GRACE AND TRUTH

An Old Testament Description of God, and Its Use
in the Johannine Gospel

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INTRODUCTION

The prologue of the Gospel of John gives this significant description of the Word that became flesh: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). The expression “full of grace and truth” is Old Testament language which occurs frequently in various ways when prophet or psalmist is speaking about God. It is not surprising that the Evangelist takes this term from the Old Testament for in the prologue, not to mention the rest of the Gospel, there are several allusions to the Old Testament, such as reference to the beginning and creation, or reference to Moses and the law, or the allusion to seeing God, or rather to the fact that no one has seen God at any time. When therefore John declares that the incarnate Word is “full of grace and truth” he is telling his readers to look for the meaning of this expression in the Old Testament where it is descriptive of God. Let one reference suffice here for an Old Testament quotation which embodies other descriptive words about God: “And the Lord passed before him [Moses] and proclaimed, ‘The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness’” (Ex. 34:6). “Abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness” becomes “full of grace and truth” in John’s Gospel.1

The purpose of this paper is to learn what the Evangelist and the believers of the first church meant when they said that the incarnate Word, Jesus of Nazareth, was full of grace and truth. To know the meaning of this statement we need to learn what the Old Testament writers meant when they described God with these words. Consequently this paper will

1The Hebrew words areラb 1b3ed wemeth which the R.S.V. renders “abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,” the A.S.V., “abundant in lovingkindness and truth.” The LXX reads πολευεός kai αληθίνος, “of much mercy and truth.” The Evangelist has, πλευρας charitos kai aletheias, “full of grace and truth.” It will be noted that in both the LXX and the N.T. the Hebrew emeth is rendered with the same Greek root aletheia; besed receives eleos most often in the LXX, but in later Greek charis became more popular and apparently supplanted eleos in rendering the Hebrew besed. This may explain the variation between the LXX and the N.T.
explore as fully and accurately as possible the concepts which these words carry in Old Testament usage.

GRACE

Our study of these two words begins with grace, since it is the first in the combination in the prologue of the Gospel, "full of grace and truth." Its counterpart in the Old Testament is the Hebrew word hesed, which is variously given by the King James Version as mercy, goodness and lovingkindness, and which is usually translated "steadfast love" in the Revised Standard Version. Since no one English word will convey the meaning, I shall beg your indulgence to allow the use of the Hebrew at this point in that I shall refer to this word as hesed.

Dr. Nelson Glueck, now president of Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati and well-known as an archaeologist of Palestine through his books and writings,² has written a very significant monograph for his doctoral dissertation, Das Wort Hesed im alttestamentliche Sprachgebrauche ("The Word Hesed in Old Testament Usage").³ This work of Dr. Glueck has had profound effect upon present-day understanding of hesed, as the rather recent lexicon of L. Koehler indicates. At the outset I want to acknowledge my indebtedness to this little book.

Professor Glueck has rightly discerned that there is a profane as well as a religious use of this word. In the so-called secular or profane usage this word appears in relationships of man to man. Let us note a few of them.

Shortly before his death Jacob summoned his son Joseph and said, "If now I have found favor in your sight, put your hand under my thigh and do for me hesed and truth. Do not bury me in Egypt" (Gen. 47:29). In the father-son relationship Jacob asked his son Joseph to show loyalty and fidelity to his father in the matter of burying him with the fathers in Canaan. This request Joseph solemnly confirmed with an oath. In a setting of a husband-wife relationship Abraham required of Sarah that she should perform this hesed, namely, that she would say that she was Abraham's sister. This half-truth had been agreed upon by them for the protection of Abraham from the lustful avarice of those who might want to make Sarah a widow. Abraham therefore appealed to Sarah to perform hesed, i.e., loyalty to her husband by saying that she was his sister (20:13). In another scene of family relationship Abraham's servant appeals to Bethuel, the father, and Laban, the brother, to demonstrate their hesed

³(Giessen: A. Toepelmann, 1927).
and truth toward Abraham, the servant's lord. The appeal is made that they may show loyalty to and respect for the family bond (24:49). To do *hesed* is to demonstrate faithfulness and loyalty toward the members within the family bond.

