

Dwelling in the Household of God

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Johannine Ecclesiology and Spirituality

Mary L. Coloe, P.B.V.M.



A Michael Glazier Book

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Foreword

It is a pleasure to introduce this fine study in the Fourth Gospel, to those who know Mary Coloe's first major study of John's Gospel, *God Dwells with Us*, and especially to those who do not. This new book, *Dwelling in the Household of God*, grows organically out of its predecessor in which Coloe explored the development of the community of the Fourth Gospel—from its roots in the Jewish perception of the Temple in Jerusalem as God's dwelling in Israel, to its experience of God's dwelling in the Christian community in Jesus. This new study looks at the Gospel of John, as it were, from "the other end," that is, from the post-Resurrection perspective from which the Johannine community experiences itself as God's household or dwelling place, as a new Israel in which the risen Jesus is the New Temple.

While just as rigorous, exegetically and critically, as the first volume this new study is theologically and spiritually richer and deeper. It is quite explicitly a work of biblical theology and biblical spirituality solidly grounded in excellent scholarship. Coloe attempts, very successfully, to discern and explicate the religious, indeed mystical, experience of mutual indwelling of believers and Jesus, which grounds their experience of community life as life in the household of God. This community experience is the matrix out of which the text arises and to which it bears witness. By her careful scholarship enriched by an unobtrusive but unmistakable personal engagement with the subject matter Coloe invites the reader not only to appropriate intellectually the information that the text conveys but to enter personally into its revelatory, that is, its transformational dynamics. Coloe's text makes the implicit claim that the Fourth Gospel cannot be read neutrally.

Dwelling in the Household of God is a highly original contribution to the understanding of the Fourth Gospel, making excellent use of previous and contemporary scholarship but rife with new insights. At the same time

it demonstrates the fruitfulness of a methodological choice to read the entire gospel through a particular theological-spiritual lens, a choice that could have resulted in a forced or selective or even tendentious reading but in this case has simultaneously deepened and broadened the interpretive perspective while offering a coherent and unified reading of the gospel. Finally, it provides a fine example of biblical spirituality both as hermeneutical practice and as existential product. The book will be a valuable resource for scholars but also a fine textbook for upper level university students, seminarians, and thoughtful pastors. Educated laity will find in this volume both an incentive to serious study of John's Gospel and robust nourishment for their life of faith and commitment. I hope it will have the breadth of readership it so richly deserves.

Sandra M. Schneiders

Preface

The Rublev icon of the Trinity draws the viewer into the scene, to take her place at the table, to fill the empty space and complete the circle. The three figures are depicted in a moment of deep communion. The central figure, Jesus, holds his hand in blessing over the cup containing the head of the sacrificial calf. His eyes are turned to the Father, whose face bears infinite sadness as he returns the gaze of the Son. The third figure, robed in green, is the vivifier, the eternally young Spirit, whose face also depicts a depth of sadness in contemplating the costliness of love.

Andrei Rublev, the great Russian master of the early fifteenth century, has captured the essence of the Johannine vision of God. Here is a communion of love and a communion of invitation. In the final discourse we read: “Make your home in me, as I make mine in you” (John 15:4). The invitation is offered—to dwell in God as God dwells in us, to participate in this divine communion of life and love.

My first book, *God Dwells With Us: Temple Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, explored one pole of this invitation: the dwelling of God with and in us. In that book the Temple, “my Father’s House,” was the symbol in the gospel text that expressed God’s dwelling in history. As the narrative unfolded, the Temple shifted in its symbolism: from a building, to the person of Jesus, to the believers.

The current book explores the second pole of the invitation: Make your home in me. Again I have focused on a symbol within the text, “my Father’s household” (14:2), which evokes both the Temple tradition and the people who are part of the household. The phrase “my Father’s household” expresses the reciprocity inherent in the invitation: “make your home in me, as I make mine in you.” It is my belief that underlying the Gospel of John is a profound experience, a mysticism of divine mutual indwelling. This book is my attempt to test this belief, to see if within the narrative we can

read the traces of a profound mystical experience of God at the origins of the Christian story.

As I write about a communion of life I am conscious that this book emerged from within such a communion. While the final product bears the imprint and limitations of my own skills, I have received support and insight from a range of people. My religious congregation, the Presentation Sisters, has continued to encourage and enable my research. My experience of living within a Presentation community and the ongoing love of women whose spirits run deep and true enables me to glimpse at times the subject of this book, the love and life of the divine communion. My colleagues at the Australian Catholic University and St. Paul's College of Theology have listened to and critiqued papers given in seminars. The biblical academies in Australia, Europe, and North America have provided further opportunities to test the development of my ideas and to receive helpful advice and directions from other academics. I am most grateful to the Australian Research Council, which provided me with a large research grant, releasing me from my teaching responsibilities and enabling me to attend a number of international conferences and to spend a year in Berkeley, California. This book could not have been written without that financial support by the Australian government. During the year at Berkeley I experienced the hospitality of the Jesuit School of Theology and the caring support of a community of men and women living in the Salesian residence, Don Bosco Hall. My time in Berkeley also gave me the opportunity to renew my collaboration and friendship with Professor Sandra Schneiders. Sandra's interest in symbolism dates back to the 70s, and her work has continued to awaken and deepen my own insights. A course on hermeneutics offered by Sandra and Professor Barbara Green was of particular help to me in articulating the theoretical perspective that underlies this work. I have been truly blessed through my ongoing friendship with both Sandra Schneiders and Frank Moloney. These two outstanding Johannine scholars have read parts of this text, offered suggestions, and guided me to some of the important studies by European scholars. I am grateful again to all at Liturgical Press, especially Linda Maloney and Peter Dwyer who provided skilled editing and recommendations. Their publishing expertise and support make it possible for my writing to reach a wider reading community.

