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# Exegesis Case Study

## JOHN 17:6-19

Erwin Buck

### INTRODUCTION

To venture into an exposition of the Fourth Gospel one must appear like a fool rushing in where angels fear to tread. Even a scholar like Ernst Kaesemann when writing on the Gospel of John, feels constrained to confess: "I shall be discussing a subject which, in the last analysis, I do not understand."<sup>1</sup>

As soon as one begins to exegete a passage from John one finds oneself face to face with the whole range of Johannine problems. It may be useful to list some of the open questions in point form here.

1. Has the original arrangement of the Fourth Gospel survived intact and, if not, can it be restored with confidence?
2. Are there levels of redaction discernible within the present composition and must such levels be isolated before attempting an exegesis of the text?
3. Has the Gospel been subjected to revisions after leaving the hands of the author and, if so, are such subsequent revisions to be considered canonical?
4. Assuming that various levels of redaction can be discerned within this Gospel, which of these are to be considered normative as the subject for exegesis?
5. What is the cultural and historical background out of which this Gospel originates (e.g. Jewish?) and how does this affect the interpretation of the Gospel?
6. Can we be sure that this Gospel is a representative of orthodox Christianity

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1. Ernst Kaesemann, *The Testament of Jesus, A Study of the Gospel of John in the Light of Chapter 17* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968), p. 1. Cf. Barnabas Lindars, *Behind the Fourth Gospel, Studies in Creative Criticism 3* (London: SPCK, 1971), p. 11: "The convention of starting with an apology is a necessity in the case of the Fourth Gospel. The literature on it is immense, and even a scholar who devotes all his time to the study of the New Testament cannot hope to keep up with it."

and, if not, how does one appraise the place of this Gospel within the canon?

7. What is the relationship between faith and history in the Fourth Gospel or, more succinctly, what is the relationship of the Johannine Christ to the Historical Jesus?
8. What is the relationship of the Gospel of John to the rest of Johannine literature; e.g. can I John be used to interpret the Gospel of John, and under what conditions?

Every exegesis of John, including our own, consciously or unconsciously presupposes a set of solutions to the above problems. Since the answers to these questions will have far-reaching consequences for the interpretation of the Gospel of John, and since it is obviously impossible for any exegete to deal exhaustively with these questions, every interpretation of the Fourth Gospel must be prefaced with a *caveat*. The results of any study such as this can be considered tentative only.

To some degree, of course, questions like the above must be addressed no matter which New Testament text is to be exegeted, but in the case of the Fourth Gospel the necessity to do so becomes much more acute since this Gospel evidently falls into a category all its own. Consequently, the exegesis of the Gospel of John demands a significantly different exegetical approach.

As far as this particular study is concerned, it becomes imperative, from a methodological standpoint, not to begin with the presupposition that in John 17 we are more or less face to face with the Historical Jesus. In view of the uniqueness of the Gospel of John, such an assumption would appear to be extremely precarious.

We must begin our study, then, by giving at least passing attention to some of the questions identified above. Only then will we be able to move with some degree of confidence into the exegesis of the text before us.

## LEVELS OF COMPOSITION

It is widely conceded today that the Gospel of John is the result of a rather complicated process of redaction involving several hands. In his exhaustive commentary in the Anchor Bible, R.E. Brown gives mature consideration to the pertinent problems and posits, as a working hypothesis, five stages in the composition of the Fourth Gospel.<sup>2</sup> He proposes that the evangelist inherited a tradition which had already been revised at least once; that, after using this tradition to compose his own work, the evangelist himself revised his composition at least once more;<sup>3</sup> and that, after him, someone else (possibly a member of the Johannine "school") introduced further interpolations.<sup>4</sup>

This very plausible hypothesis would furnish us with a logical explanation for

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2. Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, The Anchor Bible 29, 29A (Garden City: Doubleday, 1966), I, pp. xxxiv-xxxix.

3. Note, e.g., the secondary adaptation of the story of the blind man at 9:22-23 which must be dated as late as the 80's or 90's.

