JOHN 13-17 VIEWED THROUGH LITURGICAL SPECTACLES

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ABSTRACT
Chapters 13-17 form an introduction to the Passion Narrative. To read them from the context of the eucharistic worship of the church helps later disciples see the liturgy as always involving a challenge to faithfulness and love, as contrasted with the action of Judas. The High-Priestly prayer of chapter 17 corresponds to the liturgical setting of chapter 13, and the allusions to baptism and eucharist confirm the disciples’ understanding of their own identity, resulting from their unity with Christ.

1 INTRODUCTION
The section composed of chapters 13-17 has a certain completeness in itself. The acted parable of the foot-washing in chapter 13 describes the meaning of the incarnation and the passion of Jesus (Suggit 1985), while the concluding prayer of chapter 17 sums up in another way the purpose of his life and self-offering. The whole section is distinguished from the previous twelve chapters of the Gospel in that it describes Jesus’ actions and words in the presence of his disciples. No longer is it a public ministry: here Jesus meets with his friends (Phil 15:14-15) round the supper table. Though chapter 17 marks the end of the section it also serves as an introduction to the Passion narrative of chapters 18 and 19.

In many ways the section can be compared to the sort of symposium described in Plato’s dialogue of that name, where the diners — after the slave had washed their feet (Symp 175a) and they had sung the praises of the god (176a) — proceeded to sing the praises of love (ερως) before moving on to the drinking. Starting with the praises of sexual love, especially pederasty, they moved on to consider love as being the best instrument to attain to the vision of the purity of beauty in itself, the divine beauty (211d-212b). With this scene we can compare and contrast John chapter 13, where the foot-washing is performed not by a slave but by the Word of God incarnate to demonstrate the true meaning of love, which is to be the motive of the disciples’ love for each other (Jn 13:34). In John the word αγάπη is used. This word was not used in classical Greek, but it is occasionally found in the Septuagint to describe different kinds of love, especially sexual love, as in Canticles (e.g. 2:4,5,7) and in 2 Samuel 13:15. It is used in Jeremiah (2:2) to describe Israel’s love for YHWH in their marriage relationship. The verb αγαπαναι is regularly used to describe all forms of love (e.g. Dt 4:37;
Chapter 13, indicating as it does the meaning of the whole Gospel, furnishes a new understanding of love which would not have been appreciated by the participants in Plato's Symposium other than perhaps by Socrates himself. To the Greeks generally the kind of love demonstrated on the cross and signified in the pedilavium would have been foolishness (1 Cor 1:23). This is the love which is the subject of the Christian gospel, proclaimed by the church in its preaching, its liturgy and its life.

One way of regarding chapters 13-17 of the Fourth Gospel is to view them through liturgical spectacles, so that the themes contained therein may be recognised in the liturgy of the church. Certainly most Gentile readers of the Gospel would have been familiar with the cultic and religious significance of a banquet (δείπνον). Examples exist of invitations to dine (δείπνησαν) at a banquet (κλήνη) in honour of the god Sarapis. Although it is usually the host (or sometimes the hostess!) who issues the invitation, in one example the invitation comes from the god himself (Horsley 1981:5). This would seem to be good evidence for believing that Sarapis was considered to be himself present at such meals. Although κλήνη is not used in the New Testament to describe a meal, the practice of reclining at meals, which was originally a Greek custom, is regularly mentioned in the New Testament, as in John 13:23,25,28. The custom had penetrated into Egypt by the third century B.C, and Horsley (1981:9) notes the contrast between πρωτόκλασις ἐν τοῖς δείπνοις and πρωτοκαθάρις ἐν ταῖς συναγωγαῖς (Mt 23:6). Whereas people sit in synagogue, they recline at banquets. The significance therefore of the setting of the scene in John 13 would have been clear to Gentiles.

It would also have been clear to Jews, who would have been reminded of the Passover narrative both by the reference to the Passover in verse 1, and because of the reference to the reclining of the participants, which was an important feature of the Passover celebration. This is made clear by the fourth question at the Passover - 'On all other nights we eat either sitting up or reclining, but on this night we all recline' (cf Jeremias 1966:48-49). It matters little whether in fact John was describing a Passover meal in chapter 13, since there is no doubt that he was viewing the passion as a whole in terms of the meaning of the Passover. The setting therefore of chapter 13 would seem to demand a cultic context. This is further confirmed by an examination of various features throughout the whole section of chapters 13-17.