I extend my heartfelt thanks to all these people. Academic writing must be a time of intense solitude. The encouragement, friendship, and support of my sisters, friends, and colleagues enable solitude to be a creative rather than a lonely experience.

Mary L. Coloe, P.B.V.M.

Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>
ABR	<i>Australian Biblical Review</i>
ABRL	Anchor Bible Reference Library
AnBib	Analecta Biblica
ATANT	Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicae Lovaniensis
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
BT	<i>Bible Translator</i>
BZNW	<i>Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
CahRB	Cahiers de la Revue Biblique
CBET	Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology
CBQ	Catholic Biblical Quarterly
ConBNT	Coniectanea Biblica, New Testament Series
CRINT	Compendia rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum Section 1
<i>EstB</i>	<i>Estudios Bíblicos</i>
<i>ExpT</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
HTCNT	Herder's Theological Commentary on the New Testament
HUT	Hermeneutische Untersuchungen zur Theologie
IDB	<i>The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i>
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JSNT	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>

<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
LD	Lectio Divina
LXX	The Septuagint (Greek Old Testament)
MT	The Masoretic Text (Hebrew Old Testament)
NCB	New Century Bible
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NovTSup	Supplements to Novum Testamentum
<i>NRTTh</i>	<i>Nouvelle revue théologique</i>
NTL	New Testament Library
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
OTL	Old Testament Library
QD	Quaestiones Disputatae
<i>RSR</i>	<i>Recherches de science religieuse</i>
SANT	Studien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
SBFA	Studium Biblicum Franciscanum Analecta
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLSCS	Society of Biblical Literature Septuagint and Cognate Studies
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
<i>SNTSU</i>	<i>Studien zum Neuen Testament und seiner Umwelt</i>
SP	Sacra Pagina
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
<i>TDOT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i>
<i>TLNT</i>	<i>Theological Lexicon of the New Testament</i>
<i>TS</i>	<i>Theological Studies</i>
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZNW	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche</i>

1 Introduction

“In my Father’s house are many dwellings,” what else can we suppose the house of God to mean but the temple of God? And what that is, ask the apostle, and he will reply, “For the temple of God is holy, which [temple] ye are.”¹

These words of Augustine concluded my study of the Temple in the Fourth Gospel.² In that book I traced the way the Temple functioned across the text of the gospel and came to the conclusion that the Temple was not only the major image of the person and mission of Jesus, but also an image of the identity and mission of the Johannine community. Just as Jesus could be described as the tabernacling presence of God (1:14), and as a temple (2:21), so too the Johannine community was a living “temple” in which God continued to dwell (14:10, 17, 23, 25).³ But there was a problem. While the gospel narrative could express its theology through the symbol of the Temple, in the post-70 experience of the Johannine community the Temple was no longer appropriate as a means of expressing its own identity. The Temple building, along with its elaborate cult, no longer existed, nor is there

¹ Augustine, *The Gospel of John*. Tractate 68. John 14:1-3.

² Mary L. Coloe, *God Dwells with Us: Temple Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2001).

³ For a discussion of the significance of these verses see Coloe, *God Dwells with Us*, ch. 8. The gradual theological development of Israel’s relationship with God and sense of God’s presence is discussed in *ibid.*, ch. 3. Under the influence of Canaanite mythology, a royal ideology developed during the early period of the Solomonic Temple, which in turn led to a simplistic, almost literalizing view of YHWH’s presence in the Jerusalem Temple, so that God can be called “YHWH of Zion” (Ps 110:2) and “Resident of Jerusalem” (Ps 135:21). In response to this the Deuteronomists, the prophets, and the Priestly tradition set about a spiritualization of the cult (see *ibid.*, especially 36–51).

anything in the Johannine gospel to suggest a community that had a cultic sense of its identity. Nothing in the text shows interest in Christian priesthood, sacrifice, hierarchies, formal rituals to be re-enacted, or prayers to be said.⁴ On the contrary, Jesus' actions in the Jerusalem Temple (2:13-25) disrupt and overturn its cultic significance,⁵ and his words to the Samaritan woman speak of worship in Spirit rather than in sacred places (4:19-26).⁶ This gospel makes no distinction between "apostle" and "disciple"; instead, all are disciples. There is no eucharistic institution narrative, nor is there a baptismal formula such as that found at the end of Matthew's gospel (Matt 28:16-20). There is no teaching about offering sacrifice, or about prayer. Nothing therefore in the text gives any indication that the Johannine community took to itself the meaning of "Temple" as a cultic institution.

