Mangum, Rachel Klippenstein, and Rebekah Hurst, *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014), Logos 7 Electronic Version; Friedrich Büchsel, “Θυμός, Ἐπιθυμία, Ἐπιθυμέω, Ἐπιθυμητής, Ἐνθυμέομαι, Ἐνθύμησις,” ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 170–71. It appears only one time in the Gospel of John, but is used by John in a similar way in 1 John 2:16-17. There it is used in combination with the word “world”. It says in v. 16: “the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life - is not from the Father but is from the world.” 1 John 2:15 anticipates: “If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” Consequently, it has to be devilish, which shows that John always uses ἐπιθυμία negatively.

¹⁰⁰ Hans Conzelmann, “Ψεῦδος, Ψεύδομαι, Ψευδής, Ψεῦσμα, Ψεύστης, Ἀψευδής, Ἄψευστος,” ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 9:602.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 9:595. Conzelmann following Frisk, adds to the discussion on the same page: “The terms truth and lie are usually taken to be logically contradictory but in relation to linguistic modes of expression (in the Indo-Eur. languages) they are by no means par. A secondary abstract noun serves to express truth while a primary verbal noun usually expresses falsehood. A lie is an activity or the result of an activity but truth is always present as an abstraction denoting something independent of any activity.”

¹⁰² It is fair to call Jesus the Father of truth and thereby equating him with God the Father, who is the God of truth, for the Gospel of John and Jesus himself leave no doubts about Jesus being God in human flesh.

¹⁰³ When it says in John 8:44 that the devil is a murderer from the beginning, it is correct to assume that Jesus points back to the deception of Adam and Eve, which causes human suffering and death. See also Trail, *An Exegetical Summary of John 1-9*, 459.

(2) the truth, revealer of truth, the Father of truth and (3) he enables “mankind to share in its [truth’s] reality and power.”¹⁰⁴

However, the question is what the antithetical use of ψεῦδος tells the reader about the nature of ἀλήθεια? First and foremost, it shows that truth is opposed to falsehood.¹⁰⁵ In this manner ἀλήθεια is factual, as it is not the relational element which is in focus, but the intellectual construct of Jesus’ teachings that are opposed to the devil’s construct of lies. The central element of this is described by John in 1 John 2:22: “Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son.” A Christology that denies Jesus as Messiah and God, is deeply devilish.

However, the collective use of ψεῦδος and ἀλήθεια in 1 John 2:22 points back to John 8:44. Although the audience of John in 1 John is different to the audience of Jesus in 8:44, the principle goes for both groups. Everyone who partakes in the denial of Jesus as Messiah, is the ἀντίχριστος.¹⁰⁶ This denial builds the continuous conflict between Jesus and the Jews in the Gospel of John. It is not a relational issue, but it is an intellectual denial of truth that results from relationship with the devil. Porter concludes by saying:

Even though there is a relational dimension, the heart of the dialogue is about the notion of truth itself, not the relationship of his hearers to Jesus. Jesus states categorically, or, we might say, propositionally, that the devil and the truth are not compatible because there is no truth in the devil.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Compare with Beasley-Murray, *John*, 135.

¹⁰⁵ See also D. M. Crump, “Truth,” ed. Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 860.

¹⁰⁶ See also Colin G. Kruse, *The Letters of John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 106; Francis D. Nichol, ed., *Philippians to Revelation*, The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary 7 (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1980), 645.

¹⁰⁷ Porter, *John, His Gospel, and Jesus: In Pursuit of the Johannine Voice*, 192.

As such, ἀλήθεια functions in the setting of John 8:37-47 as the intellectual delineation to the concept of satanic lies.

Conclusion

The passage of John 8:37-47 describes the conflict between the Father of truth and the father of lies. The matter of truth is described as the central conflict between the devil and Jesus. The war that is fought is an information war. Jesus informs his audience about this great controversy between himself and Satan, where two different ideologies fight against each other. In other words, the anti-revelation of Satan against the truth of God.¹⁰⁸ The central element is the denial of Christ. Especially John 8:44 describes this intellectual fight, as it shows the danger of the satanic system. Evidently, there is no existence of neutrality on spiritual matters, for the whole chapter shows that this conflict is won on the relational basis. This means that the understanding and acceptance of a certain ideology leads to a spiritual relationship that defines paternity. In other words: Every relationship presupposes a certain knowledge that is existential in order to continue. Acknowledging Jesus' truth leads to a relationship with God, while rejecting his truth is equal to believing the lies of the devil and having a relationship with him.¹⁰⁹ This is very drastic and underlines the intensity of the conflict that Jesus is facing.

Thus, Jesus' statements in John 8:37-47 has to be understood as a sincere warning to reflect and repent. Yet, it would be inappropriate to conclude that anyone who does not

¹⁰⁸ Giesen brings up the term "antirevelation", which is understood as the devil's counter-attack on God's truth. See Giesen, "Ψεῦδος," 498.

¹⁰⁹ Maccini says: "True belief involves not only perception, recognition and understanding, but decision dependence and obedience [...] For John, evidence of true faith is supplied not by verb tenses of believing and knowing, [...], but by remaining in his word." Robert Gordon Maccini, *Her Testimony is True: Women as Witnesses according to John*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 125 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 161.

know all truth at once is automatically on the devil's side and lost. The passage rather stresses the importance of growing and getting acquainted with truth and making decisions according to truth. To sum up: Acknowledging truth sets sinners free, ignoring truth leads to bondage and death. As such, the absoluteness of ἀλήθεια is self-evident, since the effects of its rejection or acceptance are absolute. This is the bottom line according to the discussion of ἀλήθεια in John Chapter 8.

Jesus: The Way, the Truth and the Life

At many stages the Gospel of John addresses truth. However, there is a difference between given implications that are done by the author throughout the progress of the Gospel and Jesus' spoken self-revelation. The reader of the Gospel is introduced to the topic of truth right at the beginning and understands the implications that are made throughout its progress. What the reader knows from the beginning is slowly unfolded to the immediate audience of Jesus. Jesus passes through several stages of self-revelation towards his relation to truth, until he unambiguously expresses himself as being truth. Maybe, the reason for Jesus' approach is simple. Would Jesus have claimed to be the God of truth, right at the beginning of his ministry, it is quite conceivable that he would have been ignored or silenced quickly. Therefore, Jesus starts his ministry, manifests it through his wonders and teachings and thus unfolds his real nature step by step to his audience. One could even say that his teachings and wonders function as a life assurance, as they prove him to be the one he claims to be. Without them he could never hold on to his professed authority.

However, it is evident at any stage of the Gospel that those who really believe in him, also know who he is, although they may not fully understand his ministry. But those

who doubt Jesus are the ones, who continually ask where he is from and who he really is. Considering John 14:6, Jesus' statement does not come as a big surprise to the careful reader of the Gospel. It is the logical consequence of the previous. Indirectly, Jesus stated it several times before, yet it is the first time that he openly expresses himself as being truth: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." The timing of his statement is of interest.

The Gospel of John can be divided into four sections: (1) The prologue 1:1-18, (2) the book of signs 1:19-12:50, (3) the book of glory 13:1-20:31 and (4) the epilogue 21:1-25.¹¹⁰ While the book of signs covers the three and a half years of Jesus' ministry, the book of glory covers only the last week of Jesus' life.¹¹¹ John 14:6 falls into the last week of Jesus' ministry, where Jesus gathers his disciples in the Upper Room (13:1-2). The crucifixion is about to happen and the process of self-revelation regarding truth reaches its climax. What was clear from the beginning of the Gospel, is now openly expressed by Jesus to his disciples after three and a half years of his ministry. Three and a half years of ministry, where his miracles and teachings supported this very claim. As such, John 14:6 builds the final compelling self-declaration of Jesus being truth.

Setting the Stage

In John 13:21 Jesus is troubled by the fact that Judas is about to betray him. After Judas left, Jesus proclaims: "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him." This is a clear reference to his death which is outlined by him in v. 33, saying: "Yet

¹¹⁰ Brown, *The Gospel According to John (I-XII): Introduction, Translation and Notes*, cxxxviii–cxxxix.

¹¹¹ The book of glory is called the book of passion by Dodd. See C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 289. However, together they describe perfectly what the last week of Christ is about: passion and glory.

a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, ‘Where I am going you cannot come.’” Peter does not understand the scope of Jesus’ words and asks him where he is going, whereupon Jesus answers him in v. 36: “Where I am going you cannot follow me now, but you will follow afterward.”

What follows is the promise of Peter not to leave Jesus and even to die for him. Later, this is countered by Jesus’ prediction of the threefold denial of Peter (v. 37-38). Then, in 14:1, Jesus commands his disciples not to be afraid. This is a reaction to what has been previously proclaimed by him and the uncertainty that his words caused. He goes on to promise that he will prepare a place in his Father’s house for them (14:2) and adds in John 14:3: “I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.” Then he concludes in 14:4: “And you know the way to where I am going.” This moves Thomas to pick up Jesus’ words and to ask like Peter in v. 5: “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” Self-evidently, Thomas asks for a literal way to be revealed. This makes the contradiction even more evident, since Jesus talks about a spiritual way. Obviously, the disciples are perplexed by Jesus’ words, which shows that they had not understood his teachings.

To conclude, the context of John 14:6 is one of parting and the disciples seem to be unprepared and lost. In the midst of this uncertainty Jesus finally proclaims confidently: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” Jesus himself is the spiritual way that leads to the Father.

Truth in John 14:6

There could be much said about John 14:6 in combination with v.7 and the whole setting of the passage, but the central question is what is new to the concept of ἀλήθεια in

John 14:6. In this context, it is necessary to address ὁδός, ‘way’, and ζωή, ‘life’, briefly in order to get a full picture. First of all, ἀλήθεια finds itself within an ‘I am saying’, where the ἐγώ εἰμί formula implies Jesus’ divine nature.¹¹² Thus, the triad the way, the truth and the life, has to be understood in the light of his divinity.

However, the immediate context of John 14:6 shows that the focus is not placed on ἀλήθεια or ζωή, but on ὁδός.¹¹³ Ὁδός builds the backdrop for Jesus statement in 14:6 (see v. 4.5), while the subordinated clause functions as the logical conclusion of the main clause in v. 6 saying: “no one comes to the Father except through me”. Many theologians agree that ἀλήθεια and ζωή have the function to explain ὁδός.¹¹⁴ It is true that ἀλήθεια and ζωή support the idea of ὁδός, but it would be wrong to see a subordination of these two words to ὁδός.¹¹⁵ Although they deepen and explain the meaning of ὁδός, καί functions in John 14:6 as a separator between all three words. Hence, it gives every word

¹¹² Morris states: “ἐγώ εἰμι in LXX renders the Hebrew אֲנִי יְיָ, which is the way God speaks (cf. Deut. 32:39; Isa. 41:4; 43:10; 46:4, etc.). The Hebrew may carry a reference to the meaning of the divine name יהוה (cf. Exod. 3:14). We should almost certainly understand John’s use of the term to reflect that in the LXX. It is the style of deity, and it points to the eternity of God according to the strictest understanding of the continuous significance of the present εἰμι. He continually IS. Cf. Abbott: ‘taken here, along with other declarations about what Jesus IS, it seems to call upon the Pharisees to believe that the Son of man is not only the Deliverer but also one with the Father in the unity of the Godhead.’” See Morris, *The Gospel According to John, Rev. Ed.*, 419. Haenchen also admits that ἐγώ εἰμί is “a reference to his eternal being”. See Ernst Haenchen, *John 2: A Commentary on the Gospel of John, Chapters 7-21*, trans. Robert W. Funk, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 30. Gulley says the same in Norman R. Gulley, *Systematic Theology: God as Trinity* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2011), 13.