4. Note, e.g., that 14:31 "Rise, let us go hence" marks the original conclusion of the discourse in chapter 14 and finds its natural continuation in 18:1 "When Jesus had spoken these words, he went forth with his disciples." Accordingly, the farewell discourses (John 15-17) would need to be regarded as the result of a later interpolation.

some of the striking inconsistencies that are so prevalent in this Gospel.<sup>5</sup> According to this working hypothesis our pericope, together with its larger context comprising John 15-17, would constitute an interpolation into the revised Gospel of John, an addition which would have to be dated somewhere near the end of the first century. One can then further hypothesize that this larger section has some rather definite reference to the changed conditions in which the Johannine Church found itself near the end of the first century. More than that, those altered conditions themselves may be at least in part responsible for that interpolation. This insight gives a very valuable clue for understanding John 17.

## CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS MILIEU

The thought-world of John has long presented a puzzle. Bultmann made a strong case for reading John in terms of Gnosticism, but this view has now largely fallen into disfavor. Kysar's review of recent research leads him to conclude: "It is my conviction that current scholarship portends the demise of the gnostic hypothesis as a viable background of the Gospel."<sup>6</sup>

C.K. Barrett in his Franz-Delitzsch lectures<sup>7</sup> of 1967 presented strong arguments for placing John primarily into a Jewish milieu. With the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls it became increasingly evident that the Judaism reflected in the Fourth Gospel has greater affinities with sectarian groups, such as the Qumran community, than it does with what had commonly been referred to as "normative Judaism."<sup>8</sup>

There is now general consensus on this point in scholarly circles. Kysar concludes: "It is the accomplishment of current johannine scholarship that the evidence for the syncretistic, heterodox Jewish milieu of the gospel has become irresistible."<sup>9</sup> This scholarly consensus has to be taken seriously by the interpreter.

## THE LITERARY GENRE OF JOHN 17

We have already suggested that the so-called farewell discourses, John 15-17, most likely represent an interpolation into an earlier form of the Gospel.<sup>10</sup> Within this three-chapter interpolation, John 17 is tightly connected and integrally related. Nevertheless, this chapter forms a clearly recognizable unit of its own, so that it can

5. Compare, e.g., John 3:16 "God so loved the world" with 17:9 " . . . I am not praying for the world . . ."

6. Robert Kysar, *The Fourth Evangelist and His Gospel, An Examination of Contemporary Scholarship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1975), p. 271.

7. Published in English translation: C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel of John and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970).

8. See, e.g., the concise review of R.E. Brown, "The Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament," *Expository Times* 78 (1967):19-23 or the collection of essays edited by Krister Stendahl, *The Scrolls and the New Testament* (New York: Harper, 1957).

9. Kysar, p. 270.

10. See ft. 4.



be isolated from its context and treated separately.<sup>11</sup> That this is so, can be deduced from the way in which these twenty-six verses are formulated. In them Jesus is heard to address an extended monologue to the Father. The general tenor of the monologue is that of a series of petitions. Nevertheless, one gets the distinct impression that the real purpose of the monologue is the inculcating of information and instruction. Although formally addressed to the Father, the monologue has as its actual audience the disciples who are allowed to "overhear" it.

This literary device is thoroughly characteristic of the Fourth Gospel. The Johannine Christ (unlike the Synoptic Jesus) cannot pray in the true sense of the word, since he and the Father are one. Communication between him and the Father is intended solely for the ears of the disciples.<sup>12</sup> It follows that this prayer of Jesus is a characteristically Johannine construction and must be clearly distinguished from the prayers of Jesus recorded in the Synoptic Gospels. Its closest analogy in the history of religious literature is the parting speech of a dying patriarch to his assembled family.<sup>13</sup>

This prayer of Jesus is unique in the history of Biblical literature, and it is uniquely Johannine. No exegete can afford to overlook this fact.