While I was experiencing some disquiet about the Temple as an appropriate symbol for the community, even as that first book came to its end a second was beginning to emerge, for there was another symbol in the text, a symbol capable of meaning Temple and of being transferred to the community in a post-70 context. This symbol was the household. When Jesus enters the Temple for the first Passover he names the building "my Father's house" (2:16); later, within the final discourse, he speaks again of "my Father's house" (14:2). Although the expression obviously refers to the building in chapter 2, in the Old Testament "my father's house" is never used in this architectural sense; instead, it always has the personal sense of "my father's household."⁷ The double meaning of this expression, in its reference to the Temple and to a group of people, suggested a way of understanding the transferral of Temple imagery to the community—not in a cultic sense, as the house of God, but in a more interrelational sense, that is, as the household of God. The focus shifts from the Temple as a place of human activity, of doing cultic things, to the Temple as a place of divine activity, of God's dwelling within creation.⁸ In the life of Jesus, God's dwell-

⁴ This is not an exhaustive list of expressions of Israel's cult but a description of aspects of the cult linked to the Temple.

⁵ *God Dwells with Us*, ch. 4.

⁶ *God Dwells with Us*, ch. 5.

⁷ For example, "So Joseph said to his brothers and to his father's house, 'I will go up and tell Pharaoh, and will say to him, "My brothers and my father's house have come to me"' (Gen 46:31); similarly Gen 24:38; 28:21; Josh 2:13; Judg 6:15; 9:18; 16:31; 1 Sam 22:15; 2 Sam 14:9; 1 Chr 28:4). Often the expression "father's house" is translated as "family" in the Revised Standard Version and "household" in the New Revised Standard Version.

⁸ The understanding of the Temple as God's dwelling place is already present in the Old Testament, for in the Hebrew text the most frequent name for the Jerusalem Temple was "the House of God."

ing in creation became God's incarnation in a human person. The incarnation makes personal the mode of God's being in the world, first in Jesus; then, in and through his departure and gift of the Spirit, God's dwelling has its locus in the community of believers, born into the Father's household.⁹ Understanding the Temple raised up by Jesus as "my father's household" provided me with an initial entry point into a second reading of the gospel. The task in my first book was christological: to explore the identity and mission of Jesus through the narrative symbol of the Temple. The aim of this study is ecclesial: to explore the identity and mission of the community through the narrative symbol of the household.

In his work on interpreting texts, Paul Ricoeur speaks of a "second naïveté" to describe the process of returning to a literary work a second time, bringing to this second reading the insights gained from the first reading.¹⁰ The second reading therefore has a certain level of perception that makes possible the disclosure of deeper levels of meaning. Thus the reader is involved in an ongoing hermeneutical circle of reading, understanding, raising questions, new readings, new perceptions, and new questions. Perhaps it is more accurate to speak of a hermeneutical spiral as the new readings open the reader to ever deepening layers of interpretive possibilities that were not evident at first. Such is the ongoing nature of interpretation.

Once again I will pay attention to the symbolic potential of the narrative, to its characters, its indicators of time, its religious and social customs. The symbolic dimension will be even more important in this second reading, as in my earlier work the focus on the Temple meant overlooking other significant aspects of the narrative. My hermeneutics of suspicion will therefore be more obvious in this book, as experience has taught me to look beyond the surface meaning of the text, for this writer is a skilled artist whose apparently straightforward narrative discloses depths of theological insight to the perceptive reader. These initial comments lead me to a more nuanced and explicit statement of my hermeneutical approach and method.

Interpretive Approach and Method

The work of Paul Ricoeur has been foundational for my understanding of text and its interpretation. According to Ricoeur the written form of communication gives a particular autonomy to the text in that the author is

⁹ See my examination on the meaning of the crucifixion in John as the destruction and raising of the Temple in *God Dwells with Us*, ch. 9.

¹⁰ Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976) 4.

no longer available to question directly, nor is the author in a position to control directly how a text is read.¹¹ In a conversation, if there is any ambiguity there is opportunity to make sure that what the speaker means and what the words mean coincide. In a written text the immediacy of clarification is no longer possible, “the author’s intention and the meaning of the text no longer coincide.”¹² This creates a distance between the author and the reader, and this distance offers interpretive possibilities not available to its original recipients. The text is the only medium possible for the reader today to appropriate the meaning of its author, and even then what can be grasped by the reader is not so much the mind of the author as the author’s, or more accurately the implied author’s, point of view, his/her particular way of making sense of the world.¹³ This point of view can be discovered only within the rhetorical features of the text. The reader is involved in trying to understand not only what the author writes, the grammar of the sentences, the meaning of the words, but what the author is writing about.¹⁴ This is the task of interpretation, for words can have a multiplicity of meanings and a singular meaning can be determined only by the context. In scientific writing an attempt is made to provide an explanation of the context so that only one meaning is possible. By contrast, in poetic writing and literature the author deliberately exploits the possibility of multiple meanings to engage the reader more directly, so that *understanding* involves a creative task on the part of the reader similar to what *expression* involves on the part of the author.¹⁵

In the case of the gospel, the private experience of the first community is made public and available to me, the reader, through the author’s intention to disclose meaning in his written text. Ricoeur speaks of the “intentional exteriorization” of the author. Here he makes the distinction between

¹¹ See Ricoeur’s analysis of writing as discourse in *ibid.*, 25–29, 43–44.

