

ON THE STYLE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF JOHN 17

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I. *Introduction*

A consensus is emerging among biblical scholars that generalizations about language are to be found not just in the rules of grammar but also in the ways that language is used. Indeed, the past two decades can be characterized as a time of excited searching for the right conceptual tools and methods to investigate the relationship of discourses to contexts and situations, to actions and events, and to participants and their mutual relations.

The appearance of a number of recent monographs published under the auspices of the United Bible Societies reflects this period of assessment and consolidation. In *Sociolinguistics and Communication*, for example, E. Nida stresses the importance of sociolinguistic methodology in exegesis, and shows that "any feature of language, from sounds to rhetoric, may be sociolinguistically relevant,"¹ Thus, Nida concludes, if a good sociolinguistic analysis is lacking, grammatical analysis remains at a superficial level since linguistic units contain very important sociolinguistic markers.²

Another reflection of this period of advance is a renewed appreciation of the importance of semiotics--the study of the stylistic, rhetorical, and symbolic levels of language. Here, too, Nida and his colleagues have made a significant contribution. Their treatment of

¹ E. Nida, "Sociolinguistics and Translating," *Sociolinguistics and Communication* (ed. J. P. Louw; UBS Monograph Series 1; New York: United Bible Societies, 1986) 17.

² *Ibid.*, 46-48.

rhetorical criticism, entitled *Style and Discourse, With Special Reference to the Text of the Greek New Testament*, is doing much to help the Bible student recognize the significance of style as an imperative component in any theory and practice of biblical interpretation.³ It now seems clear that Greek studies, and particularly NT Greek studies, need to be reexamined in the light of these new insights into the functions and features of rhetoric and style.⁴

While it may be too early to expect a full-scale migration out of more traditional areas, it is heartening to note the number of Johannine scholars who have been willing to explore and even consider annexing this new-found land of literary analysis. An example is C. H. Talbert's efforts to uncover the chiasmic design of John 1:19-5:47 and of several major sections in the rest of the Gospel (6:1-12:50; 13:1-35; 13:36-14:31; 15:1-17:26).⁵ Talbert concludes that "a balanced symmetrical plan for the construction of most of the Gospel emerges,"⁶ with the first half of John (1:19-12:50) falling into two large chiasmuses (1:19-5:47; 6:1-12:50) introduced by a chiasmically arranged prologue (1:1-18), and with chaps 13-17 falling into the same pattern of two large chiasmic sections (13:36-14:31; 15:1-17:26) preceded by a chiasmically arranged frontispiece (13:1-35). Talbert shows how this chiasmic pattern is not merely for show but is the ally of meaning, both in heightening the aesthetic impact of the Gospel in general and in serving as an effective mnemonic device for the hearer/reader. More recently, J. Staley has contended that the Fourth Gospel exhibits a symmetrical, concentric pattern that is built upon the structure of the prologue through the interplay between narration and the use of *Leitwörter*.⁷ The implications of this study for exegesis are many. If Staley is correct in his analysis, the student of John can no longer rely on the standard commentary division of John 1-12 and 13-20, with chap 21 as a tagged-on epilogue.

³ E. Nida, J. P. Louw, A. H. Snyman, J. v. W. Cronje, *Style and Discourse, With Special Reference to the Text of the Greek New Testament* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1983); see my reviews in *JETS* 27 (1984) 346-47, *GTJ* 7 (1986) 133-34, and *Filologia Neotestamentaria* (forthcoming).

⁴ For a discussion of stylistic formulations and their function in the discourse structure of the Greek NT, see my *Linguistics for Students of New Testament Greek* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988) 132-36.

⁵ C. H. Talbert, "Artistry and Theology: An Analysis of the Architecture of In 1,19-5,47," *CBQ* 32 (1970) 341-66. Talbert significantly observes that "The Fourth Evangelist. . . appears before us not only as a great theologian but also as a masterful literary artist. In the Fourth Gospel theology and aesthetics are mutually complementary" (p. 366).

⁶ *Ibid.*, 360.

⁷ J. Staley, "The Structure of John's Prologue: Its Implications for 'the Gospel's Narrative Structure,'" *CBQ* 4 (1986) 241-64.

In citing the above studies I have had to leave many others unmentioned, as it is not my purpose here to compare and contrast the various proposals put forward by different scholars.⁸ Rather, in this essay I should like to join the increasing numbers of adventurous souls who are seeking their fortunes and hazarding their wits in the territory charted by books such as *Style and Discourse*. Our focus will be the Lord's prayer for unity in John 17. After some general remarks on the prayer's narrative technique, I shall turn to a rhetorical analysis of its chief stylistic components before attempting to draw conclusions about the significance of Jesus' words for the question of ecclesiastical unity in today's world.

II. *The Narrative Framework of John 17*

This chapter forms a unit of its own, but one that obviously is inseparable from its larger context. Without going into detail,⁹ it appears that this pericope forms the conclusion of that section of the Gospel in which Jesus withdraws from the world and is continually with his disciples (chaps 13-17). In this period fall the last supper (chap 13), the farewell discourses (chaps 14-16), and the final prayer of Jesus (chap 17). At the supper Jesus washes the disciples' feet, a symbolic gesture which points to the cross looming ahead. In the discourses, spoken in the shadow of the cross, Jesus reassures his disciples of his complete victory over the world. Finally, Jesus' last prayer marks the end of his earthly ministry and looks forward to the ongoing work that would now be the disciples' responsibility. Throughout the section, Jesus' death is emphasized, not in a mood of despondency, but in its peculiarly Johannine significance as the glorification that finally demonstrates Jesus' **doxa**. The unfolding of the plot by means of these events underscores the seriousness of Jesus' "hour" (17:1). Jesus is on his way to death--not to an involuntary execution, but rather to a death that will prove the consecration of the Son to the Father and his ability to overcome the world (16:33).