## THE INTERNAL STRUCTURE OF JOHN 17

### The Integrity of John 17

Since it is more than plausible that the Fourth Gospel has been revised both by the author himself and by a redactor other than the author, one must allow for the possibility that these revisions have been rather extensive and that signs of them are still discernible within every chapter. The style of the Fourth Gospel is indeed so overloaded, repetitious, and parenthetical that one could readily explain it as the result of a series of additions and interpolations. Caution is advised, of course: not every cumbersome style is the result of successive revisions, and what may appear excessively baroque to some, might be perceived as the quintessence of beauty by others. Chiasm and *inclusio*, furthermore, i.e., literary patterns which are characterized by repetition and parenthetical departures, appear to have been much favored in antiquity. It is not advisable, then, to dispose of every instance of plerophoric style as the result of subsequent interpolations into a given text. Furthermore, when one compiles the various excisions that have been proposed by scholars for diverse reasons, very little remains which all would ascribe to the original author.<sup>14</sup>

Nevertheless, it may be helpful to identify parenthetical constructions in this

11. See Rudolph Schnackenburg, "Strukturanalyse von Joh 17," *Biblische Zeitschrift* 17 (1973):69.

12. The Johannine Christ, instead of truly praying, can only give thanks for the fact that he is always heard immediately (11:41f) and his thanksgiving is made audible solely for the benefit of the disciples (11:42). Inversely, communication from heaven to him is made audible only for the benefit of the bystanders (12:30).

13. So also Kaesemann, p. 4 and O. Michel, "Das Gebet des scheidenden Erlöses," *Zeitschrift fuer Systematische Theologie* 18 (1941), pp. 521-34, as well as Schnackenburg, p. 201.

14. For a summary of various proposals see Mark I. Appold, *The Oneness Motif in the Fourth Gospel* (Tuebingen: Mohr, 1976), pp. 215ff.

chapter. Whether or not cogent arguments can be provided for considering these parentheses as the work of someone other than the original author, awareness of their presence should be useful in ascertaining the major drift of the composition.

On closer examination it appears that John 17:12b interrupts the flow of thought and that 17:16 is no more than a repetition of 17:14b. John 17:3 gives the appearance of an added explanatory definition of the term "eternal life" in 17:2. The secondary character of 17:3 is further indicated by the fact that only here do we find the striking title "the one true God" (*μονος αληθινος θεος*) and only here does the term "eternal life" (*ζωη αιωνιος*) occur with the definite article.<sup>15</sup>

All of 17:20f. is in quite obvious tension with its context. Throughout the Gospel of John, even in the farewell discourses, the disciples function as the representatives of all believers. However, verse 20 suddenly introduces a distinction between two groups of disciples, present and future. Then, two verses later at 17:22, the pronoun *αυτοις* obviously refers to the group of people mentioned at 17:18,19, but can only with difficulty be made to refer to the two groups alluded to in 17:20f. Consequently it is very tempting to regard 17:20f. as a secondary interpolation into chapter 17, possibly occasioned by the desire to interpret 17:18 in terms of mission.

Suffice it to summarize now that if one concludes that there are later interpolations in our chapter: one must then be prepared to detect two or more levels of meaning in the text, one which would be more congenial to the original author; another which would need to be ascribed to a later reviser and identified as a re-interpretation of the original meaning, introduced very likely in the interest of meeting the changed needs of later users of the Gospel.

## Structure as Vehicle for the Dominant Motif

The structure of a narrative can give important clues regarding the intended meaning of the composition. Many have attempted to discover the organizational principle of John 17 and to no one's surprise, the results of their investigations have been far from uniform.<sup>16</sup> Personally, I have found great promise in following up and carrying further some of the obviously correct observations of Schnackenburg.<sup>17</sup>

The first word of Jesus' first petition is *δοξασον*. This is the Aorist imperative of a root which occurs four more times in the opening five verses of this chapter, leading up to the climactic expression in 17:5 ". . . and now, Father, glorify thou me . . . with the glory which I had with thee before the world was made." The theme is picked up again at the conclusion of the prayer with the double emphasis on *δοξα* (17:22,24), the second of which (" . . . my glory which thou hast given me in thy love for me before the foundation of the world") remarkably parallels the climactic expression in 17:5.

It is hard to resist the conclusion that these two verses are constructed in relation

15. Whether or not 17:3 is to be ascribed to a later redactor, it is clear that the verse looks more like a confessional formula of the Johannine church than like a prayer on the lips of the historical Jesus. Cf. I John 5:20 "This (sc. Jesus Christ) is the true God and eternal life."