¹² *Ibid.* 29.

¹³ In making the distinction between the real author and the implied author revealed within the text, Francis Moloney notes that, unlike contemporary narratives, “it can be assumed (but never proved) that the real author *of* and the implied author *in* New Testament narratives speak with the same voice.” See Francis J. Moloney, *John*. SP 4 (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1998) 16.

¹⁴ Ricoeur speaks of a “verbal meaning” of the text and a “secondary metaphoric and symbolic meaning”; see *Interpretation Theory*, 75–78.

¹⁵ Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, trans. J. B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) 151: “Understanding seeks to coincide with the inner life of the author, to liken itself to him (*sich gleichsetzen*), to reproduce (*nachbilden*) the creative processes which engendered the work.”

the actual historical event, the impact of Jesus on the first disciples, which today I can no longer enter into, and the meaning of the event as it has been set down in writing. “What we write, what we inscribe is the *noema* [the thought content] of the act of speaking, the meaning of the speech event, not the event as event.”¹⁶ This meaning will have both a sense, insofar as the narrative makes sense, and a reference beyond the narrative to the symbolic world by which the first community articulates for itself the meaning of the Christ event. Within the community this symbolic world would be expressed in various forms: in liturgy, in ways of speaking, in ritual, in community organization, in the times and places it considers sacred, in the living commitment of its members, in its evangelistic outreach to others, in all the many tangible and intangible ways this community gives expression to its faith in Jesus. This world is called “symbolic,” for it attempts to bring to human sensory perception what is essentially spiritual: the community’s ongoing experience of Jesus’ presence now mediated through the Spirit. The gospel narrative is one of these sensory experiences that tries to communicate what transcends the human senses but is no less real. For this reason the gospel needs to be read as a symbolic narrative. Not only will the gospel at times use symbols, but the entire narrative is itself a symbol of the faith expression of the community. The task of interpretation, then, is to grasp not just the meaning at the level of the narrative, but also the deeper meaning that the narrative simultaneously enfolds and discloses.¹⁷

Because the gospel narrative is set in first-century Judaism, and was produced by a community writing toward the end of that century, possibly in Ephesus,¹⁸ a first level of understanding the narrative will be to grasp this historical context, for the author will use the words, faith expressions, geography, religious and cultural customs of his time. Even the symbolic world he creates in and through the narrative will be bounded necessarily by the limitations of a particular time and place. My reading of the text must therefore take note of, but not be confined by its particularity and specificity in order to bring a first-century world into dialogue with a third-millennium

¹⁶ Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 27.

¹⁷ “The sense of a text is not behind the text, but in front of it. It is not something hidden, but something disclosed. . . . Understanding has less than ever to do with the author and his situation. It seeks to grasp the world-propositions opened up by the reference of the text.” See Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 87.

¹⁸ For recent discussions of the possible location of the Johannine Community and the conclusion that Ephesus seems the most likely proposal see Moloney, *John*, 5, and Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John: Edited, Updated, Introduced and Concluded by Francis J. Moloney*. ABRL (New York: Doubleday, 2003) 202–206.

world. Even in this task I must acknowledge my own specificity and limitations in that I am not just any reader anywhere; I am an educated white Australian woman, a believing Christian for whom this gospel is part of my scriptural tradition. I read, then, with a hermeneutic of faith, as well as a hermeneutic of suspicion, as I critically engage with the text and wrestle with its multiple layers of meaning to retrieve a meaning that offers faith and life for me and for others today.

The dialogue between my twenty-first-century world and the world of the gospel presumes that there is historical continuity between these two worlds, making possible what Hans-Georg Gadamer refers to as a “fusion of horizons.”

[T]he horizon of the present cannot be formed without the past. There is no more an isolated horizon of the present than there are historical horizons. Understanding, rather, is always the fusion of these horizons which we imagine to exist by themselves. . . . In a tradition this process of fusion is continually going on, for there old and new continually grow together to make something of living value.¹⁹

This understanding of interpretation, particularly of historical works, as a fusion of horizons is important for naming what understanding means. Real understanding occurs when we have made a text our own, when we have appropriated its meaning for ourselves.²⁰ However, what we make our own is not an alien experience or another’s mental insights, for that is impossible. What I make my own is the referential meaning of the text, the “what it is about,” which is what the text is directed toward. This is the horizon of meaning that an author attempts to inscribe in a text. Insofar as I am able to place myself in the ongoing traditioning process that has its origins in the first century but continues to be effective today, the gospel has possibilities for enlarging my own current horizon. So understanding is not my empathetic entering into the past world inscribed in the text, but my allowing the text to impact on me and to work a transformation of my current vision of reality. Understanding a text will necessarily involve a change. This insight into the effectiveness of understanding was discussed by Gadamer particularly in relation to the law and the gospel. “[T]he text, whether law or Gospel, if it is to be understood properly, i.e., according to

¹⁹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. John Cumming (2nd ed. New York: Seabury Press, 1975) 273.