2 CHRISTIAN IDENTITY

Chapters 13-17 are addressed to Christ's disciples, and not simply to the disciples present with the incarnate Lord. John is writing for his own community and explaining to them the significance of the life of Jesus for their own life of discipleship. As disciples of the Lord they formed a community
which was knit together by their mutual love (In 13:34-35; 15:12-15), and by their unity with the risen Lord (15:1-7; 17:9-11,22-23,26). Any group of people conscious of its common interests and destiny needs to express its identity in common actions. In religious groups these consist of ritual actions which emphasise the unity of members of the group with one another and their separation from other groups. The problem is raised today when Christians wish to join in worship with Moslems, Jews and members of other religious bodies. However ready Christians may be to join with Moslems in expressing their concern in matters of social justice, many would be reluctant to share in common worship, since this may mean the loss of their own particular identity.

Christians in the first century needed to express their difference from unbelieving Jews, since many (if not most) of the Johannine community were Jews who had now found Jesus to be the Christ and the revelation of YHWH himself (14:6-10; cf 1:18). In chapters 13-17 John describes Jesus’ words and actions in such a way as to help disciples see that in their liturgical and ritual acts they are expressing the meaning of the gospel, as well as their own identity as a community of people united with Jesus the risen Lord present with them through the Spirit. But because they were accustomed to meeting together for their common worship, there was no need to describe the liturgical acts. Such a reference would in fact be impossibly anachronistic, since John is writing about the incarnate life of Jesus, whereas all the acts of Christian worship get their meaning from the completed work of Jesus on the cross and in the resurrection. John therefore writes in such a way that those within the community will recognise the meaning and validity of their liturgical acts, while those who are outside will not be able to understand his allusions.

3 THE CONTEXT OF CHAPTERS 13-17

It is therefore right that the setting for the teaching of Jesus to his disciples as expressed in chapters 13-17 should be his last meal with them. No Christian of the first century could be ignorant of the fact that at the Last Supper with his disciples Jesus instituted what was called the eucharist, when he told his disciples to repeat what he did with bread and wine as his ἄναμμησις (1 Cor 11:24-25). What Jesus did with his disciples on the night before he died was meant to be an anticipation of his death on the cross and a way in which this was continually made present for later disciples when they met together in their common worship. This was the special liturgical action in which they expressed their new identity as Christians, whose status as being ‘in Christ’ was thereby constantly re-affirmed.

The action over the bread and wine in the church’s eucharist was meant to be a celebration not of the Last Supper, but of that to which the Supper pointed, namely the death and resurrection of Jesus, and therefore to signify the meaning of the whole of the incarnation. John therefore quite deliberately does not record
what disciples knew Jesus did on the night before he died. Instead, he tells the story of the foot-washing, as though he was writing a midrash on Luke 22:27. By this procedure he expresses the meaning of the whole of the incarnation, culminating in the cross. Here on the cross was the great example of the service, humility and love of God as displayed in Christ. John 13:1-17 is therefore a vivid narrative describing the meaning of the incarnation, which Paul theologically expressed in Philippians 2:5-11. But at the same time, because of its setting, it is also an exposition of the meaning of the eucharist.

4 THE CALL TO FAITHFULNESS

Because the eucharist is the cultic expression of the disciples’ unity among themselves and with the risen Christ it is not surprising that John, like the other evangelists, draws special attention to the action of Judas. Bearing the name of the chosen tribe he both partook of the supper and deliberately left the group to hand Jesus over (παρεδέδωκα) (13:21). No wonder ‘It was night’ (13:30), for in leaving the group Judas also left the light of the world. Inter alia therefore John issues a warning to his readers or hearers not to desert the fellowship of believers or to betray the Lord.