¹¹³ For a historical overview on the different interpretations of John 14:6 see Frederick Dale Bruner, *Gospel of John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), iBooks Version.

¹¹⁴ e.g. Ball, who follows De La Potterie: “It is ὁδός which is the most important word, the nouns ἀλήθεια and ζωή do no more than explain it; in other words, the words “the truth and the life” simply serve to make clear in what sense Jesus is ‘the way’. [...] He is the Way in an exclusive sense which means that no one comes to the Father except through him. The words ‘truth’ and ‘life’ should be understood as another explanation of how Jesus is the Way.” David Mark Ball, “*I Am*” in *John’s Gospel: Literary Function, Background and Theological Implications*, vol. 124, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 126.

¹¹⁵ Wilson argues that “each of the nouns in John 14:6 should be regarded as equally significant (or at least almost so), not least because the latter two are not introduced by the preceding discussion (as is “way”) but are introduced without warning.” Alistair I. Wilson, “Send Your Truth: Psalms 42 and 43 as the Background to Jesus’ Self-Description as ‘Truth’ in John 14:6,” *Neotestamentica* 41, no. 1 (2007): 224.

a separate position. For that reason, it is best to have all three words standing for themselves, while ἀλήθεια and ζωή strengthen ὁδός. Jesus is the way, because he is the truth and the life. Together this triad builds a compelling argument.

Ὁδός denotes “a road or way, and figuratively refers either to a person’s conduct or to the new Christian sect.”¹¹⁶ But it also points to the way that brings salvation (Acts 16:17).¹¹⁷ Regarding Jesus, it is best understood as a fundamental statement that he makes. Jesus mediates between heaven and earth, which is why he tells his disciples that they already know the way, since the way to the Father is salvation through him. In doing so, ὁδός points to the fact that Jesus is the only way of salvation (Acts 4:12). This imagery of Jesus as the way, the truth and the life, is not new to the disciples, since it was already implied in John 10:9: “I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.” Here, Jesus referred to himself as the door to life, while he says in John 6:35 “I am bread of life [ζωή]”.¹¹⁸ To the reader it is clear from the beginning that ‘truth’ and ‘life’ are already applied to Jesus in John 1:2-4.14.17.

Ἀλήθεια is used in John 14:6 as a claim of exclusivity. The Greek expresses this with the article ἡ that is used for each of the three characteristics that Jesus refers to when talking about himself. He is ‘the way’, ‘the truth’ and ‘the life’. By speaking that way, Jesus rejects any advance to see him as ‘a truth’ among many other options. Jesus is not a truth, but the truth. Consequently, ἀλήθεια, as understood by Jesus himself, is absolute.

On the basis of being absolute truth, Jesus is able to formulate the claim of being the only

¹¹⁶ Andrew W. Litke, “Journey,” ed. Douglas Mangum, Rachel Klippenstein, and Rebekah Hurst, *Lexham Theological Wordbook* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014), Logos 7 Electronic Version.

¹¹⁷ F.H. Palmer, “Weg,” ed. Helmut Burkhard et al., *Das Grosse Bibellexikon* (Witten: SCM R. Brockhaus, 2009), 1674.

¹¹⁸ On John 10:9 see e.g. Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St John*, trans. Cecily Hastings et al., (London: Burns & Oates, 1980), 2:292; Brodie, *The Gospel According to John: A Literary and Theological Commentary*, 462.

way to the Father. For only being truth lends absoluteness and weight to Jesus' claim being the way. Obviously, ἀλήθεια occupies the central place within the triad of 14:6, as it strengthens the meaning of ὁδός. In addition, John 14:6 manifests Jesus' declaration of being the only true God and Savior, which was done throughout the Gospel. Considering the idea of pluralism, the biblical position on truth, as represented in John 14:6, rejects any form of pluralism. Ἀλήθεια reveals itself as being over-cultural. This means that it is not dependent on the particular cultural context, since it is absolute for all cultural contexts at any time. This is also reflected by the formulation "no one comes to the Father", which expresses an inclusive claim that is absolutely exclusive, for 'no one' means everyone.¹¹⁹ Thus, Jesus represents himself once more as the only way to the Father, which means that he declares himself being salvation.

Jesus' exclusive claim is not only found in John 14:6, but is also present in other passages in the Gospels. For instance, in Luke 14:26 Jesus states: "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple." In Mt 10:37 he says: "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." What these texts have in common is Jesus' exclusive expectation.

Although these two exemplary statements operate on the relational basis, they complete an important aspect of Jesus' self-understanding. There is no human system that

¹¹⁹ Koester adds: "The assumption is that all people are separated from God. To say that 'no one comes to the Father' assumes that all people are separated from the Father – otherwise there would be no need to come to him. This separation from God arises from human sin, and sin figures into the condition of every human being. To say that no one comes to the Father means that sin separates everyone from the Father." Craig R. Koester, *The Word of Life: A Theology of John's Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 210.

is equal to his divine system, may it be relational or intellectual. This is also the case with the truth. The absoluteness of Jesus' relational and intellectual authority is tangible in every moment of his ministry and is freely expressed in John 14:6. Since he is God, everything should be subordinated to him. Therefore, being exclusive and absolute, allows Jesus to declare in John 17:3: "And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." Not only was this clear to Jesus, but also the Apostles understood Jesus' relational and intellectual exclusivism and his absoluteness. This is why Peter is able to proclaim in Acts 4:12: "And there is salvation in no one else [i.e. Jesus], for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

Coming back to John 14:6, the fascinating thing about absolute truth is that it has become an event in the person of Jesus Christ. As was already shown in the discussion on John 8:31-36, truth is active, it is alive and longs for fellowship with sinners. This truth, Jesus Christ, is the "all-encompassing Truth of God, a truth that is personal, active, relational, and gracious."¹²⁰ Such being the case shows that the relational concept of truth is totally foreign to worldly systems, since they see truth as a logical construct that is solely based on the intellect.

To sum it up: (1) Jesus is the way, because he prepares the way to the Father through his death at the cross (John 3:16); (2) Jesus is the absolute truth, because he is the God of truth (John 14:6); (3) Jesus is the life, because as Creator and Savior he gives life (John 1:2-4; 11:25). (4) Therefore, the triad in John 14:6 recaps his very nature by saying

¹²⁰ John R. Franke, "Still the Way, the Truth, and the Life," *Christianity Today* 53, no. 12 (2009): 30.

that he is God, Creator and Savior.¹²¹ (5) In addition to that, it was shown that Jesus' statement on truth in John 14:6 is absolute and leaves no room for pluralism, (6) while it is deeply relational at the same time.

Conclusion

John 14:6 concludes Jesus' ministry and summarizes everything that was said before. The prologue in John 1:14.17 already implied Jesus' final statement in John 14:6. All other passages that were addressed, prepared the way for Jesus' final compelling argument with regard to his relation to truth. Jesus is the messenger of truth and truth itself. Moreover, the text provides an important analogy. The very fact that truth is a person, Jesus, shows that truth has to be relational and intellectual. In the same way that the nature of man cannot be either intellectual or relational, since human beings are both, ἀλήθεια cannot be separated into these two distinct elements as well. The intellectual and the relational dimension is joined together in the human nature. In the same way, these two are embodied and joined together in Christ. For only together, the intellectual and the relational element, represents the fullness of biblical truth, as a person – God. In other words: Based on Jesus' self-declaration in John 14:6, the term 'relational' depicts the active and personal nature of truth, which appeals to the believer's heart through relationship with Jesus Christ. At the same time, the intellectual element provides all knowledge that is necessary to enter into a relationship with Christ.

¹²¹ Rainbow puts it that way: "Being human, he himself traversed a path from this world to his Father (Jn 13:33, 36; 14:28; 16:5). The believer is following Jesus on the same journey. Jesus is the way, first, in that he lovingly laid down his life for his friends, making an atonement that they could not have made for themselves. This act awakens their love for God and establishes them in the relationship with him that is eternal life." Paul A. Rainbow, *Johannine Theology: The Gospels, the Epistles and the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 349.

Apart from this observation, the absoluteness of Jesus' claim is unambiguous. John 14:6 leaves no room for relativistic or pluralistic thinking. This is also reflected by the use of ἀλήθεια, which is always singular and never plural in the Gospel of John. It connects to the fact that God is a person (singular), who embodies absolute truth.

Borchert concludes:

Any hint at universalism, syncretistic patterns of salvation, or reaching the Father through any other means than Jesus is here completely eliminated. The issue of Johannine exclusivism is therefore placed squarely before the reader. Given the fact that the Johannine church was a community struggling for its existence in the midst of powerful pressures from both its Jewish birthing setting and its Hellenistic syncretistic context, the language and antisociety stance may seem to be completely out of touch with today's adoption of pluralism. On the one hand, it is crucial to remember that this text was not written when the church represented a majority perspective. It was a small minority in which it viewed itself as under siege and its members as tempted by the threat of losing their lives, status, or possessions if they did not yield to pressure.¹²²

Holy Spirit: The Spirit of Truth

Although Jesus already alluded to the Holy Spirit in John 7:38-39, he mentions the Holy Spirit in 14:16-17 for the first time. There, he calls two different names: 'another Helper', ἄλλον παράκλητον (14:16),¹²³ and the 'Spirit of truth', τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας (14:17). Following the wording of John 14:16-17 and comparing it with John 14:26 proves that the Holy Spirit, the Helper and the Spirit of Truth are all the same person. These titles can be used interchangeably.

¹²² Borchert, *John 12–21*, 110. Burge adds that the "incarnation of Christ (1:14a) silences the fraudulent voices of the world whose truth claims are inimical to God." Gary M. Burge, *John*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 60. See also Köstenberger, *John*, 430.

¹²³ William et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 766; G. D. Taylor, "Testimony," ed. Douglas Mangum et al., *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014) Logos 7 Electronic Version.

Starting with ἄλλον παράκλητος in John 14:16 shows that it is best rendered with ‘another Helper’.¹²⁴ Παράκλητος itself is a Johannine term, as it only appears in Johannine writings.¹²⁵ In the Gospel of John the word is always used in the immediate context of the ‘Spirit of truth sayings’ (14:16; 15:26; 16:7) that are the focus of this chapter. The παράκλητος has “to be seen in John’s Gospel as an advocate on behalf of humans, serving the role that Jesus performs, after his departure.”¹²⁶ This observation ties to the use of παράκλητος in 14:16 and 1 John 2:1. Based on 1 John 2:1, the Holy Spirit can be identified as God, because the term is used for Christ in John 14:16.^{127 128}

Actually, ἄλλον supports this observation for it means ‘same as’, which is different from ἕτερος that means ‘different from’.¹²⁹ Thus, Jesus promises in John 14:16-17 to send the παράκλητος, the third part of the Godhead, to continue the work on earth after his ascension.¹³⁰ Furthermore, Jesus’ identification with the Spirit of truth is so profound that

¹²⁴ William et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 766; Taylor, “Testimony” Logos 7 Electronic Version.

¹²⁵ John 14:16.25; 15:25; 16:7; 1 John 2:1.

¹²⁶ Porter, *John, His Gospel, and Jesus: In Pursuit of the Johannine Voice*, 185. Porter offers an abundant list for studies on that topic on the same page. The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary adds: “*Paraklētos* is used in the NT only by John. In the Gospel the word refers to the Holy Spirit; here, by John’s own identification it refers to the Son in His work of salvation. It is clear, then, that the writer sees both the Son and the Spirit as performing the office of *paraklētos*. The translation “mediator,” or “intercessor,” would here seem preferable to “advocate.” Nichol, *Philippians to Revelation*, 636.

