

THE SCOPE OF JESUS'S HIGH PRIESTLY PRAYER IN JOHN 17

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The prayer of Jesus in John 17, often called his high priestly prayer, comes at the end of his lengthy discourse following the Last Supper with his disciples. It is unfathomably rich in its implication and inexhaustible in its potential for explication. In this essay I wish to address just one question: what is the scope of Jesus's priestly intercession? According to Exodus 28, when the priest enters the holy place he bears the names of the twelve tribes of Israel "upon his shoulders...[and]...upon his heart...to bring them to continual remembrance before the LORD" (Exod. 28:12, 29).¹ Who, in John 17, does Jesus bear upon his shoulders and upon his heart, and to what end? Who and what is the burden of his priestly prayer?²

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²This paper arises out of a study of John 4:21–24 within the context of 4:1–42. That study seeks to explore the question of what it means to "worship the Father in spirit and truth," and in that light to reexamine the question of who may partake of the Lord's Supper. I hope to publish that study in a subsequent issue of *Encounter*.

JESUS AS THE “TENTING” WORD

In Jesus’s high priestly prayer, words, images, and themes introduced as early as the Prologue, and receiving progressive elaboration in the course of the intervening chapters, come to climactic expression. Before turning to John 17, therefore, it will be helpful to make a few brief observations about the thematic context of this prayer in the Fourth Gospel. First, in 1:14 Jesus is portrayed in terms of the Israelite sanctuary which God in Exodus 25:8 calls on Moses to have Israel construct. There, God says to Moses, “Let them make me a sanctuary [*miqdash*, “holy place”] that I may dwell [*shakan*, literally, “tent”] in their midst.”³ According to John 1:14, “the Word⁴ became flesh and dwelt [*eskenosen*, literally, “tented”]

³Compare Isaiah 57:15: “thus says the high and lofty One who inhabits [*shoken*] eternity, whose name is Holy: ‘I dwell [*eshkon*] in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite.’” The phrase “high and lofty” appears first in Isaiah 6:1 in a scene that stands next to Exodus 3:6 in its evocation of the sense of God’s holiness. It appears a third time in Isaiah 52:13 as applied to God’s servant who “shall be high and lifted up.”

⁴C. T. R. Hayward has argued that a primary background for the term *logos* in the Prologue is the Aramaic term *Memra*, which occurs frequently in reference to YHWH in the Targums. (See Hayward, “The Holy Name of the God of Moses and the Prologue of St. John’s Gospel,” *New Testament Studies* 25 [1978–79]: 16–32; and *Divine Name and Presence: The Memra* [Totowa, N.J.: Allanheld, Osmun, 1981].) This view had been popular in the nineteenth century, but fell out of favor. Though A. T. Hanson revisits the *Memra-logos* connection in *The Prophetic Gospel: A Study of John and the Old Testament* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), 22, Hayward rehabilitates the *logos-Memra* connection, but with a different import. As he argues—and I am persuaded that he is correct—the term arose as a cipher for the divine name *ehyeh*, “I will be,” in Exodus 3:14, and from there was connected, through its verbal association with *yehi*, “let there be,” in Genesis 1:3, to the divine activity in creation in Genesis 1. Hayward’s argument is based on a meticulous exegesis of relevant texts and is closely and plausibly reasoned. If he is correct, the image of the Word/*Memra* becoming flesh and tenting

among us, and we beheld his glory,...full of grace and truth." The presence of God's glory in that tent recalls Exodus 40:34-35, which tells us that when Moses had "finished the work" of building the tent (40:33), "the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle."

among us evokes, among other things, the Deuteronomic emphasis, repeated several times, on the tenting of the divine name in Israel's midst.

It has been argued that the phrase "full of grace and truth" [*pleres charitos kai aletheias*] echoes the phrase "abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" [*polueleos kai alethinos*] in Exodus 34:6. That passage opens with the proclamation, "YHWH, YHWH, a God merciful and gracious," an adjectival rendering of the verbal declaration in Exodus 33:19, "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy." This formula is not simply a declaration of intention but, echoing 3:14, an explication, relative to the crisis of the golden calf, of the meaning of the divine name. If in Exodus 3 YHWH equals *ehyeh* [*Memra* in Targum Neophiti] equals *ehyeh asher ehyeh*, here YHWH equals *eleeso hon an eleo kai oiktireso hon an oiktiro*. This may suggest that in John 1:14 we have a declaration concerning the enfleshed tenting in the world of the One first self-named to Moses in Exodus 3:14 in prospect of liberation from oppression, and then self-named again to Moses in 33:19 and 34:6 in prospect of covenant renewal following the Israelites' grave breach of covenant with the calf.

In this connection, we should look again at John 1:17, "the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." On the face of it, this sounds like an invidious comparison between the founding event of the Old Testament and the founding event of the New Testament, sponsoring an all-too-widespread notion that the Old Testament sponsors a religion of law while the New Testament sponsors a religion of grace and truth. The opening clause in the following verse, "no one has ever seen God," should recall Exodus 33:20, "you cannot see my face; for man shall not see me and live." If, now, the formula in Exodus 34:6 is echoed in John 1:14, 17, and if that formula is itself a restatement of the exegesis of the divine name in Exodus 33:19, then in John 1:17b we may have a preliminary announcement of the theme that comes to explicit expression in John 8:58, "before Abraham was, *ego eimi*." That is, 1:17b may involve an exegesis of Exodus 33:19 and 34:6 as referring in the first instance to the preexistent *Memra* who becomes known later as Christ.