16. J. Becker, "Aufbau, Schichtung und theologieggeschichtliche Stellung des Gebetes in Johannes 17," *Zeitschrift fuer Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 60 (1969):56-83 contains an account of various attempts to analyse the structure of John 17.

17. Schnackenburg, pp. 72ff.

to one another and that 17:24 both picks up 17:5 and makes it more precise: Jesus possesses this glory as a result of it having been given him by the Father, and his glory consists specifically in the love relationship between the Father and the Son.

Yet it is not only these two verses, but their entire immediate context which is quite clearly constructed in congruence. In 17:1-5 Jesus asks to be glorified by the Father in order that he may in turn glorify the Father. He also asserts that he has *already* glorified the Father, so that he can now "request" the *eschatological* re-bestowal of his own *primeval* glory. In parallel fashion 17:22-24 has Jesus affirm that he has already given his glory to the disciples and "requests" that the disciples may be granted eschatological participation in his primeval glory. Note, however, that while 17:1-5 and 17:22-24 are very closely parallel, the latter passage carries the thought a significant step further: the *δοξα* (glory) is now focused especially on the *disciples*, and it receives its pronounced profile in terms of *αγαπη* (love).<sup>18</sup>

We have here, then, an instance of *inclusio*. This is a characteristically Johannine pattern: statement of the subject, exposition, and return to a fuller recapitulation of the original subject. The important implication of this analysis is that the intervening passage (17:6-19) would need to be regarded as *epexegetical*, an exposition of the subject first enunciated in 17:1-5 and then chiasmically recapitulated in 17:22-26.<sup>19</sup>

It now becomes very exciting to observe how this intervening section (17:6-19) picks up and explicates the main subject. Three strategically placed Aorist imperatives immediately draw attention to themselves. Each introduces a more or less self-contained petition, and these three petitions bear a marked resemblance to one another. We list the key elements of these petitions in parallel for illustrative purposes.

	A 17:1-5		B 17:11b-16		C 17:17-19
1b	glorify thy son that the Son may glorify thee.	11b	keep them that they may be one, even as we are one.	17 (22b)	sanctify them that they may be one even as we are one.
4	I glorified thee	12	I kept them	19	I consecrated myself (for their sake) that they also may be consecrated.
5	glorify thou me.	15	that thou shouldst keep them (from the evil one).		

18. The root *agapao* occurs only in this section in John 17, and that five times!

19. Note that the root *doxazo* is indeed used once in this intervening section and that, significantly, it there begins to bring "glory" into relationship with the *disciples* (17:10).



This obvious parallelism is evidently intended and significant. It invites close examination. Sections A, B, and C, if they are not totally interchangeable, are at least mutually interpretative, so that one can say that the glory of the Father/Son (A) finds its expression in the preservation of the disciples (B) and in their consecration (C). Furthermore, whereas section A is dominated by the thought of reciprocity between the Father and the Son, sections B and C expand this thought by portraying Father and Son as acting in tandem for the benefit of the *disciples*. The glory of the Father/Son is thus specifically focused on the disciples.

The eschatological/primeval glory, which constitutes the dominant motif of the entire chapter, receives its distinctive contours in the preservation of the disciples, in their consecration, and (to get ahead of ourselves) in their perfection into a unity which is analogous to (if not identical with) the divine unity of the Father and the Son, a unity which finds its expression in a mutual relationship of love.

## Secondary Motifs in John 17

Although we have found distinct traces of subsequent interpolation in this chapter, the basic structure of John 17 is comparable to the seamless robe (19:23), the intertwining of whose warp and woof results in a perfect pattern and a mutually reinforcing unity. Several subsidiary motifs run through this chapter and are intricately interwoven with each other in such a fashion that they mutually undergird each other while they support the dominant motif of the prayer of Jesus. We shall briefly investigate some of these secondary themes in order to get a more concrete picture of the message of this chapter in John.

*The Revelation of the Father's Name.* References to the name of the Father occur three times in the central section of John 17 and the concept is recapitulated in the concluding verse of the chapter. Jesus revealed the name of the Father (17:6,26) and he will reveal it (17:26). He himself has kept the disciples in the name of the Father (17:12b) and he prays that the Father may keep them in his own name (17:11b).