In the well-known story of Ruth, who had forsaken her family tie and friends in Moab to unite herself with the family and faith of her deceased husband, which she apparently was not under obligation to do, it is interesting to note that Boaz makes this significant appraisal of Ruth’s conduct: "Blessed are you of the Lord, my daughter, for you have performed a more beautiful *hesed* now than at the first in that you did not go after young men either poor or rich" (Ruth 3:10). Boaz is noting that Ruth had done two *heseds*, the first one was in demonstrating her loyalty to her husband’s family by following Naomi back to Israel, and now in seeking marriage with the old Boaz, a relative of her deceased husband, in order to raise up seed for her deceased husband. This, says Boaz, was an even greater *hesed* than the first act of family loyalty. Boaz in a previous incident has also shown an act of *hesed* in ordering his men to allow Ruth to glean where there were many sheaves. In this he showed a devotion and loyalty to his family (2:20).

In relationships less intimate *hesed* appears as evidence of profound regard for the association or fellowship established between two or more people. Such relationships are the host-guest in which both the host and the guest perform *hesed* toward each other as in the case of Lot and his heavenly guests at Sodom (Gen. 19:19), or in the case of Rahab and the spies (Joshua 2:12, 14). This loyalty as expressed between David and Jonathan is another instance of *hesed* (I Sam. 20:8, 14, 15). Later in honoring the covenant established with the deceased Jonathan David sought opportunity to show *hesed* to the house of Saul (II Sam. 9:1, 3, 7).

To these, other examples of *hesed* in man-to-man relationships can be added. This will suffice, however, to allow the conclusion that in the performance of *hesed* one expects to find loyalty, mutual reciprocity, genuine faithfulness or brotherly love and affection. *Hesed* is not an outburst of unlooked-for mercy, nor an arbitrary demonstration of favor. It is within a covenant or fellowship or family circle that members of the fellowship demonstrate *hesed* by fidelity and loyalty to those in that fellowship. Perhaps it should be noted that members willingly entered these relationships or naturally grew up into the fellowship such as the family. And therefore each member willingly practiced this *hesed* toward those in the fellowship and he expected this *hesed* from others. As long as the relationship was vital, so long would *hesed* continue.

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4Cf. Gen. 21:23; Jud. 1:24; 8:35; I Sam. 20:8, 14f.; II Sam. 2:5; 3:8; 16:17.
TRUTH

The second word of our study is truth which I shall call by its Hebrew name emeth. Our English translation “truth,” I fear, has done some damage to our understanding of the Hebrew emeth even as the translation “grace” casts its shadow of misunderstanding upon hesed. Let us note at the outset that we see emeth clearly and in its proper setting when we associate it with hesed. These two are frequently paired together in the Old Testament as also in John’s prologue, “full of grace and truth.”

Let me recall some of the passages in which both hesed and emeth are words to describe action; they are acts, not mere words or concepts. In the incident of Eliezer with Bethuel and Laban he asked them to do both hesed and emeth toward Abraham (Gen. 24:49); thus Jacob asked Joseph to perform hesed and emeth in the oath to bury him in Canaan (47:29), and this is likewise true in the case of Rahab and the spies (Joshua 2:14). The prophet Hosea declares that “There is no emeth and no hesed and no knowledge of God in the land” (4:1). In the next verse this is explained to mean that there is swearing, lying, killing, stealing and adultery. The wise man in Proverbs says, “Hesed and emeth preserve the king and his throne is upheld by hesed” (20:28). If one were to study emeth in its own right and as it is used to express relationship, the study would yield the idea of faithfulness and dependability. Such were the judges that Moses appointed, men of emeth (Ex. 18:21). It appears to me that when hesed and emeth appear together they become a hendiadys in which the second term intends to confirm and enrich the concept of the first. This then would impressively stress the concept of faithful loyalty or dependability in covenantal fellowship.

We need to place another word in our orbit of study to sharpen the understanding of the two we have discussed. This third word is hen which very closely approximates the English word grace as we commonly understand it. In fact hen in its nounal, adjectival and verbal forms is translated as grace, gracious and to be gracious. Hen or heman, its verbal form, indicates a favor which a superior offers an inferior. The superior is under no obligation to grant the favor, yet the superior out of the goodness of his heart may choose to give the one of lower rank a consideration which could not be claimed or demanded.

