TO MAKE GOD KNOWN:
A READING OF JOHN 17:1-26

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John 17 has been the subject of much reflection and scholarship. Whether or not it is a “priestly prayer” continues to be hotly debated (see especially 17:17-19), and it has become particularly well known in recent decades because of the use made of the prayer as inspiration for the modern ecumenical movement (see especially vv. 21, 23). The study which follows does not attempt to deal with these contemporary issues in a direct fashion. There is a danger that the search for themes and particular theological perspectives can lead to a piecemeal treatment of this important Johannine passage. What follows is a deliberately synchronic reading of the prayer which does not ignore the undeniable contribution made to the study of this passage by more traditional historical-critical, diachronic, approaches. The contemporary theological and exegetical issues mentioned above will emerge from this reading, but only in so far as they form part of the larger literary unit of Jesus’ departing prayer which, in its own turn, forms part of the larger literary phenomenon of the Fourth Gospel.¹

1. Introduction

Jesus has been alone with his disciples, at a meal, since 13:1. Most critics regard 13:1-30 as a narrative introduction to the Last Discourse, and the discourse proper as 13:31-16:33. 17:1-26 is then understood as a concluding

¹ What follows is a slightly modified form of Chapter Five of the final volume of a narrative critical study of the Fourth Gospel. The first two volumes have already been published: F.J. MOLONEY, Belief in the Word. Reading John 1-4 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), and IDEM, Signs and Shadows. Reading John 5-12 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996). The final volume is entitled, Glory not Dishonor. Reading John 13-20 (21). It is due for publication in early 1998.
prayer, similar to other farewell prayers found in both Jewish and Greco-Roman literature of the period. The presence of a variety of literary forms within 13:1-17:26 is already an indication that this section of the Gospel has had a complicated pre-history. It is formed by a narrative (13:1-38), seemingly different types of discourse material (14:1-31 and 16:4-33 are marked by questions and interruptions from Jesus’ audience, while in 17:1-16:5 only Jesus speaks) and a prayer (17:1-26). Numerous attempts have been made to establish layers of tradition behind the passage, and to situate them in various Sitze im Leben in the history of the Johannine community. Recent scholarship is focussing its attention upon the structure and message of the discourse as a whole. Segovia, who was once so pessimistic about the unity of the discourse, can nowadays see the need “to address the character of 13:31-16:33 as an artistic and strategic whole with a highly unified and coherent literary structure and development, unified and coherent strategic concerns and aims, and a distinctive rhetorical situation.” However, obvious the seams (see especially 13:31-32; 14:31; 17:1), the reader of 13:1-17:26 strives “even if unconsciously, to fit everything together in a consistent pattern.”

2 For a survey of scholarship, and a presentation of this point of view, see the recent work of F.F. SEGOVIA, The Farewell of the Word. The Johannine Discourse to Abide (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991) 1-58.


7 I will read 17:1-26 as the climax of a deliberately constructed farewell scene, running from 13:1-17:26.

It is obvious that, within 13:1-17:26, 17:1-26 forms a literary unit on its own right. Introductory words from the narrator break into Jesus’ discourse, which has been the focus of the reader’s attention since 14:1. The narrator puts the discourse in the past (17:1a: τότε ἔλαβεν, then Jesus’ raising his eyes to heaven, adopting a formal pose for prayer (v. 1a). See 11:41). Jesus addresses the Father directly (πατέρα). See 11:41; 12:27), announcing that the hour has come, praying that he be glorified so that he might glorify the Father (v. 1b). Jesus continues to pray, without interruption, until v. 26. Although the disciples are regarded as present, hearing the prayer (see vv. 6-8, 9-19, 20, 24-26), they never speak. Jesus addresses the Father at all times (see vv. 1, 5, 11, 21, 24, 25) even though the bulk of the prayer concerns his listeners, and those who believe in Jesus through their word (see v. 20). The prayer concludes Jesus’ final discourse with his disciples. In 18:1 Jesus sets out with them, crossing on a garden on the other side of the Kidron.

Some Jewish testaments end with a brief prayer of praise, rendering glory to God (see Testament of Job 43:1-17; Testament of Isaac 8:6-7; Testament of Jacob 8:6-9), and the doxological element is not lacking in John 17 (see vv. 1-5, 24). Other biblical and Jewish literature shows that the practice of a final “prayer” was reasonably common. The song of Moses in Deut 32 honours God’s rule in the history of his people. Patriarchal prayers from the testament tradition can be found in Jubilees 1:19-21 (Moses), 10:3-6 (Noah), 20:22 (Abraham), using the “form” of prayer to repeat many of the
elements found in the more narrative sections of the testaments, especially admonitions and blessings (Jubilees 36:17). There is concern for the future of God’s people, requests for God’s mercy and an easing of his judgment in the apocalyptic literature, and in some cases prayers also have the literary function of linking diverse sections of the apocalypse (see Esdras 8:20-36; Syriac Baruch 21, 34, 48:1-24; 84:85). The “form” of prayer is present, and even though the prayers in the testamentary and apocalyptic traditions are “remote from the prayer of intercession”, John 17 must not only be regarded as a prayer, a privileged insight into the inner relationship between Jesus and God. As Westcott has rightly pointed out, John 17:1-26 is “at once a prayer and a profession and a revelation”. Closer parallels have been urged between the Hermetic writings (see Poinidem 1:31-32; Corpus Hermeticum XIII.21-22), where God is praised and there are certain verbal similarities, and the Mandaean literature (see Book of John 236-239; Mandaean Liturgy (Qolostà 38:9-201)) where “the Great Life” is asked to raise up and to give the splendour of light to disciples and children who are locked in the darkness of the lower world. Apart from the problem of the antiquity of the gnostic traditions, the mythological setting of these prayers from the Hermetic and gnostic world is very different from that of John 17, where Jesus is firmly located in a room with his disciples on the night before he died (see 13:1-4). There is no convincing evidence that John 17 depended upon these traditions. Yet, as Dodd has remarked, “the language and ideas would...be familiar and acceptable”.

There are literary and theological contacts between Jesus’ final prayer and earlier shorter prayers of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel (see 11:41-42; 12:27-28). This form of prayer, in turn, is close to the so-called “bolt from the Johannine sky” found in the Synoptic tradition in Matt 11:25-27 (par. Luke 10:21-22). None of these elements, and especially the Jewish testamentary traditions and pre-Johannine Christian traditions, can be ruled out as having played their role in the formation of John 17. Yet the strength and unifying principles of Johannine theology have unquestionably played a determining function in the composition of John 17. Thus in the composition of Jesus’ final prayer “the author of the prayer had received ideas from different directions, but...in the last resort he produced something quite distinctive and unique, firmly marked by the Johannine Christology”.