According to ancient Semitic usage, the name stands for the person himself. To reveal the name of God, then, is to reveal God himself. Thus, the statement which pictures Jesus as the one who reveals the name of the Father in fact affirms that in Jesus God himself becomes known. Similarly, to say that the disciples are being kept in the name of God is to say that they are being kept in God, or in unity with God. That this is so understood by John is best illustrated by the way in which the petition in 17:11 is formulated as a *parallelismus membrorum*:

“ . . . Keep them in thy name which thou hast given me,  
that they may be one, even as we are one.”

The formulation of 17:26 is equally revealing:

“I made known to them thy name, and I will make it known,  
that the love with which thou hast loved me may be in them,  
and I in them.”

Already we can see how various themes dovetail into one another or are even used as various expressions of one and the same basic concept. To be kept in the



name of God is to be kept in unity with God, or in God himself; to have the name of God revealed to oneself is to have the love<sup>20</sup> or, better, is to have Jesus himself remaining in oneself. The many threads are woven into a tight web.

*The Disciples as those given to the Son by the Father.* From its very beginning, the prayer of Jesus refers to the disciples as those who have been given to him by the Father (17:2, 24a). This phraseology describes the disciples as passive recipients of the gracious act of God. They belong to the Son, not as a result of any action on their part, but as a result of God's gracious sovereign act.

Not only have the disciples been given to the Son by the Father, they are in turn recipients. What they receive is eternal life (17:2), the Word of God (17:8,14), or the divine glory (17:22).

So, then, even the use of the root *δίδωμι* (to give) holds together several of the other prominent motifs in John 17, and it does so always in such a way that the focus falls on the disciples as the ultimate beneficiaries of the gracious act of the Father in the Son. Thus the prayer has as its ultimate objective not the glorification of the Son, nor even the glorification of the Father, but the bestowing of eternal blessing on the disciples.

*The Relationship of Love.* As already observed, love comes to occupy center stage at the conclusion of the prayer, although the root *ἀγαπᾶω* (to love) does not occur in the chapter until v. 23. Love is specifically the love of the Father for the Son as well as for those whom the Father has given to the Son (17:23,26). Yet love can also be interpreted as the full eschatological revelation of the name (person) of God (17:26). To have love within oneself is tantamount to having Jesus within oneself (17:26); and this is the note on which the prayer of Jesus concludes.

*The Connotation of ἀγιαξω.* The root *ἀγιαξω* (to consecrate) occurs elsewhere in John only at 10:36 and there it appears to form a hendiadys together with *ἀποστελλω* (to send): ". . . whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world." It may not be accidental then, that in 17:17-19 the triple occurrence of *ἀγιαξω* stands in immediate conjunction with the double use of *ἀποστελλω*. Can there be any doubt, then, that *ἀγιαξω* and *ἀποστελλω* have a similar, if not identical, frame of reference?

What that frame of reference is, however, is not so obvious. Elsewhere in the New Testament *ἀγιαξω* is connected with atonement and the expiatory death of Jesus.<sup>21</sup> Some exegetes have concluded therefrom that also here the term must have sacrificial connotations.<sup>22</sup> Since the advent of Redaction Criticism, however, we must be much more circumspect; one can no longer simply assume that various authors attach identical connotations to any given term.

Our conclusion regarding the nuance of *ἀγιαξω* is therefore best kept in abeyance

20. Does *agape* (love) here stand for *theos* (God)? According to I John 4:8 "God is love."

21. Heb. 2:11; 10:10, 14; 13:12; I Cor. 1:30.

22. E.g., Edwyn C. Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel* (London: Faber, 1947), p. 502; Schnackenburg, p. 201, ft. 19.

until we have examined the meaning of the root *αποστελλω* with which it is so closely related in the present context.

*The Nuance of αποστελλω.* On the basis of 17:18 one might readily conclude that in John 17, at least, the root *αποστελλω* is used to circumscribe missionary activity in the world.<sup>23</sup> In that case one might regard John 17:18 as the functional equivalent of Matthew 28:19ff.