²⁰ Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 82–93.

the claim it makes, must be understood at every moment, in every situation, in a new and different way. Understanding here is always application.”²¹

This study will use various methods. Historical and social criticism will provide some insights into the first-century world of the author and his community. It will provide the essential background for the author’s narrative and for a reader’s first understanding of what the text means. In conjunction with these historical considerations, my major methodology is best described as narrative criticism. I will attempt to discover the narrative world the author has created by use of characterization, dialogues, chains of events, irony, Old Testament quotations and allusions, figurative language, and particularly by the structure through which the narrative unfolds, both in small discrete units and in larger sections.²² As my focus in this study is on the possible symbolic meaning of the household, I have selected scenes that relate to households, namely, Jesus’ initial invitation to disciples to come and stay with him (John 1), the wedding at Cana (John 2), birth (John 3), the household of Lazarus, Martha, and Mary (John 11 and 12), the last discourse, when Jesus gathers with his own (John 13–17), and the Jerusalem household where disciples first experience the Risen Lord (John 20). The questions I bring to these pericopes are:

- Does the narrative offer any indication that the household scene within the text has as its reference the post-Easter household of the Johannine community?
- Does the household narrative suggest a deeper level of meaning that gives expression to the symbolic world of the community, to its faith, its spirituality, and its sense of identity?
- Is it possible to detect in these household scenes any hints that we are not only dealing with “time past,” i.e., the time of Jesus, but also “time present,” i.e., the time of the Johannine community?
- Is the living “household of God” casting its own shadow on those scenes when Jesus gathers his own?

As the study develops, I will, where necessary, review aspects of my study of the Temple, which, as I explained above, provided my first level of understanding the symbolic world of this gospel.

²¹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 275.

²² This list of narrative techniques is descriptive rather than exhaustive. One of the early pioneers in narrative criticism of the Gospel of John is Alan Culpepper; his study provides a more thorough listing of narrative devices. See R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983).

Presuppositions and Cautions

The gospel we now have is the narrative formulation of one community's insight into the person and ministry of Jesus. This theology developed over some decades of oral teaching, Spirit-guided recollection, and ongoing community praxis in different historical circumstances. Underlying the theology, which determined the particular narrative shape of this gospel, was a community's experience of the living presence of Jesus, mediated now through "another Paraclete" (John 14:16). As Sandra Schneiders writes,

it was a particular *lived experience* of union with God in the risen Jesus through his gift of the Spirit/Paraclete within the believing community (spirituality) that gave rise gradually to a particular *articulated understanding* of Christian faith (theology). This theology was encoded in the Gospel text, and through it we gain access to the experience, the spirituality, that gives this Gospel its unique character.²³

In Ricoeur's terms, the theology and christology are the primary reference of the narrative; the story of Jesus is *about* the incarnation of the divine Word. My other book, *God Dwells with Us*, explored this primary reference by examining the christological significance of the Temple as symbol. The present study aims to reach behind the theology, behind the primary reference, to the lived experience, and to ask what would be the living "spirituality" or sense of religious identity of a community that would articulate its theology in this manner? This is a more difficult task, since the primary reference of the gospel is the meaning of the life, death, and resurrection of *Jesus*. The narrative is *for* the community, but is not *about* the community. But, taking the theology of the gospel as a clue into the community's spirituality, I presume there may be some traces of this community life, however subtle, within the narrative. David Aune's words express my fundamental hermeneutic and its inherent difficulties.

It would therefore be incorrect to claim, with Ernst Käsemann, that basic elements of congregational life, worship, sacraments and the ministry play only insignificant roles in the Fourth Gospel.²⁴ *Such elements do not receive explicit treatment precisely because they are the presuppositions of the ecclesial context out of which the Gospel arose.* Since the Fourth Gospel was not

²³ Sandra M. Schneiders, *Written That You May Believe: Encountering Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (New York: Crossroad, 1999) 48.

²⁴ Ernst Käsemann, *The Testament of Jesus according to John 17* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968) 27.

written for the consumption of modern scholars, it is necessary for us to break the code in which the Gospel is written, and which it presupposes.²⁵

This study begins with an intuition, or guess,²⁶ that the household scenes in the gospel may provide access to “the code” in which the community’s experience has been inscribed. It will be the task of this book to test if this intuition is accurate, and to validate it through careful exegesis of the text, alert always to the danger of reading more into the text than it can rightfully sustain. The dialogue between the first-century world and my world will therefore need to be both rigorous and receptive. According to Ricoeur, “Hermeneutics seems to me to be animated by this double motivation: willingness to suspect, willingness to listen.”²⁷ My faith-filled lived experience may alert me to nuances or clues in the text suggesting the faith-filled experience of the Johannine community, but the final arbiter of the accuracy of my reading must be the text itself in its holistic integrity.²⁸

Recent Studies on the Household

There is a growing number of books exploring the phenomenon of the early Christian *ekkleisia* and its relationship to first-century Jewish/Greco-Roman households.²⁹ Some writers take the gospel as the starting point and

²⁵ David E. Aune, *The Cultic Setting of Realized Eschatology in Early Christianity*. NovTSup 28 (Leiden: Brill, 1972) 73 (italics supplied).

²⁶ “In the beginning, understanding is a guess.” See Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 74. In the following pages Ricoeur goes on to speak of the necessity and process of validating the initial guess.

²⁷ Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, trans. Denis Savage (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970) 27.