2. The shape of the prayer

There is widespread agreement that the prayer unfolds in three stages: vv. 1-5, vv. 6-19, and vv. 20-26. Critical studies of John 17 have pointed to the unequal length of the three sections of the prayer, and the place of vv. 24-26. Attempts to resolve these issues have led to the application of formal criteria to the text: the use of καὶ v.18, tracing rhythmic figures, linguistic structure, and the explicit references to “Father”. Developing the suggestion of a number of earlier scholars, Brown has proposed a

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11 There is no sense of a privileged gnostic access to mystical experience, as Bultmann, John, 486-87, would argue.
14 See Baud, Johannesevangelium, 207-8. See especially, the documentation provided by the notes in Bultmann, John, 489-922.
15 Dodd, Interpretation, 422.
18 A. Laurent, “We`atash - Kai nyn. Formule caractéristique des textes juridiques et liturgiques (à propos de Jean 17.5)”, Bib 45 (1964) 168-97, 413-32. See especially 426-32.
structure based upon three formal indications of prayer in 17:1-26. In v. 1 the narrator describes Jesus’ raising his eyes to heaven, adopting a position for prayer. In v. 9 Jesus states: “I am praying for them” (ἐγώ προς αὐτούς ἐπικαλομένος), and in v. 20 he indicates that he is praying for another group: “I do not pray for these only (οὐ προς τούτους δὲ ἐπικαλομένος), but also for those who believe in me through their word.” These formal indications create three more evenly distributed sections: vv. 1-8, 9-19, 20-26.

As one division closes, it opens the way to the subject of the following section. Thus, in v. 4 Jesus tells the Father, “I glorified thee on earth, having accomplished the work which you gave me to do.” This theme is then exemplified in vv. 6-8, where Jesus does not pray for his disciples, but tells the Father that he has accomplished the work among the disciples (v. 6). Having described the situation of the disciples, he then begins to pray for them (vv. 9-19). As his prayer for the disciples draws to a close, Jesus parallels his own mission with the disciples’ mission to make God known in a hostile world (vv. 17-19). There will be some in the world who believe in Jesus through the word of the disciples. Having described the mission of the disciples, the final part of the prayer indicates that Jesus also prays for “those who believe in me through their word” (v. 20). As the final section of the prayer comes to a close Jesus prays for those whom God has given him (v. 24). This section then looks back over the prayer, that all who believe might be swept up into the love which unites the Father and the Son (vv. 25-26). This conclusion begs for a resolution. It will be provided for the reader by the rest of the story (18:1-20:31). A tripartite shape emerges.

Part One: To Make God Known (verses 1-8)

Jesus prays to the Father

(a) Verses 1-3: Jesus asks for the consummation of both God’s glory and his own glorification, to bring eternal life into the human story by making God known (vv. 1-5). Jesus’ petition “glorify” (δόξασον) both opens and closes this sub-section (see v. 1 and v. 5).

(b) Verses 6-8: Jesus has perfected the task which the Father gave him to do: he has made God known. The disciples know and believe that Jesus is the sent one of the Father (vv. 6-8). This sub-section is marked by the repeated use of the verb δίδωμι, “to give” (δίδοος [twice in v. 6], δίδοθα [v. 7], διδόος, διδόθα [v. 8]).

Part Two: Keep Them and Make Them Holy (vv. 9-19)

Jesus prays to the “holy Father”

(a) Verses 9-11a: Jesus is about to depart from this world, and the disciples will remain. This sub-section is highlighted by Jesus’ negative words on “the world”, which both open (v. 9: οὐ προς τού κόσμου ἐπικαλομένος) and close it (v. 11a: οὐκέτι εἰμὶ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ, καὶ αὐτοί ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ εἰσίν).

(b) Verses 11b-16: Addressing God as “holy Father” (πατερ ἕγων), Jesus first asks the Father to be “father” to them, keeping them safe (vv. 11b-16). This sub-section opens with a petition that the Father “keep” the disciples (v. 11b: ἰδοὺ θαυμάζων αὐτοῖς) and closes with the reason for such a petition: that the Father might “keep” them from the evil one (v. 15: ἵνα τρίτης αὐτοῖς).

(c) Verses 17-19: Jesus asks that the Father extend his holiness, to sanctify the disciples (v. 17: ἐγινόσκων αὐτοῖς), that they may parallel the holiness of Jesus. They have been sent into the world as Jesus was sent into the world (vv. 17-19). This sub-section both opens (v. 17: ἐγινόσκων αὐτοῖς) and closes (v. 19: ἵνα δοκίμωσι καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐνίσχυσίμωσι) with the use of the verb ἐγινόσκων.

Part Three: To Make God Known (vv. 20-26)

Jesus prays to the Father

(a) Verses 20-23: Jesus prays for those who will believe in him as a result of the ongoing presence of the disciples in the world. He prays that oneness
among them might make God known to the world, _showing_ that the love which drives the mission of Jesus also unites them. This sub-section is highlighted by the prayer "that they may be one" (vv. 21: ἵνα πάντες ἐν ὅσιν, v. 22: ἵνα δόσων ἐν; v. 23: ἵνα δόσων τελωνεύματοι εἰς ἐν) 
(b) Verses 24-26: The prayer closes as Jesus points the disciples in the story and readers of the story further into the narrative and beyond the narrative. He asks that they might be swept into the oneness of love which unites the Father and the Son, and makes God known (vv. 24-26). This sub-section opens with a change of literary form. Jesus expresses his will (θέλω ἵνα) rather than his petition (see vv. 9, 20). It then refers to the love of God for Jesus (v. 24: ἵν ἡμῖν γίνηται τὸ χάσματος με, and closes with a prayer that all be swept up into the love which exists between Jesus and the Father (v. 26: ἵνα ἡ παρασκευὴ τῶν ἧμισυοις με ἐν αὐτοῖς ἢ καταγίζω ἐν αὐτοῖς).
Although I am unable to develop this point within the limits of this article,25 it can be shown that, in John 13, the theme of the fragility of the disciples, flanks the central statement of 13:18-20 (see 13:1-17, 21-38). It returns at the centre of 17:1-26. Jesus prays that they be kept safe and made holy (vv. 9-19). The reader finds that the theme of the central statement of 13:18-20, making God known in a hostile world, flanks the centrepiece of ch 17. Jesus has made God known (17:1-8), and he passes on this task to his disciples, and to subsequent generations who come to believe in Jesus because of their word (17:20-26). Despite the difference in literary form, ideas crucial to 13:1-38, return in 17:1-26.26

3. Reading the prayer
3.1. Verses 1-8: To Make God Known

The setting for the prayer continues the description of 13:1-4. Despite 14:31, Jesus and his company have not moved from the setting at supper (see 13:1-2). It is there that he closes his discourse (17:1a: τοῦτα ἐλάλησεν), and takes up a formal position of prayer.27 What follows is uttered at a given time and place to a specific group of people. A link is made with 13:1 in Jesus’ words of address to the Father. As this final encounter between Jesus and his disciples began, the narrator alerted the reader, “Jesus knew that his hour had come” (13:1); as it comes to an end, Jesus announces: “Father, the hour has come” (17:1b).28 Because of the arrival of “the hour” of Jesus, the time of his glorification has come. This is not new to the reader, who has already encountered a link between the glorification of Jesus and “the hour” in earlier narratives. The “not yet” (see 2:4) was later associated with a future feast (see 7:8) and violence was part of the mounting attempt on the part of “the Jews” to eliminate Jesus (7:30; 8:20). The link between the revelation of the glory of God and the glorification of the Son was made explicit in 11:4, and its relationship with Jesus’ oncoming death reinforced by the decisions taken by “the Jews”, the final negative response of this group in the story to Jesus’ words and actions (see 11:45-50, 57; 12:9-11). The reader’s increasing association of “the hour” and the glorification of Jesus has been confirmed by Jesus’ words in 12:23: “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified”. This was further clarified in vv. 32-33 by the two most authoritative voices in the Gospel: Jesus and the narrator. Jesus spoke of his being lifted up to draw everyone to himself (v. 32), and the narrator added a clarifying remark which associated the glorification (see v. 23), the lifting up and the “drawing” (v. 32) to the crucifixion: “He said this to indicate the way in which he was to die” (v. 33). These themes continue to intertwine, in a further identification of “the hour”, the revelation of the glory of God, and the glorification of the Son, in 17:1b. The prayer which follows this introductory statement will lead the reader more deeply into the enigma of a crucifixion which is also the revelation of the glory of God and part of the process of Jesus’ glorification. It unfolds under the shadow of “the hour”.29