Second, the Israelite sanctuary derives its sanctity—is “holy” (*qadosh, hagios*)—in virtue of the indwelling presence of “the Holy One of Israel” (Isaiah’s favored term). Other persons, actions, or objects are termed holy in virtue of their appropriate relation to the sanctuary. Likewise in John, holiness is attributed to God (John 17:11), to Jesus (6:29) whom God consecrated and sent into the world (10:36), and to the Spirit whom the Father sends in Jesus’s name (14:26) and who is given to those baptized by Jesus (1:33) and breathed on them by him (20:22). In the prayer in John 17, Jesus prays on behalf of his disciples, “sanctify [*hagiason*] them in the truth; thy word is truth...And for their sake I sanctify [*hagiazon*] myself, that they also may be sanctified [*hagiasmenoi*] in truth” (17:17–18).

Third, we may note that, given the *sanctity* of the sanctuary, one of the tasks of its priests is to teach, interpret, and apply to individual cases the covenant laws as they pertain to issues of sanctuary-related purity. These laws are concentrated above all in Leviticus, which provides criteria in its laws for distinguishing between the clean and the unclean, pure and impure, and makes provision for cleansing/purifying worshippers who have become unclean/impure. In John’s Gospel, the theme of purity/cleansing appears first at the wedding feast of Cana, where Jesus makes celebratory wine out of water standing there for purposes of purification (*katharismos*) (2:6). It arises again in the report of a discussion between the followers of John the Baptist and a Judahite over questions of purifying; and it seems that this discussion is related to baptismal practices (3:26–30). It appears again in chapter 13, where Jesus washes the feet of those who have been guests at his table (13:10–11). The manner of its last appearance, in 15:3, “You are already made clean by *the word* which I have spoken to you,” suggests the intimate association of the acts of “cleansing” and “sanctifying,” for in 17:17 Jesus says, “Sanctify them in your truth; *your word* is truth.”

Fourth, we should note that the Word that “becomes flesh and tents among us” with sacral connotations, is the same Word that in the beginning was with God and was God, through whom all things were

made, and whose life is the light of all humankind (1:1–5). Just as the Priestly tabernacle tradition of Exodus 25–31, 35–40 is anchored in the Priestly creation story of Genesis 1,⁵ so the sacral tenting presence of the Word in the world is anchored in the activity of the Word in cosmic creation and universal human experience.

This brief survey is meant to suggest that the priestly character of Jesus's prayer is intrinsic to its purpose, and poses in a special way the question of its scope. For it is of the essence of the thematics of sanctuary, priest, and purity that distinctions be drawn between those persons and things that fall within the boundaries and those that fall outside the boundaries of the sacral community. To ask again, then, who does Jesus pray for, and to what end? Is the scope of Jesus's prayer similarly circumscribed, or is it coextensive, redemptively, with the scope of the Word's creative activity in 1:3–5?

The prayer seems to answer that question quite clearly, and as one might expect from the imagery of the shoulder-pieces and breastplate in Exodus 28. Jesus prays for his followers who have come to believe in him (17:9) and those who will come to believe in him through the word and witness of his followers (17:20). When Jesus says, in 17:9, "I am not praying for the world, but for those whom you have given me," this seems to settle the matter. The scope of Jesus's high priestly prayer is exactly analogous to the scope of the prayer of the high priest of Exodus 28. Raymond Brown notes that Jesus prays for his own glorification (17:1), for his disciples (17:9), and for those who believe through their preaching (17:20). And he notes Feuillet's observation that in Leviticus 16:11–17 the high priest

⁵As Jon Levenson notes in *Creation and the Persistence of Evil* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 78–99, there is a "Cosmos / Microcosm" correspondence between the world created in Genesis 1 and the Tabernacle Moses constructs in Exodus 25–40. Among other things, God's instructions to Moses in Exodus 25–31 "occur in seven distinct speeches of YHWH to Moses [and] the sole subject of the seventh address is the high importance of sabbatical observance" (83). Also, as God "finished" (*synetelesen*) that work (*erga*) of creation (Gen. 2:2), so Moses "finished" (*synetelesen*) his work (*erga*) on the tabernacle (Exod. 40:33), at which point the glory of YHWH filled the sanctuary.

“prays for himself, for his house or priestly family, and for the whole people.”⁶ But the matter is not that simple. As one follows the interconnections that link various words, phrases, and themes in this chapter, and throughout the Johannine literature, one begins to wonder whether wider implications are intimated and left for the reader to draw out by inference. As we shall see, the Johannine literature may play off of texts such as Leviticus 16 in just such a direction. I shall begin with verses 20–23 and see where they lead.

DOES JESUS PRAY FOR THE WORLD OR FOR THE DISCIPLES?

In a note on John 17:20–23, Brown analyzes the structure of these verses as follows⁷ (I will modify the NRSV so as to give a more closely literal translation):

20 Not for these alone do I pray,
but also for those believing in me through their word,
21 *that* [*hina*] all may be one,
as [*kathos*] you, Father, in me, and I in you,
that [*hina*] they also may be in us,
that [*hina*] the world may believe that you have sent me.

22 The glory that you have given me I have given them,
that [*hina*] they may be one,
as [*kathos*] we are one, 23 I in them and you in me,
that [*hina*] they may be completed [*teteleiomenoī*] into
one,
that [*hina*] the world may know that you have sent me
and have loved them as [*kathos*] you have loved me.

Brown comments on the structure as follows:

⁶Raymond E. Brown, S.S., *The Gospel according to John XIII–XXI*, vol. 29A, *The Anchor Bible* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1970), 750.

⁷*Ibid.*, 769.