¹²⁷ Ekkehardt Müller, *Die Lehre von Gott* (St. Peter am Hart: Seminar Schloss Bogenhofen, 2010), 221. For an extensive study on παράκλητος read the chapter “The Paraclete in John” in T. G. Brown, *Spirit in the Writings of John: Johannine Pneumatology in Social-Scientific Perspective*, Library of New Testament Studies (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 170–234.

¹²⁸ Luke 2:25 says it even more straightforwardly. Referring to Jesus, Luke writes: “Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel [παράκλησιν τοῦ Ἰσραήλ], and the Holy Spirit was upon him.” Here, παράκλησιν is applied to Jesus.

¹²⁹ Gulley, *Systematic Theology: God as Trinity*, 19.

¹³⁰ At this point more could be said about the function, work, nature and personality of the Holy Spirit, but it would be difficult to discuss every detail. A short overview of this discussion is given by Fernando Canale, “Doctrine of God,” in *Handbook of Seventh-Day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 130–37. See also Gulley, *Systematic Theology: God as Trinity*, 16–22; Müller, *Die Lehre von Gott*, 203–229; Graham A. Cole, *He Who Gives Life: The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, ed. John S. Feinberg, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 69–72.

he equals the Spirit's coming with his very own presence in John 14:18.¹³¹ Consequently, humanity is not left alone, but has God himself at its side.

Taking a general look at πνεῦμα in John 14:17 reveals that it means breath, wind or spirit and describes many different conditions.¹³² It can “refer to wind, to the breath of humans or animals, to the animating spirit of humans, or to the Holy Spirit.”¹³³ In the LXX it mainly renders πῆλη, but mostly in the sense of ‘breath’ and ‘spirit’, while “the spiritual sense is by far the most common” in the NT.¹³⁴ Without a doubt, πνεῦμα refers to the Holy Spirit in John 14:17.¹³⁵ However, what is even more interesting is the phrase ‘τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας’. The construction shows that ἀληθείας is genitive. The genitive has the function to mark “a noun as the source or possessor of something.”¹³⁶ From this one can conclude that the Spirit is identified as the possessor of truth.¹³⁷ Since the Holy

¹³¹ The fulfillment of this prediction happened to some extent in John 20:22, but was finalized during Pentecost (Acts 2:33).

¹³² William et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 332–36.

¹³³ Roland J. Lowther, “Spirit,” ed. Douglas Mangum, Rachel Klippenstein, and Rebekah Hurst, *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014), Logos 7 Electronic Version.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.* Schweizer offers an abundant study on πνεῦμα in Eduard Schweizer, “Πνεῦμα, Πνευματικός, Πνέω, Ἐμπνέω, Πνοή, Ἐκπνέω, Θεόπνευστος,” ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 332–451.

¹³⁵ There is no doubt that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth: “The reference here is to nothing other than the Spirit of God as he manifests himself in the Paraclete, the Spirit of God who leads the church into the truth, the Holy Spirit who keeps the church close to God and distinguishes it from the world.” Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary*, 500.

¹³⁶ Michael S. Heiser and Vincent M. Setterholm, “Genitive,” *Glossary of Morpho-Syntactic Database Terminology* (Lexham Press, 2013), Logos 7 Electronic Version.

¹³⁷ “The expression ‘spirit of truth’ was current in Judaism (e.g., T. Jud. 20). Similarly, the Qumran literature affirms that God placed within humankind ‘two spirits so that he would walk with them until the moment of his visitation; they are the spirits of truth and of deceit’ (1QS 3:18; cf. 4:23–26). Yet these parallels are merely those of language, not thought. For although these expressions are part of an ethical dualism in Second Temple literature (including Qumran), John’s Gospel does not feature a ‘spirit of error’ corresponding to the Spirit of truth (but see 1 John 4:6, where ‘the Spirit [or spirit] of truth and the spirit of falsehood’ occur together).” Köstenberger, *John*, 438.

Spirit is God, this observation ties to the fact that Jesus and God the Father are the truth as well (see discussion above). Once more it becomes evident that God is truth.

John 14:16

The well-known passage of John 14:16 contains important information and is spoken as parting between Jesus and His disciples (see above). Jesus prepares his disciples for his Crucifixion that is about to happen. This is also a recurrent theme that runs through Jesus' Farewell Discourse (John 13-17). However, in John 14:1-14 the disciples are called to believe and trust in Christ. John 14:15 opens with Jesus declaring: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments," while John 14:16 continues this sentence by saying: "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever." At first glance, the transition from v. 15 to v. 16 seems strange, but it is appropriate to conclude that those who love Jesus and keep his commandments receive the Helper/Spirit of truth. Borchert observes: "Jesus knew very well that the requirement of love and keeping his commands would necessitate a resource of divine proportions and accordingly he prayed that his followers would have 'another' resource."¹³⁸

In the following passage, the Spirit of truth is described as an entity that cannot be received by the world, but by the disciples: "The Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you." (John 14:17). Why is that? The keyword in this text is 'to know', γνώσκω, which allows the reader to draw a connection to John 14:7. Looking at this verse reveals that relation to truth (i.e. Jesus), builds the foundation for knowing the Father: "If you had *known* me, you would have *known* my Father also. From now on you

¹³⁸ Borchert, *John 12-21*, 122.

do *know* him and have seen him.”¹³⁹ This succession leads to the knowledge of the Spirit, for knowing Christ also leads automatically to the knowledge of the Spirit of truth (14:15-17).¹⁴⁰ By implication, missing knowledge of Jesus prevents knowing and receiving of the Spirit. This is the case with the world, for they neither know Jesus, nor the Father. Paul reflects on this thought in 1 Cor 2:14 as well. There he says: “The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand [γνῶναι] them because they are spiritually discerned.”¹⁴¹ Obviously, relational knowledge plays an integral part in knowing the Spirit of truth. This gives a hint to the quality of truth which is inherent to the Spirit.

Jesus’ statement on the Spirit of truth in John 14:17 provides fundamental information about truth. In John 14:6 Jesus declared himself as being the truth and in John 14:17 he introduces the Spirit of truth. Both have the same quality of truth, which becomes evident in the genitival use of ἀλήθεια mentioned in the paragraphs above. Therefore, it is John’s intent to introduce the Holy Spirit as an equal person among the Trinity, after he impressively showed that Jesus and the Father are truth. Nevertheless, John 14:17 does not say so much about the function of the Spirit, except that he is going

¹³⁹ “The text of B C*, adopted by RSV [the ESV makes the same point], gives a false understanding, and really amounts to a reproach, as Barrett points out, as if they have failed to know Jesus properly, and therefore fail to know the Father. But we should certainly follow p66 N D* (reading egnōkate and gnōseste for egnōkeite and an edeite), and translate: ‘If you have known me, you will know my Father also.’ (= NEB, mg.)” Barnabas Lindars, *The Gospel of John*, The New Century Bible Commentaries (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1972), 473.

¹⁴⁰ Loving Jesus presupposes acceptance and knowledge of Christ. This very fact gets evident throughout the whole Gospel.

¹⁴¹ Taylor adds: “The natural man is the unconverted and unregenerate, the person who is void of the Spirit and who belongs to this age (1:20; 2:6). The absence of the Spirit renders the natural man unable to know the things of the Spirit of God since the Spirit is the one who searches the deep things of God (2:10). The natural man is unable to penetrate spiritual things because spiritual things are evaluated spiritually, that is, they are examined by means of the Spirit. The natural man, therefore, is unable to make spiritual judgments or comprehend spiritual truths. The spiritual man, on the other hand, is able to evaluate all things because the Spirit of God is guiding him.” See Mark Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2014), 94.

to dwell permanently within the disciples.¹⁴² In this regard, John 14:26 is an expansion of v. 17. Here, the Helper is described as the one who not only dwells within the disciples, but will teach them all things and bring to mind all that Jesus has told them. In other words: The Spirit mediates between heaven and earth and teaches everyone who is willing Jesus' truth, which is also God's truth. Thus, the Holy Spirit is inclusive, because he will live in all Christians.

John 15:26

John 15:26 ties in to this discovery and adds a new detail, since every 'Spirit of truth saying' serves as an expansion to some degree. Jesus says: "He will bear testimony about me." Although already implied in John 14:27, 15:26 expresses it more openly. The work of the Spirit of truth is to glorify Christ. He is not coming to the disciples with a new or separate testimony, but his work is deeply Christocentric in all of his teachings (16:14). "The Spirit of truth bears witness to Jesus (not to some philosophy or theory) as the incarnate manifestation of truth."¹⁴³ Nevertheless, the passage comes as a surprise to the reader within the framework of John 15.¹⁴⁴ The context of John 15:26-27 is one of persecution, since Jesus' message follows rejection and persecution (15:18-25).¹⁴⁵ For

¹⁴² Regarding the phrase 'καὶ ἐν ὑμῖν ἔσται', the following has to be stated: "Most witnesses have 'and will be in you,' but a few early manuscripts have 'and is in you.' The difference is whether the Spirit of truth is presently within those Jesus is addressing, or if it will be there at a future point." See on John 14:17 in Israel Loken and Rick Brannan, *The Lexham Textual Notes on the Bible*, Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014), Logos 7 Electronic Version. But according to what Jesus has stated in John 14:16, the coming of the Helper, who is equivalent to the Spirit of truth, has to be seen in the future, after Jesus' departure.

¹⁴³ Franke, "Still the Way, the Truth, and the Life," 30.

¹⁴⁴ There is discussion on whether the text is original or not. But Brodie correctly affirms that "The most coherent explanation of this text's newness is not that it is a late insertion, but that it is saying something new, something which may seem strange or startling. It is replacing the sense of acute conflict with a more positive process of witnessing." Brodie, *The Gospel According to John: A Literary and Theological Commentary*, 489.

¹⁴⁵ Jesus explains to his disciples that the world is hostile towards truth, for they have another spiritual Father (8:44). In Johannine writings κόσμος, "world", describes most commonly the satanic

this reason, the Spirit of truth comes as the Helper to give strength and ability to bear witness to the truth for the world to see.¹⁴⁶ Μαρτυρέω simply means “to confirm or attest someth. on the basis of personal knowledge or belief.”¹⁴⁷ Thus, “the message of Jesus and of His followers can be called simply ‘the truth’.”¹⁴⁸

John 16:13-14

John 16:5-15 continues these thoughts. Again, Jesus speaks about his soon departure and encourages his sorrowful disciples in John 16:7: “Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.” This idea is not new to the discussion, but provides a more concrete description than John 14:16. The truth is that the inescapability of Jesus’ departure comes to the disciples as a great blessing, because Jesus was physically bound through his earthly ministry. However, with the sending of his Spirit, which is synonymous with his presence (14:18), he is omnipresent. During his ministry, Jesus lead to truth in a limited area, but the Spirit of truth will globally testify to truth.

In John 16:8-11 a new dimension to the work of the Spirit of truth is added. It is the only passage in the Bible that ascribes to the Holy Spirit the task to work for the

system that is opposed to God. This is why Jesus says that his disciples are not from this world (17:14), as they have another spiritual father. An overview on κόσμος is provided in the 15th chapter of Morris’ book. See Leon Morris, *New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986), Electronic Version.

¹⁴⁶ 1 John 5:6 says the same: “And the Spirit is the one who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth.” For more on this discussion see Daniel Akin, *1, 2, 3 John*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 197; Kruse, *The Letters of John*, 178–79. See also Lindars, *The Gospel of John*, 497.

¹⁴⁷ William et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 617. For a discussion on μαρτυρέω in Johannine Literature see J. Beutler, “Μαρτυρέω,” ed. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 390–91.