Professor Lofthouse, in his article “Hen and Hesed in the Old Testa-

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ment,"a illustrates this type of consideration in cases such as Shechem, who asked to find hen in the eyes of Jacob and the brothers of Dinah whom he wished to marry (Gen. 34:11), or Joseph who found hen in the eyes of Potiphar (39:4), or the brothers who asked to find hen in the sight of Joseph (47:25). Even Jacob the father appealed to the hen of his son Joseph when he asked that Joseph bury him in the land of Canaan (47:29). Here it appears that Jacob recognized the superior status of his son and therefore sought hen from him but — let it be carefully noted — he also placed Joseph within the bond of the family when he asked Joseph to perform hesed and emeth, which, as we noted above, was the faithful loyalty that should mark the relationships within the Hebrew family. In this touching scene of Jacob and Joseph we detect the distinction between hen and hesed: hen is a gracious unmerited favor which a superior bestows on an inferior. Hesed in turn is also an act of goodness, but it is one that can be expected since it takes place within the context of a covenant of intimate fellowship. If the covenant is between unequals or between equals, hesed can be performed by either party, for through hesed the covenant is maintained and the relationship within the fellowship manifests vitality.

Our brief survey of these words in the profane life of Israel will serve as background for our study of these terms when they are used about the Lord, the God of Israel, for it seems reasonable that Israel would use the vocabulary of the common life to describe the relationship of God to Israel. It is in words such as hesed that we arrive at an understanding of such relationships. Here of necessity we struggle with words and phrases of another language in order to express through them the concepts that a word like hesed carried for the ancient Hebrew.

TRANSLATIONS

The difficulties of translating the Bible accurately have beset translators ancient and modern. A pen from the past, that of the grandson who bears the same name as his grandfather, Jesus Sirach, writes in the introduction to the Apocrypha book, Ecclesiasticus, that “what was originally expressed in Hebrew does not have exactly the same sense when translated into another language. Not only this work, but even the law itself, the prophecies, and the rest of the books differ not a little as originally expressed.” Every Bible student will give hearty assent to this observation. To this I would add that words or phrases of the Old Testament have been placed in words and phrases of ancient translations, which in some instances have confined these words to certain areas of thought from which they may be rescued with laborious difficulty. This type of rescue has taken place in the case of hesed and emeth.

aZeitschrift für die Alte testamentliche Wissenschaft, 1933:29-35.
Let me trace the course of translation through which hesed ran. The first translation of the Old Testament Hebrew was a Greek version known as the Septuagint. This version rendered hesed as eleos, which meant pity, and the Latin Vulgate followed with misericordia, which also has the sense of pity. The early church fathers followed this line of thought and used words that meant pity, compassion or tenderness. In ancient dictionaries such as the one of Brian Walton (1657) and another by John Taylor (1754) both of which are built on the works of the Buxtorfs, who flourished in the late sixteenth and first half of the seventeenth centuries, hesed is interpreted as goodness, kindness, beneficence, pity. The famous Gutenberg Bible in Exodus 34:6 has multe misericordie et verus. The early English translations usually have what we observe in the King James Version, mercy, lovingkindness and goodness. Our word hesed ran in this course of thought until recent times when, thanks to the work of Nelson Glueck noted above, it became clear that hesed was used by the ancient Hebrews to describe a relationship of loyalty and mutual responsibility to members within the covenant or within any other established fellowship.

Hesed caused the Revised Standard Version committee so much difficulty, we are told, that they could not reach a satisfactory agreement throughout the many months of discussions. It became the last word on which a vote was taken by the Old Testament committee. No one English noun could reproduce hesed, and consequently they resorted to two words, "steadfast love." Further study and trial will reveal whether this is the best the English of our day can do for this interesting and important Hebrew word.7

In these examples the second word of our study also appears. The word emeth, commonly translated "truth," was so first rendered by the Septuagint. Otto Procksch,8 an Old Testament scholar, tells us that of

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7A comparison is here given of four English versions, the New Dutch version, the Zürich version and the new Jerusalem version:

Ex. 34:6. K.J.V. abundant in goodness and truth
     E.S.V. plenteous in mercy and truth
     A.S.V. abundant in lovingkindness and truth
     R.S.V. abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness
     N.D. groot van goedertierenheid en trouw
     Zür. reich an Huld und Treue
     Jer. riche en grâce et fidélité

Ps. 25:10. K.J.V. all the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth
     E.S.V. and A.S.V. . . . lovingkindness and truth
     R.S.V. . . . steadfast love and faithfulness
     N.D. . . . goedertierenheid en trouw
     Zür. . . . Huld und Treue
     Jer. . . . amour et vérité

the ninety-two instances of *emeth*, the Septuagint translated it *aletheia* "truth," eighty-six times, and *pistis*, "faith," only six times. *Amunah*, a word of the same root is rendered *aletheia* twenty-one times and *pistis* nineteen times. "Truth" was the translation used by the Vulgate, which was passed on into the English translations. However, at the beginning of our century, biblical scholarship discovered that *emeth* was not truth as an abstract thought, as found in Greek literature, but *emeth* was used to describe a relationship in life. Consequently today our lexicons offer "faithfulness" or "steadfastness" for this word.