Each of these blocks...consists of three *hina* clauses with a *kathos* clause separating the first and the second. The first and second *hina* clause in each involves the oneness of the believers, while the third involves the effect on the world. The second *hina* clause does not merely repeat the first but develops the notion of unity.... [T]he model of unity is the mutual indwelling of Father and Son.⁸

So far, so good. Then Brown goes on to say, "It is quite clear that the first and second *hina* clauses of 21 constitute the content of Jesus' prayer: he is praying for unity and indwelling. Is the third *hina* clause also part of the prayer ('I pray...that the world may believe that you sent me')?" Brown agrees with Bultmann that the third *hina* clause in each block does not connect back to "I pray" but to the second *hina* clause. For, in John's theology, "Jesus does not pray directly for the world. The unity and indwelling visible among his followers challenges the world to believe in Jesus' mission, and thus indirectly the world is included in Jesus' prayer."⁹

To what end, however indirectly, is the world "included in Jesus' prayer"? What does it mean for the world to "believe/know that you have sent me"? Is this a saving knowledge? Or is it a bare recognition, on the order, say, of the "knowing" in Exodus 7:5, where God says, "And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch forth my hand upon Egypt and bring out the people of Israel from among them"? This order of "knowing" may vindicate YHWH and his servant Moses, but it leaves the Egyptians to suffer the consequences of their continuing resistance to Moses's intercession with Pharaoh to "let my people go." Brown comments,

[W]e contend that these statements do not mean that the world will accept Jesus; rather the Christian believers will offer to the world the same type of challenge that Jesus offered—a challenge to recognize God in Jesus...Those whom God has given to Jesus will come to believe and know; for the rest of men, that is, those who constitute the

⁸Brown, 769.

⁹Ibid., 770.

world, this challenge will be the occasion of self-condemnation.¹⁰

In support of Brown's contention, one might contrast the knowing in John 17:23 with that in 17:3. In 17:3, Jesus says, "this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." Here, God is the direct object of the verb "know," implying a direct "I-Thou" knowing, whereas in 17:23 the knowing is only a "knowing that." But such a distinction will not hold up. In 17:25 Jesus draws a contrast between the world and his disciples, beginning with the statement, "O righteous Father, the world has not known you."¹¹ Following Jesus's "but I have known you," and on the basis of 17:3, one might expect him to say, "and these know you." But instead, Jesus says, "and these know that you have sent me." In this instance, at least, knowing the Father and knowing that the Father has sent Jesus are interchangeable expressions. This means that the world's believing/knowing in verses 21 and 23 need not be a bare recognition. It opens the possibility that the third *hina* clauses in verses 20–21 and 22–23 may identify the ultimate aim of Jesus's more immediate prayer, as an aim for the salvation of "the world."

In respect to 17:23, "that the world [*ho kosmos*] may know that you have sent me and have loved them [*autous*] as you loved me," Brown observes that "Bernard...interprets this to mean that the world will understand that God has loved it,"¹² but more likely it

¹⁰Brown, 778.

¹¹This statement of Jesus resumes the narrator's statement in the Prologue, that "the world did not know him" (1:10). In the Prologue, this statement is followed by 1:14 and by statements concerning the universal scope of the purpose of the incarnation (1:29; 3:16; 6:51). In other words, the statement in 1:10 is provisional and penultimate. Does its recurrence in 17:25 sound a note of finality? Or does it remain provisional and penultimate, inaugurating (on analogy with 1:14) the mission of Jesus's disciples?

¹²Grammatically, Bernard's interpretation presupposes that the plural pronoun "them" can refer to a singular antecedent "world." This is no problem, for we have just such a reference in 17:2 (I translate literally):

means that the world will understand that God has loved the Christian believers.”¹³ Brown's further comment is nothing short of astonishing: “The love of God for the world is mentioned *only* as a preparation for the incarnation of the Son in iii 16; contrast xv 19” (italics added). It is unclear what bearing 15:19 has on the question of God's love for the world, since it speaks only of the world's love and hate. (Paul would say the measure of God's love is that while we were sinners/enemies, Christ died for us [Romans 5]. Would John say less?) What is astonishing is Brown's “only.” A propos of 17:23, “that you have loved them *as [kathos]* you have loved me,” Brown aptly comments, “The standard of comparison is breathtaking but logical; since the Christians are God's children and endowed with the life that Jesus has from the Father (vi 57), God loves these children as He loves His Son. *There is only one love of God*” (italics added). What of the world? Does God love the world as God loves these children? If not, is God's love one or is it two? More radically, does God love the world as God loves the Son? How can God *not* love the world as God loves the Son, given that “all things were made through him”? *If* the love between the Father and the Son is a love of mutual indwelling, and if that love, that mutual indwelling, predates the creation of the world (1:1–2; 17:5), this must mean that the world was created out of the matrix of that love. The love spoken of in 3:16, then, is a love that seeks to reclaim and redeem a world gone astray from that love, and to draw that world back into the sphere of that love. This, again, suggests that the third *hina* clause in John 17:20–21 and in 17:22–23 indicates the *ultimate* saving purpose to be served through the *proximate* concerns expressed in the first two *hina* clauses of those two “blocks.”

Consider now 17:15–19 (I deviate slightly from the RSV):

15 I do not pray that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil one.

“That all [*pan*, singular] which [*ho*, singular] you have given him, to them [*autois*, plural] you might give eternal life.”

¹³Brown, 771.

16 They are not of the world as [*kathos*] I am not of the world.

17 Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.

18 As [*kathos*] you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.

19 And for their sake I sanctify myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.

By definition, the very concept of the *sacred* establishes a boundary that excludes what is *profane*. And in human practice, the inveterate tendency of that which considers itself to be *sanctified* is to protect itself against whatever would defile it. The thematics of “keeping” and “guarding” in verses 11, 12, and 15 exemplify this both in Jesus’s own activity and in his prayer for the disciples. But one result is for a “sanctified community” to close in on itself and concern itself only with its own internal sanctity.¹⁴ And the passage now under examination does not stop with verse 17. The thrust of verses 18–19 is to counter that all-too-common tendency of the religious.