Jesus’ role as the one who will glorify God and thus be glorified is associated with his having been given prerogatives traditionally belonging to God (see v. 2a: κοσμικός). Jesus’ having ἐξόντων over all flesh, so that he might give eternal life to all (ɲe) that God has entrusted to him (v. 2. See also 6:37, and 17:1-4), conjures up memories of the Prologue (see 1:12-13), further developed in Jesus’ discourse on his authority as life-giver and judge that Jesus uttered the prayer in the Temple Courts. LÉON-DUPOUR, Lecture, 3:273, points out that Jesus’ departure from “the Jews” and from the disciples opens with the same words: τοῦτα ἐλάλησεν Ἰησοῦς (see 12:36; 17:1).
26 Bultmann’s recognition of the links between chs 13 and 17 led to his re-ordering of the text. On these parallels, see G. SEGALLA, Giovanni (NVB 36; Roma: Edizioni Paoline, 1976) 416-17; M.W. G. STIBBE, John (Readings: A New Biblical Commentary; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993) 173-76.
27 The τοῦτα refers to the discourses of chs 14-16. WESTCOTT, St John, 237, hypotheses
in 5:19-30. Jesus does nothing of his own authority, as “the Father loves the Son, and shows him all that he himself is doing” (5:20a). The glorification of the Father and the Son (17:1. See 5:23), flows from (καθότι) the Son’s giving eternal life to those entrusted to him (17:2. See 5:21, 24). But the author reinforces what has already been said in 5:19-30, and succinctly restated in 17:2 through the clarification of 17:3. V. 3, widely regarded as a later editorial comment added to an original prayer, can also be taken as the leit-motif of the prayer. The reader knows that the believer comes to know of God in and through the sent one, Jesus Christ (see 1:19-14, 16-18; 3:14-15, 16-17, 31-36a; 4:13-14; 5:24-25; 6:35, 51; 7:37-38; 8:12; 9:5; 10:27-29; 11:42; 13:18-20; 14:6-7). This is no gnostic promise of a saving “knowledge”, but the promise of life which can be had by those who believe that Jesus Christ has told the story of God (see 1:18). The believer comes to life by knowing the God revealed by Jesus, the λόγος of God. Revelation, through which all flesh can come to eternal life (vv. 2-3), has taken place in Jesus’ revealing words and works (ἐργα). Jesus’ indication, at the beginning of the ministry, that the fundamental orientation of his life was to complete the task given him by the Father (see 4:34: τελειώσω αὐτον to ἐργά, and also 3:35; 5:36), is now regarded as accomplished (17:4: τό ἐργον τελειωμένον). A decisive turning point in the story of Jesus has been reached (καὶ νῦν). The revelation of God is complete, and thus Jesus can ask that the Father enter his story in a final way, glorifying him (νῦν δόξασά με) by restoring him to the Father’s presence, with the glory which was his before the world was made (see 1:1-2; 6:62; 8:58). Jesus’ origin with God determined his ministry. Now, as the story comes to a close, Jesus asks that he come to his own glory by returning to his origin. But, the reader knows, this can only happen through “the hour” of the “lifting up”, in an act of perfect love for his own, so that God will be glorified, and that Jesus might come to his glory (see 12:23, 32-33; 13:31-32). The hour is “now” (v. 1: ἔλημεν ἣ νῦν). As Jesus crosses the threshold into his “hour”, he looks back across his life and ministry, to the people at table with him (see vv. 6-8), and claims to have brought to completion the task given by the Father. But the final moment for the revelation of the glory of the Father, through which the Son will be glorified, lies in the near future. The reader is again faced with the puzzling claim of this story, that the “lifting up” on the cross is the event - in time and space - which reveals the δόξα of God, and by means of which the Son is glorified (see 3:13-14; 7:39; 8:28; 11:4, 12:23, 32-33; 13:18-20, 31-32). At that time and place the love of God revealed in Jesus’ love for his Father and for his own will be seen (see 13:1, 18-20; 17:1-2). Through the “hour” Jesus will return to the glory which was his before the world was made (17:5).

If the hour has come, and its completion will not be achieved until Jesus passes through it, how can he claim to have perfected the task given to him by the Father (see v. 4)? As he concludes the first part of his prayer, Jesus provides the answer by looking to the fragile group of disciples sharing his table (vv. 6-8)? There is an intimate link between Jesus’ words in vv. 3-5 and vv. 6-8. Jesus has said that eternal life flows from the knowledge of God, the result of an acceptance of the revelation which takes place in Jesus Christ (v. 3). Jesus has made God known, and his revealing ministry is at an end. He is about to return to the glory which he had with the Father before the world was made (vv. 4-5). Nevertheless, Jesus is able to indicate to the Father the group around him, his disciples, given to him by the Father from “the world”. A theme which stood at the centre of the discourse (see 15:12-17, especially vv. 14-16), returns as the disciples at the table hear Jesus’ words to the Father, recalling that they are disciples of Jesus because of the initiative of God. God “gave” them to Jesus (v. 6: ἐξονέαξα... ἐξονέαξα); they

30 The use of the neuter singular πᾶν rather than the masculine plural suggests the one-ness of the group of disciples, and the use of the aorist ἐξονέαξα is associated with the incarnate one (see 1:14) being the sent one of God.
31 Some limit the ἄνω-clause to v. 2: “given him power ... so that”. See Barrett, St John, 502; Lagrange, Saint Jean, 440. More likely, however, Bernard, St John, 2560 and Brown, John, 2740-41, among others, suggest that there is a link between the “glorify ... so that” in v. 1 and the “given ... so that” in v. 2. The glorification of the Father is reflected in Jesus’ gift of life. The use of καθότι in v. 2a supports this view.
32 V. 3 may well have been added to an original prayer. The use of “Jesus Christ” on the lips of Jesus is strange (for its only other use, see 1:17), and the expression πᾶν μοίνος ἐξανέμησιν πάνω is only found here. But why was it added? See Barrett, St John, 503.
33 For the gnostic background, see Bultmann, John, 494-95; Kasemann, Testament, 6. On the widespread biblical background to “knowledge of God”, see Barrett, St John, 503, and Brown, John, 2752-53.
34 V. 3 is no doubt a traditional “summary”, inserted here to make an important point. See D. Marzotto, L’unità degli uomini nel Vangelo di Giovanni (Suppl. 90; Brescia: Paideia, 1977) 172-73; Thümmler, Herrlichkeit, 40-41.
35 However much the later experience and thought of the Johannine community may be present in the prayer, its place in the narrative, before the death and resurrection of Jesus, must be kept in mind in a reader-oriented approach, as Jesus looks both backward and forward. As Régagnon, “Les destinations”, 299 n. 32, points out, it is not true to claim that “Toute cette prière est écrite sub specie aestemnisi” (Lagrange, Saint Jean, 437).
36 Many point to Phil 2:9-11 as parallel to John 17:1-5, but two different Christologies are involved. It is as a consequence of the humiliation of crucifixion that the Pauline Jesus is lifted up into glory (see Phil 2:9: δει και θεος αυτον κυνηγησον), while the Johannine ἐξανέμησε takes place on the cross (see John 3:14; 8:28; 12:32-33).
37 See Segalla, Giovanni, 419, who points to vv. 6-8 as "una explicitazione del v. 4".
are part of God's larger gift of all things to Jesus (v. 7: πάντα δόθη δέδοκάς μοι), and Jesus, the Son of the Father, has "given them" (v. 8a: δέδοκα αὐτοῖς) the words which the Father "gave" to him (v. 8c: δύναμίν αὐτοῦ). Jesus' positive assessment of his disciples cannot be regarded as the result of their achievements. Jesus has made the name of God known (v. 6: οἴκον ἐρωτήσας σοι τὸ ὄνομα) to them. The use of the aorist tense looks back and sums up the ministry of Jesus (see v. 4). To reveal "the name" of God means to make known all that can be known of the reality of God. "The name stands for God's being and nature, his holiness, 'justice' and 'love'". Jesus has completed the task given to him by the Father because these people have kept this word. Made clean by the word of Jesus (see 13:10; 15:3), abiding in Jesus and in God, as Jesus abides in God (see 15:9-10), the disciples know that everything which Jesus has passed on to them is from God (v. 7. See 15:15). "Gifted" in a remarkable way, they have now (v. 7: νῦν) reached a greater maturity of faith and knowledge. The disciples are described in terms which make them models of the Johannine believer: they have received from Jesus the revelation of God which comes to Jesus from the Father (τὰ μέρη καὶ ἐστιν δόθη δέδοκα αὐτοῖς). They have accepted that Jesus is the sent one of the Father (v. 8).