In tracing John's foreshadowing of the events related to Jesus' death, one must keep in mind the narrative perspective of John 17. In

⁸ For an example of the application of current literary theory to the Gospel of John, see R. A. Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983). Note also the thorough bibliography provided on pp. 239-48.

⁹ For a fuller discussion, see Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 34-43; J. A. Fitzmeyer, *The Gospel According to John* (AB 29A; Garden City: Doubleday, 1970) 744-51. For an overview of John 14-17, one can do no better than to consult the excellent treatment by D. A. Carson, *The Farewell Discourse and Final Prayer of Jesus: An Exposition of John 14-17* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980).

the first place, v 1 establishes the fact that this is a prayer, but it is immediately apparent that the prayer was uttered not primarily for the benefit of the Father, but of the disciples, who were listening (v 13). This means that the chapter is more a brief discourse than a prayer in the usual sense. Secondly, it is vital to note that Jesus speaks as though he were already in heaven: "I am no longer in the world" (v 11).¹⁰ In this sense, the prayer assumes an atemporal character. Finally, the relative length of the prayer is important in establishing the fact that the Fourth Gospel is more than a body of doctrines, but also a witness to the mind and heart of Jesus, including "the hidden foundation of all his work, namely, his relationship with his Father."¹¹ We are thus reminded of themes that are emphasized earlier in the Gospel (cf. 1:1, 18; 3:13; 6:57; 8:58). One is therefore fully justified in calling John 17 yet another example par excellence of Jesus' teaching as the Son of God.

III. *The Stylistic Features of John 17*

While there is a fair degree of consensus among scholars that John 17 contains an important number of stylistic features, there is no general agreement as far as the structure of the chapter is concerned. Differing analyses have been offered by A. Laurentin,¹² J. Becker,¹³ and E. Malatesta.¹⁴ Each has presented several stylistic features that could not have been accidental, but none of these analyses is problem-free.

Instead of attempting to advance another structural analysis of the text, I think it more valuable to observe the subject from a slightly different angle. In this approach, an attempt will be made to classify the rhetorical features that occur in the text, and to determine on this basis the possible functions or meanings of these features for the reader. In order to accomplish this purpose, the methodology proposed by E. Nida *et al.* will be followed.¹⁵ Our analysis will take into account the broader and more inclusive units normally related semantically as well as the rhetorical features that serve to increase the impact and appeal of these broader units. Specifically, the method

¹⁰ The same thought is emphasized in John 3:13, if the reading **eh t&?oujan&?** retained; see my "The Text of John 3:13," *GTJ* 6 (1984) 49-66.

¹¹ J. Cadier, "The Unity of the Church. An Exposition of John 17," *Int* 11 (1957) 166.

¹² A. Laurentin, "We'attah-**kai-nuh**. Formule caractéristique des textes juridiques et liturgiques (a propos de Jean 17,5)," *Bib* 45 (1964) 168-97, 413-32.

¹³ J. Becker, ". . . Aufbau, Schichtung und theologisches geschichtliche Stellung des Gebets in John 17," *ZNW* 60 (1969) 56-83.

¹⁴ E. Malatesta, "The Literary Structure of John 17," *Bib* 52 (1971) 100-214.

¹⁵ *Style and Discourse*, 25-55, 93-144.

will be to (1) break up the sentences into their nuclear structures; (2) describe the progress in the chapter in terms of the logical relationships between the nuclear structures; (3) analyze the cohesion of the whole discourse, and (4) identify the rhetorical features on the microlevel of rhetoric. The possible *meanings* for these stylistic devices will then briefly be considered.

Demarcation of nuclear structures

John 17 is much more complexly organized than most discourse units in the NT. In the analysis presented in Figure I, each numbered expression consists of a single nuclear structure, though frequently ellipses have had to be filled in for the sake of clarity.

Progression

Before drawing attention to the logical relations between the nuclear structures in terms of progression, it is necessary to describe the syntactic structure of the text. The syntactic structure is indicated by the couplings on the left-hand side of Figure I and consists of 95 nuclear structures (if the divisions between 10-12 and 56-57 are accepted), embedded into 52 cola. The pericope consists of relatively short sentences, considerable embedding in places, heavy ellipsis and anacoloutha, and considerable parallelism and contrast. Items 4-16 clearly form a subsection, marked by chiasmus:

- a "Father... glorify your Son" (5)
- b "that the Son may glorify you" (6)
- b' "I glorified you on the earth" (12)
- a' "glorify me, Father" (15)

