

The Priesthood of Christ and His Ministers

By André Feuillet

Translated by Matthew J. O'Connell

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those who "share the same flesh and blood" with him (2:14) and whom he wants to set free from the fear of death (2:15).

There is another, equally essential point to be made here. The death from which Christ asks to be delivered in Hebrews 5:7 is not simply bodily death, nor even the torments of crucifixion. "Death" must be understood as in 2:14 where it is the supreme catastrophe behind which the power of the devil lurks. This had already been in 2:9: "We do see in Jesus one who was 'for a short while made lower than the angels' and is now 'crowned with glory and splendour' because he submitted to death; by God's grace he had to experience death for all mankind."

By his bodily death, then, Jesus freed men from spiritual death which is the normal companion of bodily death and makes the latter so fearful. He was heard in the sense that, thanks to him, God removed a fearful evil from mankind, and the devil, involved in that evil, was repulsed. It is not only or even chiefly to Gethsemani that we should relate Christ's priestly prayer in Hebrews 5:7; it is also, and above all, to the prayer of Jesus reported in John 12:27-28, a prayer that ends in a victory song: "Now sentence is being passed on this world; now the prince of this world is to be overthrown. And when I am lifted up from the earth, I shall draw all men to myself" (Jn. 12:31-32). Once again, the Letter to the Hebrews turns our minds to what is said in John.

In summary: The synoptic accounts of the Last Supper and the Johannine tradition concerning Jesus are the chief source of the teaching in the Letter to the Hebrews on priesthood and sacrifice. It is principally through this twofold gospel tradition that Hebrews refers back to Isaiah 53.

Chapter 4

The Priesthood of Christ's Ministers

AT THE END OF THE PRECEDING CHAPTER we emphasized the numerous similarities between the teaching of the Letter to the Hebrews on sacrifice and priesthood and the teaching we believe we can discern in the Johannine writings, especially in the priestly prayer of John 17.

But amid the likenesses there is one major difference. The Letter to the Hebrews asserts very emphatically that there is only one priest, Christ, and only one sacrifice, the one Christ offered on Golgotha. It delights in drawing the contrast between, on the one hand, the successive priests of the old covenant and the constantly repeated sacrifices of the Levitical liturgy which were each time ineffective, and, on the other hand, the eternal priesthood of Christ, the Son of God, and the infinite value of his self-oblation, *once and for all*, on Calvary. The Letter to the Hebrews gives no hint that in addition to the incarnate Son of God, ordinary men could be considered as priests in the Christian dispensation.

On the contrary, according to the priestly prayer of Christ, as we understand it, Christ gives his apostles a share in his own twofold consecration as priest and victim. Obviously, this is an extremely important gesture and one that is highly relevant to the present situation in the Church.

The present urgency, as well as the permanent value, of a study of Christ's action recently found very forceful expression. By way of introduction to this chapter we cannot do better than to quote some sentences from a manifesto that hits off nicely the very purpose of the present book:

It is useful to draw up a list of different kinds of ministry as the basis for choice and distribution of them among priests and laity. It is even more important, however, to determine and set apart what is essential to the priestly ministry. The decreasing number of vocations presses us to put the emphasis on the essential tasks of the priest. Isn't it startling to see priests looking for various professions while neglecting such essentially priestly tasks as the teaching of religion at all levels and the celebration of the sacraments in the spirit of the Church? These essential tasks must be presented in the light of the gospel and the Acts of the Apostles and in connection with the actions and words of Christ. Christ alone is a priest. The people of God as a whole is priestly. Each member of God's people shares through baptism and confirmation in the royal priesthood of Christ. The priesthood of the faithful, however, and the priesthood of the ordained priest are not of the same order. This must be forcefully reasserted and *given a theological, and especially a scriptural, basis* that will be crystal clear and thus put an end to the efforts to reduce the ministerial priesthood to the universal priesthood of all Christians. The distinction between the common priesthood and the ministerial priesthood must be put forward more strongly.¹

We shall begin by explaining those passages of the priestly prayer that speak of the consecration of the apostles. We shall speak later of two passages in the fourth gospel that we think have the same doctrinal significance: the washing of the feet (13:1-20), which we will show can be taken as a kind of prelude to the consecration of the apostles; and the gift of the Holy Spirit to the apostles in the Easter Christophany of John

20:19-23, which is a consequence of or complement to their consecration.

The fourth gospel speaks only of the apostles. But once Christ had willed the Church to be a lasting society, the apostles had to provide for successors to themselves who would share, as they did, in the priestly consecration of Jesus in a way that would distinguish them from the rest of the Christian community. Our main task, then, is to give solid proof that the apostles were really priests, after the model of Christ, the supreme priest; many today tend to doubt that they were. Yet it is not without interest that in the Johannine writings themselves the apostles are already providing successors to themselves in their role as leaders of the Church. With this perspective as our guide, we shall, in the final section of this chapter, tackle the difficult problem of the "angels" of the Churches in the letters of the Apocalypse (Chapters 2-3).

We shall limit ourselves here to an examination of the Johannine writings. The Pauline corpus provides numerous valuable indications concerning the hierarchical Church, but we shall deliberately leave them aside or, at most, speak of them only in passing and by comparison with what we find in the Johannine literature.

THE PRIESTLY CONSECRATION OF THE APOSTLES (JN. 17:17, 19)

A POINT OF PHILOLOGY will serve us as a springboard. The Letter to the Hebrews and the prayer in John 17 both apply the same verb "to sanctify" (*hagiazein*) both to Christ who "sanctifies" and to other men who "are sanctified" by Christ. But the meaning of the verb is not quite the same in both documents.

Consider, first of all, the various uses of the verb "to sanc-

tify" in the Letter to the Hebrews: "The one who sanctifies, and the ones who are sanctified, are of the same stock" (Heb. 2:11);² "And this will was for us to be made holy by the offering of his body made once and for all by Jesus Christ" (10:10); "By virtue of that one single offering, he has achieved the eternal perfection of all whom he is sanctifying" (10:14);³ "Anyone who disregards the Law of Moses is ruthlessly 'put to death on the word of two witnesses or three'; and you may be sure that anyone who tramples on the Son of God, and who treats the 'blood of the covenant' which sanctified him as if it were not holy . . . will be condemned to a far severer punishment" (10:28-29); "And so Jesus too suffered outside the camp to sanctify the people with his own blood" (13:12).

There is also 9:13-14: "The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer are sprinkled on those who have incurred defilement and they restore the holiness of their outward lives;⁴ how much more effectively the blood of Christ, who offered himself as the perfect sacrifice to God through the eternal Spirit, can purify our inner self from dead actions so that we do our service to the living God." This text is of special interest to us because it shows the Letter to the Hebrews undertaking the same kind of transposition which we observed earlier in the fourth gospel. The author is deliberately shifting sanctification from the ritual to the moral sphere.