¹⁴⁸ Marshall, “Johannine Theology,” 1083.

unbelieving world.¹⁴⁹ In fact, it is a threefold work that he has to do: To convict the world of its sin, of Jesus' righteousness and of the judgment.¹⁵⁰ In all of this, the only focus of his work is the glorification of Jesus (16:14). When Jesus speaks about judgement in this context, he obviously alludes to Satan, who was earlier declared as the father of lies (8:44). This is of importance: The Spirit of truth has the honor to proclaim victory to a world that is bound in lies, for in Jesus the devil is exposed and judged. In this manner, John 16:13-14 comes as the logical conclusion to this discourse.

At this point a short excursus on the process of knowing truth has to be done. Yet, these considerations are only done within the framework of divine revelation. It was said that the Spirit of truth guides to all truth (16:13).¹⁵¹ First of all 'to all truth', ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ πάσῃ, raises the following question: What did Jesus had in mind when he used the prefix 'all'? Considering the immediate context, it is best to see it as a reference to "the truth about Jesus and his teachings and actions", but not as truth in all areas of knowledge.¹⁵² Thus, it is theological truth, which provides all theological knowledge that is necessary for the salvation of man.

Significant is the eschatological dimension of the Spirit's work that is mentioned in that context, since it says that he will declare "the things that are to come." Without

¹⁴⁹ Müller, *Die Lehre von Gott*, 214.

¹⁵⁰ For a detailed explanation see Koester, *The Word of Life: A Theology of John's Gospel*, 154–55.

¹⁵¹ "The Spirit's action is described by the verb *hodegeō*, which is based on the words 'way' (*hadas*) and 'lead' (*agein*). For the Spirit to 'lead in the way' to all truth means that the Spirit brings people to Jesus, who is the way and the truth (14:6)." *Ibid.*, 155. Few pages earlier Koster states: "First, 'reminding' maintains the connection with the past, with what Jesus said and did during his ministry. The Spirit calls to mind things that Jesus has already made known. It brings people back to the message they have already received. Second, teaching opens up new insights into the legacy of Jesus. To teach 'all things' (*panta*) is to bring fresh insight to 'all things (*panta*) that I have said to you' (14:26)." *Ibid.*, 152.

¹⁵² Trail, *An Exegetical Summary of John 10-21*, 287; Rodney A. Whitacre, *John*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 391–92.

doubt, these things will have Jesus' at its center (John 16:14). But even more important is the element that is implied in this statement, namely the constant growing in truth. Obviously, there is truth that is unknown to humans, otherwise they would not need divine revelation. Therefore, the Bible supports the idea of constant growing in truth, since "the Spirit will lead them [the disciples] into an ever fuller understanding of what truth means [John 16:13]."¹⁵³ How exactly this happens is not the subject of this paper, but the discussion reveals that the God of absolute truth makes known many aspects of truth through the Bible, Jesus and the Spirit of truth. Yet, these aspects are part of God's all-encompassing truth, but do not cover all truth that exists. As such, humans can only know partial aspects of absolute truth that are necessary for their salvation (John 16:12-13), but cannot know truth in its fullness, since only God knows truth fully (1 Cor 2:11-12).¹⁵⁴

Accordingly, human understanding of absolute truth will always be fragmentary. This does not weaken, invalidate or relativize biblical truth, but rather calls the believer to be open to new revelations by the Spirit of truth, who offers new insights into the absolute truth.

Conclusion

It has been shown that the Spirit of truth is God and thus an integral part of the Trinity.¹⁵⁵ Concerning the notion of truth that is inherent to the Spirit of truth, the

¹⁵³ Morris, *New Testament Theology*, 260.

¹⁵⁴ "There is no such thing as 'progressive truth'; it is only our comprehension of truth that changes. Truth is as unchanging as God, and therefore as dependable as He is." Gulley, *Systematic Theology: Prolegomena*, 115.

¹⁵⁵ A striking detail is that the 'Spirit of truth sayings' do not coincide the sender of the Spirit. In John 14:16 it is the Father who sends him, in v. 26 it is the Father in the name of the Son, in 15:26 the Spirit of truth goes out from the Father and in John 16:7 he is sent by Christ. Instead of seeing a contradiction within the text that would suggest John's inability to distinguish between the members of the

following can be said: The Spirit of truth is the possessor of truth. The very fact that he is the παράκλητος, namely Jesus' representative on earth through whom Jesus is present (John 14:18), reveals that he embodies the same qualities of truth as Jesus. He convicts humans of the truth and guides them into all truth, which means that he helps them to understand Jesus' teachings and truth more fully. He also dwells within the believer, what makes him highly relational.¹⁵⁶ Thus, he is gift and giver of gifts at the same time. He comes as a support to Jesus' followers and takes over the function Jesus had. Jesus testified to the truth that he received from the Father, but now the Spirit testifies to the truth he received from the Son, namely the truth of Jesus Christ. Porter concludes: "The Spirit's role is not simply a passive one, however, since he has the several roles of testimony, guidance, and meditation, as well as performing the role of convicting humans regarding their behavior during this time."¹⁵⁷

Conclusion on the Trinity and Truth

After the relation of ἀλήθεια to God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit has been deliberated, the most intriguing conclusions will be drawn from the discussion up to this point.

First of all, ἀλήθεια is a divine attribute that is inherent to each person of the Trinity: God the Father is described as the only true God, Jesus himself is truth, as well as

Trinity, this observation rather points to the tight unity of the Father and the Son. Such being the case, the Spirit of truth is introduced as integral part of the Trinity. Within the structure of the Trinity, he does not take a subordinated place among the two others, but is described as an equal person among the Trinity. This is also reflected by the use of ἀλήθεια, which is used as a divine attribute in Johannine literature and strengthens this observation.

¹⁵⁶ Köstenberger states: The Spirit of truth "accurately represents the truth regarding Jesus; he is the eschatological gift of God; he imparts true knowledge of God; and he works in both worship and sanctification." Andreas J. Köstenberger, *Encountering John: The Gospel in Historical, Literary, and Theological Perspective*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2013), 146.

¹⁵⁷ Porter, *John, His Gospel, and Jesus: In Pursuit of the Johannine Voice*, 188.

the Holy Spirit. As such ἀλήθεια builds the very foundation on which the Trinity is founded and from where it operates from. For without truth as the basis of the Godhead, all statements from God about his being, character and salvation plan for humanity would be relativistic and vain. Consequently, truth as proclaimed in the Gospel of John is absolute and leaves no room for contradictory concepts, for God is truth. It is not surprisingly in that context that the devil is presented as the antagonistic force to truth/God, who tries to lead humanity into error and lies. For he knows that acknowledging truth/God is life, while rejecting truth leads to eternal death.

Throughout the discussion, Jesus was introduced as the focal point within the discussion on truth. He reveals the absolute truth about God, himself and the Holy Spirit, since he is the mediator of truth between heaven and earth. He does so, because absolute truth is inherent to him. As such, truth is a Christological concept, for it has Jesus at its very center. But it is a Trinitarian concept as well, because every part of the Trinity is inseparably connected to truth. Accordingly, ἀλήθεια is not only intellectual, but highly relational, since it acts within time and space and longs for relationship. Moreover, the discussion showed that understanding and acknowledging theological truth intellectually and believing it, leads the believer into a relationship with truth/God.

Within the process of acquiring theological knowledge and leading sinners to Christ, the Holy Spirit holds the leading role since Jesus' ascension. He is Jesus' representative on earth and is the channel through whom divine truth is transferred to human beings. As the possessor of truth, it is self-explanatory that his work is highly relational and intellectual at the same time.

To sum it up, being truth is synonymous with being God. As a logical consequence, the Gospel of John proclaims ἀλήθεια to be intellectual and relational, since it is a fundamental characteristic of the Trinitarian God.

Sanctification, Truth and the Trinity

In John 17 the reader finds the well-known high-priestly prayer of Jesus. John 17:17 is central to the discussion, for Jesus makes an important statement on truth in combination with sanctification: “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.” The context reveals that Jesus asks his Father to do so, because the world is hostile towards God’s word, which Jesus has handed over to his disciples (17:14). Jesus did so, because the disciples are called to minister to the world (17:18). In the same way God has sent Jesus to a hostile world in order to proclaim his word (12:49; 17:6-8), Jesus sends his disciples to the world to proclaim his word. Therefore, Jesus goes on to ask God the Father, that he may protect his disciples from the evil one (17:15), which is an allusion to the devil.¹⁵⁸ For this reason, sanctification by truth functions as protection of and antidote to the depravity of this world. Not only for Jesus’ disciples, but for the following generations of Christians as well (17:20). In addition, it serves as qualification for proclaiming the Gospel properly, as will be shown later.

However, the idea of this text is embedded in the larger context of the Gospel. John 8:31-36 already proclaimed that truth (i.e. Jesus) sets sinners free and that this liberation is achieved through relationship with Christ. Therefore, John 17:17 comes as

¹⁵⁸ “The ‘evil’ mentioned is the personification of cosmic evil, known as ‘the ruler of this world’ (12:31; 14:30; 16:11).” Jey J. Kanagaraj, *John*, ed. Michael F. Bird and Craig S. Keener, New Covenant Commentary Series (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013), 168. Compare with 1 John 2:13-14; 3:12; 5:18-19.

an extension to the reader, since it becomes more concrete on the process of sanctification that is already indicated in John 8:31-36. Throughout the following discussion, this topic will be discussed in detail. This will also be coupled with the question of how each person of the Trinity partakes in the process of sanctification by truth.

The Preposition ἐν

Before diving into the discussion of John 17:17, the preposition ἐν has to be considered briefly, since it is a decisive factor for correctly understanding the whole sentence. There are two possible ways to read ἐν in the context of John 17:17. Either one can render it with ‘in’, as many translations do, or with ‘by’. In order to get a satisfying answer, one has to consider John 17:11 as well. John 17:11 and 17:17 are linguistically connected in two ways to each other:¹⁵⁹ (1) Both verses use the same root to denote holiness, ἅγιε. John 17:11 mentions the *Holy* Father, while 17:17 refers to *sanctification*; (2) they use the same phrase. However, they open the phrase with different imperatives and conclude with different prepositional objects: *τήρησον* αὐτοὺς ἐν τῷ *ὀνόματί* (17:11) vs. *ἁγιάσον* αὐτοὺς ἐν τῇ *ἀληθείᾳ* (17:17). Thus, there is much discussion among theologians about the correct meaning of ἐν in John 17:11. It could be read as “keep them *in* your name” or “keep them *by* your name”. The latter would support an instrumental force, which supports the idea of “protecting the disciples by his name”, while the previous would have a locative force, which would favor the reading of “keeping them in loyalty to you”.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St John*, trans. David Smith and G. A. Kon (London: Burns & Oates, 1982), 3:185; Beasley-Murray, *John*, 300.

¹⁶⁰ Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 562.

Although it is hard to decide in John 17:11 which rendering of ἐν is best, it is appropriate to go with Brown who states that ἐν “is both local and instrumental: they are to be both marked with and protected by the divine name that has been given to Jesus.”¹⁶¹ To conclude, John 17:17 allows the translation of ἐν with “by” as well.¹⁶² Thus, it is sound to read it as follows: “Sanctify them *by* the truth; your word is truth.”

God the Father

Right at the beginning of John 17, Jesus makes a fundamental statement in 17:3. He declares that God the Father is the God of truth and that eternal life is only attained by knowing God (see discussion above). This statement is strengthened only a few verses later in John 17:17, where Jesus says: “your word is truth.” In doing so, Jesus equates God’s word and truth with each other and upholds once more that God is the God of truth.¹⁶³ For if God is the true God (17:3), his word must be truth (17:17) and vice versa.