Figure I

- 1. **taufa el a] a] hsen]hsou]**
- | 2. **kai>paraj tou] of qal mou] au]ou?eij ton ou]ranon**
- | 3. **eipen**
- 4. **pater, el h] uqen h]wra**
- | 5. **docason sou ton ui]n**
- | | 6. **iha o]ui]oj docas ^ se<**
- | | | 7. **kaqw] edwkaj au]t&?e]ousian pashj sarkoj**
- | | | 8. **iha pa]n of dedwkaj au]t&?dws ^ au]toj zw]n ai]v]nion**
- | 9. **auth de>stin h]ai]v]nioj zw]n<**
- | | 10. **iha ginw]skousin seton monon a]]qinon qeon**
- | | 11. **kai>(iha ginw]skousin) of a]pesteil aj]hsou]n Xriston**
- | 12. **egw<se edocasea epi>th] gh]**
- | | 13. **to>egon tel eiws aj of dedwkaj mi**
- | | 14. **iha poi]hsw (au]to>**

- | 15. **kai>nuñ docason me su< pater, para>seaut&?**
 | 16. **t^>doc^ ^>xi>ton pro>ton?ton kosmon ei>ai para>soi<**
 | 17. **ef anerwsa< sou to>oma toij ahqrwpoij ouf e@wkaj moi**
 ek tou?kosmu
 | 18. **soi>h#an**
 | 19. **kai>mi>au>toij e@wkaj**
 | 20. **kai>ton logon sou tethrhkan**
 | 21. **nuñ e@nwkan**
 | | 22. **oti panta o>sa dedwkaj moi para>sou?ei>sin**
 | | 23. **oti ta>rhmata a@wkaj moi dedwka au>toij**
 | 24. **kai>au>toi>e@abon (au>ta>)**
 | 25. **kai>e@nwsan a] hqw]j**
 | 26. **oti para>sou?e>th] qon**
 | 27. **kai>episteusan**
 | 28. **oti su>me a>pesteil aj**
 | 29. **e]w>peri>au>twñ e]wtw?**
 | 30. **ou]peri>tou?kosmu e]wtw?**
 | 31. **a] l a>(e]wtw) peri>wñ dedwkaj moi**
 | 32. **oti soi>ei>sin**
 | 33. **kai>ta>e]n>panta sa>e]stin**
 | 34. **kai>ta>sa>e]n>(e]stin)**
 | 35. **kai>dedocasmai e] au>toij**
 | 36. **kai>ou>keti ei]n>e] t&?kosm&**
 | 37. **kai>au>toi>e] t&?kosm& ei>sin**
 | 38. **ka]w>proj see>xomai**
 | 39. **pater agie, thrhson au>toij e] t&?b>h>omati< sou &?ledwkaj moi**
 | 40. **iha w#in eh**
 | 41. **kaqw] h]peij (eh e]s men)**
 | 42. **ote h>hn met]au>twñ**
 | 43. **e]w>e]throun au>toij e] t&?b>h>omati< sou &?ledwkaj moi**
 | 44. **kai>ef ul>aca (au>toij)**
 | 45. **kai>ou>deij e] au>twñ a]w]eto ei]n>o]ui]j th] a]w]leiaj**
 | 46. **iha h]graf h>pl hrwq^?**
 | 47. **nuñ de>proj see>xomai**
 | 48. **kai>ta>u>ta l al w?e] t&?kosm&**
 | 49. **iha e>wsin tha xaran tha e]n>ha pepl hrwmenwn e] au>toij**
 | 50. **e]w>dedwka au>toij ton logon sou**
 | 51. **kai>o]kosmoj e]n>ishsen au>toij**
 | 52. **oti ou>keti ei>sin ek tou?kosmu**
 | 53. **kaqw] e]w>ou>keti ei]n>ek tou?kosmu**
 | 54. **ou>keti e]wtw?**
 | 55. **iha a>e]j au>toij ek tou?kosmu**
 | 56. **a] l](e]wtw)**
 | 57. **iha thrhs^j au>toij ek tou?ponhrou?**

- | 58. ek tou kosmu ouk eisin
 | 59. kaqwj egw>ouk eimi ek tou kosmu
 | 60. agiason autouj eh t^?al hqei%
 | 61. oll ogoj o[soj al hqeia estin
 | 62. kaqwj epe>apesteil aj ej ton kosmon
 | 63. kaqw>apesteila autouj ej ton kosmon
 | 64. kai uper autwn egw>agiazw ehaouton
 | 65. iha wsin kai>autoi>hgiasmenoi eh al hqei%
 | 66. ou peritoutwn de efwtw monon
 | | 67. al la(efwtw) kai>peritwn pisteuontwn dia>tou?logou
 | | autwn ej epe<
 | | 68. iha pantej eh wsin
 | | | 69. kaqwj su>pater, eh ehoi>(ei#
 | | | 70. kaqw>eh soi>(eimi)
 | | 71. (efwtw) iha kai>autoi>eh hmiñ wsin
 | | 72. iha o[kosmuj pisteu^
 | | 73. oti su>me>apesteil aj
 | | 74. kaqw>tha docan hf dedwkaj mi dedwka autoi?>
 | | 75. iha wsin eh
 | | 76. kaqwj hpei? eh (ešmen)
 | | 77. egw>eh autoi? (eimi)
 | | 78. kai>su>eh ehoi>(ei#
 | | 79. (efwtw) iha wsin tetel eiwnenoi ej eh
 | | 80. iha ginwsk^ o[kosmuj
 | | | 81. oti su>me>apesteil aj
 | | | 82. kai>hgaphsaj autouj
 | | | 83. kaqwj epe>hgaphsaj
 | | 84. pater, o{dedwkaj mi qel w
 | | 85. iha opou eimi>egw>kakeinoi wsin met lehou?
 | | 86. iha qewrwsin thñ docan tha epha hf dedwkaj mi
 | | 87. oti hgaphsaj me pro>katabol h? kosmu
 | | 88. pater dikaie, kai>o[kosmuj se ouk egnw
 | | 89. egw>de>se egwn
 | | 90. kai>ousoi egnwsan
 | | 91. oti su>me>apesteil aj
 | | 92. kai>egnwrisa autoi? to>@ma>sou
 | | 93. kai>gnwrisw (auto)>
 | | | 94. iha h[agaph hf hgaphsaj me eh autoi? ^#
 | | | 95. kaqw>eh autoi? (w#