Consider: As in verses 20–23, *kathos* in verse 18 has the meaning, “in the same manner as.” Jesus is sending his followers into the world (see already 4:31–42) *in the same manner* as the Father has sent him into the world—that is, with the aim expressed in 3:16: God’s love for the world, embodied in the action of the Son, to win the believing response of the world to that love. *That* is how Jesus sends into the world those whom Jesus has just asked the Father to “sanctify” in the truth. Further, Jesus says that he sanctifies himself *for their sake*. His sanctification is not for his own sake, but for theirs. Here again, a sanctification which arises out of love is a sanctification which is for the sake of the beloved. But if Jesus was sent into the world as one who sanctified himself for the sake of his followers, so that they might be sanctified in truth, and if they are sent into the world as he was sent into the world, does this not raise the question of the purpose of *their* sanctification? Are they sanctified merely for

¹⁴See the discussion of the Johannine community as, from a sociological point of view, a separatist sect, in David Rensberger, *Johannine Faith and Liberating Community* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1988).

their own sakes? Or for the sake of the world to which they are sent? And, if the latter, is it not so that the world also may come to be sanctified in truth?¹⁵

In other words, a concern for sanctity that arises out of a heart and mind and will of love is not centripetal in its social tendencies but centrifugal. To the degree that a concern for sanctity displays centripetal tendencies which lead it to "circle the wagons" and, in effect, take itself out of the world (compare 17:15a!), such a concern is not a manifestation of the love of God in Christ. For that love manifests itself—shows forth its glory (John 12:27–28)—in undergoing the ultimate profanation of God's living sanctuary (1:14) on a cross of shame.

JESUS TRANSVALUES THE PRIESTLY UNDERSTANDING OF SANCTITY

I would like now to take one step further the presumably contrary vectors of the typically centripetal tendencies of the concern for sanctity (as exemplified, for example, in John 4:9b, 20) and the

¹⁵The Greek words translated "true" and "truth" appear forty-six times in the Revised Standard Version of John, in various degrees of reference, some specific to the scene in context, some with universal generality. Two occurrences are especially germane to the present discussion. The word occurs with definitive import in 1:9: "The true light that enlightens every person was coming into the world." In a geopolitical context that has its biblical origins in the story of the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1–9) and whose continuing saga is one of "wars and rumors of wars" between states demarcated from one another by defensive walls, Jesus says to Pilate, *a propos* of the distinctiveness of his kingdom *vis-à-vis* the kingdoms of the world, "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" (John 18:37). That is to say, the kingdoms of this world secure their borders by force of arms. Jesus's kingdom is "secured" in the same manner that his sacral community's identity and sanctity is secured—by embodying and so bearing witness to the truth. Does that truth exclude? Or does it, at its own risk, invite the outsider in?

centrifugal impulse of Jesus' sending of his disciples into the world as [kathos] the Father has sent him into the world.¹⁶ Might the juxtaposition of these two concerns in 17:15–19 imply a transvaluation of our understanding of sanctity, through a connection with the prayer in 17:20–23?

that [hina] they may be completed [teteleiomenoī] into
one,
that [hina] the world may know that you have sent me
and have loved them [as] [kathos] you have loved
me.

I will begin with the central concern of the book of Leviticus as set forth in 11:44–45:

- a. I am the LORD your God; consecrate yourselves [hagiasthese] therefore, and be holy [hagioi esesthe], for I am holy [hagios].
- b. You shall not defile yourselves with any swarming thing that crawls upon the earth.
- a'. For I am the LORD who brought you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God; you shall therefore be holy [esesthe hagioi], for I am holy [hagios].

The separatist (and centripetal) impulse implicit in these verses is made explicit in Leviticus 20:26:

You shall be holy to me; for I the LORD am holy,
and have separated [aphorisas]¹⁷ you from the peoples,
that you should be mine.

¹⁶Compare the centripetal move on the part of the disciples in John 20:19 and Jesus's counteracting centrifugal impetus in 20:21.

¹⁷The point under discussion in this part of my exploration is taken up from several perspectives in the following New Testament passages containing this verb: 2 Corinthians 6:17, "Therefore come out from them, and *be separate* from them, says the Lord, and touch nothing unclean; then I

What is true for the congregation as a whole is especially true of “the priests, the sons of Aaron,” as spelled out in reference to several specific issues in Leviticus 21. This chapter may be said to center in verse 8:

You shall consecrate [*hagiasei*] him, for he offers the bread of your God;
he shall be holy to you; for I the LORD, who sanctify you, am holy.

As is commonly recognized, the reiterated “be holy, for I am holy” lies behind Matthew 5:48, “Be perfect [*teleioi*], as [*hos*] your heavenly Father is perfect [*teleios*],” and Luke 6:36, “Be merciful [*oiktirmones*], as [*kathos*] your Father is merciful [*oiktirmon*].” Relevant to the concerns of this paper, one may note the following: Matthew 5:48 comes at the end of the first long section of the Sermon on the Mount. Does this verse sum up the whole sermon to this point? Even if it does, one may note that it follows immediately on the discussion of Leviticus 19:18, “you shall love your neighbor as yourself.” In Leviticus 19 that neighbor seems clearly to be identified as a member of one’s own people. Jesus extends the injunction to encompass one’s enemies, including one’s persecutors. One is to love them and pray (sic!) for them “that you may be children of your Father who is in heaven.” In Luke’s version of the scope of love, the call is to “be merciful as your Father is merciful [*oiktirmos*].” This characteristic of God is rooted in the promise of Exodus 33:19, “I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy [*oiktireso*] on whom I will show mercy [*oiktiro*],” and the definitive

will welcome you”; Galatians 1:15, “But when he who had *set me apart* before I was born, and had called me through his grace...”; Galatians 2:12, “For before certain men came from James, he ate with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and *separated* himself, fearing the circumcision party”; and Romans 1:1, “Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, *set apart* for the gospel of God...” Paul’s autobiographical reports involve a revolution in his understanding of what it means to be “set apart.”

proclamation in Exodus 34:6, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful [*oiktirmon*] and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness." (Paul, of course, quotes Exodus 33:19 in Romans 9:11 in a manner that seems to suggest God's selectiveness in showing mercy, but then in Romans 11:32 shows how God's mercy, in fact, "selects all.") The question these passages in Matthew and Luke raise is whether we are to see in John 17 a similar transvaluation of the concern for sanctity, as reversing its centripetal vector.