**THE HESED OF GOD**

Now to return to our subject, I propose to take up the *hesed*, the steadfastness, of the Lord, the God of Israel. Before we can properly discuss any concept about God we need to sense clearly the relationship which God has established with his people. This relationship is called "covenant." "Covenant," a well-known term, was in common use among the neighbors of ancient Israel. In his studies on this subject, Professor George E. Mendenhall9 of the University of Michigan has found two types of covenant in the ancient east: the one of an equal with an equal, and the other of a superior with an inferior. In the latter the superior relates himself through his gracious act to the inferior by means of covenant. The superior places himself under obligation to protect his vassal, who in turn is to show proper respect and service for his lord. This was a common covenant relationship in the ancient Orient.

In the Old Testament God as sovereign has established his covenant with Israel his people by the mighty act of deliverance from the bondage of Egypt. If one asks why it was that God established his covenant with Israel or why he chose Israel to be his people from all the peoples of the earth, then the answer is that Israel was chosen because the Lord had set his love upon them, and that the Lord remembered the oath made to the patriarchs. The covenant was an act of God's unmerited favor to Israel. In the language of Paul this is grace, *charis*. The wonder of God's favor in establishing the covenant is enhanced in that God also keeps the covenant, and here we observe that "he keeps covenant and *hesed* with those who love him," and if Israel keeps the commandments then the Lord their God will keep with them covenant and *hesed* (Deut. 7:9, 12). This is the idea in Solomon's prayer of dedication when he addresses God as one who keeps covenant and demonstrates *hesed* (I Kings 8:23; II Chron. 6:14; cf. also Neh. 1:5; 9:32). Here one can sense that *hesed* carries in it the idea of fidelity to Israel because of the covenant which God had made with them.

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This same concept of fidelity is found in the covenant made with David as Nathan the prophet declares this, "I will be his father and he shall be my son. When he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, but I will not take my hesecl from him as I took it from Saul" (2 Sam. 7:14f.). Here was established a father-son relationship which would express itself in hesecl, i.e., God's faithful concern for David, and also the faithfulness of David and his seed toward God. If David did not manifest hesecl there would be chastening with the rod of men. The establishing of this covenant with David is celebrated in Psalm 89, in which three terms interplay on one theme: berith "covenant," emeth "faithfulness," and hesecl "steadfastness," which comprise the one theme, God's faithfulness to David. "I will sing of thy hesecl O Lord forever, with my mouth I will proclaim thy emeth to all generations. For thy hesecl was established forever, thy emeth is firm as the heavens. Thou hast said, I have made a berith with my chosen one, I have sworn to David my servant: I will establish your descendants forever, and build your throne for all generations" (89:1-4).

"I will not remove from him my hesecl, or be false to my emeth. I will not violate my berith, or alter the word that went forth from my lips" (89:33-34, cf., also vs. 28, 49).10 The three words of Psalm 89 appear in the promise made by the prophet in Isaiah 55:3, "I will make with you an everlasting covenant, the dependable hesecl of David." Glueck11 interprets "the faithful hesecl for David" as the normative faithful relationship which God exercises through the covenant.

Hesecl as covenantal loyalty of the Lord for Israel may be observed in some of the prophets. In Hosea God contemplates the bringing back of Israel into the God-people relationship. Israel had become a wayward wife like Gomer, the wife of Hosea. After God had subjected Israel to severe punishment, he then will allure Israel into the desert as in the days when first Israel was beloved of God, when God loved Israel and called his people out of Egypt. There Israel will answer to God as at the time she came out of the land of Egypt and then God will betroth her to himself forever. "I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in hesecl and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness" (2:19f.). In this setting the Lord will restore Israel in three realms of experience: in righteousness and justice, which reflect the moral or ethical life, in hesecl and faithfulness, which reflect God's reliability and dependability, and in mercy, which reflects the love and tenderness of God which forgives wayward Israel.