Plausible as this interpretation may appear, it is not at all uncontested. With the exception of 17:18b the root *αποστελλω* in John 17 consistently refers to the sending of Jesus into the world (17:3,8, 18a, 21, 23, 25). Since the sending of the Son by the Father is regarded as the content of saving knowledge everywhere else in John 17 and since John consistently portrays Jesus as the revealer of the Father rather than as the missionary to the nations, it is hardly tenable to understand *αποστελλω* here with reference to the commissioning of a missionary.

According to Berach 5:5, the one who is sent (the *shaliah*) is like the sender himself.<sup>24</sup> Accordingly, to refer to Jesus as the one whom the Father sent, is to affirm that he reveals the Father. All things considered, then, it would appear most natural to conclude that the root *αποστελλω* at 17:18b designates the disciples not as missionaries but rather as revealers of the Son who sent them.

## Summary Conclusions

A good many of the terminological variations in John 17 appear to be just that: *terminological* variations. By and large these phrases really “express different aspects of the same occurrence.”<sup>25</sup> To participate in the glory of Jesus is to receive the revelation of the name of God; to be kept in the name of God; to keep the word of God; to be sent into the world; to be kept in the truth; to be consecrated; to be perfected into one; to be kept in love; *to be one even as the Father and the Son are one*. The thought of the Gospel writer is indeed like the seamless robe, and the essential message of the evangelist appears to be everywhere the same, at least in this chapter.

All these secondary motifs running through John 17 seem to explicate ever more fully the one dominant theme of the prayer: the divine glory in its primeval/eschatological dimension as a gift bestowed on the disciples. This divine glory finds its most perfect expression in the unity of the fellowship and in the divine love which characterizes that community.

## CHRISTOLOGY IN JOHN 17

For the exegesis of this passage it now becomes necessary to place into focus briefly the contours of the Johannine Christology as it comes to expression in John 17. At this point we can be content with a few brush strokes.

Jesus is the one whom the Father has sent and who reveals the Father's name.

23. John 17:20f does indeed appear to understand 17:18 in the sense of mission, but above (p. 8) we began to suspect that 17:20f may have to be assigned to a later level in the redaction of the Fourth Gospel.

24. See K.H. Rengstorf, “apostolos,” *Theologisches Woerterbuch zum Neuen Testament*.

25. Kaesemann, p. 50.

He is not of the world and no longer in the world. He belongs totally on the side of God. For John the Historical Jesus had become indistinguishable from the Resurrected Lord. To say it more succinctly: the Son is even more than the Father's proxy, he is one with the Father. Eternal life is to know God and the one whom God has sent.

Kaesemann<sup>26</sup> appears to be correct: Johannine Christology, at least in John 17, is in danger of falling into docetism. At this point it may be only incipient docetism, naive and unreflected, but it is docetic nonetheless. To call the Fourth Gospel anti-docetic is to interpret the Gospel from the perspective of the Johannine Epistles and is to overlook the fact that such passages as John 6:51c-58, which are indeed anti-docetic, are best ascribed to the revision of an ecclesiastical redactor.

Our exegesis had better allow for the probable incipiently docetic character of the Johannine Christology.

## JOHANNINE ECCLESIOLOGY

The Fourth Gospel does not employ the characteristic ecclesiological designations such as "church," "people of God," "Body of Christ," or the like, and has nothing comparable to such Matthean passages as 16:17-19; 18:15-20; or 28:16-20, and there is no evidence in John of any awareness of an organized church.

This is very unusual at the end of the first century. This strange state of affairs must be kept in mind particularly when exegeting Johannine passages in which the oneness motif plays a dominant role. When John speaks of oneness, it is almost certainly not the unity of the ecclesiastical organization that he has in mind.

According to the theology of John, the unity of the people of God is both given and indispensable; it includes the Father, the Son, and those whom the Father has given to the Son. This unity exists irrespective of ecclesiastical organization.

It is of significance now that in the two instances in John 17 in which a desire is expressed that the world may come to a saving knowledge of Jesus (17:21b, 23b), it is precisely that unity which causes the world to reach such saving knowledge.

## UNITY: PRESENT FACT OR FUTURISTIC HOPE?

The motif of oneness is structurally determinative for Johannine Christology as well as for the ecclesiology of the Fourth Gospel. As we have seen, this motif resonates through the major as well as through the subsidiary concepts running through John 17. What is not so clear, however, is whether the writer affirms a present fact or expresses a future hope when he speaks of such a unity.