The importance of Judas is shown by the words which follow (vv31-32). In 1 Corinthians 11:23 the context of the institution of the eucharist is the night on which Jesus ‘was being handed over’ (παρεδέδετο). The imperfect tense is used deliberately, and was retained in all the early Greek liturgies. The action of Judas in going out to ‘hand over’ his Lord to the authorities set the context for the glorification of the Son of man. So verses 31-32 describe the glorification in the aorist tense, as though it had already been accomplished, for it was the treachery of the chosen disciple which led to the crucifixion and the glorification of the Son of man. It is therefore not surprising that the new commandment to the disciples to love one another as Jesus has loved them (v34) is given at this point. The life of the disciples is to be very different from the example of Judas.

Now, the new commandment which Jesus gave at this point recalls the words of Jeremiah 31:31-33 (cf Lyonnet 1974:220-221). The Greek version of Jeremiah 31(38):33 has διαδοθεὶς δῶσον ὅμοιος μου ἐς τὴν διὰ νομιμὸν αὐτῶν. The same verb (διδοσα) is used in John 13:34. Further, it is of note that the phrase ‘the new covenant’ (ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη) is found in the New Testament with reference only to Jeremiah 31 or to the eucharist. The establishment of the new covenant is made possible only through the death of Jesus, who thereby displays his love for his disciples. It is this which is at the centre of the church’s faith as expressed in the eucharist.
5 CHRIST’S WORK FOR AND IN HIS DISCIPLES

The remainder of this section (cc 13-17) therefore is concerned with the work of Christ, and the unity of the disciples with him. These themes are continually reinforced by allusions to the eucharist as the act of Christian worship in which God’s display of love in Christ is shown to be of as much concern to disciples of a later age as it was to the first disciples. The gospel is not primarily a history of events in the past, but is rather the expression of the meaning of these events for the present. It is this which is proclaimed in the liturgy of the church.

In 13:33-38 Jesus talks of his going (παραγελλω). But this is no reason for the disciples’ dismay (14:1). They are told ‘Go on believing in God, and go on believing in me.’ Both verbs are rightly taken as imperatives in RSV and REB. They give the conditions for avoiding dismay. The next verse introduces the word μονή (‘abode’), which is the substantival form of the verb so favoured by John, μένεω (‘abide’). The noun is used again only in 14:23, where it refers to the abiding of the Father and the Son in the disciples. The verb is used in various ways in chapter 14. In verse 10 the Father abides in the Son; in verse 17 the Spirit abides, or will abide, ‘with you’ (παρ’ ὑμῖν); in verse 25 Jesus says ‘I have spoken these words to you while abiding with you’, as though he was not going to be abiding with them in the future. But verse 23 has the promise ‘If anyone loves me he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and will make our abode with him.’ The enigmatic references to abiding are paralleled by the references to Jesus’ coming and going. In 13:33 Jesus said to the disciples ‘You will look for me, and as I told the Jews “Where I am going you cannot come”; so now I say the same to you.’ In 14:3, however, he said ‘If I go and prepare a place for you, I am coming again and I shall take you to myself that where I am there you may be too.’ So although in 14:12 he is going to the Father, he promises another Paraclete, the Spirit of truth, to those who keep his commandments (vv 15-17), and in verse 18 he says ‘I shall not leave you bereft; I am coming to you.’

Not only do these utterances equate the coming of the Spirit to the disciples with the coming of Jesus: they also allude (as disciples would know) to the coming of the Lord to them in their worship, when they exclaimed Marana tha (1 Cor 16:22; Did 10:6). Such an allusion is confirmed by the stress on the giving of peace in 14:27, where it is made clear that this is not the ordinary greeting χαλόμ but the real peace which God alone can give, as Philo (Mos 1,304) expressed it: ‘God granted Phineas the greatest good, peace, which no human being is able to provide’ (Barrett 1955:391). For Christians this peace is made possible through the death and resurrection of Jesus (20:20-21) and is liturgically expressed in the eucharist. So the disciples are again told ‘Do not let your hearts be dismayed or afraid....I am going and I am coming to you’ (vv27-28).