10To the anointed one God manifests his hesecl, Ps. 18:50; II Sam. 22:51.
11Ott. cit., pp. 42f. It is this same normative faithful relationship of God which Solomon noted on taking the throne as David's son, I Kings 3:6; II Chron. 1:8.
The prophet of the exile speaks about the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel, who will have compassion with eternal hesed on Israel, and his hesed shall not depart from Israel, nor shall the covenant of his peace be removed (Isa. 54:8f.). Hesed here is paralleled with covenant and mercy. God's covenant has in it both love and loyalty for his people.

**SIN - FORGIVENESS**

As we contemplate the covenant, we confront the important, but disruptive, element of sin. Many are the incidents that narrate the rebellions and murmurings of Israel. This necessitated forgiveness. And for our present purpose we want to determine how forgiveness is related to the Lord. As we examine certain passages about the forgiveness of sin, we should ponder carefully whether the plea for pardon is addressed to the *ben* of the Lord, i.e., to the unmerited favor of God, or to his hesed, i.e., to his covenantal faithfulness. Or to state this differently, does forgiveness come as an unmerited, perhaps unexpected response from God, or does forgiveness result from God's faithfulness to his covenant?

Nelson Glueck has proposed a discerning and clear insight as an answer to the above. He would conclude from his exegesis of Numbers 14:18 that God forgives because of his *ben*, "grace," and because of his compassion. This is an act of unqualified grace. And because Israel's sin is forgiven, then it is that God's faithful loyalty to Israel can come to full manifestation. Glueck recalls that God's choice of Israel was an act of pure grace. The covenant with Israel rests upon unmerited favor. This would be *ben*, "grace." Within that covenant, as we have noted before, God has established his relationship of hesed and emeth, "steadfastness" and "faithfulness." So it is in the matter of forgiveness for sin that breaks the covenant. This breach is healed because God is gracious and compassionate. When forgiveness and consequent restoration have taken place, then we read in the longer expression of the formula in Exodus 34:6 that God abounds in hesed and emeth, in that he is keeping hesed for thousands even as the commandment says (Exodus 20:6), that God performs his hesed to thousands who love him and keep his commandments. It is therefore God's compassion and grace that forgive sin, and it is his hesed and emeth that characterize his relationship to the forgiven community. God performs his hesed to thousands "who love me and keep my commandments." Perhaps we may see that same order of *ben* and hesed in the prayer of the psalmist for pardon. "Show me *ben* O God according to thy hesed, according to the abundance of compassion blot out my transgressions" (51:1). In another psalm the order is that the Lord forgives all iniquities and heals all diseases, and then he crowns with hesed and compassion (103:3f.).
In assessing the data of the Old Testament the interpreter confronts on the one hand the temptation of making distinctions where none really exists, and on the other hand a dull insensibility of failing to catch the instructive variations within the Scripture. And for our own good we should repeatedly remind ourselves that words, phrases and expressions of the Old Testament as used by men under the direction of the Spirit of God cannot be contained in neatly defined categories. All biblical scholars know the living word breaks out of all well-intended definitions, so that it is constantly necessary to listen to what the Spirit is saying to the church as the church ponders the Word of Life. But to summarize here, let it be said that God demonstrated his free act of grace in his choosing Israel to be his people. In that election of Israel he graciously established the covenant, and he graciously forgives the sin of his wayward people. On that foundation he comes to Israel daily in hesed and emeth; these terms describe his faithful covenantal loyalty to his people. It is in this Israel can place her trust.