We turn now to the three uses of "sanctify" in John 17: "Consecrate them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world, and for their sake I have consecrated myself so that they too may be consecrated in truth" (17:17-19). The difference between Hebrews and John 17 is manifest. In the Letter to the Hebrews all Christians without distinction are sanctified, and the sanctification is clearly of the moral order. In John 17 Jesus asks the Father only for the sanctification of the apostles;

he is clearly thinking only of them, and he does not repeat this petition when he comes to the third part of his prayer and prays for all the faithful (17:20-26).⁵

There is a further point. The consecration or sanctification of the apostles is closely connected with that of Christ and is in the image of his: "For their sake I have consecrated myself so that *they too* may be consecrated in truth." Now, as we saw above, Christ's "consecration" of himself in 17:19 is a consecration as victim, and depends on the consecration as priest which he had received from the Father (10:36). The consecration by the Father was, in turn, connected closely with the mystery of the hypostatic union, which is a permanent reality; consequently the priesthood of Christ is necessarily eternal.

Against this background we are already in a position to determine the exact nature of the consecration that Jesus asks his Father to bestow on the apostles. It can only be a consecration to priesthood. For, as W. Thüsing has accurately observed, when Christ, *acting as a priest*, consecrates himself as a victim (Jn. 17:14-19), the dominant idea is that of the very real assimilation or conformation of the apostles to Christ.⁶ Like Christ, the apostles have been sent into the world; like Christ, and in the same sense as he, they too must be consecrated. J. H. Bernard refers us to the command given to Moses in Exodus 28:41: "You will . . . consecrate them [Aaron and his sons] to serve me in the priesthood" (consecrate is *hagiazein*).⁷

There can be no question for the apostles, any more than for Christ, of being set apart only temporarily. The consecration the apostles receive marks them forever; a merely temporary consecration would not really assimilate a man to the eternal priest of the new covenant. In 17:19 Christ says: ". . . so that they too may be consecrated in truth." Here the perfect participle (literally: "[men] having been consecrated") indicates a permanent state already acquired; we

shall see further on that the words "in truth" contrast this permanent reality with the imperfect and temporary institutions of the Old Testament. Although the point being made is different, the same basic meaning is expressed in Revelation 21:14: "The city walls stood on twelve foundation stones, each one of which bore the name of one of the twelve apostles of the Lamb." The permanent Jerusalem of the end of time will forever keep the hierarchic structure given it by Christ.

Max Thurian proposes other Scriptural and theological arguments for the permanence of the priestly character:

The gifts and choice of God are irreversible, St. Paul tells us (Rm. 11:29). It is impossible to imagine the apostles thinking their ministry to be limited in time. . . . God is faithful, despite the possible infidelities of his ministers. God does not repent of his gifts and his call (another way of rendering Rm. 11:29). If we are unfaithful, he remains faithful, for he cannot deny his own nature (2 Tm. 2:13). Christian tradition is fully justified in holding the pastoral ministry to be a lifelong commitment and in speaking of the permanent character given to the minister at his ordination."⁸

The connection which Christ makes between his own consecration as victim and the consecration of the apostles as priests ("I have consecrated myself so that they too may be consecrated in truth") shows clearly that, like all the other blessings of the new covenant, the priesthood of the apostles is the fruit of Christ's self-giving on the cross as an expiatory victim that men may have eternal life. By this very fact, that priesthood is also connected in a special way with the eucharistic mystery in which Christ, who has already given himself on Calvary for the life of the world, now gives himself to each of his disciples as food: "The bread that I shall give is my flesh [already given] for the life of the world" (Jn. 6:51).

In our first chapter we showed that even if the prayer of Jesus in John 17 does not speak directly of the eucharist, it is nonetheless uttered in a eucharistic atmosphere. As W. Thü-

ing writes, the two essential themes of John 17—glory and unity—are:

two key-terms in the whole work of salvation, and not simply in the eucharist. But in the work of salvation there is neither the glorification of Jesus nor the unity of the Church without the eucharist. Is the eucharist not part of the glory given to Jesus? In the eucharist the Holy Spirit is given, and the love which unites Jesus to his Father is breathed into the hearts of believers, so that they may be one in this love and their unity may lead the world to faith.⁹

The eucharistic mystery is at the very center of Christian worship. It is suitable, then, but also very meaningful, that the eucharist should provide the context within which Jesus asks his Father to consecrate the apostles as priests.

That petition, with its eucharistic context, can be easily related to an element in the synoptic accounts of the Last Supper to which the Council of Trent and speculative theology rightly attach great importance.¹⁰ When Jesus institutes the eucharist, in which he gives himself as food and drink and thereby anticipates his self-giving on the cross (what he gives as food and drink is his body broken on the cross and his blood poured out on Calvary), he asks those at the table with him, that is, the Twelve (who alone share the meal with him) to repeat in their turn his eucharistic action. It is evident that they must at the same time be enabled to repeat this wonderful gesture. The words of Luke (22:19) and Paul (1 Co. 11:24-25): "Do this as a memorial of me," and the words of John (17:17-18): "Consecrate them . . . I consecrate myself," clarify and complement each other: The Father consecrates the apostles as priests, and one of the essential purposes of the consecration is to enable them to act "in the person of Christ" and to consecrate him as a victim under the signs of bread and wine, as a memorial of the one sacrifice of Golgotha ("as a memorial of me").

The reader may be inclined to object that Paul's two ex-

PLICIT references to the celebration of the Eucharist (1 Co. 10:16–21; 11:17–27) make no mention of anyone presiding over the gathering and rather show the eucharist to be essentially a community action. But the silence is, in fact, not total, inasmuch as the words “the blessing-cup that we bless” (1 Co. 10:16) probably allude to the formula of consecration as pronounced by the president of the meeting; note that in 1 Samuel 9:13 the words “bless the sacrifice” (*eulogein tēn thysian*) mean “consecrate the victim.”¹¹ In any event, the silence is not a sure proof that no one presided over the gathering, for another explanation is preferable. Paul’s language, especially “the table of the Lord” as contrasted with “the table of demons” (1 Co. 10:21), shows that he regards the eucharist as a true sacrifice. But, since there can only be one sacrifice in the new covenant, Paul can only think of the true celebrant of the eucharist as Christ himself. If, then, there are men who repeat the gestures of the Last Supper in the presence of the assembled Church, they can only be living signs of the invisible presence and permanent mediatorial action of the Christ the priest.¹²

It is clear, however, that the role of priests in the new covenant cannot be limited to the eucharist, however important the latter may be. Their mission, being a sharing in that of Christ, must be coextensive with his. It must therefore include the preaching of the word of God, from which indeed the eucharistic mystery itself is inseparable, as the discourse on the bread of life in John 6 shows. As Jesus indicates in John 17:20, it will normally be through the mediation of Christ’s ambassadors and thanks to their preaching that men through the centuries will believe in Jesus. It is true enough that the Council of Trent did not stress this important aspect of Christian priesthood, although it had been prefigured in the Old Testament inasmuch as priests were charged with the religious education, unfortunately often overlooked, of the people of God. The reason for Trent’s oneness is that its aim was

to oppose the errors of Luther, who denied the existence of a special priesthood communicated through the sacrament of orders, as well as the sacrificial nature of the Mass. In his view, there could only be delegates of the community, and their only function was to preach the gospel.