Regarding the use of λόγος in John 17:17, the following can be stated: The discussion in John 8:37-47 already revealed that λόγος refers to Jesus’ teachings and is indirectly used as a synonym for ἀλήθεια. But to be precise, Jesus’ teachings are not his own teachings, because he only handed down God’s word (John 17:14; 12:49). Still, it would be too narrowly conceived to see λόγος only as a reference to God’s teachings in

¹⁶¹ Brown, *The Gospel According to John (XIII-XXI): Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, 759. For a short textual note on John 17:11 see Loken and Brannan, *The Lexham Textual Notes on the Bible*, Logos 7 Electronic Version. See also Trail who offers an overview on all possibilities. Trail, *An Exegetical Summary of John 10-21*, 321.

¹⁶² The prestigious German Elberfelder Bibel also favors the reading of “by” in John 17:17.19. See *Revidierte Elberfelder Bibel* (Witten: SCM R. Brockhaus, 1985).

¹⁶³ See also 1 John 1:8.10: Here, John identifies truth as being God’s word by paralleling it. The statement of being sinless testifies that “the *truth* is not in us” (v. 8) and that “his *word* is not in us” (v. 10). Schnelle mentions in regards to truth, while talking about sanctification: “Die Heiligung vollzieht sich in der Wahrheit, die nach Joh. Auffassung eine Wesensbestimmung Gottes ist und mit dem Wort Gottes gleichgesetzt werden kann (vgl. Joh. 8,31 f.)” Udo Schnelle, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes*, ed. Jan Herzer and Udo Schnelle, 4th ed., Theologischer Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2009), 282–83.

the setting of John 17:17. Taking the whole Gospel into account, λόγος has to be understood as a reference to Jesus himself. Jesus is the incarnated word (1:14) that was sent by God and is the personified truth (14:6). Consequently, when Jesus says “your word is truth” he says that God’s teachings are truth and that he is truth. Hence, Jesus is identical to God’s teachings because he is truth and the essence of everything that God taught through him.

Apart from that, Jesus wants to stress the necessity of holiness. This is shown primarily by how he starts his sentences with a plea: “Sanctify them by the truth”. At this point, it is compulsory to understand the concept of sanctification in order to draw further conclusions. The verb in focus is ἀγιάζω and means “to be set apart, sanctify” or to “make something holy”.¹⁶⁴ It describes the process of becoming holy – being transformed in the image of God.¹⁶⁵ Apart from John 10:36; 17:19, it is the only time that ἀγιάζω appears in the Gospel of John. Its Hebrew equivalent is שׁוֹדֵף and means “to be or become holy, consecrated or sanctified.”¹⁶⁶ Considering the connection between John 17:11 and John 17:17 that was mentioned above, ‘Holy Father’, πᾶτερ ἅγιε, already prepared the way for ἀγιάζω in 17:17. Whitacre following Westcott adds to John 17:11: “Holiness refers to divine otherness, the realm of the divine in contrast to the mundane. Thus, this

¹⁶⁴ Kenneth D. Litwak, “Sanctification,” ed. Douglas Mangum, Rachel Klippenstein, and Rebekah Hurst, *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014), Logos 7 Electronic Version.

¹⁶⁵ A short examination of sanctification is provided by Eugene E. Carpenter and Philip W. Comfort, “Sanctification,” in *Holman Treasury of Key Bible Words: 200 Greek and 200 Hebrew Words Defined and Explained* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2000), 385. For more detailed studies on the Greek term ἀγιάζω and the topic of sanctification in general see e.g. Ivan T. Blazen, “Salvation,” in *Handbook of Seventh-Day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 292–300. See also Hon-Lee Kwok, “Holiness,” ed. Douglas Mangum et al., *Lexham Theological Wordbook* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014), Logos 7 Electronic Version.

¹⁶⁶ Litwak, “Sanctification,” Logos 7 Electronic Version.

phrase captures beautifully God's 'purity and tenderness'".¹⁶⁷ This gives weight to the meaning of 'to sanctify' in John 17:17. Well known passages as Lev 11:44; 19:2; 20:26; 1 Pet 1:15–16 stress that God's people are to be holy, because God is holy. The reason for this is found in the very fact that sanctification/holiness is inevitable for salvation: "Strive [...] for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord." (Heb 12:14).

Obviously, *ἁγιάζω* embodies a quality that is divine and reveals that human holiness is conditional on God's holiness. Moreover, the use of *ἁγιάζω* reveals that it was essential for Jesus' disciples to be sanctified, since sanctification serves as distinction from the world and its sinful system. Only by reflecting the image of God they would be properly prepared for their testifying work, which they could not execute otherwise. Additionally, the harmonization with the divine nature serves as a shield against diabolic attacks (John 17:15), for the believer becomes dead to sin (Rom 6:2). Thus, the purpose of sanctification is the salvation of the sinner and to prepare him/her for mission work. In such a way, John 17:18 comes as the logical consequence of the previous to the reader. F. F. Bruce concludes: "This involves their consecration for the task now entrusted to them; it involves further their inward purification and endowment with all the spiritual resources necessary for carrying out that task."¹⁶⁸

Up to this point the following can be said: God is the possessor of truth and holiness, which is reflected in everything that he is and does. For this reason, he is the ultimate standard of truth and holiness. Having these qualities, he is the only one capable of sanctifying through truth. How he does that becomes evident by looking at the role of Jesus and the Holy Spirit throughout the process of sanctification.

¹⁶⁷ Whitacre, *John*, 411.

¹⁶⁸ F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983), 334.

Jesus Christ the Son

God the Father is the foundation of truth and holiness, since these characteristics are rooted in his very being. Jesus, who is God in flesh and the image of God (Eph 1:15), possesses them as well, since they are one (John 17:11). During his life on earth, he represented these characteristics and made them accessible for everyone. This is why Jesus says in John 17:19 that he consecrates¹⁶⁹ himself by the truth for his disciples: “And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified by truth.”¹⁷⁰ Jesus’ self-consecration in John 17:19 depicts his sinless life, which culminates in his crucifixion mentioned in John 18-19.¹⁷¹ This statement assumes the following: Jesus sanctified himself in all truth in order to complete the work that he came to accomplish. “Before Him lay the cross and in the act of offering Himself, He made possible the sanctification of all believers.”¹⁷² Heb 10:10 affirms in that context: “[...] we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”

¹⁶⁹ ‘Consecrate’, as well as ‘sanctify’ originate from the same root, ἁγιάζω. Some translators use ‘consecrate’ instead of ‘sanctify’, because it seems to express the meaning of the text better in their thinking. It is, however, legitimate to also use the translation ‘sanctify’.

¹⁷⁰ ἐν should be read in the same way as in John 17:17: “The meaning of the phrase ‘in truth’ is virtually the same as its meaning in verse 17 except that here the focus is on the realm of the disciples’ consecration and Jesus is the agent of it [AB]. The truth is the full revelation of the Father in which the disciples are consecrated [ICC].” Trail, *An Exegetical Summary of John 10-21*, 330.

¹⁷¹ “The verb ἁγιάζω is used in LXX of the setting apart of both people and things for the service of God (more often of people than things). Two uses in particular are important for the present passage, namely, those where the verb is used for the sanctifying of priests (Exod. 28:41; 29:1, 21, etc.), and of sacrifices (Exod. 28:38; Num. 18:9, etc.). Both are appropriate in the present passage. The verb does not signify in itself a setting apart for death, but in this context the meaning can scarcely be anything else. Some interpreters hold that this is excluded by the subsequent statement with respect to the disciples, but this does not follow. Jesus sets himself apart to do the will of God, and he looks for them to be set apart to do God’s will. But the implications are not the same in the two cases. For him the consecration issued in an atoning death; for them in lives of service (sometimes crowned with a martyr’s death). There does not appear to be a parallel to Jesus’ statement, ‘I sanctify myself.’” Morris, *The Gospel According to John, Rev. Ed.*, 648. “The preposition ὑπέρ ‘for’ may suggest death. Note the following uses of this word that indicate the laying down of Jesus’ own life (11:51; 10:11, 17–18; 15:13; Romans 8:32).” Trail, *An Exegetical Summary of John 10-21*, 330.

¹⁷² Nichol, *Matthew to John*, 1053.

To sum it up so far: When Jesus asks God the Father to sanctify by truth, he asks God to sanctify through his life and death that is in accordance with God's teachings and will (i.e. truth). This is logical, for only the one who is truth and holy at the same time, is worthy to sanctify by truth. Thus, God is the giver and enabler of sanctification in Jesus Christ. This observation leads the reader to the work of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit

First of all, the Holy Spirit is not explicitly mentioned in the passage, but he is inherent to the process of sanctification that is presented in John 17:17-19. God the Father is the possessor of truth and holiness, Jesus Christ, God in flesh, lived according to truth and holiness, whereby he made salvation and sanctification accessible. But it is the Spirit of truth that accomplishes that sanctifying work within the human being, as he guides the believer into all truth (John 14:17, 26; 15:26; 16:13-14).¹⁷³ Being guided into all truth has to be understood as a process that is not only intellectual. It is a process that leads to action. 1 John 2:4-6 confirms that real knowledge of truth has to lead into realization of truth, which is a description for sanctified living. Spence-Jones notes: "the sanctification of the New Testament is a spiritual process passing over heart and conscience and will, and is the work of the Divine Spirit."¹⁷⁴ He correctly addresses the necessity of the Spirit's work for the sanctification of the sinner. Phil 2:13 strengthens this observation: "for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure." How does he do that? By accomplishing this work through the Spirit of truth as 1 Pet 1:2 says:

¹⁷³ "With the mind, we *learn* God's truth through the Word. With the heart, we *love* God's truth, His Son. With the will, we yield to the Spirit and *live* God's truth day by day. It takes all three for a balanced experience of sanctification." Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Expository Commentary* (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1996), 1:370.

¹⁷⁴ H. D. M. Spence-Jones, ed., *St. John*, The Pulpit Commentary (London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), 2:348.

“the sanctification [ἁγιασμός] of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ”. Here, the same root like in John 17:17.19 is used for holiness. However, in this case the prepositional object refers “to the process of becoming holy, by which the state of holiness is attained, or to the end result that the sanctifying work has obtained.”¹⁷⁵ Thus, sanctification describes a progressive process of obedience to Christ, with the Spirit as the driving force of this sanctification.¹⁷⁶

According to the Holy Spirit and its role, the following can be concluded: The Spirit of truth helps anyone who desires it. Keeping in mind that Jesus’ life, death and resurrection is the truth that sets free. He enables the believer to believe in the truth and to act according to this truth, which leads to sanctified living in turn.

Conclusion

Since the Trinity is truth, it comes as no surprise that sanctification is inseparably connected to truth. It is impressive to see how God the Father, Jesus the Son and the Spirit of truth work together in order to transform the heart of the sinner. Only by entering into a relation with Jesus, God the Father and the Holy Spirit, the believer can understand and live according to the truth.¹⁷⁷ Tolmie notes that sanctification draws the believer “into the truth, into the unity between Father and Son, and into salvation in such a way that the Father’s being, his holiness, permeates”¹⁷⁸ the believer’s heart and mind

¹⁷⁵ Kwok, “Holiness,” Logos 7 Electronic Version.

¹⁷⁶ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 54.

¹⁷⁷ “God’s truth has been given to us in three “editions”: His Word is truth (John 17:17); His Son is the truth (John 14:6); and His Spirit is the truth (1 John 5:6). We need all three if we are to experience true sanctification, a sanctification that touches every part of our inner person.” Wiersbe, *The Bible Expository Commentary*, 370.