The doxologies which concluded some of the Jewish testaments (see Testament of Job 43:1-17; Testament of Isaac 8:6-7; Testament of Jacob 8:6-9) rendered glory to the wonder of God in the midst of the ambiguity of Israel's situation. The reader is aware that the disciples' knowledge and belief reflects Jesus' accomplishment of the task that his Father gave him; he has made God known to them (see vv. 3-4). How they will respond to the challenges which lie ahead of them, the necessary consequences of their knowledge and faith (see 15:1-16:3), is yet to be seen. There is more to the story of Jesus (see 18:1-20:31), but an even longer story lies ahead of the disciples (see 13:1-17:26). The future success or failure of the disciples of Jesus takes nothing away from Jesus' claim: "I have glorified you on earth, having brought to completion the task which you gave me to do" (17:4).

39 Schnackenburg, St John, 3:175; Bultmann, John, 498. B. Barrett, St John, 505, points out that the language is both biblical and gnostic. There is no need to see the revelation of a particular name, as do Dodd, Interpretation, 417 n. 2, and Brown, John, 2:754-56.

3.2. Verses 9-19: Keep Them and Make Them Holy

Jesus' explanation of his claim to have brought to perfection the task given to him by the Father (v. 4) by making God known to the disciples (vv. 6-8. See v. 3) serves as a bridge into a new stage in the prayer. Jesus turns away from petitions for himself (see vv. 1, 5), to pray for these disciples (v. 9: ἐγὼ περὶ σοῦ ἐπηρεάζω). Much of Jesus' description of the disciples' situation is familiar to the reader. The reader is not surprised that Jesus does not pray for the world (see 14:30; 15:18-19, 21; 16:3). Jesus prays for those whom the Father has given to him (see vv. 6-8). In the closing stages of the discourse, developing his earlier words on the relationship between the Father and the Son in 5:19-30, Jesus told his disciples that everything belonging to the Father has been given to the Son (see 16:15). The disciples are part of this gift of the Father to the Son (v. 10a). But the disciples have their own responsibility: Jesus is glorified in them (v. 10b). The reader recalls Jesus' earlier challenge to the disciples. They are no longer δοῦλοι; they are φίλοι of Jesus (15:14-15). They will demonstrate their new status by doing what Jesus has commanded (15:14). Jesus' command has been that they love one another, as he has loved them (see 13:34-35; 15:12, 17). The repetition in the life of the disciples of the loving self-gift of Jesus will reveal that they are disciples of Jesus (see 13:15; 35; 15:12). Initiating an argument which will gather momentum through the prayer, Jesus' words to the Father inform the reader and listener that as his own gift of self in love glorifies the Father, so the ongoing presence of the same quality of love among his disciples glorifies Jesus (v. 10b).

At the threshold of "the hour", Jesus tells the Father he is no longer in the world (v. 11α). In strictly physical terms, Jesus is at table with his disciples, and thus still part of the human story. However, his presence to the world has come to an end: his public revelation of God through word and deed came to a close as he "hid himself from them" (12:36b). The reader, nevertheless, waits for the inevitable end of Jesus' story, "the hour" (12:23, 31-32; 13:1; 17:1), the lifting up on the cross (3:14; 8:28; 12:32), the gathering of the whole world (10:16; 11:52; 12:11, 19, 32), which will also be the moment when he reveals the glory of God and begins his own glorification (11:4; 12:23; 13:31-32; 17:1, 5). Jesus' words concerning his no longer being in the world of v. 11α do not remove him from the constraints of

Jesus has begun a prayer for his disciples (v. 9). They are in the world, and will remain in the world (v. 11a), but Jesus is returning to the Father (v. 11a). He is passing from this world to the Father (v. 13:1–17:5), but has one further task. He is to love his own (εἰς τέλος 13:1). Through the performance of that task, which will be the consummate revelation of love, and the revelation of God in and through Jesus (see 13:18–20), he will return to the Father. The disciples will be the ongoing bearers of the mission of Jesus. They are to make God known by loving as Jesus has loved (see 13:15, 34–35, 15:12, 17, 17:10). Jesus’ mission in and to “the world” has come to an end (v. 11a). See 12:36, but that of the disciples is about to begin (v. 11a). See 10b).

Throughout the prayer, Jesus addresses God as “Father”, but here he adds a qualification, addressing his prayer to a holy Father (v. 11b: πατέρ τε ὁ ἅγιος). These two words, ἁγιός and πατέρ are the determining elements of the remaining sub-sections of this central section of the prayer (vv. 11–16 [πατέρ]; vv. 17–19 [ὁ ἅγιος]). Applying the implications of the address, Jesus asks the Father to be “father” to the disciples. He asks that the Father care for them (τοῖς παιδίσκοις). However well Jesus might have spoken of the disciples in vv. 6–8, they are fragile (see 13:2, 10–11, 12, 18, 21–30, 36–38; 16:29–31). All Jesus is and does flows from his oneness with the Father (see 10:30, 38), a consequence of his being the sent one of the Father. The one sent is to be identified in every way with the one who sends. There is a

42 There has been a presence of Jesus in “the world”, teaching and doing “signs”, which Jesus has brought to its completion (see v. 4. See 12:36). This presence “in the world” is past, however much the reader looks forward to a future “completion” in the lifting up of the Son of Man to reveal the glory of God and inaugurate the glorification of Jesus (3:14; 8:28; 11:4; 12:23, 31–33; 13:1; 17:1).


44 For this meaning of πατέρ, see DELABEYCE, Jean, 197.


### Footnotes


47 Reading the perfect tense, rather than the aorist found in some manuscripts. Also reading, along with פֶּלֶג, the dative neuter singular relative pronoun, referring back to אֶלָּה פֶּלֶג. See M. ZWEIFEL, “The Name ‘Plerōma’”, in The Greek New Testament (ed. E. Käsemann; ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994) 124–25.