ISRAEL'S RESPONSE

A brief comment should be made here about Israel's response to the hesed of her Lord. The well-known response as given in Deuteronomy 6:5 requires the love of Israel in heart and soul and might. The prophet Hosea, however, describes the sought-for response in Israel's hesed toward God. At the outset the prophet declares that the Lord will betroth Israel, rebellious Israel, to him in righteousness, in justice, in compassion, in hesed and in emeth. This hesed of God, as A. Weiser says in his commentary, is not an impulsive mood but the basis of a personal fellowship between God and people. However, in his contention with the people of the land, God found no hesed or emeth, no faithful love toward God and toward man (4:1). If there were any hesed, it evaporated like the morning cloud (6:4). The relationship with God and people is not built on sacrifice but on hesed, not ceremony, but the knowledge of God (6:6). It is hesed and justice that repentant Israel must keep. Since Gomer the wayward wife of Hosea represents infidelity and unfaithfulness, this would be the picture of Israel who no longer had hesed for God and for the people. Hesed is faithful loyalty and love for God and his people. It is most interesting to note that Jeremiah, who was greatly influenced by Hosea, employed his predecessor's word to picture Israel in her ideal time in the wilderness. "Thus says the Lord, I remember the hesed of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness, in a land not sown" (2:2). There Israel responded to the Lord, her husband, in loyal devotion and love. Our point to be remembered here

is that Israel made response to God's *hesed* by demonstrating *hesed* in her relationship with God and his people.\(^{13}\)

**JOHN'S PROLOGUE**

At the beginning of this paper our attention was called to the testimony of the Evangelist about the Word, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). It seems most reasonable to believe that the Old Testament words which were used to describe the Lord God of Israel are here ascribed to Jesus, thereby attesting to his full deity. What was said of God in the Old Testament is here said to be equally true of Jesus of Nazareth. The prologue asserts further that the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. This is to say that the God full of grace and truth revealed through the law had now fully come in Jesus Christ, who was indeed full of grace and truth. And of that fullness all had received grace upon grace. Even as in the Old Testament the covenantal faithfulness of God happened to Israel time upon time, so also within the first generation of Christian believers God's faithful redemptive grace in Christ came time upon time.

\(^{13}\)The conclusion reached in the above study of *hesed* unfortunately does not satisfy every instance of its use. This note takes up one of those instances, which is the well-known text of Isaiah 40:6, "Hark, one is saying, 'Cry!' And I said, 'What shall I cry?' All flesh is grass and all its *hesed* [busdo, Hebrew text] is like the flower of the field." Faithful love or covenantal loyalty does not offer good sense here since neither quality is found in the flower of the field with which a comparison is made. Most translators have followed the LXX's *doxa*, the only instance of its use for *hesed*. Cf. the Vulgate's *gloria*, the K.J.V.'s *goodness*, the R.S.V.'s *beauty*. Apparently the idea of glory derives from the comparison with the flower of the field, but it poorly serves the other object of the comparison, all flesh. Emendations such as *kebodo*, *bedaro* or *bodo* (its glory, its beauty or its splendor) have been offered to justify the translation glory.

Felix Perles in his *Analecten zur Textkritik des Alten Testaments* (München: Theodor Ackermann, 1895), pp. 76ff., presents another emendation, *basno* (its strength). He finds support for this in the Targum of this passage, kol toqe biton (all its strength). Thus the Targum also renders *behosen* (the strong) in Isa. 1:31.

In a later study of the same title (Leipzig: Verlag von Gustav Engel, 1922), p. 89, Perles returns to this passage and asserts that *hesed* may well mean strength, and consequently his emendation proposed twenty-seven years before becomes unnecessary. Perles adduces some instances in the Psalms (59:9f., 10f. [Heb. 10f., 17f.]; 62:11f. [Heb. 12f.]; 144:2) in which *hesed* appears in the context of words such as might, refuge, stronghold, fortress, etc. In 143:12 the psalmist prays, "In thy *hesed* cut off my enemies." The concept of power or might seems appropriate here. From these references we observe that *hesed* may well embody the idea of strength or power.

If we may translate the pertinent part of Isa. 40:6 accordingly, it becomes, "All flesh is grass and all its strength as the flower of the field." The contrast in this passage, vv. 6-8, is between the Word of God which endures forever and flesh, mankind, which is weak and transitory. The Word of God much like the Spirit of the Lord has power, whereas flesh is weak (cf. Isa. 31:3; Ps. 78:39). The *hesed* of flesh, i.e., its strength, is feeble like the flower of the field. Cf. further N. H. Snaith, *Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1946), pp. 132-4; E. Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958), p. 103.
It is significant to note, I feel, that the word "grace," charis, occurs four times in verses 14-17 and does not appear in the rest of the Gospel. Twice it is used with truth, full of grace and truth. And "truth" is used some twenty-five times in the Gospel. One wonders why the word "grace" was dropped. Let me suggest an answer. The Evangelist abandons the word for he intends to let the word "truth" carry the full import of the concept within the expression "grace and truth." This is to say, John would let "truth" become the word to declare that God's faithfulness to his covenant of redemption has become manifest in Jesus who declared, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (14:6). Truth as understood in Old Testament usage has now become incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth.