I return, then, to the reiterated emphasis in John 17:20–23 as a possible transvaluation in this Gospel of the Levitical injunction to "be holy, for I am holy."

I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word, *that they may all be one; even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us*, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. *The glory which you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completed into one*, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

We recall that in Exodus 40 the glory of God filled the completed tent sanctuary, and that in John 1:14 the tenting of God's Word in flesh enabled the disciples to "see his glory, full of grace and truth." In John 17 the attributes of the Father's glory and the Father's holiness or sanctity may be distinguishable (17:11, 22), but they are not separable. In light of John 1:1–2, and its resumption in 17:(1–)5, and in light of the repeated emphasis in 17:20–23 on the "mutual indwelling" (as Brown puts it) of the Father and the Son, I suggest that the mystery of the divine holiness/glory consists, for John, in the mystery of this mutual indwelling. If, then, we may hear the prayer in verses 20–23 as a prayer equivalent to the dominical injunctions in Matthew 5:48 and Luke 6:36, and if John 17:17–19 echoes the Levitical "Be holy as I am holy," 17:20–23 implies that this "being holy" will consist in becoming "one as you and I are one."

Why the urgency of such a prayer? Because of the inveterate tendency of the call to holiness and sanctity to be understood differently within the very bosom of the company of those who seek to respond to it, with the result that the "separated" community itself soon breaks up into separate, mutually exclusive groups, each convinced that it understands and embodies the claims of sanctity while the other does not. Such fissiparous tendencies are all too familiar to participants in or students of (and, some might add, recoverers from) modern "holiness" movements. They underlie the reality indicated in John 4:9 with its implications for worship in mutually exclusive sanctuaries (John 4:21–22). I propose that, by his prayer in John 17, Jesus transvalues the meaning of sanctity in the direction, not simply of separateness, but of a distinctive inclusive unity.

Is it a unity that marks only the followers of Jesus, while leaving "the world" beyond its pale? And does that prayer, thereby, simply re-draw the boundaries between insiders and outsiders? Or does the distinction rather have the character of an open threshold across which outsiders are at all times welcome?

In this connection, it is important to consider the import of Jesus's address to God in 17:25 as "righteous [*dikaios*] Father." In the Gospel of John, God is referred to 113 times as Father. Three times, the term is qualified by an adjective: 6:57, "living [*zōn*] Father"; 17:11, "Holy [*hagios*] Father"; and 17:25, "righteous [*dikaios*] Father." The first phrase, "living Father," recalls the phrase "living God" that occurs fifteen times in the Old Testament and thirteen times in the New. In the Old Testament, "the living God" is repeatedly contrasted with idols and false gods who have no life in themselves and cannot give life (and compare Jer. 2:13). In John the adjective "living" modifies a noun in two other phrases. In 4:10–11, it refers to Jesus as "living water" (see 4:14); in 7:38 it refers to Jesus as "living water"; and in 6:51 it refers to Jesus as the "living bread which came down from heaven." It is no surprise, then, to see this God described in the latter context as "the living Father [who] sent me." But if the adjective "living Father" is apt in the context of chapter 6 and its

reference to Jesus as “living bread,” what is the significance of the phrases “holy Father” and “righteous Father” in John 17?

The occurrence of “holy Father” in 17:11 is, to put it colloquially, a no-brainer. This verse (“and now”) introduces that part of the prayer in which Jesus prays that the Father will guard and keep his disciples (a centripetal concern), and in which he goes on to pray that God will sanctify the disciples in the truth even as Jesus sanctifies himself for their sake (17:17–19). So, as with “living Father,” “holy Father” is appropriate to the immediate context. But what of “righteous Father”?

What I write now (Sunday afternoon, March 20, 2005) comes after attendance at this morning’s Palm/Passion Sunday service in which the Epistle for the day is Philippians 2:5–11 and the Old Testament reading is Isaiah 45:20–25. As I listened to the Isaiah passage and my eyes followed the text in the bulletin, my attention was riveted by the phrase in 45:21, “righteous God.” Could it be that Jesus in John 17:25 is echoing that phrase? A concordance check (using the *Accordance* 5.2 research program) disclosed that the phrase “righteous God” occurs only twice in the Hebrew Bible, in Psalm 7:10[9], *elohim tsaddiq* [LXX simply *ho theos*]; and in Isaiah 45:21 [*el tsaddiq*, LXX *dikaios*]. Interestingly, both passages speak of a gathering of peoples or nations for purposes of divine judgment (Isaiah 45:20; Psalm 7:8[7]). Psalm 7:11[10] portrays God as a “shield” for the psalmist *vis-à-vis* the enemy (who are presumably the nations). Isaiah 45, on the other hand, sets God forth not only as universal judge but as universal eschatological savior.

20 Assemble yourselves and come,
draw near together, you survivors of the nations!
They have no knowledge who carry about their wooden
idols,
and keep on praying to a god that cannot save.
21 Declare and present your case;
let them take counsel together!
Who told this long ago?
Who declared it of old?
Was it not I, the LORD?

And there is no other god besides me,
a righteous [*dikaios*] God and a Savior;
there is none besides me.
22 Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth!
For I am [*ego eimi*] God, and there is no other.
23 By myself I have sworn,
from my mouth has gone forth in righteousness
a word that shall not return:
"To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear."
24 Only in the LORD, it shall be said of me, are
righteousness and strength;
to him shall come and be ashamed, all who were incensed
against him.
25 In the LORD all the offspring of Israel shall triumph and
glory.