²⁸ In describing the interpretive value of clues Ricoeur writes: “A clue serves as a guide for a specific construction, in that it contains at once a permission and a prohibition; it excludes unsuitable constructions and allows those which give more meaning to the same words. Second . . . one construction can be said to be more probable than another, not more truthful. The more probable is that which, on the one hand, takes account of the greatest number of facts furnished by the text, including its potential connotation, and on the other hand, offers a qualitatively better convergence between the features which it takes into account. A mediocre explanation can be called narrow or forced” (Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 175–76).

²⁹ See, for example and for further bibliographical works, Roger W. Gehring, *House Church and Mission: The Importance of Household Structures in Early Christianity* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004); Joseph H. Hellerman, *The Ancient Church as Family* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001); David L. Balch and Carolyn Osiek, eds., *Early Christian Families in Context: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003). One issue of the *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* was devoted entirely to this

read this text with the aid of sociological studies on ancient Mediterranean families.³⁰ Other writers take for their text the archaeological and epigraphical remains and interpret these in order to construct a picture of a first-century household and its many complex activities and associations.³¹ These studies provide helpful background in a general way to Mediterranean family life, but historical reconstructions have necessary limitations. Documentary evidence may only be available for certain types of households and in certain locations, either because the type of household did not keep documents, as in the case of nomadic Bedouins, or because these documents have not been preserved. A similar difficulty applies to archaeological and epigraphical remains. It is possible that the picture constructed through such evidence is quite skewed and not applicable to a specific location. There is also the problem of locating the Johannine community with utter certainty. While these limitations suggest that it is not possible to propose a precise picture of a household that would apply to the Johannine setting, nonetheless there is sufficient evidence to recreate a general idea of some customs.³²

One such general feature is the patriarchal organization of family and social life in the first century. This immediately raises serious hermeneutical difficulties for modern interpreters. In suggesting “household” as a possible symbol for the self-identity of the Johannine community, am I implying that this gospel community organized itself along patriarchal lines? Studies of the New Testament that restrict themselves to sociological analysis can suggest this. A proper understanding of symbol will liberate the term “household” from its sociological meaning and allow it to take on a theo-

theme, and a bibliography of recent studies can be found in the editors’ introduction; see Margaret MacDonald and Halvor Moxnes, “Domestic Space and Families in Early Christianity: Editors’ Introduction,” *JSNT* 27 (2004) 5–6.

³⁰ For example, Michael H. Crosby, *House of Disciples: Church, Economics and Justice in Matthew* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988); Michael F. Trainor, *The Quest for Home: The Household in Mark’s Community* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2001).

³¹ For example, Carolyn Osiek and David L. Balch, *Families in the New Testament World: Households and House Churches* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997).

³² An important study from this perspective on the Fourth Gospel is Jan Gabriël van der Watt, *Family of the King: Dynamics of Metaphor in the Gospel According to John*. Biblical Interpretation Series 47 (Leiden: Brill, 2000). The author provides an excursus on the use and limitations of socioeconomic models for investigating family life in John (pp. 163–65). In some respects my study is similar to *Family of the King* in its exploration of symbol and a focus on “family” terminology in the gospel. However, my starting point has been the symbol of the Temple, which has opened up for me the possibilities of the expression found in the phrase “my Father’s house,” with its reference to the household of God.

logical meaning that is more appropriate, given the theological nature of the gospel text. In other words, the household model for the Johannine community is not to be found in the social sphere of the first century, but must be located in the world of divine relationships.

The Symbol of the Father's Household in this Study

Ricoeur begins his work on symbol by examining the dynamics of a metaphor, which has a more restricted semantic context. A metaphor is a linguistic double meaning. Two realities from different contexts or domains are brought together in such a way that, simply at a verbal level, the statement does not make sense.³³ The reader is then forced to grapple with the assimilation of these two realities into some meaningful relationship beyond the verbal sense, creating something new out of what would otherwise be absurd. In speaking of God dwelling in a temple, or of God's household, we are speaking metaphorically. Whatever we mean by the word "God," it has the sense of a transcendent, spiritual, divine reality beyond containment "in" either the spatial or temporal dimensions of human experience. We may speak of sacred times or places, but these are terms we use to describe our embodied experience of the numinous. In this metaphorical sense we may say God is present or dwells in a temple, but the theory of metaphor also notes that there is both an "is" and an "is not" operating in this type of speech. Literally God, the full reality of divinity, is not present or dwelling "in" a temple/house. The linguistic tension between the "is" and the "is not" is the dynamic that enables a metaphor to create a new perception of reality. The meaning of a metaphor transcends the literalness of the words in the sentence, and the image evoked by the metaphor creates a new reality in the mind of the reader that cannot be exactly translated.

In a similar manner a symbol looks beyond its factual reality for its meaning; it refers to another level of reality and truth that is only accessible through the symbol. This last point is critical for understanding the theological necessity of symbols. Our primary way of knowing is mediated through sensory experiences: what we see, hear, taste, touch, and smell. However, in itself the divine or spiritual world is beyond such sensory experience. For that reason the process of revelation occurs through symbolic experience. God's presence is known through what God does: in creation, in the history of Israel, through prophetic teaching and writing, and for

³³ The following brief description of metaphor and symbol draws on Ricoeur's *Interpretation Theory*, 45–69.