But we may well ask the question which C. H. Dodd raises. Did those who read the Gospel, or those who heard it read, understand aletheia to mean that which emeth of the Old Testament meant? Or what was the common understanding of aletheia among people using Greek in the first century? The word in the literature of the time had the fundamental meaning of the real as against the unreal, the actual as against the apparent, the true as against the false. Here one can sense a difference between the Hebrew and Greek concepts of truth. If the Greek spoke of the true God it would be in contrast to a false God. Truth or emeth as it relates to God in the Old Testament would speak about the faithfulness and reliability of God. Psalm 25:5 according to Septuagint is, "Lead me in thy truth," but a more accurate rendering of the Hebrew would be, "Lead me through thy faithfulness." The Greek aletheia is something abstract, a concept of the mind; the Old Testament emeth is a God-man relationship manifesting faithfulness.

I think that we should readily accede to the conclusions of New Testament scholars of repute, such as Dodd, Strachan and Barrett, to mention just a few, that the Greek sense of the real, the genuine, or the truthful is to be found in passages such as "I am the true vine" (15:1); "For my flesh is the true bread and my blood is the true drink" (6:55), or in Jesus' word to the woman at the well, "He whom you now have is not your husband, this you said truthfully" (4:18). And others can be added.

I would like to submit, however, what appears to be a consensus of scholars that in this Gospel there is a fusing of the Hebrew idea of emeth with the Greek concept of aletheia. It is not difficult to detect concepts of faithfulness or dependability in some passages of this Gospel. Let us observe a few. "He who does the truth comes to the light" (3:21). This indicates the practice of fidelity and steadfastness. In this Gospel, the

Spirit is called the Spirit of truth. He is to be the manifestation of Jesus who has ascended into heaven. If we may equate the fullness of grace and truth in Jesus with the redemptive faithfulness of God in sending his Son to save the world, then the Spirit of truth is to lead the disciples into that redemptive faithfulness of God. This is to say that the disciples will time upon time and in increasing measure receive and experience the gracious faithfulness of God's redemption. In this setting Jesus declared, "all that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you" (16:15). If all that the Father has may be compressed into the prologue statement, "full of grace and truth," then it is clear that the Spirit of truth would take this fullness of God, this faithful redeeming action, so abundantly demonstrated in the Old Testament, and he would lead the disciples into this.

SANCTIFIED IN TRUTH

In the intercessory prayer of Christ we have truth related to being sanctified. "Sanctify them in the truth, thy word is truth. As thou didst send me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth" (17:17-19). Two concepts in this passage require our attention. They are to be found in the words "sanctify" and "truth." The word "sanctify" or "make holy" has the basic sense of separation, especially from the profane world for service for God. Since in this prayer Jesus has already declared that the disciples are not of the world for the world has hated them (17:14), it would seem that here "sanctify" would carry some additional concept, such as faithful devotion to or perseverance in their mission. Here the burden of Jesus' prayer is a concern for the disciples already called and chosen by him, that they would remain dedicated to their mission in the hostile world. Thus it appears that here "sanctify" denotes separation for faithful service.

The second concept is to be derived from the word "truth." If we have correctly discerned the Old Testament understanding of this word as descriptive of faithfulness in all relationships with God and with man, and if truth in this Gospel often incorporates this Old Testament sense, then we have something other than the Greek concept of the real, the genuine or the verifiable. This truth, as we have noted above, embodies the faithfulness and dependability of God which he has manifested in Jesus Christ, his Son, and which is to be communicated through Jesus to his disciples. This indeed is what the Spirit of truth would do as he takes of the things of Christ and presents them to the disciples. To be consecrated or to be sanctified through the truth, therefore, is to possess steadfast devotion by means of the steadfastness of God communicated through Jesus Christ.

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This interpretation finds support, so it appears to me, from verse 19 where Jesus declares, "For their sakes I sanctify myself that they also may be sanctified in truth." Here as above the word "sanctify" has more than the idea of separation for a task. Here Jesus expresses faithfulness to the mission for which he came, which meant his suffering and death. For the sake of his disciples he now sanctifies himself to finish that mission for which he was sent into the world. This act of self-dedication as expressed by Jesus has one purpose, viz., that the disciples also may be dedicated in truth. What Jesus manifested in his faithfulness to do the Father's will would be the pattern of the faithful dedication of the disciples. This would be in truth, i.e., in persevering steadfastness.