With John 17 in mind, we may note the following four elements in this passage. First, those who worship idols "have no knowledge" (see John 17:25). Second, the one who is called "a righteous God" is at the same time called "a Savior." This befits Deutero-Isaiah, where the nouns *tsedeq* and *tsedaqah* occur frequently with the connotation of "victory" or "deliverance" and in parallelism with "salvation."¹⁸ Third, the idol-worshippers who "have no knowledge" are called to "Turn to me and be saved." Fourth, that call is undergirded by a divine oath, assured by the divine self (by myself I have sworn [*nishba 'ti*]) that the invitation to be saved will not be in vain, for "To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear [*tishshaba'*]."¹⁹ What will every tongue swear? "Only in the LORD are righteousness and strength [*tsedaqot we-'oz, LXX dikaiosyne kai doxa*]." The oath in the latter instance is a confession (and LXX translates *tishshaba'* with *exomologesetai*, "confess") that the power to save and "set things right" rests only with YHWH.

We may note also the occurrence in this passage of the LXX phrase *ego eimi* that runs through Deutero-Isaiah, often as a formal

¹⁸See, for example, Isaiah 51:6, 8; also 56:1; 59:17; and Psalm 98:2.

¹⁹Note how "righteousness and strength" in verse 24 parallels "righteous God and Savior" in verse 21.

epithet for God (like *ego eimi* for the first *ehyeh* in Exod. 3:14), and that Jesus echoes in his seven times repeated “I AM” (*ego eimi*).²⁰ But what of Isaiah 45:24b–25? Does this not, despite the universal invitation in 45:22 and the divine oath in 45:23, suggest a final division between the saved and the lost? I think not. The difference between “shame” and “glory” here pertains only to the difference between vindication of those who were faithful all along and the need for contrition and repentance on the part of those who had all along “bet on the wrong horse.” “Shame” here, I suggest, has its counterpart in Paul’s vision of those who will be saved “only as through fire” (1 Cor. 3:15), shame being the burning heat appropriately involved, among other things, in refining crude ore into a pure metal (see Isa. 48:10–11). Certainly, that is the redemptive connotation of shame in Ezekiel 36:32: “It is not for your sake that I will act, says the Lord GOD; let that be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your ways, O house of Israel.” Rather, God will act “for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned...” (36:22).

What I mean to suggest, then, is that, just as the phrase “living God” is appropriate to the context in which Jesus speaks of

²⁰Raymond Brown considers that Jesus’ seven “I AM” declarations in John have their primary background in Deutero-Isaiah. He writes, “Jesus is presented as speaking in the same manner in which Yahweh speaks in Deutero-Isaiah” (Brown, p. 537). The importance of Deutero-Isaiah as a scriptural context for understanding the figure of Jesus in John is underscored by the way in which the pre-Passion narrative is framed by Isaiah 40:3 (John 1:23) and Isaiah 53:1 and 6:10 (John 12:38, 40). After 12:40, the narrator says, “Isaiah said this because he saw his glory and spoke of him” (12:41). The immediate reference is, of course, to Isaiah 6:5. But the statement that Isaiah saw Jesus’s glory (compare John 8:56), together with the repeated *ego eimi* connections between John and Deutero-Isaiah, make it all the more plausible to suggest that “righteous Father” alludes to “righteous God” in Isaiah 45:21. (Given that, as observed in footnote 3, Isaiah 6:1 speaks of God as “high and lifted up,” while Isaiah 52:13 speaks of the servant of God as “high and lifted up,” and Isaiah 57:15 speaks of the “high and lifted up” God as dwelling [*shoken*] in a “high and holy place,” and also with the “contrite and humble in spirit,” one may see how, for John, Isaiah might be thought to “see” God’s glory even in the crucified Christ.)

himself as “living bread,” and just as “holy Father” is appropriate to the context in which Jesus speaks of his sanctifying himself that his disciples “may also be sanctified in truth,” so “righteous Father” is appropriate in a context where Jesus speaks of his aim that, through the disciples’ word, the world may come to believe and know that the Father has sent him. C. K. Barrett interprets the phrase this way:

[T]he adjective *dikaios*...is significant here because it is by God’s righteous judgment that the world is shown to be wrong, and Jesus and the disciples right, in their knowledge of God.²¹

Such an interpretation is correct as far as it goes, but it does not go far enough. Barrett prefaces his comment by writing, “John applies the adjective *dikaios* to no one other than God, and the whole group of words is of infrequent occurrence.” He is correct in his last assertion: “*dik*” words occur in the Johannine literature only a few times. But they deserve careful study for their bearing on 17:25. The following passages are particularly suggestive:

(1) 1 John 1:9 and 2:1–2 read,

If we confess [*homologomen*] our sins, he is faithful and just [*pistos kai dikaios*], and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness [*adikias*].

if any one does sin, we have an advocate [*parakletos*] with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous [*dikaion*]; and he is the expiation [*hilasmos*] for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

It is striking that God’s “justness” is exegeted (so to speak) on the one side by the term “faithful” and on the other side by the statement that God will forgive sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. While there is obviously an element of moral and spiritual discrimination

²¹C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel according to St. John* (London: S.P.C.K., 1958), 429.

and accountability implicit in “just,” that element operates here not with the aim of condemnation but with the aim of “setting the sinner to rights.” Not only is God just in this sense, but so is Jesus as advocate. Now, an advocate in a legal setting is one who appeals—intercedes, we may say—on behalf of the accused. How far is that from Jesus’s intercession in John 17? If Jesus’s advocacy and his expiatory work are of a piece, the latter work is “not for our [sins] only but also for the sins of the whole world.” The passage may be compared with the above-mentioned passage in Leviticus 16. The whole chapter is concerned with the ritual for the day of atonement. 16:17 refers to the act by which the high priest “atones [*exilasetai*] for himself and for his house and for all the assembly of Israel.” But if Brown, following Feuillet, can compare the threefold focus of this act with the threefold intercessory focus of Jesus in John 17, we may observe that according to 1 John 2:1–2 Jesus Christ the righteous is the expiation [*hilasmos*] also for the sins of the whole world. This is what we would expect following the announcement of John the Baptist in John 1:29. Are we to believe, then, that Jesus’s prayer to the “righteous Father” in John 17:25 concerns mainly the discriminating element in God’s judgment, and not also, and ultimately, the redemptive?