Christians in the incarnation of the divine Word. The reality of Jesus' humanity provides access to the reality of the divine Word. The transcendent is present in the symbol.³⁴

In the Fourth Gospel, particularly in the last discourse, Jesus refers to aspects of his relationship with God as a model for human relationships: "Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me so that they may be one as we are one" (17:11); "that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us" (17:21, also 22).³⁵ This explicit comparison with the divine world provides a hermeneutic for examining household not in reference to Jewish/Greco-Roman patriarchal models, but using the relationships between the Father, Jesus, and Spirit as the primary reference.³⁶ While the term "Father's house/hold" comes from the social context of the gospel, it must be understood in a symbolic sense as referring to people in relationship with God and each other. Its reference is to a household "not of this world."³⁷

Similarly, the word "Father" as a reference to God must be understood in a metaphorical sense and may not be reduced to equating God with a

³⁴ Sandra Schneiders' early work on symbolism in the Fourth Gospel remains foundational for appreciating the symbolic nature of biblical texts from a theological perspective, especially the Fourth Gospel. See Sandra M. Schneiders, "History and Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel," in Marinus de Jonge, ed., *L'Évangile de Jean: Sources, Rédaction, Théologie*. BETL 44 (Louvain: Louvain University Press, 1977) 371–76, and eadem, "Symbolism and the Sacramental Principle in the Fourth Gospel," in Pius-Ramon Tragan, ed., *Segni E Sacramenti Nel Vangelo Di Giovanni*. Studia Anselmiana 67 (Rome: Editrice Anselmiana, 1977) 221–35. Craig Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995) has contributed a study of many symbols found across the gospel, and most recently Ruben Zimmermann published a major study of the phenomenon of symbolism in John, using John 10 to demonstrate his theory; see Ruben Zimmermann, *Christologie der Bilder im Johannesevangelium: Die Christopoetik des vierten Evangeliums unter besonderer Berücksichtigung von John 10*. WUNT 171 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004).

³⁵ Other examples of this correlation between the divine and human worlds can be seen in John 6:57; 10:14–15; 13:15, 34; 15:9, 10, 12; 17:18; 20:21.

³⁶ The use of "household" as a way of speaking of the divine relationships will be explored in more detail in this study. I am not suggesting here that the Fourth Gospel is already using a full Trinitarian concept of God that will develop in later centuries. To read the formulations of Nicea and Chalcedon back into the Fourth Gospel is anachronistic.

³⁷ In speaking of his kingship, Jesus says to Pilate: "My kingship is not of this world" (19:36). I am applying this same principle to the notion of household. While the metaphor of household or kingship uses the language of first-century culture, the reference is to the divine world.

male patriarch. The frequency of the word “Father” in the Fourth Gospel has attracted a number of studies and a variety of responses.³⁸ The gospel itself provides a clue to why the image of “father” is so significant. In the discussion following the Sabbath healing in chapter 5, Jesus claims he has the authority to give life and to judge on the Sabbath because these are two works God is permitted to do on the Sabbath (5:17).³⁹ In his argument with “the Jews”⁴⁰ he provides a brief parable of a son learning a trade by copying his father.⁴¹ “Very truly I tell you, the son can do nothing by himself, but only what he sees the father doing; for whatever he does, the son does likewise. The father loves the son and shows him everything that he does” (5:19-20). The son apprenticed to his father and therefore able to do what his father does provides “the underlying imagery of Father and Son in the Fourth Gospel.”⁴² Dorothy Lee draws on C. H. Dodd’s work to examine the meaning of “Father” within the gospel text; in other words, she allows the evangelist to create his own world of meaning. In this way fatherhood is properly interpreted from within the narrative by asking what kind of father-figure is described in the gospel. She points to the number of times “the Father-symbol occurs in narrative contexts that are concerned with the surrender of power.”⁴³ The Father’s love for the world renders him vulnerable through the gift of his son, given over to death. Power and authority are not held

³⁸ In 1999 an entire edition of *Semeia* was devoted to the use of “Father” in this gospel without resolving the problems created by the use of paternal God-language; see Adele Reinhartz, ed., *God the Father in the Gospel of John*. *Semeia* 85 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999).

³⁹ On the prerogatives of God’s Sabbath work see M. Asiedu-Peprah, *Johannine Sabbath Conflicts as Juridical Controversy*. WUNT 2nd ser. 132 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001) 76–77.

⁴⁰ See Moloney, *John*, 9–11 for the meaning of “the Jews” as a characterization of disbelief rather than of actual historical persons. He writes: “The expression ‘the Jews’ in this gospel must always be placed within quotation marks because it does not represent the Jewish people. A critical reading of the Johannine Gospel makes it clear that ‘the Jews’ are those characters in the story who have made up their minds about Jesus. . . . They do not accurately represent the experience of the historical Jesus” (italics in the original, p. 10). On the purpose of this narrative strategy see the recent study by Raimo Hakola, *Identity Matters: John, the Jews and Jewishness*, NovTSup 118 (Boston and Leiden: Brill, 2005) esp. 232–38.