In both John 17 and the accounts of the Last Supper, we see men being specially set apart by Jesus for functions strictly reserved to them. There is nothing surprising about this if we remember the structure of Jesus’ prayer in John 17 (cf. Chapter 2, above). In this tripartite prayer the apostles occupy a special section, set between the prayer of Jesus for himself and his prayer for all believers. In other words, they occupy the same middle place as the Levitical priests in the liturgy of the Day of Atonement, when the high priest offers a threefold expiation: for himself, for the other priests, and for the whole people of God.

We also saw earlier, at the end of Chapter 3, that according to the Apocalypse, Christ makes “kings and priests” of all his faithful disciples. In fact, if we take all the scriptural data into account, and especially the triple link of the Servant of Yahweh with the Davidic line, the prophets, and the priests, we must say even more of the disciples of Christ. As Max Thurian writes:

Christ came as the Servant who fully carries out the old covenant: he is the perfect successor of the prophets, the priests, and the kings of the chosen people; he brings to completion the work they had begun in the service of the living God. Once Christ has come, there will be no more prophets, priests, and kings, as the old covenant knew these, but only a prophetic, priestly, and kingly people.¹³

But analogy with the Old Testament also makes it clear that the priesthood of all God’s people under the new covenant does not exclude a priestly ministry strictly reserved to certain individuals. In Exodus 19:5–6 Yahweh says that although all the earth and all peoples belong to him, he has nonetheless de-

termed to make of Israel alone "a kingdom of priests." That is the reason for his choice of them. The meaning is doubtless that Israel will be a kind of intermediary between God and the other nations; Israel will be the normal place where he manifests himself, and the means by which he will communicate his salvation to other men. And, in fact, it was indeed through Israel that the gentiles came to know the one true God. But this choice of Israel does not prevent a further setting apart of men within the bosom of the chosen people for the exercise of liturgical functions that are strictly reserved to them. Later on, the third part of the Book of Isaiah foretells the resacralization of the whole chosen people: "But you, you will be named 'priests of Yahweh,' they will call you 'ministers of our God'" (61:6). But once again the same oracle foretells also the choice of priests and Levites for the purpose of helping the people to maintain its sacred character: "Of some of them I will make priests and Levites, says Yahwêh" (Is. 66:21).

The two settings apart, of the first people of God and of priests in the narrow sense of the term, are neither exclusive of each other nor identical with each other. In fact, the serious sin of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, which led to their death, was to deny the distinction between the two kinds of priesthood. "Korah . . . Dathan and Abiram . . . joined forces against Moses and Aaron saying to them, 'You take too much on yourselves! The whole community and all its members are consecrated, and Yahweh lives among them. Why set yourselves higher than the community of Yahweh?' . . . The moment he [Moses] finished saying all these words, the ground split open under their feet, the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them, their families too, and all Korah's men and all their belongings" (Nb. 16:3, 31-32).¹⁴

In order, probably, to express the difference between the two priesthoods, the Septuagint uses for the priesthood of all the people the word *hierateuma* (Ex. 19:6; 2 M. 2:17; the *-ma* ending points to the result of the action). For the priest-

hood in the narrower sense, it regularly uses the term *hierateia* (Ex. 29:9; 39:19; 40:15; Nb. 3:10; 18:1, 7; 25:13; Jos. 18:7; 1 K. 2:26; Ezr. 2:62; Ne. 7:64; 13:29). The same distinction of terms is found in the New Testament: *hierateia* is used for the priesthood of Zechariah (Lk. 1:9) or the sons of Levi (Heb. 7:5), and *hierateuma* for the priesthood of the Christian people in 1 Peter 2:5, 9: "so that you too, the holy priesthood that offers the spiritual sacrifices which Jesus Christ has made acceptable to God, may be living stones . . . You are 'a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a consecrated nation . . .'"¹⁵

We need not enter here into a lengthy discussion of the nature of the distinction. But we can, even while staying within the Johannine writings, show that the distinction has a solid basis. All the disciples of Christ must love one another as Christ has loved them, and must sacrifice themselves as he has done before them. They must even be ready to give their lives ("lay [down] their souls") as he did. It is undoubtedly through such self-sacrifice and readiness to die that they chiefly carry out their priestly office (cf. Jn. 12:24-26; 13:34; 15:12; 1 Jn. 3:16; Rm. 12:1-2; 1 P. 2:5). But how are they to fulfill their duty and reach such heights of generosity if they do not have at their disposition the redemptive and sanctifying power of Christ? It is by means of Christ's ambassadors and agents and the exercise of their ministerial priesthood that his power is normally present with and given to his disciples. From such texts as John 13:20; 17:18; and 20:21, it follows that Jesus hands on his own mission of sanctification to the Twelve and thus also to their successors.¹⁶

PRIESTHOOD AND MISSION

WHEREAS THE PRIESTS of the Old Testament were not the messengers of Yahweh, priesthood and mission are closely connected for the apostles: "Consecrate them in the truth . . .

As you have sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world." Priestly consecration by the Father and mission go together in the life of the incarnate Son of God: "someone the Father has consecrated and sent into the world." Priestly consecration by the Father and mission will also go together in the lives of the apostles. In fact, due allowance being made, the apostles will be, as it were, other Christs! It is true, of course, that while it is the Father who sends his Son into the world, it is Christ who sends the apostles. Yet through Christ it is the Father, origin of all things, who does the sending since the sole reason for their being sent is that they may carry on the mission of the incarnate Son of God.

In the strict sense of the terms, Christ is the only one sent by the Father into the world in order to save it; he alone is the Saviour of the world. If, then, the apostles are also sent into the world to labor for its salvation, it can only be as the ambassadors or stewards of Christ, who act in his name and in dependence on him.¹⁷ Similarly, Christ alone is, in the strict sense, the priest of the new dispensation. He is priest by nature and for ever because he is the incarnate Son of God; he can have neither rival nor successor. If, then, the apostles and those who continue their work become priests, it can only be as the agents of Christ the priest, who depend on him and act "in his person."

What we would like to do here is to analyze more exactly, in the light of the data provided in the gospel, the relations between the priesthood of the apostles and their mission. The consecration of Christ as priest precedes his being sent into the world: "someone the Father has consecrated and sent into the world" (Jn. 10:36). So, too, the priestly consecration of the apostles (17:17-19) precedes their being definitively sent out into the world, an event that takes place only after the resurrection of Jesus: "As the Father sent me, so am I sending you" (20:21). The end of the first gospel harmonizes with the Johannine presentation: "All authority in heaven and on

earth has been given to me. Go therefore, make disciples of all the nations" (Mt. 28:18-19; cf. Mk. 16:15).