(2) 1 John 2:28–29 reads,

And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming. If you know that he is righteous [*dikaios*], you may be sure that every one who does right [*dikaiosyne*] is born of him.

We may note the contrast between “confidence” and “shame” at the coming of the righteous One. But is it clear that “shame” entails utter damnation? In any case, I suggest that “righteous” here has a different connotation, similar to that in Deutero-Isaiah, where it so often connotes deliverance. 1 John 2:29, then, may be paraphrased to mean, “If you are counting on God to have set things right for you, remember this—it is those who do righteousness who give evidence

of being born of him.” The argument parallels the argument concerning love that runs through 1 John 4 to the effect that one who “does not love does not know God; for God is love” (1 John 4:8). But these are not simply parallel arguments. For in the Johannine tradition (as in Deuteronomy for that matter), love and justice are mutually explicating terms. If God’s love is not sentimental toleration for any kind of behavior, God’s justice is not merely a cold bookkeeping manipulation of a moral and legal slide rule. But despite this mutual explication, John’s addressees in this epistle (like the Israelites in Jeremiah’s day) are all too capable of “trusting in deceptive words to no avail” (Jer. 7:8–10; see 1 John 1:6; 2:4, 6).

(3) John 5:30 reads,

I can do nothing on my own authority; as I hear, I judge [*krino*]; and my judgment [*krisis*] is just [*dikaia*], because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me.

(4) And what is the will of the One who sent Jesus? John 3:16–17 reads,

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn [*krino*] the world, but that the world might be saved through him.

It is not that judgment does not occur. Of course light exposes darkness! Of course those who would hide their deeds in darkness must come to the light, redeeming sense of shame and all! (John 3:19–21; 1 John 1:5–9). But the aim and end of God’s sending of the Son into the world is (as promised on oath in Isaiah 45) that “the world might be saved through him” (John 3:17; 1 John 2:1).

THE COSMIC SCOPE OF PRAYING IN GOD'S NAME

Another intertextual vector bearing on the topic of this paper can be identified in terms of the biblical theme of God's action for the sake of the divine name. In Psalm 79:9 and Daniel 9:19 divine forgiveness is sought "for the sake of thy name." This appeal is grounded in Exodus 34:6-7 with its explication of the connotations of the divine name. In Ezekiel 20:9, 14, and 22 God recalls for Israel (echoing the logic of Moses's intercession in Exod. 32:11-13 and Num. 14:13-19) how God had dealt with previous covenant betrayals: "I acted for the sake of my name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations among whom they dwelt, in whose sight I made myself known to them in bringing them out of the land of Egypt." Here, however, Ezekiel, through the phrase "for the sake of my name," ties Moses's intercession back to the scene at the burning bush, where Israel's deliverance from Egypt is grounded in the divine name. When God in Ezekiel promises deliverance from Israel's exilic situation, it is again "for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations" (Ezek. 36:22). All this is to suggest that, in these passages, the scope of the redemptive connotations of the divine name is delineated by the context in which it is foundationally proclaimed, in Exodus 3:14, 33:19, and 34:6. That scope is the descendants of the Genesis ancestors, the current people of Israel.

But between the time of Ezekiel and the writing of the Gospel of John, if C. T. R. Hayward is correct, Targumic exegesis, by the way it has employed the term *Memra* not only as a surrogate for *ehyeh*, "I will be," but also for God's speaking to create in Genesis 1:3 (*yehi*, "let there be"), extends the scope of the connotations of the divine name to cosmic creation. If, now, the same divine name for the sake of which God delivered Israel out of Egypt and forgives Israel its most grievous covenant violations is understood to be the divine name in and through which God created the world (John 1:1-5), how can the incarnation of that name, in his intercession, pray for a more circumscribed community? The matter may be put, crudely, in the form of a ratio: Jesus as an intercessor is to the community for whom

he prays, in the light of the scope of the divine name in which he prays (cosmic creation), as Moses is an intercessor to the community for whom he prays, in the light of the scope of the divine name in which he prays (Exodus redemption).

I wish now to sum up the preceding exegetical tour, which I hope is not a *tour de force*. The focus has been the theme of holiness and its transvaluation. In the first instance, holiness belongs to God, as that which sets God apart from all that is not God. Holiness also belongs to God's name—which is another way of saying the same thing. In the second instance, holiness marks the sanctuary in which God or God's name dwells. In the third instance, holiness marks the priests who minister in the sanctuary and the vessels and other physical means by which the priests carry out their duties. Finally, holiness marks worship acceptably offered by the people, and marks them as well. Thus, for example, of the twenty-two times that the phrase "my/thy/his holy name" occurs in the Old Testament, it occurs ten times in 1 Chronicles and the Psalms in the context of praise and thanksgiving; and it occurs three times in Leviticus and seven times in Ezekiel in connection with God's concern for the defilement or profanation of God's holy name. Especially noteworthy is Leviticus 20:3, where worship of Molech through child sacrifice "defil[es] my sanctuary and profan[es] my holy name."²² Further, texts such as Isaiah 6:3, Habakkuk 3:3, and Ezekiel 28:22 are sufficient to indicate that in reference to God "holiness" and "glory" are mutually defining terms, while texts such as Exodus 28:2 and 1 Chronicles 16:29 (Psalm 29:2), indicate the same in reference to those who worship the divine holiness/glory.