¹⁷⁸ D. F. Tolmie, *Jesus’ Farewell to the Disciples: John 13:1-17:26 in Narratological Perspective*, vol. 12, Biblical Interpretation Series (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), 225.

through the sanctifying work of the Spirit. On these grounds, the concept of sanctification harmonizes with the relational concept of truth in John's Gospel.¹⁷⁹ Ἀλήθεια is an intellectual construct, that is highly relational at the same time, for it sanctifies the sinner and makes him/her holy. In other words: "truth is communicated in the Word, which is both personal and propositional."¹⁸⁰

However, the discussion on sanctification tells the reader something else about the nature of truth. Since God is holy his intrinsic truth, revealed and embodied in Jesus Christ, has to be holy too. Accordingly, if truth is holy and has the power to sanctify, there is no other possibility to accept truth, without being sanctified. Otherwise it would not be true acceptance of truth. This is why sanctification results from truth, for truth provides all significant information about God and salvation (justification) in order to be sanctified (sanctification). Therefore, it is appropriate to say that justification, which is the acceptance of the truth about Jesus Christ and his teachings, is sanctification. For those two aspects are inseparably intertwined. This observation is extremely important to the discussion on the matter of truth, regarding the conflict presented in John 8:37-47. It explains why the devil, as the adversary of truth (8:44), is so interested in obscuring and destroying truth, for truth is essential for salvation. Holy truth leads to justification and sanctification, which is salvation.

¹⁷⁹ It is interesting to note that truth is communicated among the Trinity on the basis of relation (John 8:40; 14:17; 15:26; 16:13; 1 John 5:6). Therefore, it is not surprising that truth is also communicated to mankind on a relational basis. Spicq adds: "Not only is the true identical to being, the real; but it is the divine reality as revealed to humans. Truth is God." See Ceslas Spicq and James D. Ernest, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 3:67.

¹⁸⁰ Edwin A. Blum, "John," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 333.

Humans and Truth

Throughout the research it has been shown to some degree how humans react or are supposed to act towards truth. That included accepting and abiding in truth (John 8:31-36), neglecting truth (John 8:40-45) or testifying to the truth (John 15:26-27). This chapter will deal with three more passages where truth is directly connected to humans.

Doing Truth

In John 3:1-21 Jesus has a conversation with Nicodemus, a Jewish scribe. Nicodemus comes to Jesus by night with the obvious intention to have a discussion. But it appears that Jesus directly points to the heart of the matter in John 3:3, as he sees that Nicodemus is searching for more. During that discussion, Nicodemus is confronted with the very fact that he has to be born again (3:3-6) in order to be saved (Rom 8:9) and realizes his ignorance on this matter (John 3:9). Moreover, Jesus reveals to Nicodemus that he is not an ordinary rabbi, but the Messiah, who imparts salvation (3:12-17). Thereby, Jesus calls Nicodemus to accept him as the one he really is. In addition, Jesus reveals that the prerequisite for salvation is belief in the Son of God which is refused by those who love darkness instead of light (3:18-20). Then, the passage is completed by the statement of John 3:21: “But whoever does what is true [truth/ἀλήθεια] comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.” So, the claim is that Jesus sees that Nicodemus is in search of truth, which is why Nicodemus comes to Jesus, who points to the truth at the end of the passage.

The immediate context of John 3:21 is of judgment (3:17-20). The judgment is introduced to this world by the light that came into the world (3:19). Light and darkness

are presented as two antagonistic forces that are opposed to each other.¹⁸¹ However, communion with darkness follows doing evil, hating the light and shunning the light, because the sinner does not want to see his works uncovered in the light of Jesus. On the other hand, the one who lives according to truth comes to the light (i.e. Jesus).¹⁸² As a result, belief or disbelief in Christ, decides if one accepts truth or not and defines the quality of one's work.¹⁸³

In this regard, it is interesting to take a look at ποιέω, which signifies 'to make' or 'to do'. In the setting of John 3:21 "'works truth' contrasts with 'perpetrates evil' in the preceding verse and represents a typical Jewish expression meaning 'to act faithfully.'"¹⁸⁴ This thought is also used by John in his letters. There he describes the impossibility of claiming fellowship with Christ, while walking in darkness. For those who do so, do not practice the truth and are not in the truth (1 John 1:6.8; 2:4-5). Taking this into consideration, while looking at John 3:21, the moral depravity of those who love the darkness is obvious. From this follows that "'he who does the truth' [...] expresses morally good action done according to God's will", which is very Semitic thinking by the way.¹⁸⁵ Therefore, ἀλήθεια bears a moral meaning in John 3:21.¹⁸⁶ It denotes that which is morally flawless and opposed to evil. Moreover, this observation has a practical

¹⁸¹ Satan is described as the transcendent force that is opposed to Christ in the Gospel of John (especially 8:44). Consequently, it is reasonable to see "darkness" not only as a reference to sin, falsehood or evil in general, but also as a personification of Satan on the transcendental level. Since John 1:9 reveals that "light" is the personification for Jesus, it is possible to also have a personification of "darkness".

¹⁸² See also Colin G. Kruse, *John: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 119; Bernard, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St John*, 1:123.

¹⁸³ The idea of being judged according to one's works is a present theme that runs through the NT. R. Heiligenthal, "'Εργον, Ου, Τό," ed. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 50.

¹⁸⁴ Köstenberger, *John*, 131.

¹⁸⁵ Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St John*, trans. Kevin Smith (London: Burns & Oates, 1968), 1:407.

¹⁸⁶ See also Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, 419. And also *Ibid.*, 574.

implication as well: Whatever the believer does with his hands, mouth and mind, has to be in accordance with truth. Naturally, ἀλήθεια includes Jesus' teachings in John 3:21, which build the basis for flawless work.

Apart from that, the passage does not describe a sanctifying process at first glance, but rather depicts a general distinction between those who reject “the ultimate revelation of God in Jesus Christ, and those who are delighting in it.”¹⁸⁷ Nevertheless, the working of the Spirit is inherent to the statement in John 3:21. Keeping in mind that Jesus stressed the necessity of the Holy Spirit in order to be born again (3:3-6), it is self-explanatory that the works of truth have to be done in the strength of the Spirit. Thus, John 3:21 assumes the sanctifying process through the Spirit of truth that leads the believer to obedience.¹⁸⁸ In other words: “Believing becomes obedience”.¹⁸⁹

To sum up, the essence of Jesus' statement is to help Nicodemus understand that it is necessary to act according to truth. In Nicodemus' case it is his new-found knowledge about the work of the Spirit, the Messiah, salvation and judgment that supersedes his Pharisaic ideas and concepts. Therefore, it is not enough to know truth intellectually, but rather it is important for him to know Jesus. Otherwise he is not living in the truth. Therefore, John 3:21 stresses that “‘he that practices the true (Christian) faith and life.’ Such a man comes naturally to the light.”¹⁹⁰ So, the keynote of that text is, that

¹⁸⁷ Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 208.

¹⁸⁸ “This is a text about the work of the Spirit as generator (creator, begetter and birther). From the Johannine perspective, the point is not that the believer ‘gets’ the Spirit at baptism [...] This is true Christian doctrine, but not the point of this text. Here, the point is that the Holy Spirit is active in the generative act that leads one to become a Christian in the first place.” Eugene M. Boring, “Biblical Reflection: The Church Guided by the Holy Spirit - A Johannine Perspective (John 3:1-21),” *Mid-Stream* 35, no. 4 (1996): 454.

¹⁸⁹ Rainbow, *Johannine Theology: The Gospels, the Epistles and the Apocalypse*, 313.

¹⁹⁰ C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1978), 218.

humans are called to know truth and to act according to the truth. Ἀλήθεια is not only an intellectual concept to understand, but practical and relevant for daily living. It plays an integral part for a peaceful and holy life on an interpersonal/relational level.

Worship in Spirit and Truth

During his conversation with the Samaritan woman, Jesus makes the well-known statement of John 4:23-24:

But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.

It is not possible to understand the meaning of Jesus' remark fully, without considering the historical background of the Samaritans, as well as the immediate context of Jesus' words. Around 722/21 BC the Assyrians conquered Samaria and ordered the Jews exile. They settled in Samaria which resulted in foreign people mingling with the remaining Jews. They did not only mingle ethnically, but also religiously, which lead to syncretism. After the Jews returned from their exile, they were hostile towards the Samaritans. Their religious syncretism was especially the object of offense. Around 400 BC the Samaritans built a counter-temple on mount Gerizim, which was destroyed at the end of the 2nd century BC by the southern kingdom (Juda). This caused further animosity. In the 1st century they finally developed their own theological tradition that only accepted the Pentateuch.¹⁹¹ An elementary component of their belief was Deut. 18:15 that says: "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your

¹⁹¹ The historical exposition is based on the comments of Carson on that topic. See Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 216.

brothers – it is to him you shall listen.” The Samaritans believed that this “second Moses”, the Taheb, would reveal all truth to them.¹⁹²

Obviously, Jesus knew the historical background of the Samaritans, which is why he revealed himself to the Samaritan woman as being a prophet (John 4:16-18). At least that is what the Samaritan woman thinks he is, as she says in v. 19: “Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet.” But without hesitation she goes on to say in v. 20: “Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.” The woman refers to the conflict and builds a contrast in differentiating between ‘our fathers’ vs. ‘you’, though ‘you’ is plural and denotes the Jews in general. In the following verse Jesus does not directly react to the statement, but introduces his sentence with an imperative and calls the woman to believe him, πιστεύέ μοι (4:21). He encourages the woman in the same way he called Nicodemus to believe. In doing so, Jesus shifts to the spiritual level and points to a time “when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.” He shares with the woman the triviality that is about to overcome both temples, as his sacrificial death will make any kind of temple service superfluous. Then in 4:22, he goes on to proclaim: “You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.” Jesus continues the contrasting motive by using “you do not know” vs. “we know” and turns the woman’s statement around. He emphasizes the superiority of the Jewish faith and confronts the woman with their false theological system. A system that only viewed the Pentateuch as being canonical, while rejecting the rest of the OT.

¹⁹² John Bowman, “Samaritan Studies,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 40, no. 2 (1958): 300.

In this regard, there are two main ways to interpret the pronoun ὃ in v. 22, meaning ‘what’: (1) Either it refers to personal knowledge of God, or (2) it denotes the whole Samaritan theological system, as incomplete. Instead of choosing one interpretation, it is reasonable to see both possibilities as adequate. In other words, the first and second option are related. Although, Jesus heavily criticized the Jews throughout His ministry, he highlights that the Jews at least know what they worship, “for salvation is from the Jews.” (4:22). This is a blunt confirmation and testimony for the truthfulness of the OT and its theology.

After having clarified the superiority of the Jewish system, Jesus makes his statement in John 4:23-24. It is not intended to focus on every detail, but to only focus on what is central to the discussion.¹⁹³ The term προσκυνέω, ‘to worship’, is pivotal to the text. It means “to express in attitude or gesture one’s complete dependence on or submission to a high authority figure”.¹⁹⁴ As such it can be used by human or transcendent beings, with the latter being the case in John 4:23-24. Those who worship God according to his standards are called ἀληθινοὶ προσκυνηταὶ, the ‘true worshipers’. These true worshipers worship God in the way he wants to be worshiped and Jesus underlines that the Father “is seeking such people” (4:23). This suggests that there are also people who do it wrong, which applies to the Samaritans, for they do not have the truth. The whole sentence does not seem to be restricted to the Samaritans only, but

¹⁹³ Regarding “the hour is coming”, the following can be said: “The ‘time’ that was coming was the time when true worshippers would no longer need to go to Jerusalem, for Jesus’ death, resurrection and sending of the Spirit would usher in the new way of worship. This time could be said loosely to have ‘now come’ because Jesus had already set in motion things that would bring in the new worship in spirit and truth.” Kruse, *John: An Introduction and Commentary*, 136.