In John 17, however, the mission is also presented as an accomplished fact, an event in the past: "As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world" (17:19). Does not mission therefore seem to have preceded priestly consecration, since Jesus is just now asking the Father for this consecration: "Consecrate them in truth"? How is this discrepancy to be explained? The answer is that in John 17 Jesus is anticipating the future, as though he had already returned to the Father. At the same time, however, we must not forget that consecration and definitive mission were preceded by a lengthy preparation that began when the Twelve were appointed or chosen.

In John 17, Jesus alludes to this preparation. For, whereas in Verses 2 and 24 the formula "that which you have given me" applies to all the disciples of Jesus, present and future, in Verse 6, which speaks only of the apostles, the latter are described as "the men you took from the world to give me." In John 15:19 this setting apart from the world is attributed to Christ himself: "Because you do not belong to the world, because my choice withdrew you from the world, therefore the world hates you."

The appointment of the Twelve is highlighted in the three synoptic gospels (Mk. 3:13-19; Mt. 10:1-4; Lk. 6:12-16); it is already a setting apart. The text of Mark is especially clear: "He appointed twelve; they were to be his companions and to be sent out to preach, with power to cast out devils" (3:14). The idea that the apostles were to represent the whole people of God and should therefore be twelve in number seems to be a priestly rather than a prophetic idea. Thus, in the pectoral of the high priest twelve precious stones were set, bearing the names of the twelve tribes of Israel (Ex. 28:17-21), and in the shoulder straps which supported the ephod were set two more precious stones, each inscribed with the

names of six of the twelve tribes (Ex. 28:9–11). The language of Mark in 3:14 is unusual: *kai epoïesen dodēka*, literally “he made twelve.” The use of the verb “make” to mean “appoint” is non-classical, but it is found in 1 Kings 12:31: “he appointed priests” (*epoïesen hierais*; cf. 13:33; 2 Ch. 2:18), and again in 1 Samuel 12:6: “he [Yahweh] who raised up Moses and Aaron.” In these passages the reference is not to prophetic vocations but to the cultic institutions of the Old Testament.

The appointment of the Twelve means two things: They are to leave their present familial and social milieu and remain with Jesus; they are to share in his ministry. It is clear that even though the other disciples of Jesus cannot be disinterested in the cause of God’s kingdom, the Twelve are now bound to make it their special concern. This is why as time passes we see the Twelve often receiving special instruction. The consecration for which Jesus prays in John 17 is thus the climax of a long preparation that has already set them apart from the mass of disciples.

If we prescind from Luke 6:13, the fourth gospel is the only one to speak of choice (verb: *eklegesthai*) with regard to the Twelve: 6:70; 13:18; 15:16 (twice), 19. The five occurrences of the term are the more noteworthy in that John rarely mentions the Twelve as such. The great Old Testament prophets were not instructed by Yahweh in the same way that the Twelve are instructed by Jesus, nor were they said to be chosen. The objects of a divine choice or election were the kings, the chief agents in the history of salvation (Abraham, Moses), places of worship, the priests, and the Levites.¹⁸

This fact about “choice” helps us realize how complex and difficult it is to define the idea of “apostle.” Since the Twelve are appointed or chosen by Jesus, we are reminded of the cultic institutions of the Old Testament, and especially the priesthood. On the other hand, the appointment of the Twelve as a group was preceded by individual callings which remind

us of the calling of the prophets: the calling of the four fishermen (Mk. 1:14–20 par.), the calling of Levi (Mk. 2:13–14 par.). There is also the remark that immediately precedes the listing of the Twelve: “He went up into the hills and summoned those he wanted” (Mk. 3:13).

The fact that the apostles are sent by Jesus turns our thoughts in the same direction. Just as Yahweh had his envoys, the prophets, who were his greatest servants, through whom he spoke to the chosen people and in whom he was, as it were, present to his people, so Jesus too (and this is a mark of his transcendence) has his envoys and servants. The latter are the apostles, in whom he is, as it were, present, so that whoever receives them receives Jesus himself, and whoever rejects them rejects Jesus himself (Mt. 10:24–25, 40; Jn. 13:20; 15:20–21).

In short, like the suffering Servant of Isaiah and like Christ himself, the apostles resemble both the priests and the prophets of the old covenant. It is a well-known fact that St. Paul thought of, and expressed, what we call his conversion, in terms of a prophetic calling; he had in mind more especially the calling of Jeremiah (cf. Ga. 1:15 and Jr. 1:5). But his case is not to be regarded as an exception; what is true of him is basically true of all the apostles.

When St. Paul writes that the foundation of the Church, God’s holy temple, is the apostles and the prophets (Ep. 2:20–21), we can hardly take this as referring to the Old Testament prophets since these would not be named after the apostles and, great though they were, do not form part of the Christian building but only prepare for it. Nor can we take the word “prophets” as referring only to the prophets of the New Testament; these figures are too shadowy to be given such importance. “Prophets” must include, at least in part, the apostles themselves: the apostles who are also prophets (we note that there is but one article with the two nouns: “the apostles and prophets”).¹⁹

Admittedly, if the priesthood passes from the apostles to their successors, it does not follow that the latter are also prophets in the same way and the same degree. After all, St. Paul had just reminded us that the apostles play a unique role in the history of salvation; there is a sense in which they have no successors.²⁰ But we must at least maintain that the priesthood of the new covenant is in the line of the priesthood of Isaiah 53 and of Christ himself; that is, priesthood in the New Testament is a synthesis of both the priestly and the prophetic conceptions of the Old Testament.

When we bear in mind that the mission of the apostles is like that of the prophets, it becomes easier to understand how John 17 can suggest that, alongside the high priest of the new covenant, there are other priests, the "consecrated" individuals of Verses 17 and 19. The Old Testament knew only one divine revealer: Yahweh alone teaches; Moses and the prophets have no real successors.²¹ But the one revealer does communicate through numerous prophets who are his spokesmen; the one God speaks through these many instruments. Similarly, in the New Testament there is only one priest, the incarnate Son of God, but he speaks and acts in the Church through many priests who are simply his instruments. The latter may act as priests only in dependence on Christ, for their priesthood and mission derive from the priesthood and mission of Christ.

CONSECRATION IN THE TRUTH (JN. 17:17), ASSIMILATION TO CHRIST THE TRUTH, AND THE SPIRITUAL LIBERATION OF MANKIND • THE PRIEST AT THE SERVICE OF MEN THROUGH THE WORD OF GOD AND THE SACRAMENTS

WE MUST NOW TURN to the very important and difficult formulas of John 17:17 and 19: consecration "in the truth" and consecration "in truth." Though they seem almost identical,

they are not to be taken as synonymous. Grammatically, they differ since the first has the definite article and the second does not. We must take each formula separately.