The words of 14:31 might lead us to suppose that we have reached the end of
Jesus' discourse, whereas in fact there is much to come. Is it possible perhaps that ἐγείρω is meant to remind the hearers of their need to be raised and to share in the new life given by Christ? The verb is often used in this way (e.g. Eph 5:14), and if this is the allusion here, the next two words (ἀνευμένος ἐντευθεὶς) might well mean 'Let us go on from here', since ἐντευθεὶς refers not only to place, but also to a stage in an argument (1 Esdr 4:22). In this case the following chapters spell out more clearly the meaning of Jesus' words and explain the consequences of the new life in Christ. All along John has been concerned to proclaim the centrality of Jesus for the understanding of the nature and work of God. So it is that Jesus is 'the way, the truth and the life', through whom alone there is access to the Father (14:6). But John writes in such a way as to remind his readers or hearers that this is exactly what they assert in their worship at the eucharist. The next chapter therefore is rich with eucharistic allusions.

6 THE TRUE VINE

Chapter 15 begins with the claim of Jesus 'I am the genuine vine.' The ἐγώ ἐξίμεα statements of the Fourth Gospel probably all allude to the name of God as expressed in Exodus 3:14. This would certainly seem true of John 8:58, and in view of John's generally allusive style of writing is likely to be found elsewhere too. The ἐγώ ἐξίμεα statements however were commonly used with reference to other divinities in the ancient world. A good example of this use with regard to Isis is found in an inscription from Kyme of the first or second century AD, most recently reprinted by Horsley (1981:18-19), who suggests that these aretologies of Isis reflect credal elements. The claim therefore of John 15:1 would have been intelligible in both a Greek and Hebrew context, and perhaps provides a further reminder of the pervasive influence of Hellenism in Palestine.

There are some (e.g. Sandvik 1967) who believe that the vine in chapter 15 refers primarily to the Temple, in view of a number of factors of which the most important would seem to be the reference to the great golden grape-vines above the gate of the Temple (Josephus Bell Jud 5:212; Tacitus Hist 5:5). As Jesus is described as replacing the Temple (Jn 2:21) such a reference is by no means impossible, though it would seem more likely that the allusion here is to Jeremiah 2:21 where the Septuagint refers to Israel as 'a fruit-bearing vine all genuine' (ἀμπελών καρποφόρον πᾶσαν ἄληθινήν). Jesus then is claiming to be the true Israel, the true people of God. Now, a vine consists of the stock and the branches, so that the description of the disciples as branches of the vine shows the intimate connection and unity between them and Jesus.

There are good reasons for seeing in this allegory allusions to the eucharist. The primary reference is, of course, to Jesus. But as John writes his gospel for the benefit of believers of his own day he continually helps them to see how the unity between Jesus and his disciples is expressed in the worship of the church.
The context of chapter 15 is the Last Supper, at which Jesus took bread and wine, where the synoptics describe wine as the produce \((\gamma\nu\nu\nu\mu\alpha)\) of the vine (Mk 14:25; Mt 26:29; Lk 22:18). In the eucharistic prayer of Didache (9:2) reference is made to ‘the holy vine of David your child \((\pi\alpha\iota\varsigma)\) which you made known to us through Jesus your child \((\pi\alpha\iota\varsigma)\).’ The image of the vine therefore can scarcely fail to remind believers of the wine of the Last Supper and of the eucharist.

Such a view is strengthened by the language of the chapter. The importance of ‘abiding’ in Jesus is stressed (vv4 ter, 5,6,7 bis, 10 ter). Disciples are to abide in the vine (v4), in Jesus (vv4-6) and in his love (v10). For Christians the celebration of the eucharist would be a most appropriate expression of all three forms of abiding. For though abiding in the vine refers especially to the risen Lord, the vine is made up of branches, so that to abide in Jesus means also abiding in the fellowship of believers united with him. A similar expression occurs in John 6:56 where it is very difficult to avoid a eucharistic reference: ‘They who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me and I in them.’