¹⁹⁴ William et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 882.

points to a universal dimension. God has a universal longing for true worshipers, since he has a universal message to share.

The expression ἐν πνεύματι καὶ ἀληθείᾳ, “in spirit and truth”, is a single prepositional phrase and belongs together, because ἐν is used for both nouns at the beginning. This means that worship has to be “sincere and genuine.”¹⁹⁵ In this context, Whitacre points out that these key terms operate “on more than one level”.¹⁹⁶ It is conceivable that they point to a human level, but also to the transcendental realm, “for behind the earthly things are the heavenly things”.¹⁹⁷ The very fact that “God is spirit”¹⁹⁸ presupposes that God is to be worshiped in the spirit. The same goes for truth: Since God is truth (John 14:6), he has to be worshiped in truth.

Taking a look at πνεῦμα in John 4:23, Trail points out that there are two main interpretations of ‘spirit’ among theologians: (1) Either, πνεῦμα denotes the human spirit in John 4:23, or it refers to the Holy Spirit. If it denotes the human spirit the text would suggest that true worship takes place in the human spirit. Generally spoken, this includes that the believer worships God with his whole inner being. The very fact that it says “in spirit and truth” means that this worship is sincere and genuine. The worshiper builds his worship on the truth that has been unfolded to him by the word of God. (2) But if it is the Holy Spirit that is addressed, then it is the Spirit who enables the believer to worship God

¹⁹⁵ Trail, *An Exegetical Summary of John 1-9*, 178.

¹⁹⁶ Whitacre, *John*, 106.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ Regarding Jesus’ statement on “God is Spirit”, the following should be stated: “We must say that God is *spirit*. Whatever this means, it is a kind of existence that is unlike anything else in creation. It is a kind of existence that is far superior to all our material existence.” Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 187. Moreover, “In Himself He is real and has a form, yet that divine reality and form completely surpass the reality and capability of comprehension of the highest created intelligence.” Canale, “Doctrine of God,” 113.

properly.¹⁹⁹ It seems best to see the human spirit in mind of Jesus, since the passage deals with the worship of the believer. Nevertheless, one has to acknowledge that the Spirit of truth is included in this worship. Jesus already explained to Nicodemus that he has to be born again by the Spirit (John 3:3-8). His discourse with Nicodemus reveals that spirit and flesh are antagonistic (John 3:6), which underlines the necessity of the Holy Spirit in any realm of the believers' life. Consequently, the believer is only able to worship in spirit and truth, if he is guided by the Spirit of truth, who leads him into all truth (John 14:17).²⁰⁰ This is appropriate, since it is the Holy Spirit who also intercedes for us when we pray (Rom 8:26-27).

Looking at ἀλήθεια one can conclude the following: The fact that God is truth (John 14:6) requires worship in truth. Consequently, true worshipers are only true, if they worship in truth, because Jesus is truth. Hence, truth embodies everything that is in harmony with the revelation of God in Christ. Morris states: "Truth is a quality of action, not simply an abstract concept. Believers worship 'in spirit and truth' (4:23-24). [...] Worship must be in conformity with the divine reality as revealed in Jesus."²⁰¹ This ties to the experience of Nicodemus. Jesus taught Nicodemus to do works according to truth, while he says the same to the Samaritan woman in quite a different way. He challenges

¹⁹⁹ Compare with Trail, *An Exegetical Summary of John 1-9*, 177–78.

²⁰⁰ "Worship 'in spirit' is worship within the liberated human situation newly disclosed by God. It happens in the 'truth' that has come through Christ (1:17). Indeed, Christ *is* the 'truth' (14:6). God's Spirit leads into 'truth' (16:13). Worship 'in spirit and truth' (so also 4:24a, b) is worship made possible by Jesus Christ and realized in the believer by the Holy Spirit." J. M. Nützel, "Προσκυνέω," ed. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 174. Schnackenburg adds: "After the dialogue with Nicodemus, it is easy to understand that the true adorers 'in Spirit and truth' are those who are 'born of the Spirit' (cf. 3:3-8). Of himself, earthly man can have no access to God and his heavenly realm (cf. 3: 31); and if he is to pray effectively, he must also be enabled to do so by God, by being filled with his Spirit." Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St John*, 1:437.

²⁰¹ Morris, *The Gospel According to John, Rev. Ed.*, 261–62.

her to accept him as the Messiah (4:26) and to lay aside her wrong theological concepts that oppose the truth. Thus, she is called to live and to worship according to the truth. As such, John 4:23-24 comes as the logical consequence of 3:21. The one who works according to truth, will automatically worship “in all sincerity, with the highest faculties of the mind and emotions” in spirit and truth.²⁰²

Bearing Witness to the Truth

There is one more aspect that is mentioned at different points in the Gospel that will be addressed before diving into the last section of this chapter. The former two sections clarified that the one who does works according to truth, will worship in spirit and truth. Giving witness to the truth is the logical consequence that follows from this. John upholds that there is no way to testify to the truth, as long as one acknowledges truth and is filled with the Spirit of truth. John proves this by pointing to different people in his Gospel that did so: John the Baptist did so (John 5:33), the disciples are called to do so (John 15:27) John, the writer of the Gospel, himself did so (John 21:24) and Jesus himself testified to the truth (John 18:37). Hence, it is the task of every believer to witness to the truth as Jesus did. As such, it is compulsory to discuss Jesus’ final testimony of truth in front of Pilate in the following section.

Pilate: What is Truth?

Finally, the reader comes to the last three occurrences of ἀλήθεια in the Gospel of John. They are embedded in Jesus’ conversation with Pilate and highlight Jesus’ statement on truth, as well as Pilate’s reaction to it. The following events, as described in John 18,

²⁰² Nichol, *Matthew to John*, 940.

happened after Jesus was brought from Kaiphas to the Praetorium, Pilate’s place (18:28). Here, Pilate tried to convince the Jews to stop demanding Jesus’ death (18:29-31),²⁰³ which turned out to be difficult and leads to a conversation between Jesus and Pilate.²⁰⁴ Pilate opens the conversation in 18:33 by asking Jesus if he is the king of the Jews, which is replied with a counter question by Jesus in v. 34: “Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?” Pilate vehemently denies and asks in return: “What have you done?” (18:35). Jesus does not answer the question directly, but goes into Pilate’s first question and declares that he is a king indeed, but that his “kingdom is not of this world” (18:36). To some degree this is an indirect answer to the second question of Pilate, as Jesus’ ‘crime’ was to claim his divine authority and kingship among the Jews, which caused the trial. However, Pilate takes up Jesus’ claim to be a king and through his reply to Jesus, he introduces the reader to the last three occurrences of ἀλήθεια in John 18:37-38a:

Then Pilate said to him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world – to bear witness to the *truth*. Everyone who is of the *truth* listens to my voice.” Pilate said to him, “What is *truth*?”²⁰⁵

²⁰³ Keener suggests in his writings about Matt 27:15-23: “Pilate presumably thought that it was safer to release Jesus, the ‘so-called Christ’ (vv. 17, 22), than alternatives like Barabbas, who, like those ultimately executed with Jesus, was a ‘robber’ (vv. 38, 44; Mk 15:7), the aristocracy’s derisive title (shared by Josephus) for insurrectionists. Pilate probably saw Jesus in the terms suggested in John 18:36–38: as one of the relatively harmless wandering philosopher-kings known to him from Greco-Roman tradition. Roman officials were generally not inclined to execute (hence, perhaps, make martyrs of) those they saw as harmless fools (compare Jos. *War* 6.305).” Craig S. Keener, *Matthew*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), Logos 7 Electronic Version.

²⁰⁴ For a historical outline on Pilate see Walter A. Elwell, ed., “Pilate, Pontius,” *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1988), 1694–95.

²⁰⁵ “His kingship is not part of the political system of which Pilate is concerned. It is not ‘of the world.’ Nonetheless, it can be witnessed in the world. Therefore, Pilate pursues the question, ‘So you are a king?’ (v. 37a). this base understanding of kingship allows Jesus to assert his identity positively, ‘You say that I am a king’ (v. 37b). The rejoinder is not a simple affirmative, nor is it negative; and indeed Pilate will ‘say’ that Jesus is ‘king’ four times in the coming scenes (18:39; 19:14, 15, 19).” Sherri Brown, “What is

Jesus completes his claim that his kingdom is not from this world and neither is he. Although, he was born in this world (worldly realm), he came into this world (transcendental pre-existence) and left the glory of his kingdom behind (Phil 2:5-11). This is a subliminal hint to John 1. Yet, this is not the main concern of Jesus' reply to Pilate. The focus lies on "I have come into the world – to bear witness to the *truth*. Everyone who is of the *truth* listens to my voice." Jesus' life purpose and mission was to witness to the truth by restoring the truth of God. This was revealed in him as the personification of God (cf. 3:11, 32; 7:7; 8:14).²⁰⁶ He did this during his entire ministry and also does it in his last hours of life. But the crucial point is the sentence that follows: "Everyone who is of the *truth* listens to my voice." This statement comes to the reader with three significant points:

(1) "Everyone who is of the truth" is a principal statement. Ἀλήθεια involves everything that is true, according to the revelation of Jesus Christ as presented in the Gospel of John. God is truth and the revelation of God in the Son. Being of the truth describes a person that accepts and lives by truth.²⁰⁷ (2) As a result, such a person is able to recognize the voice of Jesus. In other words: Being in the truth allows direct access to the source – Jesus. Ἀκούω, 'to hear', connects to John 10:27, where Jesus spoke of himself as the Good Shepard. Consequently, those who hear him, are part of his flock. This was not the case with the unbelieving Jews as Jesus states: "Why do you not understand what I say?" (8:43). (3) The first two points did not add something new to the

Truth?: Jesus, Pilate, and the Staging of the Dialogue of the Cross in John 18:28-19:16a," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 77, no. 1 (2015): 76.

²⁰⁶ "His was a spiritual kingdom of truth; and He won people to His cause, not through force, but through conviction and persuasion." Wiersbe, *The Bible Expository Commentary*, 378.

²⁰⁷ As was shown multiple times before, this knowledge of truth is only possible, if the believer connects himself to the divine and enters into the process of understanding truth. It is self-evident that the Spirit of truth is inherent to this process, for he convicts believers and unbelievers of truth (John 16:8-13).

discussion of truth. However, the third point is more a question than an observation: Does Pilate belong to the group of people that are in the truth and hear Jesus' voice, or not? Obviously, Pilate belongs to the second category, for he had enough information to make up his mind about Christ. He had the possibility to witness Jesus' humble nature throughout the whole interrogation and concluded that there was no guilt in him (John 18:38b; 19:4.6).²⁰⁸

Having said that it is compulsory to look at Pilate's statement "What is truth?" (John 18:38a). There are two ways to view Pilate's question. Either Pilate was confused by Greek, Roman and Jewish thought and asked a philosophical question,²⁰⁹ or he was simply indifferent to truth and devalues Jesus' statement with his question. If one takes a look at John 18:38 it seems that Pilate does not even wait for Jesus' response. It says in 18:38b: "After he had said this, he went back outside to the Jews and told them, "I find no guilt in him." So, the claim is that if he was really interested in an answer, he would have had waited for it. But the context suggests that Pilate is more concerned about his

²⁰⁸ But even more interesting is the passage in Matt 27:19 that says: "Besides, while he [Pilate] was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, 'Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much because of him today in a dream.'" It is important to notice that "Greeks and Romans regularly viewed dreams as an important way in which the gods spoke to people." See Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 411. Pilate could have interpreted his wife's dream as a divine interaction. Although the Bible does not say anything about the content of this dream, it must have been enough for Pilate to conclude that Jesus is not an ordinary man. Though, one has to consider the chronology of Jesus' trial. If one compares Matt 27:17-21 with the course from John 18:39 on, one has to ask, if Matt 27:19 happens before, or after John 18:38a. Some may speak for the latter, but it would go beyond the scope of this paper to discuss this. Still, it is reasonable to ask if Matt 27:19 stresses Pilate's ignorance in regards to his statement in 18:38a? However, it does not change the fact that Pilate is more concerned about politics than Jesus' fate, as he gives in to the Jewish mob, who shouts for Jesus' crucifixion.