But first, what does the word "truth" mean? Despite the opinion of some exegetes,²² it is difficult to maintain that the Johannine idea of "truth" is wholly reducible to the "fidelity" (*'emet*) of the Old Testament. Other commentators have often derived the meaning of the term from Platonism or Gnosticism, in which truth has to do with what is hidden from the senses and is permanent, in contrast to what is superficial and changing. I. de la Potterie rightly rejects this approach.²³

Without entirely forgetting the Greek world (cf. Jn. 8:32: "liberation through the truth" is a commonplace of Hellenistic philosophy), we must certainly start with the fact that in the Old Testament truth is not atemporal and suprahistorical, as in Hellenism, but bound up with the history of salvation and the covenant. At the same time, however, we must take into account the partly new meaning the word "truth" receives in the apocalyptic and sapiential literature as well as in the Qumran writings.

In the sapiential and apocalyptic literature "truth" is synonymous with revealed teaching, mystery, or the divine plan of salvation. A glimpse of this meaning may be caught as early as Proverbs 8:6, to be translated as, "My mouth proclaims the truth" (cf. 23:23). In Daniel 11:2 "truth" refers to the revelations brought to Daniel by an angel; in Daniel 10:21 "the Book of Truth" is the book in which the divine plan of salvation is written down. The promise of Wisdom 3:9, that the just "will understand the truth," does not mean that they will experience God's fidelity or that they will see God, but that they will at last understand God's mysterious plan.²⁴

Especially important for us here is the sapiential Psalm 119, in which the Law (or the Word) signifies the whole of divine revelation considered as a rule of life, and in which Law, knowledge, and truth are very closely interconnected.²⁵ In a

rather remarkable way, the Psalm several times makes Word (or Law) and truth equivalent (cf. Verses 43, 142, 151, 160). Jesus will later do the same thing in the very passage we are now studying: "your word is truth" (Jn. 17:17), and John does it in the prologue of his gospel where "the Word" is the very person of Jesus. The conclusion to be drawn is clear: the incarnate Son of God, the Word made flesh, brings the truth because his coming into this world, his teaching, and his action all are the definitive revelation of the divine plan for salvation.

In the Book of Wisdom the revelation of Wisdom's action in history brings with it the revelation of Wisdom's own nature: "What Wisdom is and how she came to be, I will now declare, I will hide none of the secrets from you; I will . . . set out knowledge of her, plainly, not swerving from the truth" (Ws. 6:22). So, too, in the fourth gospel, the understanding of Christ's saving intervention in the world depends on the understanding of his origin and nature and thus of the very mystery of God. In the last analysis, truth in the fourth gospel is something christological and eschatological, for it is the mystery of the divine being and the divine plan for salvation insofar as these have been revealed in the person and work of Jesus Christ. The invisible, transcendent God has spoken in his only Son who is now incarnate. Consequently, "truth" has its ultimate basis in the very person of Christ; in Christ truth has entered the world.²⁸

Exegetes have sometimes seen a relationship between the prologue of the fourth gospel and the priestly prayer of Chapter 17.²⁷ One of the most striking resemblances between the two is the fact that the word "truth" occurs twice in the prologue and three times in Chapter 17 and that in both places it is connected with the word. There is an obvious parallel between "your word is truth" (Jn. 17:17) and "The Word was made flesh . . . full of grace and truth. . . . grace and truth have come through Jesus Christ" (Jn. 1:14, 17). It is a fact,

of course, that in John 17:17 "word" does not directly refer to the person of God's only Son, as it does in the prologue.²⁸ But is there any doubt that in 17:17 the person of the Son is what is ultimately being referred to, as the living synthesis of the revelation that Christ brought to the world? In recording the statement in 17:17 could the evangelist have forgotten what he himself had written at the beginning of his gospel?

We are now in a position to explain more fully what is meant by the consecration of the apostles "in the truth." According to M.-J. Lagrange, it is not enough to say simply that the apostles are to be at the service of the truth; the meaning is rather that they are to be "penetrated and interiorly changed by the truth."²⁹ W. Thüsing comments: "The Father consecrates the disciples of Jesus in the truth by keeping them within the sacred space formed by his revelation and by bestowing on them the power of his revelation, which is the power of the Holy Spirit."³⁰

Thüsing's final words here suggest that we should connect the petition "consecrate them in the truth" with the statement: "When the Paraclete, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will lead you into the path of truth in its entirety" (Jn. 16:13).³¹ The various promises concerning the Paraclete show that his role is to make them understand from within the teachings of Jesus; it is to be the interior teacher of the disciples, enabling them, as it were, to get inside the truth that Jesus reveals; that is, to get inside Jesus himself. For he is in his very being the Way which leads to the Father (14:6), as well as the Truth (ibid.), and sums up in his own person the whole revelation he brings concerning what God is and what men are or ought to be in relation to God.

We should remember at this point that the promises of the Paraclete have a double reference.³² They certainly refer to future history and the Church of all the ages since they herald the fulfillment of the prophecies uttered by Jeremiah (31:31-34: divine teaching to be given within man's heart) and

Ezekiel (36:26–27: communication of God's spirit) concerning the new covenant. But, first of all, and in a very special way, the promises refer to the apostles, who alone hear the discourses after the Supper. They are the first to be introduced to the truth in its entirety, so that they may establish the apostolic tradition which the later Church will not change but simply explain and make explicit. As eyewitnesses of Christ the Truth, the apostles have a unique role in the Church.

In asking, then, that the Father consecrate the apostles in the truth, Jesus is, for all practical purposes, asking that the Father make them like him ("the priest is another Christ"), prolongations, as it were, of he who is by his very being the Truth. Moreover, the connection between consecration in the truth and the promises voiced in 16:13 suggests that the assimilation to Jesus the Truth will be effected by the Holy Spirit. Commentators have wondered at times that the priestly prayer should say nothing about the Holy Spirit; but, in fact, the Spirit's action is presupposed at several points and especially at the point of which we are now speaking.³³

Jesus the Truth, to whom the apostles are to be assimilated in a special way by their consecration, is the one Savior given men by the Father. The Father was looking to the salvation of mankind when he consecrated Jesus and sent him into the world. So, too, it is with the salvation of men in view that Jesus asks the Father to consecrate his apostles. As M.-J. Lagrange says in commenting on 17:17: "In order to act upon the world without being of the world, that is, without being contaminated by it, the disciples must receive a consecration which will complete their separation from the world and bring them close to God."³⁴ Their being set apart and separated from the world is not intended to isolate the apostles from the world, but only to assimilate them to the Truth that sets men free, to the one Saviour who lived in the world without being of it. In this way, they will be better fitted to work

for the salvation of mankind by the same means that the one Saviour of men used.

We must emphasize this twofold orientation which the priest of the new covenant has in his mission among men. Being "consecrated in the truth," he is to bring the saving truth to the world, and he is to work for the world's salvation by using the same means as were used by Christ, the Truth to whom he has been assimilated.

The truth in which the apostles are consecrated is, as we have seen, the revelation brought by Jesus Christ; it is, in the last analysis, the very person of Christ the revealer. The two claims: "the truth will make you free" (8:32) and "the Son makes you free" (8:36) are set side by side by Jesus himself; he offers them as equivalent statements, synonyms that are quite evident in view of all we have been saying here. Chapter 8 must be read carefully if we are to understand what it is that Christ the Truth intends to free men from, first in his own person and later on through his representatives.