As far as logical relations are concerned, item 6 is the reason for the petition in item 5: Since Jesus' power to grant eternal life (7-8) can be exercised only as he is glorified in the cross, he calls upon the Father to glorify him (5). Items 9-11 serve as a characterization of item 8: Eternal life is simply the knowledge of God and his Son, Jesus Christ.

This is followed by a statement (12-16) that reiterates the thoughts of items 5-8. Because of the ring structure, "We may regard items 4-16 as a unit, while items 1-3 clearly have their own structure and serve as the introduction to the prayer.

The remainder and greater part of the chapter is more difficult to analyze. Item 17 clearly starts a new statement and the main subsection of the chapter--Jesus' prayer for his disciples. Items 17-28 form the basis for the actual petitionary section beginning in item 29 and are therefore transitional. Here Jesus tells the Father what he has done in subordination to the Father (17-19) and in the faithful disciples (20-28), whom he has called out of the world and instructed (chaps 13-16). Thus in the opening verses of the chapter the author of the Gospel has provided the proper setting and has laid the groundwork for such statements about the disciples as we find in this prayer.

In item 29 Jesus begins to pray for his little band of friends, carefully drawing a distinction between them and the world. The latter stands in opposition to God and, therefore, to the disciples. Although the disciples are "in the world" (37) they are not "of the world" (52), just as Jesus is not "of the world" (53). They have a task, however, that can be carried out only as Jesus sends them "into the world" (63). And, in order to accomplish this task, they must be kept from evil (39, 43, 44, 57), united as one (40), full of joy (49), and wholly consecrated to God (60, 65). The major thrust of this entire section (29-65) is on the church as a unified, witnessing community, not for the sake of the world's condemnation but for its salvation.

The concluding section of the chapter begins in item 66. After a long petition for the disciples (items 17-65, or at least items 29-65), Jesus prays "for those who will believe in me through their message" (67). This can only mean all believers, of all generations. Specifically, Jesus prays for the unity of the church (68, 75, 79), a unity that is grounded in the unity of Jesus and the Father (69-70, 76-78). The goal of this unity is so that the church might be able effectively to bear witness to God's sending of the Son as an expression of his love for the world (72-73, 80-83). The visible expression of this unity is found in the love of the disciples for one another (94).

It is certainly possible to describe the logical relations of this passage in greater detail, but this brief explanation gives at least a basic idea of the progression of the text. The prayer itself seems to fall into three parts (4-16, 17-28, 29-65); but the division between them is not sharp. There is some justification for viewing items 4-28 as a transitional section to the prayer proper, because in these items the ministry of the earthly Jesus is still in view. One might suggest that Jesus' prayer for his own glorification (4-16) and the description of his special ministry among his disciples (17-28) are preparatory to the

main part of the prayer which concerns the ministry of his followers after his departure from the world (29-65).

Cohesion

The cohesion in the prayer is accomplished especially by the different means of repetition occurring in it. The same lexical units are repeated: **didwni** (7, 8, 13, 17, 19, 22, 23, 31, 39, 43, 50, 74, 84, 86); **kosmj** (16, 17, 30, 36, 37, 48, 51, 52, 53, 55, 58, 59, 62, 63, 72, 80, 87, 88); **threw** (39,43,57); **alhgeia** (60, 61, 65); **apostellw** (11, 28, 62, 73, 81, 91); **ef** (40, 68, 75, 76, 79); **docazw/doca** (5, 6, 12, 15, 16). These expressions may be regarded as involving redundancy or more probably emphasis.

The same *syntactical structures* are repeated: clauses with **iha** (6, 8, 10, 14, 40, 46, 49, 55, 57, 65, 68, 71, 72, 75, 79, 85, 86, 94); comparative clauses with **kaqwj** (7, 41, 53, 59, 62, 69, 76, 83); relative clauses involving **didwni** (8, 13, 17, 22, 23, 39, 43, 74, 84, 86).

Finally, the same *themes* are frequently repeated: the significance of Jesus earthly ministry (12, 13, 17, 23, 43, 44, 50, 74, 92), the glorifying of the Son through his death (5, 15, 16, 35); the close connection between the Father and Jesus (10, 11, 16, 22, 32, 33, 34, 41, 69, 70, 71, 76, 77, 78, 89); the theological premise that God loves the world and sent the Son to save it (8, 25, 26, 27, 28, 72, 73, 80, 81, 82); the name (ie., character) of God (17, 39, 43, 92); the unity of the disciples with Jesus and thereby with the Father (40, 41, 68, 69, 70, 71, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79); the disciples' alienation from the world even while in it (37, 51, 52, 53, 55, 58, 59, 63); the outward marks of discipleship (49, 94). Interestingly, items 84-95 appear to comprise a summary in which certain motifs of the whole prayer are taken up and repeated. The somewhat repetitious style of the Johannine discourses is thus apparent in the style of the prayer. But the cohesion of the prayer is further marked by certain features on the microlevel of rhetorical structure, to which we now turn.