48 Some scholars regard “in the name of” here as “by the power of your name”. See, for example, W. HERZOG, “The Name Jesus”. For the interpretation adopted above, reading it as “in adherence to what Jesus has revealed to the disciples of the character of God” (G. BRADBURY, John [WBC 36; Waco: Word Books, 1987] 299), see LACROIX, Saint Jean, 445; LINDARS, John, 524; SCHEHNER, St John, 3:180.

49 The expression ἡμεῖς εἰσέρχομαι is stronger than παρατίθεμαι, but here “it is probably no more than a synonymous variation” (BARRETT, St John, 508).
who planned the betrayal (see 13:2). But Jesus washed the feet and shared the morsel with Judas, despite Satan’s designs. Nevertheless, Satan entered Judas (see 13:27) “that the scripture might be fulfilled” (17:12c), and the reader recalls 13:18. There is a divine order in the events of the life and death of Jesus beyond the control of Jesus.50 The Son of Perdition is beyond the control of Jesus, but he was given the disciples to care for (see v. 6, 9, 10, 11). During their time with him they have been made clean by his word (see 13:10; 15:3), which they have kept (17:6), and they have believed that he is the sent one of the Father (see 16:30; 17:8). He has manifested the name of God to them (17:6). Jesus has kept and cared for them all, including Judas. As his gestures in 13:1-17, 21-38 indicate, not even Judas can be judged as lost. The intervention of the Son of Perdition is part of the larger design of God, manifested in the Scriptures, but so is the limitless love of God, revealed in the unfailing love of Jesus for fragile disciples (see 13:18-20). He now asks the Father to be “father” to all the disciples, including Judas.

The time of Jesus’ presence with the disciples is now at an end, as Jesus has begun the process of coming (ἀργόνα) to the Father. Thus it is important that, while he is still speaking in the world,51 the disciples hear this prayer, asking the Father to keep them after his departure. In this way, all anxiety about their future will be overcome, and their joy will be full, matching the joy of Jesus (v. 13). The promises of the discourse, that the disciples’ openness to the Father in the in-between-time will bring them a fullness of joy (see 15:7-11; 16:24), are now solidly based upon a request which Jesus makes of the Father, in the hearing of his disciples. This section of the prayer, asking that the Father “keep” and care for the fragile disciples, closes with the repetition of themes from across the last discourse, and the earlier parts of the prayer itself (v. 14-16). The disciples are not “of the world” (ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου), as Jesus is not “of the world” (ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου) (see 15:19).52 This does not mean that the disciples are some sort of otherworldly enclave. The expression ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου indicates that they do not belong to the prince of this world, to the Son of Perdition (see v. 12), to the power of darkness, to the forces of evil which are even now lining up against Jesus in order to kill him (see, most recently, 11:49-50, 57; 12:9-11). He has come to make God known, but “the world” has rejected Jesus, the one who sent him, and his disciples (v. 14. See 15:18-16:3). In the face of this opposition, and even violence (see 16:2), the revelation of God will continue. Jesus is departing from the world (v. 13), but he is leaving behind disciples who do not belong to this world, so that they may continue to glorify him (v. 10). The disciples will continue to make God known as they continue to glorify Jesus. Jesus does not pray that they be removed from their situation in the world, but that the Father keep them (τὸν τίτηραν αὐτῶν) from the evil one.53 The reader senses closure as the petition which began Jesus’ prayer to the Father (v. 11b: τὸν τίτηραν αὐτῶν) returns (v. 15: τὸν τίτηραν αὐτῶν).

Disciples of Jesus cannot simply bask in the protecting care of God as their father (vv. 11b-16). They are to be made holy by a holy God (vv. 17, 19. See v. 11b: κοσμήσας ὦν). Jesus now prays that they be made holy in the knowledge of God, in the truth (ἐν τῇ αληθείᾳ) (v. 17). It is identification with the design of God which will make the disciples holy. To be ὀγνιός means to be one with a ἀνήρ ὀγνίος (see v. 11b).54 They are the recipients of the manifestation of God in Jesus, and they have come to believe that he is

50 J. DALEXANDRE, “Le fils de pédition (Joh., 17,12)”, in Mélanges d’histoire des religions offerts à Henri-Charles Puech (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1974) 187-89, suggests that Judas anticipates the Antichrist. The opposite is the case: the Antichrist is responsible for the betrayal of Judas, whom Jesus has loved, and whom he continues to love and care for.

51 This claim, that Jesus is still speaking “in the world” does not contradict v. 11a: “I am no longer in the world”. Jesus is still firmly located in a room on the face of earth (v. 15), but he is no longer involved in his revealing mission to the world (v. 11a. See 12:36b).

52 The phrase “as I am not of the world” in v. 14b is missing in P. This is the result of an accidental omission, through homoeoteleuton. See METZGER, Textual Commentary, 213.

53 As the word is genitive (ὁμοιοῦ), it is impossible to be certain if “evil” (ὁμοιοῦ). See 3:19; 7:7) or “the evil one” (ὁμοιοῦς) is meant. In the light of 12:31; 14:30; 16:11, and 1 John 2:13-14; 3:12; 5:18-19, and especially the reference to Satan as “the Son of Perdition in v. 12, the “evil one” is likely.

54 I am rendering the verb ἀνήρ as “make holy”, rather than “consecrate”, in the sense of setting apart for sacred things. The latter translation is closely associated with the tradition, which has its beginning at least as early as Cyril of Alexandria (In Joannis Evang. 11, 8; PG 74.465) and was made popular in the 16th Century by David Chrysostom (1350-1600), that this prayer was priestly, associating the disciples with Jesus’ self-oblation. Some, for example, HOFTES, Fourth Gospel, 301-4; LINDAAR, John, 528-29; KYSAR, John, 261, argue that ἀνήρ means “make holy” in v. 17 and “consecrate” in v. 19. For a more detailed discussion, rejecting this shift of meaning, see DE LATTRE, La Vérité, 2740-46, and especially his rich study, “Consécration ou sacriﬁcation du chrétien d’après Jean 17?” in E. CASTELLM. (ed.), Le Sacré: Etudes et Recherches. Actes du colloque organisé par le Centre International d’études Humanistes et par l’Institut d’Etudes Philosophiques de Rome Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1974) 339-49. Against the sacrificial-priestly interpretation in general, see APFOLD, The Oneceous Motif, 194-98. The use of ἀνήρ in v. 11b determines the meaning of ἀνήρας. In v. 11b it does not mean that the “holy Father” is in some way consecrated and separated from the profane. A FRÉLLET, The Priesthood of Christ and His Ministers (Garden City: Doubleday, 1975) 37-48, traces the passage from the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53 into the Jewish liturgy of yom kippur to show that John 17:19 as both priestly and sacrificial. For a detailed discussion and rejection of this position, see J. DLACROIX, "Sacerdoce du Christ et ministère. (A propos de Jean 17). Sémantique et théologie biblique", RSR 62 (1974) 199-219.
the sent one of God (v. 8). Jesus prays that they might live holy lives, corresponding to the holiness of God, revealed to them in and through Jesus.\(^{55}\) As Jesus' association with the Father has determined his life, the disciples' association with Jesus, who has revealed the truth to them, determines theirs. The disciples are to become the sent ones of the Sent One. They are to make God known in the world.\(^{56}\) As Jesus made God known in and through his mission as the sent one of a holy God, so must the disciples continue to make the same God known as the sent ones of Jesus (v. 18b). The revelation of a holy God calls for a holy sent one. It is a mission to make God known (v. 18) which determines the demand for holiness (vv. 17 and 19).