The liberation Christ brings is first and foremost a liberation from sin. Sin is the great enemy of God and by that very fact the great enemy of men; it is the only thing that truly enslaves men: "Everyone who commits sin is a slave" (8:34). Of course, as the gospel makes clear, Christ is also concerned with other aspects of liberation. He did not look upon physical ills with an indifferent eye. He had compassion on all human wretchedness, including the wretchedness of the body, and cured many who were ill. How could we forget that the message of the gospel has, more than anything else, roused love for the poor and oppressed and given men a sense of social justice? Nonetheless, it is clear that liberation from physical suffering of whatever kind is not the main thing with which he who was the great sufferer among men was concerned.

Moreover, the Christ of the gospels had no intention of establishing the rule of God on earth by using violence. Recall in this connection the third temptation in the desert (Mt.

4:8–11; cf. Lk. 4:5–8), the “Give back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar” (Mk. 12:17 par.), Jesus’ refusal to call down fire from heaven on the Samaritans (Lk. 9:54), his refusal to let himself be made a king (Jn. 6:14), his rejection of violent resistance to evil (Lk. 22:38; Mt. 26:52), and his statement that his kingdom is not of this world (Jn. 18:36). Respectable commentators even claim that during his public ministry Jesus had constantly to fight against any compromise with the politico-religious ideals of the Zealots who were preaching a holy war and dreaming of bringing Roman overlordship to an end by force.³⁵

Whatever is thought of this last hypothesis, one thing is clear: The essential aim of Christ was always the spiritual liberation of his brothers. The early Church understood this and followed the example of the Master. Thus, although its members often came from the lowest strata of society, and even from among slaves, it never preached rebellion. It did, however, preach a revolutionary message which would in the long run put an end to slavery: Slaves and masters alike, when converted, came to realize that in God’s sight they were brothers, called to the same sharing in the life of God.

The representatives of Christ must therefore always bear in mind that their primary concern must be to change the souls of men and turn them to God, and that a mixture of religion and politics, in which politics gains the upper hand, is a betrayal of the gospel. This is not to say that the religion of Christ is content to rule over souls alone. On the contrary, the Apocalypse shows that this religion sets limits to the authority men exercise in this world; it sets its face against that authority when it becomes tyrannical and leagued with Satan. Historians have often noted that the religion of Christ is destructive of all tyranny and that wherever Christ has truly ruled the hearts of men, violence has subsided. But to this we must add that the authentic Christian message is not directly

concerned with the well-being of the earthly city; it contributes to the latter, but it looks to something higher.

The poems of the Servant had already taken the same view, and in very eloquent fashion.³⁶ In the Old Testament political liberation and moral liberation are ordinarily closely connected and indeed inseparable. But the Servant of Yahweh is to be a purely spiritual liberator: “It is not enough for you [that is, it is unworthy of you] to be my servant, to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back the survivors of Israel; I will make you the light of the nations so that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth” (Is. 49:6). In Isaiah 40–55 Cyrus is to free Israel from its Babylonian captivity; the Servant, on the other hand, is to free men, be they Israelites or gentiles, from a purely spiritual captivity and imprisonment: “I, Yahweh . . . have taken you by the hand and formed you; I have appointed you as covenant of the people and light of the nations, to open the eyes of the blind, to free captives from prison, and those who live in darkness from the dungeon” (42:6–7). M.-J. Lagrange astutely observes in commenting on this passage: “Since the Servant’s preaching is concerned with religion, it is clear that the servitude from which he frees men is the ignorance of religious truths . . . and from sin which is the usual consequence of such ignorance.”³⁷

In earlier prophecies, and notably in Ezekiel 34, the image of the straying and scattered flock is applied to the chosen people in their Babylonian captivity. But Isaiah 53 (probably having in mind a time when many Israelites have returned from exile to the holy land unaware of having been spiritually liberated) gives us to understand that the real diaspora does not arise from spatial separation from the home country but from spiritual distance away from the Lord, a distance caused by sin. Only from this diaspora, which consists for a man in following his own way and not that of the Lord, is the Servant commissioned to free men. That will also be the mission

of Christ the Truth who fulfills to the letter the astounding oracle in Isaiah 53, which one might think had been written at the foot of the cross: "We had all gone astray like sheep, each taking his own way, and Yahweh burdened him with the sins of all of us" (53:6).

In the fourth gospel Christ the Truth saves the world through his word and through the sacraments he institutes. The latter are prolongations, as it were, of the mysteries of the incarnation and the redemptive passion. They will make their appearance once the incarnate Son of God, the great living sacrament who brings God to men, has returned to the Father. As long as he is on earth, there is no reason for the sacraments.³⁸ In reaction against some commentators (R. Bultmann, G. Bornkamm, E. Lohse, E. Schweizer), the dimension of reference to the sacraments in the fourth gospel has been heavily stressed, at times in what is clearly an excessive way.³⁹ It is impossible to doubt that John is interested in the sacraments and that the highlights, in particular, the basic importance of baptism and the eucharist. The close relationship between the word of God, which is in itself an authentic food, and the sacrament of the eucharist has long been a traditional teaching of the Church; that teaching has the most solid of foundations in the discourse in John 6 on the bread of life.

Having been by their consecration assimilated in a special way to Christ whom the Father has sent into the world to save it (Jn. 17:18: "As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world"), the apostles must labor, through preaching and the administration of the sacraments, for the salvation of the world. The two tasks must be as closely linked in their ministry as the word of Jesus and the sacraments are in the fourth gospel. Need we remind ourselves here that the atmosphere of John 17 is entirely eucharistic?

In his commentary on John 17, Lagrange is quite right to protest against A. Durand's statement that "the chief ministry of the apostle is to preach the gospel; the Old Testament was

chiefly concerned with cultus, the New Testament must be concerned, *first of all*, with teaching."⁴⁰ As Lagrange says, the "first of all" is true only in the order of execution; that is, first must come the teaching, which gives rise to and nourishes faith, then come the sacraments.⁴¹ Moreover, Lagrange goes on to say, Durand's view of things has been unduly influenced by the special vocation of St. Paul who writes: "Christ did not send me to baptise, but to preach the Good News" (1 Co. 1:17). The work of the other apostles, as defined by Christ, includes not only preaching but the sacraments, as two inseparable functions of the same ministry. "Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations; baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt. 28:19). We may note, too, that St. Paul did occasionally baptize (cf. 1 Co. 1:14-16) and that it must have been chiefly for practical reasons, especially the lack of time, that he preferred to leave this task to others.⁴²