Rhetorical features

There are a good number of significant rhetorical features in John 17. According to the classification of the figures (**sxhmata**) in the NT proposed by A. H. Snyman and J. v. w. Cronje,¹⁶ these features may be classified in terms of three processes, namely, repetition, omission, and shifts in expectancy. In what follows an attempt is made to classify all the figures found in John 17 according to these principles.

¹⁶ Ibid., 172-91; see also their study, "Toward a New Classification of the Figures of Speech (**SXHMATA**) in the Greek New Testament," *NTS* 32 (1986) 113-21.

Repetition

1. Repetition of single items in structurally significant positions.
 - a. Epanaphora (initial position).
 - pater** (4, 39, 84, 88).
 - iha** (6, 8, 10, 14, 40, 46, 49, 55, 57, 65, 68, 71, 72, 75, 79, 85, 86, 94).
 - b. Epiphora (final position).
 - ek tou kosmou** (52,53,55,59).
 - ei] ton kosmon** (62, 63).
 - **ejwtw?**(29, 30).
 - **eh t&w homati sou & sledwkaj mi** (39,43).
 - c. Homoeoteleuton (identical endings).
 - ta sa eha** (34).
 - apesteilaj** (81).
 - hgaphsaj**
 - hgaphsaj** (83).
 - dedwkaj** (84).
 - dedwkaj** (86).
 - hgaphsaj** (87).
 - d. Alliteration (repetition of sounds).
 - ta eha panta sa** (33).
 - o[logoj o[soj** (61).
2. Repetition of single items in non-structurally significant positions.
 - a. Anaphora (repetition of content words).
 - pater** (4, 39, 84, 88).
 - edwkaj** (7,17,19,23).
 - dedwkaj** (8, 13, 22, 31, 39, 43, 74, 84, 86).
 - dedwka** (23, 50, 74).
 - kosmj** (51, 72, 80, 88).
 - kosmu** (17, 30, 52, 53, 55, 58, 59, 87).
 - kosm&** (36, 37, 48).
 - kosmon** (16, 62, 63).
 - docason** (5, 15).
 - docas**^ (16).
 - elocasa** (12).
 - doc**^ (16).
 - hgaphsaj** (82, 83, 87, 94).
 - eh** (40, 68, 75, 76, 79, implicit in 41).
 - apesteilaj** (11, 28, 62, 73, 81, 91).
 - kaqwj** (7, 41, 53, 59, 62, 69, 76, 83).
 - ejwtw?**(29, 30, 54, 66, implicit in 31, 56, 67, 71, 79).
 - thrhson** (39).

eþhroun (43)

thrhs ^j (57).

-al hqeia (61).

al hqei% (60,65).

-o@oma (17,92).

oþomati (39,43).

b. Polysyndeton (repetition of structure words).

-kai<(20, 24, 27, 33, 35, 36, 37, 44, 48, 64, 92).

3. Repetition of two or more items in structurally significant positions.

a. Synonymia (semantic parallelism).

-iha ... dws ^ auþoiþ zwħa aiþnion (8).

ihā ginwskousin se<(10).

-eþw <se eþocasa eþiþþj ghj (12).

to >eþon tel eiwsaj oþedwkaj moi

-eþhroun (43).

eþ ul aca (44).

-iha w#in eh (75).

ihā w#in tetel eiwnenoi eij eh

-eþnwrisa auþoiþ to >o@oma sou

kai >gnwrisw (93).

-pro >tu?ton kosmon ei#ai

pro >katabolhj kosmou (87).

-tethrhkan (20).

eþnwkan (21).

eþnwsan (25).

eþisteusan (27).

b. Chiasmus (inverted parallelism)

-docason sou ton uiþn (5)

ihā o[uiþj docas ^ se<(6)

-pater ... docason (4, 5)

docason ... pater (15)

-zwħa aiþnion (8)

aiþnioj zwħ<(9)

-eþa > .. sa<(33)

sa >eþa<(34).

-ek tou?kosmou ouk eiþin (58).

ouk eiþi >ek tou?kosmou (59).

c. Diaphora (identical forms with different meanings).

-kosmon, kosmou 16, 87).

(the created universe)

kosmoj and related forms elsewhere (17, 30, 36, 37, 48, 51, 52, 53, 55, 58, 59, 62, 63, 72, 80, 88).

(mankind)

-iha (6, 8, 40, 46, 49, 65, 68, 72, 75, 80, 85,94).
(final)

iha (10, 14, 55, 57,71,79).
(non-final)

d. Antithesis (different forms with opposite meanings).

-epi>thj ghj (12).

para>seaut&?(15).

-egw>peri>au<wn e<wtw?(29).

ou<peri>tou?kosmou e<wtw?(30).

-kai>ou<eti e<pi>e<h t&?kosm& (36).

kai>au<oi>e<h t&?kosm& ei<sin (37).

Omission

1. Omission of words important for the referential context.

a. Zeugma (the same word).

-iha ginwskousin

-e<wtw?(31, 56, 67,79).

-eh e<smen (41).