Jesus has come to the moment of his final self-gift in love so that the glory of God might be revealed. For the sake of the disciples – those at the table, and all disciples – Jesus' consummate act of love will be accomplished. Jesus' total identification with the design of God (see 4:34; 17:4) and his being associated with the judging and life-giving actions of God (see 5:19-30) are the basis of his holiness. Thus Jesus can lay claim to a final and consummate act of holiness (ἐγὼ Ἃγιός ἐσμένων) in "the hour", the lifting up, the gathering, the revelation of the glory of God and the glorification of the Son, the final revelation of his love for his own (see 13:1). But Jesus' holiness is not an end in itself (see 3:16-17; 10:14-18; 13:1; 15:13). He thus commits himself to a final act of holiness for their sake (tàς οὖν), so that in his total self-gift, making known the love of God, he makes known to them the holiness which must be theirs.\(^{57}\) The present tense of the verb ἁγιόζω asso-

ciates this moment of final revelation of holiness with the departure of Jesus, which has already been initiated (see 13:1; 17:1, 11, 13). As his oneness with the Father is the basis of his holiness, their oneness with the God who has been revealed to them (ἐν ἁληθείᾳ). See v. 17) is the basis of their holiness.\(^{58}\) Jesus prays that they be made holy in the truth (Ἰνά καὶ σωτή ἡγιασμένοι ἐν ἁληθείᾳ). The holiness of God (v. 11b: πάσας ἀγίας), visibly present in the human story in the holiness revealed by Jesus' gift of himself for his own (v. 19a: ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν ἐγὼ ἁγιόζω ἐμαυτοῦ), is to be matched by the holiness of the disciples (v. 19b: Ἰνά σωτή καὶ σωτή ἡγιασμένοι), as Jesus is sending them into the world to make God known, just as God sent him (v. 18). To succeed in this mission, they must be holy as God is holy (see Lev 11:44; John 17:11b, 17, 19).

3.3. Verses 20-26: To Make God Known

Jesus not only prays for them (v. 20a: οὖ περὶ τούτων δε ἐρωτο μόνον), but also for those who will be fruit of the missionary activity of his sanctified disciples: "for those who believe in me through their word" (v. 20b: ἀλλα καὶ περὶ τῶν πιστευόντων διὰ τοῦ λόγου αὐτῶν εἰς ἐμὲ). The situation at table must not be lost from view. While there has been no report in the Gospel story of the disciples' having successfully brought such people to faith, such believers are presupposed by the narrative.\(^{59}\) Jesus prays for those already believing (περὶ τῶν πιστευόντων) because of the word of the disciples.\(^{60}\) There is a double reading possibility in v. 20. Remaining strictly within the story-time of the passage, Jesus prays for his disciples, present with him at the table, and for other believers, not present. Jesus' reference to these believers is an analepsis, looking back to a non-reported event, now called into the narrative. However, real readers across the generations rightly read themselves into Jesus words "for those who believe in me through their word".\(^{61}\) They are the continuing presence of those original

\(^{55}\) See de la Potterie, La Vérité, 2747-58, for a full discussion of ἐν τῇ ἁληθείᾳ, concluding that it serves as place of holiness, a means for sanctification, closely related to ἐν τῇ ἁληθείᾳ εἰς τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τῷ ἐν τ threadIdx, 2747-58)

57 It is this "made holy for their sake" which is often read as priestly. The reader is aware that Jesus' final act of holiness is an act of self-gift in love, in total obedience in the perfect fulfillment of his God-given task (see 4:34; 17:4), so that he can make God known, and thus enable eternal life (see 17:3). The notion of sacrifice is present. See Schüssler Fiorenza, St. John, 3:187-88; J.T. Forrestell, The Word of the Cross, Salvation as Revelation in the Fourth Gospel (AnBib 57; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1974) 78-82; Thüsing, Herrlichkeit, 79-85; de la Potterie, La Vérité, 2761-67. Jesus is not showing the disciples how to be holy. His holiness flows from his oneness with God, whose love leads Jesus to lay down his life and take it up again (see 10:17-18). This is revealed to the disciples. They pray that they may be caught up in the same, as a result of his manifestation of God to them (see v. 6) and thus be holy as he is holy. See especially de la Potterie, La Vérité, 2767-75. For some, this may have "priestly" connotations.

58 In itself, the expression ἁγιοῦσθαι would simply mean "indeed". However, the expression ἐν τῇ ἁληθείᾳ in the parallel v. 17 makes this more theological reading of v. 19 probable. See de la Potterie, La Vérité, 2773-75.

59 See the hint of such activity, however, in 4:35-38. See Moloney, Belief, 163-68.

60 V. 20 is almost universally read as addressing the time of the Church. Yet the present participle πιστευόντων could be a hint of the present disciples' mission (see 4:35-38).

61 I am rejecting a theory of "timelessness" for the interpretation of the prayer, or a reading of the words of Jesus entirely from the point of view of the later Johannine Church. For this perspective, see G.R. O'Day, "I Have Overcome the World" (John 16:33: Narrative
believers who were part of the time of the story, fruit of the preaching of the original disciples (see 4:35-38).

Jesus' having made God known to the disciples has opened a new possibility: they can share in the oneness which exists between the Father and the Son (see v. 11b). This petition is repeated in v. 21ab, and a further element is added in v. 21c. Jesus now prays that this group of believers be taken into the oneness which exists between the Father and the Son (v. 22ab). In a carefully structured prayer, Jesus first asks that the believers be united as one (21a: ἐνα τόνες ἐν ὑμῖν). The juxtaposition of the many (πάντες) and the one (ἐν) expresses the point of Jesus' request. But, as in the earlier part of the prayer for the disciples (v. 11b), a unique model of unity is given. As the Father is in the Son and the Son in the Father, so also might it be among believers (v. 21b). Throughout the Gospel Jesus has revealed a oneness at the level of action between himself and the Father (see 4:34; 5:19-30; 10:30, 38; 17:4). As with the unity between the Father and the Son, the unity among believers is not an end in itself. The believers are to be one, as the Father and the Son are one (ἐν δόκησιν πιστεύον ὑμᾶς ὑπὲρ τοῦ ἐκτοσελεστή (v. 21c). Jesus may not be praying for "the world" (v. 9), but he has been sent into the world (see 3:16; 17:18) and he sends his disciples into the world (17:18). Because of the mission of his disciples, others have come to believe in Jesus as the sent one of the Father (v. 20). The missionary chain, however, runs on endlessly. A further group of believers is to mirror in the human story the oneness between the Father and the Son that "the world" might be led to believe that Jesus is the sent one of God.