Nor may we forget that the Apostle of the gentiles understands his missionary work to be an act of worship and priesthood:⁴³ "The reason why I have written to you . . . is to refresh your memories, since God has given me this special position. He has appointed me as a priest [*leitourgon*] of Jesus Christ, and I am to carry out my priestly duty [*hierourgounta*] by bringing the Good News from God to the pagans, and so to make them acceptable as an offering [*prosphora*] made holy by the Holy Spirit" (Rm. 15:15-16).⁴⁴ And: "If my blood is to be shed as part of your own sacrifice [*thysia*] and offering [*leitourgia*]-which is your faith-I shall still be happy and rejoice with all of you" (Ph. 2:17).⁴⁵ We must also mention the text in which St. Paul compares workers for the gospel with the Jewish priests who drew their livelihood from the altar because they had Yahweh for "their inheritance" (cf. Dt. 18:1-2; Nb. 18:20-24): "Remember that the ministers serving in the Temple [*ta hiera ergazomenoi*] get their food from the Temple [*ta ek tou hierou*] and those

servant at the altar can claim their share from the altar itself. In the same sort of way the Lord directed that those who preach the gospel should get their living from the gospel" (1 Co. 9:13-14). In commenting on this passage P. Grelot rightly observes:

It is also true that Paul's reflection here on the calling of the Christian clergy and their condition as men living on earth looks as much to the example of the prophets as to that of the levitical clergy. The title "prophets" for the apostles is not unknown to the gospels (Mt. 23:34; Lk. 11:49), and the account of St. Paul's vocation recalls the visions with which the prophets began their work. So too the charismatic side of the apostolate and other ministries reminds us very much of the charismatic side of Old Testament prophetism.⁴⁶

Here we come back to a point made several times in earlier chapters of this book: like the priesthood of the suffering Servant, which prophetically points to the priesthood of the new covenant, the latter looks back to both the Levitical and prophetic traditions of the Old Testament.

CONSECRATION IN TRUTH (JN. 17:19) AND ASSIMILATION TO CHRIST AS PRIEST AND VICTIM • CONSECRATION IN TRUTH AND WORSHIP IN SPIRIT AND IN TRUTH • THE THEOCENTRIC NATURE OF PRIESTLY CONSECRATION

THE CONSECRATION OF THE APOSTLES "in truth" is closely dependent on the consecration of Christ himself: "For their sake I consecrate myself so that they too may be consecrated in truth" (Jn. 17:19). In consecrating a victim Jesus acts as a priest; in consecrating himself he also acts as the expiatory victim which replaces the animal sacrifices of the Old Testament. In so doing he carries further the thought of Isaiah 53, as we have frequently noted in the preceding pages.

The surprising thing in John 17:19 is that the fruit of the

redemptive sacrifice seems to be limited to the apostles alone. Elsewhere in the Johannine writings, Christ is given by the Father and offers himself in sacrifice for the salvation of the whole world (Jn. 3:16; 6:51; 1 Jn. 4:10). But the narrowing of perspective in the present passage is readily explained once we accept the priestly interpretation of the prayer in John 17 as a whole and the transposition of the liturgy of the Day of Atonement which the chapter represents. Jesus' intention in the verses under consideration is to show his redemptive suffering to be the wellspring of the priesthood of the apostles, just as elsewhere in the fourth gospel the same suffering is clearly shown to us as being the source of the sacraments of baptism and the eucharist.

The consecration received by the apostles is to assimilate them to Christ as priest. The Father had first consecrated his Son as priest (10:36); now Jesus asks him (17:17) to consecrate his apostles in the same way. At the next moment (17:19) Jesus stresses the fact that like the other blessings of the new covenant this consecration will be the fruit of his redemptive sacrifice: The Father will consecrate the apostles through Jesus. It is evident that their consecration will be connected with his own: "For their sake I consecrate myself so that they too may be consecrated."

Here we may recall the commentary given earlier (Chapters 1 and 3) on John 10:36, as well as the connection we showed between the consecration of Jesus in 10:36 and the one in 17:19. It is with a view to the sacrifice he must offer to save men that the Father consecrates Christ as a priest; that is, it is with a view to the voluntary gift of his own life for the sins of all mankind. Jesus shows himself a priest first and foremost by fulfilling the oracle of Isaiah 53 on the suffering Servant. The Servant himself is the climactic figure in the long and splendid line of prophets who committed themselves wholeheartedly and heroically to the service of God, generously pouring out their energies and, if need be, sacrificing

their lives for the cause of God's kingdom and the salvation of their brothers. The representatives of Christ the priest could not be worthy instruments of his if they were content to share in his saving power without at the same time sharing his outlook as victim and without trying to rouse in themselves something of the generosity of the ancient prophets.

In the Old Testament priestly consecration did not indeed bestow moral holiness, but it did call for such holiness in everyday life because of the holy actions priests had to perform. The prophets on occasion reproached priests for not living in a way that corresponded to their calling (Ho. 4:4-5; Mt. 1:6-7). The setting apart of the prophets likewise did not effect a moral holiness in them, and it is wrong to understand the "consecration" of Jeremiah before his birth as a purification from original sin.⁴⁷ It is true, however, that the call to be a prophet was also a special call to holiness and to a life wholly dedicated to the service of God. Moreover, this requirement on God's part brought with it promises of special divine help: God committed himself to make his demands possible of fulfillment through his grace, as we see in the model case of Jeremiah.

The same is true of the priestly consecration of the apostles which, like that of the Servant, is connected with both the Levitical and the prophetic traditions. Such a priestly consecration brings with it a special demand for holiness in the line of Isaiah 53 and the suffering of Christ; at the same time it is a guarantee that the divine energies needed for such holiness will be given along the way.

Bossuet expressed all this in a very rich text:

Christ was holy and consecrated to God not only as a priest but also as a victim. That is why he sanctifies himself, offers himself, and consecrates himself like an object that is holy and dedicated to the Lord. But he adds: "I consecrate myself for their sake" (meaning his apostles), so that, sharing through their ministry in the grace of his priesthood, they

may also make their own his condition as victim, and, not having in their own power the holiness needed in order to be the envoys and ministers of Jesus Christ, they may find it in him.⁴⁸

Numerous commentators have realized that the phrase "in truth" (17:19, without the definite article) cannot have exactly the same meaning as the phrase "in the truth" (17:17), which we explained earlier. Lagrange thinks that the words "in truth" mean "truly, in all truth," as in 2 John 1 and 3 John 1; that is (as he adds with a reference to St. John Chrysostom), "not by a purely external consecration, as in the old Law."⁴⁹

Lagrange's remark is accurate enough as far as it goes, but we think it incomplete. It is hardly thinkable that there should be no connection at all between the "truth" meant in 17:17 and the words "in truth" of Verse 19. To determine what the connection is we cannot do better than to go to the "worship in spirit and in truth" of which Jesus speaks in his conversation with the Samaritan woman (4:23-24). We say this because the priestly consecration of the apostles "in truth" has to do with liturgy and must therefore have reference to the new worship in spirit and in truth which the "Christian dispensation" brings with it. R. E. Brown has noted the fact that 4:23-24 and 17:17-19 shed light on each other.⁵⁰

What does adoration "in spirit" and "in truth" mean? In the past most commentators (Lagrange may serve as an example) gave the words "in spirit" and "in truth" a chiefly subjective meaning. These commentators prefer to think here of human psychology: "in truth" would mean "in a sincere disposition with regard to the truth one knows and possesses," and "in spirit" would mean "a human disposition: the spirit of a man is the part of him that is purest and most like God; man must use this faculty to seek and worship God."⁵¹ Most modern exegetes rightly reject this kind of explanation. For, even prescindng from the fact that the expression "in spirit"

is connected with the statement that "God is spirit" (4:24), the phrase "true worshippers" (4:23) must be connected with a number of similar formulas in the fourth gospel that have a precise meaning. Moreover, the immediate context concerns the complex relations between Old Testament worship and the new worship brought by Christ. These various facts direct us to an interpretation that is theological and not simply psychological.