2. Omission of words important for the linguistic context.

a. Ellipsis (words that are obviously understood).

-au<oj in its declined forms (14, 24, 44, 93).

-e<pi in its conjugated forms (34, 41, 69, 70, 76, 77, 78, 95).

b. Asyndeton (conjunctions).

-kai<or de<(12, 17, 29, 42, 50, 54, 60, 66).

3. Omission of deep-structure features.

-u<po>ou?qeou?(35).

Shifts in expectancy

1. Shifts involving word-order.

a. Hyperbaton (unusual position in a clause).

-sou (5).

-kai>au<oi<(65).

-qe<w (84).

b. Parenthesis (insertion).

-items 9-11 (which are omitted by some analysts as a gloss).

2. Shifts involving communicative function.

a. Metaphora (a figure based on similarity).

-h[wra (4) = the consummation of Jesus' earthly ministry on the cross.

b. Metonymia (a figure based on association of part for whole).

-pashj sarkoj (7) = mankind.

-**kosmn, kosmu** (16, 87) = the universe.

-**kosmj** and related forms elsewhere = mankind.

-**o@oma, o@omati** (17, 39,43,92) = one's character.

-**docason, elocasa** (5, 12) = to lift up (on the cross).

c. Idioms (words whose meaning is not to be derived from the sum of the parts).

-**o@uibj thj apwleiaj** (45) = one whose nature is characterized by "lostness."

Now as to the possible meanings of the rhetorical features of the prayer, it is obvious that the great majority of the features on the microlevel of rhetorical structure are those which can be classified as repetitions. Of the 59 **sxhmeta** identified in the prayer, 40 cause a process of repetition. Since repetition is the most effective way in which cohesion is attained, it is clear that the prayer is closely bound together as far as its structure is concerned. For example, by the repeated use of the vocative **pater** on the broad level, and by its repetition at the beginning and the end of the prayer (items 4, 39, 69, 84, 88), the unity of the discourse is significantly reinforced. Likewise, the fact that the major thematic units are repeated anaphorically is a striking confirmation of cohesion. Thus the cohesion of the prayer is confirmed by the rhetorical features on the microlevel of rhetoric.

The obvious demarcation of items 4-16 as a separate unit is further reinforced by synonymia in items 8 and 10 and items 12 and 13, the repetition of the **doc-** stem in items 5, 6, 12, 15 and 16 (and nowhere else in the prayer), and the chiasmuses in items 5 and 6, items 4-5 and 15, and items 8 and 9. For these reasons items 4-16 as a whole are in a closer relationship than for instance the relationship between items 17-28 or items 29-65.

A special feature of the prayer is the frequency of both semantic and inverted parallelism, which strengthens cohesion in the chapter as a whole while characterizing the discourse as graceful. On the other hand, the omission of words that can be supplied from the context lends compactness to the text, thus increasing the likelihood that the content will be remembered. The numerous shifts in expectancy also contribute to the effectiveness and acceptability of the text in terms of impact and appeal.

On the basis of these possible meanings of the rhetorical features, it can be concluded that the text of John 17 is well marked by repetition and structural organization. Such a magnificent prayer appropriately sets the stage for the following chapters in which Jesus moves into the garden, and thence to the court of the high priest, the judgment seat of Pilate, and the cross of Calvary.

IV. The Significance of John 17

A study of Jesus' prayer in John 17 reveals several distinctive features. The following are especially to be noted.

1. The prayer is obviously intended to summarize the content of the preceding chapters, especially the words that were spoken by Jesus in the upper room. In this lengthy discourse Jesus dealt with three topics that involve the disciples: their relationship with him, their relationship with one another, and their relationship with the world around them. In the prayer Jesus continues these themes as he prepares his small group of followers for the change his departure would make in their relationships.

2. The prayer is also intended to summarize Jesus' relationship with the Father and the relationship he desired his disciples to maintain with him and the Father. It assumes Jesus' equality with God, confirming his claim that he and the Father are one (10:30). Each has full possession of the other's interests and responsibilities, and it is from this unity in the Godhead that the common interests and responsibilities of the disciples spring. Just as the Father sent Jesus with authority, so Jesus gives them authority (cf. Matt 28:18-20); as Jesus had come to proclaim God's love for the world, so they must proclaim the message of forgiveness; as Jesus had experienced conflict with the world, so they would encounter the same opposition; and as the Son had enjoyed the Father's protection, so they would enjoy the security that eternal life imparts.

3. By far the largest part of the prayer relates to the disciples and not to the Son's needs. Having already predicted the desertion of his followers (16:32), Jesus was much more concerned about them than about himself. Nevertheless, the last section of the prayer shows that Jesus expected the failure to be temporary. The upper room discourse had already made plain the continuation of Jesus' work in these men through the new ministry of the Holy Spirit. Thus the prayer breathes a tone of expectant confidence that the disciples would be kept by the Father's power against the persecution that would soon be theirs.

4. The underlying theme of the prayer is unity. This is established, not by counting how many times the expression *en* occurs, but by noting where it occurs and how it is used. It expresses the purpose both of Jesus' petition for the Father's protection of the disciples and his petition for the disciples' consecration to the Father's service (vv 11, 17). It forms the basis upon which the disciples can maintain a convincing testimony before the world to the revelation of God's character as manifested in the Son (vv 21,23). It witnesses to the new nature of the church because it springs from the common life of

believers in the Father and the Son (vv 11, 21-23). In short, it is the indispensable testimony to the divine mission of Jesus and the essential basis of intimate knowledge and personal communion between God and man. The topic of unity is clearly a theme of great importance and one that lay close to Jesus' heart as he prepared to leave his disciples.