²⁰⁹ "Greek philosophy could speak of ἀλήθεια in terms of a true perspective on reality; Romans could speak of *veritas* as accurate, factual representation of events (Cicero *Inv.* 2.53.161)." Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, 1113.

politics than Jesus. Obviously, Pilate is not in the truth, otherwise he would have had responded positively to Jesus' statement in John 18:37.²¹⁰ In the words of Whitacre:

Pilate's response, *What is truth?* (v. 38), is probably not a great philosophical remark, but a dismissal of the whole subject as irrelevant. Pilate has heard enough to determine that Jesus is not a political threat, and, therefore, he has gotten from the interview what he was after.²¹¹

Apart from Pilate's indifference, there is one last observation to be made from Pilate's question. John 18:38 is the last time that ἀλήθεια appears in the Gospel of John. Thus, it is appropriate to conclude that ἀλήθεια functions as a literary device at the end of the Gospel regarding the matter of truth. John places the last appearance of ἀλήθεια in such a way that the question "What is truth?" functions as a rhetorical question. Pilate did not get an answer from Jesus because he was not paying attention to the details of Jesus' message and thus could not discern the answer. In contrast, a careful reader of the Gospel is able to give an answer and to decide on the matter of truth for himself, after having received enough information on the matter.

Conclusion

The discussion on Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman showed that walking in the truth includes behaving according to the truth and worshiping in the truth, which leads to testifying to the truth. However, the reaction of Pilate stands in sharp contrast to a proper reaction towards truth. He neglected the importance of Jesus message on truth and thus could not discern Jesus' answer. Moreover, the case of Pilate showed once more

²¹⁰ Trail provides an overview on popular interpretations that are all pointing to the ignorance of Pilate. See Trail, *An Exegetical Summary of John 10-21*, 379.

²¹¹ Whitacre, *John*, 443. See also Hirsch, who discusses if Pilate was a sceptic E. Hirsch, *Das vierte Evangelium in seiner ursprünglichen Gestalt* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1936), 416.

that there is no neutral stance on the matter of truth, for “a *neutral* stance toward Jesus is a decision *against* Jesus”.²¹² This was the case with Pilate, since he preferred giving in to the truth for the purpose of appeasing the Jews. The same goes for the reader of the Gospel. He is called to decide on the matter of truth by the rhetorical question, which John uses as the last appearance of ἀλήθεια.

²¹² Andreas J. Köstenberger, “‘What is Truth?’ Pilate’s Question in its Johannine and Larger Biblical Context,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48, no. 1 (2005): 52. See also Brown, “What is Truth?: Jesus, Pilate, and the Staging of the Dialogue of the Cross in John 18:28-19:16a,” 77.

CHAPTER 4

FURTHER IMPLICATIONS

(1) Soteriology: Looking at the churches, one becomes aware of the fact that some people rate their quality of faith and assurance of salvation by their knowledge and observance of biblical doctrines. It is important to know and to observe these doctrines. However, some people detach these doctrines from Christ, as if they were mere concepts that had to be mastered. When doctrines are degraded in such a way, people miss the real purpose, since it was shown that truth and biblical doctrines are deeply Christocentric. Christ is the living Center of each doctrine. Detached from Christ, they cannot unfold their full power and meaning in the life of the believer. Instead, they become a dry and factual edifice of teaching that has no life changing content. This sheds a bad light on the Christian religion, makes it unattractive and ineffective.

The truth for this time is broad in its outlines, far reaching, embracing many doctrines; but these doctrines are not detached items, which mean little; they are united by golden threads, forming a complete whole, with Christ as the living center. The truths we present from the Bible are as firm and immovable as the throne of God.¹

¹ Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages, Book 2* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1958), 87.

Christ is our living Center. Divine truth, which is shining upon us in its bright, clear, distinct rays, is not detached atoms of doctrines, loose and disconnected, but they form one string of precious pearls. Christ's mission and work are threads of gold binding all together and constituting a complete whole.²

Only put together, understood and experienced as a whole, will biblical doctrines have a life changing effect on the human heart.

(2) Missiology: In John 15:15b Jesus calls the disciples his friends: “but I have called you *friends*, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.” Jesus’ key for successful discipleship was becoming friends with his disciples. Only in this way he could reach his disciples fully and teach them eternal truths. Looking at his ministry, it is clear to see that he always ministered on a relational basis to the people.

Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, “Follow Me.”³

The quote indicates: First comes relationship, then the personal experience with Christ and finally teaching. This coincides with the relational concept of truth. It is all about relationship to the truth or Jesus that leads the believer into a process of being taught in the truth and being transformed by the truth. Harrington and Absalom support this view: “The way Jesus does apprenticeship is through three broad elements: relationships, experiences, and information.”⁴ Also Paul highlights that faith and the

² Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases, Volume 19 [Nos. 1360–1419, 1988]* (Silver Springs, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1990), 91.

³ Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing, 1905), 143.

⁴ Bobby Harrington and Alex Absalom, *Discipleship That Fits: The Five Kinds of Relationships God Uses to Help Us Grow* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 25.

passing on of soul saving truth is “best transferred and deepened in the context of relational experiences.”⁵ This is extremely important for introducing people to the teachings of the Bible. However, the problem is that information or doctrinal teachings, seem to be overstated in the beginning when it comes to discipleship. The reason may be found in the circumstance that was already mentioned above, or in the fact that the Western society is fixed on the transfer of knowledge. First and foremost, people have to get to know Christ by relating to believers who can introduce them to him. Then, through curiosity, they are open to receiving more information. This is Christ’s method. But to assail someone with information is counterproductive. “Regrettably, the Western church has the tendency to emphasize information downloading over relational discipleship.”⁶

(3) Ecclesiology: Regarding the doctrinal teachings of the Bible, the Church in general and each believer has to be cautious of not having an immovable understanding of doctrinal teachings. The human understanding of biblical truth is progressive. That does not mean that truth itself is progressive, but that the Spirit of truth guides the believer into all truth. This presupposes that the believer and the church will never fully understand truth completely. Which means a constant advance towards a fuller understanding of truth. Besides, Christians claim absolute truth (i.e. God) exists on the basis of faith, for they cannot prove it. Based on their faith, they trust in the genuineness and absoluteness of the Bible and its doctrines (2 Tim 3:16). It is appropriate to say that when the Bible claims something to be true, it is irrevocably true. It does not matter that there could be more information that is unknown to humans but known to God.⁷ The

⁵ *Ibid.*, 23. See also 1 Cor 4:16; 11:1; Phil 3:17; 4:9; 1 Thess 1:6; 2 Thess 3:7.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁷ Taking the doctrine of the Second Coming of Jesus as an example, it does not matter that the Bible does not reveal every detail. In its essence, the Bible proclaims the Second Coming of Jesus as an

Bible is the written word of God. For this reason, the fact that the Bible proclaims something to be irrevocable is the evidence for its absoluteness. In this regard, submitting to the guidance of the Spirit of truth and laying aside preconceived ideas and interpretations is essential in order to understand biblical doctrines.⁸ The preamble of the ‘Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day-Adventist Church’ states:

Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as their only creed and hold certain fundamental beliefs to be the teaching of the Holy Scriptures. These beliefs, as set forth here, constitute the church’s understanding and expression of the teaching of Scripture. Revision of these statements may be expected at a General Conference Session when the church is led by the Holy Spirit to a fuller understanding of Bible truth or finds better language in which to express the teachings of God’s Holy Word.⁹

As such, Adventist beliefs are descriptive and not prescriptive. This means that the church is open to a fuller understanding of biblical truth. The understanding of truth may change through the guidance of the Spirit of truth. When he leads to a better understanding, the Church articulates their creed in better or new wording. Therefore, it is crucial to note that truth is not something the Church possesses. Truth is something that the church humbly searches for with an ever-open heart to new revelations. This protects from doctrinal arrogance. At the same time, this observation stresses the necessity of being sensitive and cautious to side issues. Christians are called to refuse proclaiming

absolute landmark of the Christian faith. In other words: An absolute truth that will become reality one day. This is enough in order to claim the absoluteness of that doctrine on the basis of faith. This also goes for other biblical doctrines.

⁸ “Truth is not an object with which people can do what they like, not a ready-made possession, which one can take over and administer. The truth which Christ has revealed must be opened up by the ‘Spirit of truth’, ever more deeply explored and exposed to particular possibilities of understanding it (the Paraclete sayings, esp. 16:13). It is a dynamic process, which makes it a duty for every generation to learn to understand the revelation brought by Christ anew in the Spirit of God.” Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St John*, 2:237.

⁹ General Conference Ministerial Department, *Seventh-Day Adventist Believe: An Exposition of the Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing, 2005), v.

something to be absolute and irrevocable, while the Bible remains silent on that topic or does not offer detailed information.

CHAPTER 5

FINAL CONCLUSION

At the beginning of this research, John's approach towards truth was discussed. According to John's truth theory, it was shown that John had proof of absolute truth. He experienced Jesus' divinity, wherefore he believed in him. Based on John's experience with the divine, Christianity is called to believe in the absolute truth that he testified about. In this regard, it was shown that the biblical approach towards truth is incompatible with worldly truth systems, as both systems have competing fundamentals though equal, since they are grounded on faith – supernatural vs. natural. While the biblical testimony clearly proclaims the existence of absolute truth and rejects a relative understanding of truth, non-biblical systems reject the idea of absolute truth. As a result, it is self-evident that the dismissal of absolute truth by various philosophical systems is incompatible with the biblical concept of truth. Moreover, it was stated that it is not possible to understand absolute truth fully, but only fragmentary. When a Christian speaks on the basis of faith about absolute truth, he has to acknowledge that he only understands absolute truth as what has been revealed by God so far through Scripture, Jesus and the Spirit of truth. Thus, he should be open to new revelations from God.

The exegetical discussion on ἀλήθεια showed that truth builds the fundament on which the Trinity is founded and from where it operates from. In other words: God is truth. As a consequence, ἀλήθεια is a theological concept that is deeply Christocentric,

but also Trinitarian. This means that it is intellectual and factual, but at the same time deeply personal, relational and active. Köstenberger puts it in the following words:

In John, then, truth is first and foremost a theological, and perhaps even more accurately, a Christological concept. Rather than merely connoting correspondence with reality, as in Greek philosophy, or factual accuracy, as in Roman thought, truth, for John, while also being propositional, is at the heart a *personal, relational* concept that has its roots and origin in none other than God himself.¹

Thus, the Johannine representation of truth is revolutionary for postmodernists, as they are used to an impersonal and relative understanding of truth. The biblical truth system, however, offers an intellectual construct that can be experienced in relationship with God. Therefore, it comes as a valuable opportunity to postmodern thought that is superior to human theories and philosophies. The relational aspect of truth turns truth into more than an intellectual concept, since it is a practical cornerstone in daily life that deepens the relationship with Christ. Moreover, the understanding of the Johannine concept of truth will prevent a Christian from being dragged into the misleading whirl of philosophical and theological currents of today's society. Lastly, the last occurrence of ἀλήθεια in John 18:38 completes the discussion on truth, by indirectly allowing the reader to reflect on everything that was said before and to find an answer to the question: "What is truth?"

35. ¹ Köstenberger, "What is Truth? Pilate's Question in its Johannine and Larger Biblical Context,"

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