Abiding in the vine refers not only to the unity of disciples with the Lord, but also to the unity of disciples among themselves (cf 15:12), a unity which is expressed in the eucharist (1 Cor 10:16-17). To abide in Jesus’ love is to keep his commandments, but Jesus’ love was shown especially in his death which was on behalf of \(\upsilon\pi\epsilon\rho\) his friends (15:13). It is this which is recalled in the eucharist. The same preposition \(\upsilon\pi\epsilon\rho\) is used with reference to the eucharist in Mark 14:24 and 1 Corinthians 11:24, as well as in the longer text of Luke (22:19,20), and in John 6:51 where a eucharistic reference is likely. The connection of chapter 15 with chapter 6 is shown by the description of Jesus as the genuine \((\alpha\lambda\eta\theta\iota\iota\iota\omega\varsigma)\) bread from heaven (6:32), his flesh as true food \((\alpha\lambda\eta\theta\iota\iota\varsigma\beta\rho\omega\varsigma\varsigma\varsigma)\) and his blood as true drink \((\alpha\lambda\eta\theta\iota\iota\varsigma\pi\omicron\omicron\iota\varsigma)\) (6:55). These references serve to confirm the eucharistic allusions of chapter 15.

7 GOINGS AND COMINGS

The remainder of chapter 15 describes the unity of the disciples with their Lord after his death and resurrection. The unity is confirmed by the coming of the Paraclete who will bear witness to Jesus, just as the disciples too are to bear witness because they have been with him from the beginning (15:27). It is tempting, but probably unjustified, to see in the phrase \(\alpha\tau\iota\gamma\rho\chi\eta\varsigma\) (cf 1 Jn 1:1) a reference to the choice of disciples from eternity (cf Eph 1:4-5). Here is the new community, constituted by the death and resurrection of Christ, now led by the Spirit into all the truth. As the truth is revealed in Jesus, the Spirit is constantly bearing witness to him, and is doing so in and through the disciples. This theme is continued in 16:1-16, after which there occur references, in ambiguous terms, to the going and coming of Jesus. If chapter 15 has eucharistic allusions, it is significant that both before and after it (cc 14 and 16) there are references to the
Spirit as bearing witness to Christ and his work. It is in the worship of the church that the Spirit continues to bear witness to the risen Lord.

The world’s joy at the death of Jesus (v20) is contrasted with the disciples’ grief, but the grief will turn to joy. The joy was realised on the day of resurrection (20:20), at a scene which has many eucharistic references (cf Loisy 1921:510; Barrett 1955:477; Brown 1970:1019). Towards the end of chapter 16 (vv29-30) the disciples exclaim that Jesus is now speaking no longer in riddles (παρομοίαι) but is speaking plainly. But there is still ambiguity. Jesus has been speaking in order that disciples may have peace in him (16:33). His going from them should give them courage. So the command ὑπάρχει is specially significant. Horsley (1981:15), with reference to an aretalogy of Isis, says that the verb ‘has a technical connotation in religious contexts, especially those involving initiation into mystery cults where the death and resurrection of a god is celebrated.’ At the end of the discourse of Jesus to his disciples, and before the prayer of chapter 17, the disciples are to take heart, for their Lord who is leaving them will still be present with them.

Loisy (1921:508), with reference to John 20, notes John’s understanding of the presence of Christ — ‘Le Christ johannique n’est pas que ressuscité et glorifié, il est venu et il vient, pour la foi, par la foi, aux croyants.’ Such a comment is particularly relevant to the eucharist where the coming of the Lord is recognised and received by faith. Since the whole discourse is set in the context of the Last Supper these eucharistic allusions may not be neglected, and indeed provide believers with a vivid understanding of the Lord’s presence with them in their worship. It is not therefore surprising that the discourses conclude with the great prayer of chapter 17.

8 THE HIGH-PRIESTLY PRAYER

Chapter 17 can be seen as providing a kind of liturgical inclusio to the section, which started with the setting for the Last Supper and the institution of the eucharist. So the reader/hearer of the Gospel is reminded that the whole section, chapters 13-17, is to be understood in the context of worship when the church meets to celebrate the triumph of God’s love shown in Christ. For it is a triumph, as the prayer of chapter 17 makes clear. The meaning of the incarnation and of the cross has been partially explained in the discourses and actions described in chapters 13-16. Disciples have been assured that the Holy Spirit will lead believers into all the truth (16:13). The summary of Jesus’ work (16:28) enables the disciples at last to understand what he has been saying. This understanding is confirmed by their experience of the risen Lord in their worship. Their worship is (inter alia) the statement of who they are and what they are called to be and to do — to share in the victory which has been achieved in Christ (16:33).