WHAT IS TRUTH?

I would like to close this study about "truth" in what is the last significant use that the Evangelist John makes of this interesting word. This occurs when Jesus stands before Pilate. In summary the conversation between Pilate and Jesus is about being the King of the Jews. Jesus assures Pilate that his kingship is not of this world. If it were, his servants would fight for him. Then "Pilate said to him, 'So you are a king?' Jesus answered, 'You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Every one who is of the truth hears my voice.' Pilate said to him, 'What is truth?'" (18:37f.).

It seems very likely that the Evangelist has more in mind than recording some conversation between Jesus and Pilate during the trial. The Evangelist's method throughout his Gospel is to present his primary purpose, not in the sign or the event or conversation as such, but in what the sign or event or conversation represents in the understanding of Christ in his suffering and glorification. So in this instance the conversation gets its special turn or point of emphasis on truth. And the special emphasis involves the unique difference between the Old Testament or Hebrew understanding of truth and the Greek understanding of that word. In the presence of Pilate Jesus declares that his main purpose for being born and coming into the world is to bear witness to the truth, to the truth of God which he himself was in fullness, even as the prologue stated. This truth has incorporated within it God's faithfulness, God's redemption and God's grace which is seen in his redemptive faithfulness. This is the truth that confronts the world. Primarily the confrontation had been vis-a-vis the Jews. Yet there had been a secondary confrontation vis-a-vis the Greeks. There had been Greeks who wanted to see Jesus. There were other sheep who were not of this fold. And did not the prologue say that this Jesus was the true light that enlightens every man that comes into
the world? This secondary confrontation reaches its climax in the conversation with Pilate. In this Jesus asserts that in himself God manifests truth, and further that every one who is of the truth hears or obeys his voice.

Every one who is of the truth designates those, often referred to in this Gospel, who have been wondrously brought within the kingdom of God (3:3-7), and from his fullness have received grace upon grace (1:16). They have come within the redemptive act of God as demonstrated in Jesus Christ. Since they are of God they readily respond in obedience to Jesus, who is the truth of God.

This declaration of Jesus about truth made little sense to Pilate because truth in his mind carried the commonly accepted Greek concepts. And so in something of disdain or bewilderment he said, "What is truth?" It is hard to determine the mind of Pilate at this point. It is clear, however, that his question had no bearing on his verdict which he told the Jews, "I find no crime in him." If this conversation between Jesus and Pilate had no bearing on the trial, then we should earnestly inquire what purpose the Evangelist had to incorporate it. His intent, as I see it, is to place Jesus, the fullness of truth, vis-a-vis Pilate, who represented truth of the Greek world. Salvation-truth is not to be found in Greek or Roman systems of culture or law, not in truth as they understood it. Rather salvation-truth is incarnated in Jesus; and it is through him that salvation-truth becomes redemption for the world. Observe, therefore, that at the beginning of his Gospel the Evangelist has posted his thesis, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth" (1:14); at the close of this Gospel this truth confronts the world.

Let me finish this paper at this very focal point where our three words, *ben*, unmerited grace, *hesed*, steadfast love, and *emeth*, faithfulness converge upon the Gentile world as here represented by Pilate. These words are more than concepts. They are the faithful and redemptive act of God as demonstrated in Christ. He, as our Evangelist declared, is the truth. The pathos, the baffling pathos, of this incident is that the Gentile world with its truth turned aside. We ought not to miss the intent of the Evangelist, namely this, that the world with its truth will constantly turn aside. YET — and this is a big YET — Jesus came to present the truth, the truth in all of its Old Testament meaning. Jesus came to present this truth to Pilate, to the Gentile world. And he declared that everyone who is of the truth hears and obeys his voice. So then before the Pilates, be-

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16 Other designations are: "Born . . . of God" (1:13), "one born anew" (3:3), "one born of water and the Spirit" (3:5f.), "every one who has heard and learned from the Father" (6:45), "he who is of God" (8:47).
fore the Gentiles, and before the Jews, we who are of this truth take for ourselves the appropriate word of Jesus: "For this I was born and for this I came into the world to bear witness to the truth."

Additional Bibliography