5. No less important is the location of the prayer in the Fourth Gospel, before the prayer in Gethsemane reported in the passion narrative of the synoptic Gospels (Matt 26:36-45; Mark 14:32-41; Luke 22:39-46). This means that, despite the anguish in Gethsemane, Jesus crosses the book Kidron with the confidence that the way of the cross is the way of true glory--a basic NT teaching and one that is uniquely exemplified in the life and ministry of the apostle Paul.¹⁷ Therefore the deep agony which Jesus shared with his disciples in the garden must be read against this background, not solely with reference to the synoptic accounts.

With these preliminary thoughts, it is necessary to inquire into the nature of the unity spoken of in the prayer and the implications of this for evangelical Christianity. This is, of course, a matter of great concern, as well as of great difficulty. But several conclusions seem inevitable.

First, regarding the nature of the unity here envisioned, we should be clear that the unity for which Christ prays is a unity which rests on the unity of the Son and the Father. This does not mean that the unity between believers and God is exactly the same as the unity between Christ and the Father. But it does mean that because God is one, his people are to live on the basis and in the recognition of unity. L. Morris uses too weak an expression when he speaks of an "analogy,"¹⁸ for there is a causal and final connection between the two. The unity of the church dynamically, effectively, and epistemologically depends upon the oneness and unity of God. Similarly in other NT passages the oneness of God is the ontic presupposition of statements about the oneness of the church (cf. esp. 1 Cor 12:4-6; Eph 4:1-6).¹⁹ Thus in John 17 oneness is not a dormant attribute of God but rather God's power to unite and reconcile those hostile to him and to each other. This oneness is, furthermore, not only to be an attribute

¹⁷ See my *Paul, Apostle of Weakness* (New York: Lang, 1984); "Paulus Infirmus: The Pauline Concept of Weakness," *GTJ* 5 (1984) 77-93.

¹⁸ L. Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971) 734.

¹⁹ See also the important argument in Phil 2:1-11 and my "Paul and Christian Unity: A Formal Analysis of Philippians 2:1-4," *JETS* 28 (1985) 299-308.

of God the Father and God the Son but also an attitude of the unified people of God. In point of fact, the church cannot help but exhibit this attitude: by its very existence the church manifests God's nature to the world.

There is another important factor that demonstrates Jesus' dynamic rather than static understanding of God's oneness. This is the mission of the church as a witnessing and ministering body. God's own oneness and manifoldness define the church's oneness and manifoldness.²⁰ For just as God is one in three, so the church is made up of different parts, all of them important, and yet the whole body functions as a unit. Thus for Jesus to call for the unity of his followers, with their various temperaments and abilities, is not a non sequitur. A multiplicity of persons could never truly express oneness if God had not shown himself to be one even in his plurality, the unity amid diversity, the power that establishes and guarantees community. As M. Barth insightfully puts it, "Unless God were three in one, no great feat would be accomplished by calling him 'One'."²¹ Likewise, if the church fails to prove its unity in diversity, it cannot attest to the oneness of God.

In the light of the above discussion, there are at least two pitfalls that must be avoided in interpreting John 17. The first is to regard denominationalism as something inherently wrong. A multiplicity of denominations does not necessarily imply that Christianity is sectarian. To quote D. Barrett, editor of the *World Christian Encyclopedia*: "Diversity--divergences in faith and practice from one denomination to another--is not divisiveness; it is what we would expect when Christianity is being spread among some 8,990 peoples speaking 7,010 languages in the modern world."²² R. Webber likewise writes that "an adequate theology of the church cannot ignore the pluriformity of the church. The church has unfolded in many forms, and no one single external form stands alone as the correct visible expression. As the church settled in various geographical areas and as it penetrated through a variety of cultures, it found expression in multifaceted forms. Thus, the insistence that the church must exist in a single form is a denial not only of the richness of creation, but also of the complexities of the human response."²³ Hence there is no question of

²⁰ For the following discussion I am indebted to the insightful comments of my former professor M. Barth, *Ephesians 4-6* (AB 34A; Garden City: Doubleday, 1974) 464-67.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 467.

²² D. Barrett, *World Christian Encyclopedia* (Oxford: University Press, 1982) v.

²³ R. Webber, *Common Roots. A Call to Evangelical Maturity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978) 57.

an attempt to establish a world church in which everyone would be a catholic, or an orthodox, or an evangelical, not to mention a Methodist, a Southern Baptist, and so forth.

The second pitfall to be avoided is to regard the unity of the church as a purely social or organizational phenomenon. The unity spoken of here is not a matter of agreement on doctrinal or other matters. It is something vastly more difficult. It is, to quote Morris, a unity of heart and mind and will."²⁴ This unity is never merely outward and external, since it involves the union of believers with a spiritual Being. Thus the unity for which Christ prays is essentially a unity which rests upon the believer's abiding in him just as the branch abides in the vine (15:1-8). This relationship with Christ is evidenced (among other things) by a loving and patient attitude toward others. Thus, for example, since each individual believer has the right to embrace the belief of his or her choice, Christians should respect this basic human right by showing genuine religious toleration to all other expressions of faith, including those expressed in what one may consider deviations.