The theme of oneness and mutuality, which leads to the world's coming to know that Jesus is the sent one of the Father (v. 21), is expressed in another way in v. 22. There is a slight deviation from the form of a prayer as Jesus tells the Father, in an aside heard by the disciples listening to the prayer, that the mutuality between himself and the Father which he passes on to believers is the δόξα (v. 22). Consistent with the use of this expression across the Gospel, the biblical idea of the revelation of God returns. God was made known through the gift of the covenant at Sinai, and has continually been made known throughout Israel's history in the habod YHWH, especially in and through the Law. But the love and oneness which have existed between the Father and the Son from all time (see 1:1-2; 17:5), have been made visible in and through the gift of the Son (see 1:14; 3:16). Jesus' life, teaching and his signs have been the revelation of the δόξα of God (see 2:11; 5:44; 7:18; 8:50-54; 11:4, 40), a δόξα τοῦ Θεοῦ rejected by "the Jews" because they preferred the δόξα τῶν ἀνθρώπων (see 12:43). But there are some to whom the love of God, made visible in the δόξα of Jesus, has been given (see vv. 6-8). Jesus has already prayed for their oneness (see v. 11b). He now prays for oneness among those who have come to believe that Jesus is the sent one of God through their word (see v. 20). Jesus has given the love and oneness shared by the Father and the Son to the believers. The δόξα, which is the love bestowed upon the Son by the Father (ἡ δόξα ἦν δόξαι, ὢ, ἐστελεσώμενοι εἰς ἐν), is present in the human story in the δόξα which Jesus has given to the believers (δόξα υἱοῦ εἰς ἐν). The love which the believers bear one another reflects the love which exists between the Father and the Son. After this brief pause, describing the uniting love between the Father and the Son and the believers in δόξα, the form of prayer returns (see v. 21). But a chain of relationships continues into v. 23. Jesus now prays for the interrelated mutual indwelling stated in v. 22. This prayer takes the reader back to 15:1-11. Jesus asks the Father that the mutual abiding be realised in a mutual indwelling between Jesus and the believers, and the Father and Jesus (v. 23a). The realisation of this indwelling will have two results, one internal and the other external. In the first place, it will produce a situation in which the Father enables the perfection of oneness among a new group of believers (v. 23b: ἐν πάντι τετελεσώμενοι εἰς ἐν). But, as throughout the prayer, Jesus does not make intense communion among disciples an end in itself. There is to be a quite different consequence: that God might be made known. The gift of the δόξα given to Jesus by the Father and passed on to the believers by Jesus (see v. 22) reaches beyond the bounds of the believers - into the world. The end result of Jesus' request for a oneness

63 The position taken here is only one of many possible. WESTCOTT, St John, 246-47, saw it as "the revelation of the divine in man realised through Christ." For BULTMANN, John, 513-16, the δόξα is to be paralleled with the name of God and the words of God, given to Jesus (see vv. 8, 11, 14). SCHNACKENBURG, St John, 3:191-92, sees it as the anticipation of eternal life, and BARRETT, St John, 513, suggests that it is unity with the death and resurrection of Jesus, from which life flows. My reading depends upon the principle that the reader will regard the use of δόξα and δόξαι across the story as having the same basic meaning, linked to the revelation of God.

64 The passive participle τετελεσώμενοι indicates that the Father is the agent who enables this oneness. See WESTCOTT, St John, 247. The use of this verb associates the "perfection" with Jesus' accomplishment of the task given him by the Father (see 4:34; 5:36; 17:3). See RIGAUX, "Les destinataires", 312-16.
between the Father, Jesus, and the believers is that the glory of the love which unites them makes God known to the world (v. 23c). The unifying love which should exist between the believers makes known that the Father so loved the world that he sent the Son (3:16) who loved his own εἰς τέλος (see 13:1). This love which Jesus has shown for his own, and the love which they have for one another, makes known - not only the love of Jesus and the mutual love of believers - but also the love which lies behind the sending of the Son: God. God so loved the world that he sent Jesus (see 3:16), and it is this same love which produces the oneness among the believers (καὶ ἡγάθησις αὐτοῦ καὶ καθὸς ἐμὲ ἡγάθησις). Jesus’ loving his own is not for their comfort and encouragement. It inevitably leads to a mission, matching the mission of Jesus (see vv. 17-19), to make God known (v. 23b. See 17:3). 65

Jesus has already asked the Father that he be restored to the glory which was his before the world was made (see 17:5. See 1:1-2). The reader senses a change of tone. Jesus expresses a desire (θέλω ἵνα) that all those whom the Father has given him may be with him “there” (ὅπου εἰμί ἐγώ κόσμον ὑμῶν μετ’ ἑμῶν) (v. 24a). The expression “whom you gave me” could be limited to the disciples, described in this way in vv. 6-7. This might exclude those who have come to believe that Jesus is the sent one of God because of the teaching of the disciples (v. 20), but the cumulative effect of the prayer makes such a reading improbable. Jesus prays for all who have been touched by his love, which makes known the union existing between the Father and the Son (see vv. 21-23). Jesus expresses his desire that the gulf between the union of the Father and the Son, and the ambiguous situation of fragile disciples and believers in the world, but not of the world (see vv. 11, 14-15, 16) be bridged. In a transformed situation, all fragility will be overcome, and they will join Jesus in a new “place” (see 14:2-3), to behold the δόξα which Jesus had as a result of the Father’s love from before all time (v. 24). Such a transformation is, for the moment, impossible for the disciples in the story of Jesus. They have seen the δόξα in Jesus’ revealing life and actions (see 2:11; 11:2, 40). They wait for its consummation in the lifting up, the gathering, the revelation of the glory of God and the glorification of the Son. They also wait for the return of Jesus, as he has promised them, to take them to the place he has prepared for them (14:1-3). But believing readers of

the story of Jesus are also involved. The prayer draws to an end, and brings the story closer to Jesus’ death, with a message of transcendent hope. Jesus’ words to the Father open the mind and heart of the reader to the possibility of “a world” which lies beyond “the world”: the vision of the glory of Jesus which existed, as the result of the Father’s love for the Son, “before the foundation of the world” (v. 24b). 66

Earlier the reader encountered Jesus’ prayer to a “holy Father” (v. 11b: πάτερ γεγένετο), followed by his request that God be both “father” and “sanctifier” to the disciples. Jesus now addresses God as πάτερ δίκαιος (v. 25. See v. 11b). As a holy God is asked to make holy all those to whom he is Father (vv. 17-19), so also a just God will act justly with the world which does not know him, as also with those who turn to him as Father. The reader recalls the exposing task of the Paraclete, bringing righteousness δικαιοσύνη and judgment (κρίσις) into a hostile world (16:7-11). Despite the world’s rejection of the Father of Jesus as God, Jesus never failed in his knowledge of his Father. Disciples, in the world but not of the world, have come to know the one true God in and through their belief in Jesus. The sound of a single theme tolls across all three sections of the prayer: to make God known. 64 Jesus stated the principle, that eternal life comes from knowing God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent in v. 3. He affirmed that his disciples had come to know God, and the one whom he had sent in v. 8. In the final section of the prayer, in vv. 21 and 23, he asks the Father that such knowledge be the fruit of a oneness among believers. Jesus has made God known, and his disciples and other believers have come to know the God and Father of Jesus as their God and Father (v. 29). Jesus has made known all that can be known of God (v. 26a: τὸ δόξα σου. See vv. 6, 11), and this revealing task will continue in the brief time which remains for Jesus (v. 26b). 67 Indeed, the reader is aware that the high point of Jesus’ revelation of the love of God still lies


66 The difficulties and challenges of the in-between-time, so much a part of chs 14-16, will be finally overcome. For those who exaggerate Johannine realised eschatology, to the total exclusion of a traditional end-time eschatology, this is not so. See, for example, A. STIMPFLE, Binde Seben. Die Eschatologie im traditionsgeschichtlichen Prozess des Johannesevangeliums (BZNW 57. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1990) 217-43. For Stimpfle, the Johannine “insiders” are aware that they are already part of a predestined elect, while the “outsiders” mistakenly wait for an end-time solution.