In other words John is writing a theological commentary not only on the
meaning of the incarnation, but also on the meaning of the eucharist. Chapter 17 therefore provides both a fitting conclusion to the section and also an introduction to the meaning of the passion. Its liturgical nature cannot be doubted. Not only is it a prayer, but it also seems to allude to the Lord's Prayer, with the address to the Father, the prayer for the glorification of the Son which is the glorification of his name (vv1,6) and the prayer that they may be kept from evil (v15). Bouyer (1966:99-101) notes its relation to Jewish berakoth, and its connection with the eucharist. Feuillet (1975:60) sees it as being analogous to the celebration of the Day of Atonement. Just as the High-Priest made atonement for himself, for his family, and for the whole community of Israel (Lv 16:17), so Jesus prays for himself, for his immediate disciples and for later disciples (vv1-8; 9-19; 20-26).

The themes of the prayer centre around the glorification of the Son, who is called Jesus Christ (v3), the only use of the name other than in 1:17. Grace and truth, which the Torah was supposed to provide, are now seen to be found in the death of Jesus which effects his consecration. The manifestation of God is declared not simply in the person of Jesus Christ, but in his act of consecration on the cross. This accounts for the aorist eγγυησατο in 1:18, which draws attention to the completed act of revelation. It is with the crucified and risen Christ that the disciples are united, and they are therefore called to share in his life of self-offering and obedience.

Jesus' prayer is for his disciples, not for the world. This is not a contradiction of 3:17 ("God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him"). It is rather the assertion that the world's salvation is being made known, and is being effected, in and through the work of the church. But the life and work of the church (by which is meant Christian disciples united with Christ) depend entirely on the consecration of the Son. Brown (1970:746-747) recognises that the theme of unity is often associated with the eucharist, though he believes that the eucharistic reference in John 17 is by no means clear. It is certainly evident that the real thrust of the prayer is concerned with the passion of the Lord and the unity of the disciples with him.

Nevertheless the context of the prayer (the Last Supper) and its content (the passion of Christ and the theme of unity between the Lord and his disciples) are such as to help believers see that when they are met together to celebrate eucharist the Lord is present with them and continues to pray for them. The eucharist is the liturgical expression of their unity with him, as has already been suggested in the allegory of the vine and the branches. Several features suggest that such an allusion is intended.

The frequent reference to 'the name' (vv6,11,12,26) is striking. It refers primarily to the nature of God. Jesus revealed God's name to those whom God had given him (v6). But God's name was given to Jesus (v11, according to the best,
and most, manuscripts), and Jesus prays to the Father for the disciples 'keep them in your name.' He goes on to say 'When I was with them I (ἐγώ) kept them in your name which you have given me' (v12). Jesus' protection of the disciples during his earthly life is now contrasted with the future position, 'but now (νῦν ἡε) I am coming to you' (v13). So Jesus prays that the Father may protect them from evil (v15) and 'consecrate' them in the truth (v17), adding 'your word is truth.' The consecration of the disciples 'depends on the consecration of the Son of God' (Hoskyns 1947:504), who is the incarnate word and truth of God.

Now, the name of God which was given to the Son, in which the Son kept the disciples during the incarnation, and which he will continue to make known to them, is a phrase regularly used in connection with baptism. Matthew 28:19 gives Jesus' parting instructions to the apostles — 'Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them into (εἰς) the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit....' (cf Did 7:1,3). Similar phrases in connection with baptism occur in Acts 8:16 and 19:5 (εἰς τῷ δυναμοῦ), and in a slightly different form in Acts 2:38 and 10:48 (ἐν τῷ δυναμοῦ). The use of the preposition εἰς is especially noteworthy, and can be compared with such passages as Romans 6:3 — 'all we who were baptised into (εἰς) Christ Jesus were baptised into (εἰς) his death' —, and Galatians 3:27 — 'All of you who were baptised into (εἰς) Christ....' To be baptised, therefore, into the name of Christ, or of the Trinity, is the same as being baptised into Christ or the Trinity. The meaning would seem to be that by baptism the believer becomes the property of God or of Christ and is united with him.