In the second place, the picture of unity in John 17 challenges the overemphasis in evangelical circles on the church as "invisible." The unity in question, while it is essentially spiritual rather than organizational, has an outward expression since it is a unity which the world can observe and which can influence the world. This fact is recognized in the Chicago Call:

We must resist efforts promoting church union-at-any-cost, but we must also avoid mere spiritualized concepts of church unity. We are convinced that unity in Christ requires visible and concrete expression. In this belief, we welcome the development of encounter and cooperation within Christ's church.²⁵

This same emphasis is found in the Lausanne Covenant of 1974: We affirm that the church's visible unity in truth is God's purpose."²⁶ The Covenant then calls for unity "in fellowship, work and witness" and urges "the development of regional and functional co-operation for the furtherance of the church's mission, for strategic planning, for mutual encouragement, and for the sharing of resources and experience."²⁷

²⁴ Morris, *John*, 728.

²⁵ "The Chicago Call," in *The Orthodox Evangelicals* (eds. R. Webber and D. Bloesch; Nashville: Nelson, 1978) 16.

²⁶ "Lausanne Covenant" (Lausanne: International Congress on World Evangelism, n.d.) Clause 7.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

Clearly, Jesus' prayer for unity does not leave unanswered the question of how this unity can achieve visible form. Such tangible expression is found in the love of the disciples for one another, in fulfillment of Jesus' command (13:34-35). Jesus himself will exemplify this love by his death for them on the cross. It is in the light of his death and subsequent exaltation that the disciples will be able to see the real meaning of his earthly ministry (Phil 2:1-11). Thus the unity mentioned here is not a unity achieved by legislation; rather, it is based on the Son's love for his followers, and is manifested in their common love for Christ and for one another.

Exactly what forms of expression this love will take are, of course, variable and much beyond the scope of this paper. But our times demand an open and honest reevaluation of the options. At the very least, mutual love will express itself in the honest acknowledgment that each person and tradition has failed to be as tolerant with differing people and traditions as the demands of Christ would require. The next step would perhaps be a careful study of the Chicago Declaration and the Lausanne Covenant in order to become more aware of the issues that are being raised and the gulfs that some are trying to bridge. One might then move on to works that examine the contemporary evangelical movement and that provide a window through which one can view the rapid changes taking place in evangelicalism. Not to overlook theological issues, the reader is also encouraged to consult books that treat the question of biblical authority and interpretation, as well as works that seek to define missions in terms of evangelism and social justice.²⁸

²⁸ An annotated bibliography of works in each of these areas—evangelicalism, Scripture, and missions—may be found in R. J. Coleman, *Issues of Theological Conflict* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972) 275-82. See also the recent work edited by D. A. Garrett and R. R. Melick, Jr., *Authority and Interpretation: A Baptist Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987). One might also consult F. B. Nelson, "A Call to Church Unity" (in *The Orthodox Evangelicals*, 190-210). Nelson writes, "I believe the time has come for all the stops to be pulled out in the contemporary quest for church unity" (p. 207). Some of the implications he raises are most telling and need to be considered by every thinking evangelical. These include the setting aside of stereotypes and hasty judgments of others; the belief that evangelicals need the whole church in their pilgrimage toward maturity; the rejection of the false dichotomy between evangelism and social justice; the promotion of denominational mergers and the union of local congregations; the cultivation of increased discussion between evangelicals; and the exploration of concrete and visible ways of meeting together, worshiping together, and praying together (p. 208). Concerning the latter suggestion I may be permitted a personal reminiscence. While a student in Basel, Switzerland, I attended die Baptisten-Gemeinde Basel, a small Baptist congregation of about thirty-five members. But an annual *ökumenischer Gottesdienst* (ecumenical worship service) was held in the city's great cathedral, and we Baptists were invited to participate (along with all the other

A third and final implication of our study of John 17 is so obvious it is almost unnecessary to mention. If our Lord prayed for the unity of his church, should we who have believed in him and have received his Spirit do any less?

Only as unity is sought with passion and bathed in prayer can it be cultivated. I do not doubt for a moment that there will be some disagreement with my merely mentioning mutual toleration as an implication of our study of John 17. It is my conviction that something very real is to be gained by discussing the issues that divide evangelicals. It would be impossible, however, even to begin this process without first dealing with the prejudices within ourselves that hinder the positive analysis and appreciation of another's heritage. If we in the evangelical community cannot humbly turn to God and ask him for a new awareness of our own shortcomings and for a sincere desire to love our brothers and sisters within the community, the chances are slim that we will ever become an effective witness to those outside the church. Let us, therefore, gratefully reaffirm before God our unity as members of Christ's body, humbly acknowledge our sectarian mentality, and sincerely commit ourselves by the power of the Spirit to flesh out the prayer of John 17 in a way that will promote the growth of the whole church of Jesus Christ.

churches in Basel) in this "great congregation" in order to joyfully praise God, hear the Word, and give public testimony to the unity of the body of Christ. Such a service affirmed both the unity and diversity of the church, and the Swiss were amazed at the sense of oneness that could cross denominational and confessional ties. Could not similar meetings be held in large public arenas in American cities, uniting all the people of God who will cooperate, so that the world could see the visible reality of the unified church? The annual Easter sunrise celebration in Los Angeles is a good start, but only a start.

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