68 Jesus is situated at the end of his ministry, during which he has revealed the δόξα. He will shortly consummate that revelation (see 13:1). There is a parallel between the past revelation of the name of God and its shortly to be accomplished future revelation of 17:25, and Jesus’ proclamation of his past revelation of the glory of God (δόξαν ... δοξάσων) and God’s future glorification of the Son of Man (… δοξάσει αὐτῶν) in 15:3-32.
ahead (see 13:1; 19; 34-35; 15:12-13). The enigma of the revelation of love upon a cross looms large (see 13:1; 15:13). Jesus has made God known to the disciples so that the love which bonds the Father and the Son might bond the disciples, that they might be loved by God in the same way that the Father has loved the Son, and that this love will be their experience of the never-failing presence of Jesus to his own (17:26c). It is crucial to the ongoing story of disciples who will be known as followers of Jesus: only through God’s being father to them by bonding them in the love which unites the Father and the Son will disciples make God known. They are to live in the world in a way which responds to the commandment of Jesus: “By this they shall know that you are my disciples, if you love one another, as I have loved you” (13:34-35; 15:12, 17).

Jesus’ first request in this closing passage (v. 24) offers hope to all believers. It transcends their life in the world, and their mission to the world: that they might behold the glory which the Son possessed before the foundation of the world. His closing prayer (v. 26bc)missions the disciples for the world, united by the same love that unites the Father and the Son, making God known in loving self-gift, as Jesus has made known the name of his Father. Between these requests lie words of Jesus telling of his having made God known (vv. 25-26a). The first two sections of 17:1-26 (vv. 1-8; vv. 9-19) closed with a sub-section which served as a bridge from one section of the prayer into the next (vv. 6-8; vv. 17-19). The final section of the prayer (vv. 20-26) closes with words which end Jesus’ prayer to his Father (vv. 24-26).

They point the reader into the remaining moments of the story of Jesus (see vv. 25-26a), into the future story of Jesus’ disciples (v. 26b), and into a place which transcends the story-time of both Jesus and his followers, beyond the in-between-time, contemplating the glory given to the Son by the Father before the world was made (v. 24. See 14:2-3).

4. Conclusion

Jesus has completed the task the Father gave him (17:4). He has made God known (v. 3), and there is a group of people, given to Jesus by the Father, who are the fruit of Jesus’ having made God known (vv. 6-8). They believe that Jesus is the sent one of God (v. 8). He has also completed his prayer for these first believers, the disciples at the table (vv. 9-19). He has asked that they may be one, as the Father and the Son are one (v. 11b), that they be both protected and made holy in a hostile world, so that they may perform their mission (vv. 11-19). As Jesus was sent into the world, Jesus sends them into the world (v. 18). The revealing task of Jesus is passed on to the disciples, whose performance of that task, making God known, glorifies Jesus (v. 10). They too have been successful in this mission, and thus Jesus has prayed for a newer group of believers, who have come to believe that Jesus is the sent one of God through their word.60 They too must be one, as the Father and the Son are one, so that they might make God known (vv. 20-23). The love which unites them will reveal to the world the love which unites the Father and the Son, and continues to make known that Jesus is the sent one of God. Jesus, the disciples and the believers have an identical mission: to make God known (see vv. 3; 10, 18, 21, 23). The prayer comes to a close as all those for whom Jesus has prayed are recalled. The final words of Jesus’ prayer reach beyond the limits of the time and place of the prayer, into the proximate glorification of Jesus (v. 24), and the desired future glorification of the disciples and the first believers, through their association with his love and the love which unites him and the Father. Jesus has made God known to the disciples, and the believers’ loving oneness with the Father and the Son will further make God known to a world which has not known God (vv. 25-26).

A rich interweaving of themes has been present throughout 17:1-26. However, one theme predominates: the mission to make God known.60 Jesus prays for himself, now that he has made God known (vv. 1-8). He prays to his holy Father for his fragile disciples, so that, in the midst of a hostile world, cared for and made holy, they might make God known (vv. 9-19), thus continuing their initial success (see v. 20). He also prays that all who believe in Jesus as the sent one of God might make God known (vv. 20-26), until such time as they are with Jesus, in the place he has prepared for them (see 14:2-3), beholding the glory which was his before the foundation of the world (17:24). This is eternal life, that they know God, a knowledge now possible through the revelation which has taken place in and through Jesus Christ, whom God has sent (see v. 3).

Within the limitations of this study of John 17 I am unable to develop my thoughts on the place of the prayer within the overall literary shape and the unfolding theological argument of 13:1-17:26.61 I suggest, however, that the

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60 This is further reason for seeing the believers in v. 20 as absent contemporaries of the people at the table. As Jesus’ mission (see v. 4) was successful (see vv. 6-8), so also is the disciples’ mission (see v. 18) successful (see v. 20).

61 For readings of John 17 which stress this missionary aspect, see MANN, L’Evangile, 396-400; RANDALL, “The Theme of Unity”, 384-88, and especially SEGALLA, La preghiera, 193-207.

62 For this, see chapters 1-5 of my forthcoming Glory not Dishonor.
reading of the events and words which took place at a table the night before Jesus was “lifted up” has come full circle. The evening begins with the footwashing and the gift of the morsel, even to Judas (13:26). Jesus makes God known in the perfect love which he shows for his fragile disciples. In and through his loving, Jesus is glorified, and God is glorified in him. The disciples are to be recognised as the sent ones of Jesus by the unity created by the love which they have for one another (13:1-38). As the discourse opens Jesus instructs his failing disciples on his departure, and the conditions and challenges which will face them. Guided by the Paraclete in his physical absence, love, faith, joy and peace should be theirs, as they are swept up into the love which unites the Father and Jesus, the sent one (14:1-31). At the centre of the discourse the reader hears the voice of Jesus, without interruption, telling of abiding, loving and being hated. He proclaims that oneness and joy can be experienced by the disciple who abides in Jesus, the true vine. The disciple will be swept up into Jesus’ abiding oneness with the Father (15:1-11). The disciples of Jesus are to love as he has loved, as a consequence of all that he has done for them (15:12-17). Hatred, rejection, expulsion and slaying of the disciples will highlight the response of “the Jews”, the false vine which has rejected Jesus and the Father (15:18-16:3). The voices of the disciples are again heard as the themes and the form of 14:1-31 return. Jesus instructs his failing disciples on his departure, and the conditions and challenges which will face them. They will be guided by the Paraclete in his physical absence; joy and confidence should be theirs, as they are loved by the Father who sent Jesus (16:4-33). A prayer of departure instructs the reader that Jesus makes God known in the perfect love and unfailing care which he shows for his fragile disciples, even Judas (see 17:11-12). In and through his loving, Jesus is glorified, and God is glorified in him. The disciples are to be recognised as the sent ones of Jesus by the unity created by the love which they have for one another (17:1-26).72

The account of Jesus’ final evening with his disciples encourages the reader to look further into the story for the resolution of the many questions which flow from this insistence that Jesus’ loving is the revelation of God. In short, the reader must read on to discover how this happens in the life (and death) of Jesus. But the narratives, discourses and prayer of John 13-17 also make a statement and raise questions which point the readers beyond the


73 This is part of the genre of the farewell discourse. As W.S. KURZ, Farewell Addresses in the New Testament (Zacchaeus Studies: New Testament; Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1990) 15, remarks: “Farewells ... explicitly look ahead beyond the time of the narrative itself”.

To make God known: a reading of John 17:1-26