There is no suggestion that baptism is merely an outward rite by which such unity is given and received. It is always linked with the theme of believing or the expression of faith, and the frequent use of the aorist of πιστεύειν throughout the New Testament often refers to the moment when a person became a Christian which was marked by his expression of faith in baptism. John 17:8 describes the response of the disciples to Jesus: they received (ἐλαβούν) his words, they came to know (ἐγνώσωσαν) that Jesus had come from the Father, and they believed (ἐπιστεύσαν) that the Father had sent him. Here is the description of those who received (ἐλαβούν) the Word of God and who believed on his name (1:12). All this would have been publicly expressed in the act of baptism. The prayer of Jesus in John 17 is to enable the disciples to be kept in the name of God which they professed in their baptism (v17).

In chapter 17 then we have Jesus' prayer for his own. By it disciples are reminded of the profession of faith which they made at their baptism, while the context and content of the prayer link their discipleship to the passion of the Lord. It is to this that both baptism and eucharist refer, shown in the Pauline writings by Romans 6:3 in the case of baptism and by 1 Corinthians 11:26 in the case of the eucharist.

The prayer of John 17 is a prayer for the unity of the disciples with their Lord
and so with the Father — 'I in them and you in me' (v23). In this way they are to find their full being in the attainment of unity (τινὰ δοξὴν τετελεσμένον εἰς ἐν). In 13:1 John described how Jesus loved his own 'to the end' (εἰς τέλος). Jesus showed his love on the cross (15:13), where he exclaimed τετέλεσται, 'the end, the goal, has been attained' (19:30). The fullness of being of the disciples is made possible through the death of Christ and his resurrection. In expressing their unity with him in the eucharist disciples show that they abide in him as he abides in them. They are also called to share in his glory, which means his life of loving self-offering. In this way the Father's love for the Son and the Son himself will be 'in' the disciples (17:26).

9 THE PURPOSE OF THE GOSPELS

All the Gospels appear to have been written to meet the needs of different Christian communities, and are not simply historical records. This is especially the case of the Fourth Gospel, which seems to be concerned to show the unity of the Christian community both with the Lord and in itself. It therefore draws attention to the way in which Christians are distinguished from unbelieving Jews. This all centres on the person of Jesus Christ as the true revelation of God. He is therefore the focal point of their worship, since it is through him that they worship the Father.

As it would normally have been in their meetings for worship that disciples would hear the scriptures of the Old Testament read, together with letters from apostles (e.g Col 4:16) and what Justin later called their memoirs (ἀπομνημονεύματα) (Apol 1:66), any allusions to their worship would be particularly clear. Such a reading of John 13-17 enables Christians today to see the meaning of the Gospel and the relation between their liturgy and their life. In expressing their unity with the Lord in baptism and eucharist they are at the same time asserting that their unity with other disciples, whoever and wherever they may be, is more fundamental and important than unity of nation or of race, or even of their own family (Mt 10:34-37; Lk 12:51-53; 14:26). The assertion made in the liturgy by disciples finds its meaning in their life in the world. Perhaps it was the failure of the Johannine community to recognise this that led to the admonition of 1 John 3:14-19a:

We know we have crossed over from death to life, because we love our fellow-Christians. Anyone who does not love is still in the realm of death, for everyone who hates a fellow-Christian is a murderer, and murderers, as you know, do not have eternal life dwelling within them. This is how we know what love is: Christ gave his life for us. And we in turn must give our lives for our fellow-Christians. But if someone who possesses the good things of this world sees a fellow-Christian in need and withholds compassion from him, how can it be said that the love of God dwells in him?
Children, love must not be a matter of theory or talk; it must be true love which shows itself in action. This is how we shall know that we belong to the realm of truth. (REB)

We always read any text through metaphorical spectacles, since we come to it with our own presuppositions and our own understandings. If we put on our liturgical spectacles and look at the Fourth Gospel through them we may be helped to see who we are and how the profession of our Christian discipleship expressed in worship is related to our daily life.

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