The observation that this unity is most often alluded to in purpose clauses (17:11b, 21, 22b) is not very helpful, since what appears to be a purposive *iva* may

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26. *Ibid.*, p. 26. See also his footnote 41: "The assertion quite generally accepted today, that the Fourth Gospel is anti-docetic, is completely unproven."



in fact be an exegetic *ἰσᾶ*, such as we meet throughout the Fourth Gospel and even in this chapter (17:3). Again, the observation that this unity is the subject of petitions is inconclusive, since it has been shown that the "prayer" of the Johannine Jesus is more akin to the category of declaration than to that of petition. Finally, even if we could conclude definitely that John conceives of the unity of the church in eschatological terms, we must recall that Johannine eschatology is not entirely futuristic, if it can be called futuristic at all.

Where does all this leave us? We can be certain at least about this: the unity of the church according to John belongs to the category of divine glory and perfection (17:22f). It is a heavenly reality and is not conceived in terms of organizational oneness. The concluding sentence of the prayer appears most cogent for purposes of our study: the various explications of the oneness of the community culminate in the statement that the revelation of the Father's name has as its ultimate purpose that the love of the Father for the Son may be in the community and that the Son himself may be in the community.

But there are some rather definite historical clues: Does the constant emphasis on unity in the Gospel of John not betray the painful realization on the part of the author that such unity is seriously threatened in the community as John knows it? Paul, for example, strikes up the theme of unity of the Body of Christ precisely when he must face the painful signs of division in the church. It appears highly likely that John proceeds analogously. The affirmation of the eschatological unity of those whom the Father has given to the Son serves at once as an affirmation of a God-given reality, as an expression of confident hope on the part of a divided people, and as an exhortation to value most highly such a unity and to rest uneasy in the face of continued division within the fellowship.

John evidently feels that his church, in continual danger of further and further fragmentation, needs to hear over and over again, and in the most eloquent language, that irrespective of outward appearances, the church is one, because the Father and the Son are one.

If the Christian Church today takes seriously the theological convictions of John, it must rest uneasy whenever and wherever the full expression of unity within the Christian fellowship is impeded. But this church should also realize that the unity John speaks of is not of human creation. Wherever the church is divided, it nevertheless must continue to affirm with full conviction, in faith, the eschatological reality which is operative even in the present: The Father and the Son are one, and those whom the Father has given to the Son are one with each other and with him!

## Addendum

*Norman J. Threinen, editor*

When the foregoing paper was presented to the Division of Theology in May, 1980 the suggestion was approved by the division committee that the response to this paper and the findings from our discussion also be shared with the readers of CONSENSUS.

Dr. George Evenson had been asked by the division to respond to this particular



paper in order to bring to the discussion other perspectives. In his response he shared the following:

1. While the analysis of the structure of John 17 was very helpful, there seemed to be undue concern for scholarly problems. Should not the main concern be to make relevant the message of the text as it is before us.
2. The essay reflected a high degree of tentativeness about what the text has to say. Lutherans who accept the authority of Scripture have a real problem when such a tentative approach is used.
3. The claim that John 15-17 is an interpolation added to Jesus' discourse is dubious. Other similar instances could be cited where sections of material could be omitted without seeming to interrupt the flow of thought.
4. The ambiguous attitude toward the world need not necessarily be contradictory. It could reflect differing uses of the term."

Following discussion, the Division of Theology approved findings of which the following flow out of the deliberations on this paper:

1. We do not find that the divisions which arise out of questions of exegesis bear any relationship to the current divisions between our church bodies. Since we can have fellowship with these differences within each of the bodies, it should follow that we can have fellowship among the bodies.
2. With respect to the historical-critical method, the pertinent questions are: To what degree is it legitimate? To what degree is it helpful? To what degree is it a threat to the faith?

On the theological scene there have been and may well be expected to be emerging new insights and methodologies. Flatly to reject such in advance could result in extinguishing a potentially creative edge of a common theological endeavour. This is neither desirable nor necessary, since it has been observed that as long as the authentic hermeneutical presuppositions of the Christian faith are retained, positive results can be gained with good will and sincere work regardless of the specific method used."