²²In Ezekiel 39:25, the only "priestly" passage not concerned with profanation, God promises to restore the fortunes of Jacob and have mercy upon the whole house of Israel, as an act in which "I will be jealous/zealous for my holy name." Amos, earlier, had spoken of the profanation of God's holy name through oppression of the poor and the afflicted and through sexual immorality (Amos 2:7). In the one place where the phrase "holy name" becomes a sentence, "his name is holy," God is said to dwell in a high and holy place and also with the contrite and humble in spirit, to revive that heart and that spirit (Isa. 57:15).

Now, if God's holiness refers to the divine mystery by which God is utterly other than all that is not God; and if that mystery is gathered up in the holiness of the divine name YHWH (a mystery that manifests itself foundationally at the burning bush and its "holy ground," and is then both revealed and hidden in the proclamation, "I will be who I will be"); that mystery is both disclosed anew and further deepened by the audacity of John 1:1–2 and 17:5, in which the Word (here understood in terms of the Targumic *Memra* and behind it the divine *ehyeh* of Exodus 3:14) both is *with (pros)* God and *is* God; is (post-resurrection) *unto (eis)* God; and thereby is glorified *in the presence of (para)* the Father, with the glory had *with (para)* God before the world was made. That mystery, I suggest, is then "exegeted" in John 17 as the mystery of a oneness characterized as "mutual indwelling." It is to this mutual indwelling—to be manifest supremely in that death on the cross by which the Son is glorified in glorifying the Father—that Jesus in 17:19 consecrates/sanctifies himself. This means that the mystery of the divine glory/holiness, as a mystery of mutual indwelling, is manifest/hidden (see Isaiah 45:15) in an event which—if the crucified one is the living tabernacle of God (1:14)—is an act of utter profanation and defilement of God's sanctuary and God's holy name. How can this be? How can God be glorified in an act which profanes God's holy name and sanctuary? What does this do to our notions of divine holiness and the communities that seek to relate themselves and their sanctuaries and sanctuary practices to that holiness (communities called to a sanctity likewise explicated as a unity of mutual dwelling)? Do we have here the Johannine version of what the other three Gospels intimate in reporting that at the death of Jesus the curtain of the temple was torn in two (Matt. 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45; and compare Heb. 10:20)?

JESUS'S UNIVERSAL PRAYER CONCERN

Martin Buber has written somewhere that we should not speak of the holy and the not-holy but rather of the holy and the not-yet-holy. In a similar vein, I recall someone reporting that when Ernst Bloch, the Marxist philosopher, was asked to sum up his philosophy of hope in a sentence, he responded by saying (presumably by way of revising Aristotle's fundamental logical axiom of identity and difference, enshrined in the saying, "A is not B"), "A is not yet B." The centripetal tendency of the concern for holiness, when it is not transvalued, is to remain content with the distinction, "A is not B." That is, to draw a sharp distinction between the holy and the not-holy, and then to draw a boundary around the holy and protect it from the not-holy—in effect, to take the holy "out of the world." The centrifugal impulse discernible in John 17:15–19, and then again in 17:20–23 (where the concern for sanctity becomes reframed in terms of the concern for oneness), operates out of the divine concern that A may yet become B—that all that is as yet not holy may yet become holy. If Jesus prays "directly" only for his disciples and those who believe through the word of those disciples, and if he prays only "indirectly" for the world, this does not mean that the world lies merely on the fringe of the scope of his intercessory concern. The Jesus of 4:31–42 and 6:51, I suggest, prays so intensely for his followers precisely because, once he returns to the Father, it is they who are to bear his name in witness to the world for the sake of the world.²³ If they are to be "perfected" (*teteleiomenoi*, "completed,

²³With this understanding of the scope of Jesus's high priestly prayer in John 17 we may compare the scope of the intercession of the Son in Romans 8:34 and the intercession of the Spirit in Romans 8:26–27. If we ask who the "us" is in 8:27 and 34, the answer in 8:27 seems straightforward: "the saints," that is, those who through faith in Christ have been cleansed and sanctified and indwelt by the Spirit. But two things suggest that the ultimate scope of this intercession is broader than that. First, the "unutterable groanings [*stenagmois alaletois*]" of the Spirit (8:26) stand in solidarity not only with those who have the first-fruits of the Spirit who "groan [*stanazomen*] inwardly" awaiting for adoption as children (8:23) but also

finished”) into one, it is not simply for the sake of their own perfection. (That would be, as Deutero-Isaiah says, “too light a thing” [49:6].) It is for the sake of their participation (14:12) in the “work” by which Jesus “finishes” the work of God (4:34; 5:36; 17:4; 19:28).

The point can be put this way: the Prologue asserts that all things were made through [the Word], and “without him”—*choris autou*, outside of him, apart from him—was not anything made. Neither, in Jesus’s prayer in John 17, is any part of that creation outside of his prayer concern. One mark of those who understand themselves to be his disciples is that the very concern for participation in Jesus’ sanctification of himself should commit his followers not to withdraw into a “holy huddle” but to move outward into the world seeking the oneness of the world in God and God’s Christ. In the terms of the Nicene Creed, if the first defining mark of the church is its unity and the second its holiness, the third is its apostolicity—its “sentness” into the world. In a subsequent paper I hope to explore the implications of such a vision, and in particular of the scenario in John 4:1–42, for Christian practice at the Lord’s Table.

with “the whole creation [that] has been groaning in travail [*systemazei*] together until now” (8:22) as it awaits “the revealing of the children of God” (8:19). Second, if the “us” seems confined to the saints, and if that “us” seems similarly circumscribed by the argument in the course of which Paul quotes Exodus 33:19 (Rom. 9:15), then that circumscribed election turns out to be instrumental, not ultimate; for ultimately God “will have mercy upon all” (Romans 11:32). In this sense, Paul’s understanding of the scope of Christ’s redemptive intercession displays interesting parallels with John’s, as I analyze the latter.



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