⁴¹ See the study by C. H. Dodd, “A Hidden Parable in the Fourth Gospel,” in his *More New Testament Studies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1968) 30–40.

⁴² Dorothy A. Lee, “The Symbol of Divine Fatherhood,” *Semeia* 85 (1999) 179.

⁴³ Lee, “Divine Fatherhood,” 180. Lee develops her critical understanding of the symbol of God as Father in her recent title, *Flesh and Glory: Symbolism, Gender and Theology in the Gospel of John* (New York: Crossroad, 2002) 110–34.

onto by the Father, but are relinquished freely to the Son. This is in sharp contrast with the figure of the *paterfamilias* in the Greco-Roman world. Lee contrasts the gospel language of intimacy and mutuality with that of duty and fear associated with Roman family life and points out that the mutual love between Father and Son is opened out to include others. “Unlike patriarchal kinship, those outside the immediate family are drawn into the paternal embrace (*kolpon*, 1:18).”⁴⁴ Even the master-slave model is rejected and deconstructed by the model of friendship (15:11-17).

I find Lee’s methodology and arguments convincing. With her, I want to insist that the symbolism of the gospel be taken seriously. God in God’s-self is beyond gender categories, beyond names and representations, and would be utterly unknowable without God’s condescending self-revelation in ways accessible to human apprehension. Even then the language used to speak of this revelation is necessarily metaphorical because of the limitation of language in adequately expressing the divine reality. The God we speak of always “is” and “is not” communicable. In becoming flesh, the divine has allowed a specific particularity, Jesus, to be the means of God’s presence in history. The male Jesus is symbol of the divine Word, and the Father in this gospel is a symbol of the life-giving, self-surrendering God who invites all to be embraced as children (1:13). The fatherhood of God functions in the text as a way the evangelist tries to articulate the experience of being drawn into participation in God’s own life mediated through Jesus and the Spirit. A father-son relationship becomes a symbol for the believer’s post-Easter experience of life in Jesus. As Lee writes, “God’s fatherhood reveals itself, on the one hand, through the giving away of power. . . . On the other hand, God’s fatherhood operates in the Gospel by drawing others into the filial relationship between God and Jesus, so that it becomes symbolic of God’s relationship to the world.”⁴⁵ Ultimately, the challenge to the reader is not so much to see divinity in terms of fatherhood, but to re-vision fatherhood in the light of the gospel.

The Post-Easter Perspective

In 1965 a German scholar, Franz Mussner,⁴⁶ presented a new hermeneutical approach for reading the Fourth Gospel, based on the interpretation

⁴⁴ Lee, “Divine Fatherhood,” 181.

⁴⁵ Lee, *Flesh and Glory*, 126.

⁴⁶ Franz Mussner, *Die johanneische Sehweise und die Frage nach dem historischen Jesus*. QD 28 (Freiburg: Herder, 1965), translated by W. J. O’Hara as Franz Mussner, *The Historical Jesus in the Gospel of John*. QD 19 (New York: Herder, 1967).

theory of Gadamer. In his study he used the term *johanneische Sehweise*, which I translate as a Johannine way of seeing, or Johannine perspective. This perspective merges the pre-Easter history of Jesus and the post-Easter experience of Jesus as the risen and glorified Lord—Gadamer’s “fusion of horizons.” The present experience of the risen Jesus, mediated through the Paraclete, brings to this gospel its particular first-person character, which at times is made explicit: “we have seen his glory” (1:14) and at times is implied: “He who saw this has testified” (19:35). As well as its first-person character as a witness, this gospel offers a self-conscious post-Easter recollection of events: “After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this” (2:22); “when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that this had been written of him and had been done to him” (12:16).⁴⁷ Mussner’s initial work has been most comprehensively developed by another German scholar, C. Hoegen-Rohls,⁴⁸ who argues that the Johannine perspective is governed by the activity of the Spirit enabling believers to look back on the life and death of Jesus and to see and recognize in him the presence of the divine Word. In other words, the Spirit enables a symbolic way of interpreting the Jesus event, and this is the foundation of the Fourth Gospel’s theology, which is then given expression in the narrative. The present Spirit-mediated experience of the risen and glorified Lord permeates the narrative vision of the evangelist, giving this gospel its unique quality when compared with the Synoptics. While Mussner developed his argument by examining the terms used in the gospel by which people came to knowledge of Jesus, Hoegen-Rohls takes as her starting point the final discourse and Jesus’ promises regarding the Paraclete (14:16-17, 26; 15:26; 16:13-14). Hoegen-Rohls’ work articulates the underlying premise of this study, that a careful and sensitive reading of the narrative will reveal not only the theology of the evangelist but also the gospel’s post-Easter spirituality.

⁴⁷ Mussner summarizes his findings in these words: “The Johannine mode of vision deepened the early Church’s knowledge of Christ, by rendering present in the Gospel through the Paraclete the ‘remembrance’ of the Christ-event and so maintaining the ‘situation’ of Jesus in the church and the world” (*The Historical Jesus*, 93).

⁴⁸ Christina Hoegen-Rohls, *Der nachösterliche Johannes: Die Abschiedsreden als hermeneutischer Schlüssel zum vierten Evangelium*. WUNT 2nd ser. 84 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1996) 309–10.