The fourth gospel frequently uses the adjective "authentic, genuine" (*alēthinos*), which is not to be confused with "true, real" (*alēthēs*).⁵² The adjective "genuine" expresses the fact that something corresponds to the meaning of the name given it; "real" expresses the fact that a person does not lie or that a thing is not lying or deceptive.⁵³ In 6:55 the statement that "my flesh is real food" (with *alēthēs*) means that the food is not imaginary. On the other hand, the genuine (*alēthinos*) light of 1:9 is not opposed to a false light but to the imperfect revelations of the Old Testament. The genuine bread that comes down from heaven (6:32) is opposed to the manna that was likewise a bread that came from heaven. The genuine vine (15:1) is opposed to the vine that was Israel and had so often been reproached by the prophets. Similarly, the genuine worshippers who will worship the Father in spirit and in truth (4:23) are contrasted not with a false worship but with the imperfect worship of the Old Testament. The context also makes this clear: Jesus heralds the cessation not only of the schismatic worship of the Samaritans on Mt. Gerizim but also of the legitimate worship offered in the Temple at Jerusalem. Yet the latter was based on a genuine, even if imperfect, revelation; in God's plan it paved the way for the definitive kind of worship, since "salvation comes from the Jews" (4:22).

This data will help us understand what is meant by worship in spirit and in truth. Worship in truth is worship in conformity with the definitive revelation brought by Jesus, a

revelation that is in the last analysis summed up in his own person. But worship in truth is inseparable from worship in spirit, inasmuch as it is possible only through a rebirth which the Spirit effects (3:5). In other words, worship in spirit is possible only because of a basic fact of the new dispensation: The new spirit that is given by the Holy Spirit.⁵⁴ Consequently, the words "worship the Father in spirit and in truth" imply the Trinity.

The "consecration in truth" of 17:19 must be explained along the same lines. It is a consecration that is in harmony with the definitive revelation given by Christ to mankind. This consecration is not effective without the intervention of the Holy Spirit, so that "consecration in truth" is also a "consecration in spirit." This consecration is contrasted with priestly consecration in the Old Testament, not as if the latter were false, but inasmuch as it was imperfect. Thus, we are led to compare the two dispensations in this respect. In fact, John 17 itself invites us to make such a comparison.

The fact that consecration in truth must be explained by reference to worship in spirit and in truth has important consequences. The priest of the new covenant, who is consecrated in the truth and thus assimilated to Christ the Truth, is certainly called to work for the salvation and spiritual liberation of mankind; this we showed above. But this more-or-less man-centered aspect of priesthood must not make us lose sight of another, essentially God-centered aspect. That the priesthood should have this other side to it is only to be expected, when we recall the transcendence of God and the fact that man exists only in dependence on God. The priests of the new dispensation are consecrated for the sake of a new worship; that is, for the sake of winning for the Father those worshippers in spirit and in truth whom Jesus tells us the Father seeks as though he had need of them (though he needs nothing and no one) and as though that were the highest goal of his plan of salvation. How could the priest win such worshippers

for the Father if he did not try in his own prayer to become such a worshipper himself?

The theocentric character of priestly consecration in truth can also be established in another way. In the Old Testament the setting apart and consecrating of priests was an eloquent proclamation of God's rights and awesome holiness. "They shall be consecrated to their God and must not profane the name of their God. For it is they who bring the burnt offerings to Yahweh, the food of their God; and they must be in a holy condition" (Lv. 21:6); "Let no one enter the Temple of Yahweh except the priests and the Levites on duty, since they are consecrated and may enter" (2 Ch. 23:6). Now, it can be shown that in the same way the priestly consecration of the apostles is closely connected, in John 17, with God's holiness.

The prayer contains three forms of address to the Father: simply "Father" in Verses 1, 5, 21, 24; "Holy Father" in Verse 11; and "Father, Righteous One" in Verse 25. Some exegetes see a progression in the three forms of address. According to E. C. Hoskyns the progression reflects the movement of Jesus' prayer that begins with thoughts of his coming death and ends with thoughts of the glorification of the Church.⁵⁵ B. Schwank thinks that "Righteous One" represents a step beyond "holy"; for support he appeals to 1 Corinthians 6:11: "now you have been washed clean, and *sanctified*, and *justified* through the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and through the Spirit of our God."⁵⁶

We cannot agree with this approach to the text. "Father," without a qualifying adjective, is the highest form of address conceivable, and it occurs at the very beginning of the prayer; it is not the starting point for an ascending series. "Father" corresponds to the Aramaic *abba*, a familiar term used by children in addressing their father. It is quite unusual to find it used in a prayer to God, yet it does express the spirit of Jesus' prayers as well as his awareness of being the Son of God in the strictest sense of the terms (cf. Mk. 14:36; Mt.

11:25-26; Lk. 11:2; Jn. 11:41; 12:27).⁵⁷ The address, "Father, Righteous One," in Verse 25, is easily explained, as R. E. Brown notes, by what comes immediately after. The Bible habitually speaks of the "justice" of God when he intervenes to punish the guilty or save the innocent; Verse 25 implicitly describes a divine judgment, since it contrasts two groups of men who stand before the Father: the world that has not known him and those men who have.⁵⁸

But what of "Holy Father" in Verse 11? It occurs in the second part of the prayer; that is, the part that concerns the apostles and in which Jesus asks that they be set apart in a special way, that they be preserved from evil (or the evil one),⁵⁹ and that they be consecrated as priests and as victims. As we see it, there is surely a deliberate connection between the *hagios* (holy) addressed to the Father in Verse 11 and the three occurrences of *hagiazein* (sanctify or consecrate) in Verses 17 and 19. Lagrange cogently observes: "If Jesus addresses his Father as 'holy,' it is because he is going to ask his Father to sanctify his disciples"⁶⁰ and to make them, as it were, manifestations of his own holiness.

But what conclusion are we to draw from the fact? The conclusion that the priests of the new covenant are not simply men who dedicate themselves, or are dedicated by God, to the service of other men in a special way. Before they are directed toward men, they are directed toward God. Like the priests of the Old Testament, they are by their consecration to recall to men the unconditioned rights and moral demands of a God who is completely transcendent to the world and thrice holy.

We must add, however, that in the Christian dispensation the proclamation of the thrice holy God is internalized and sublimated in a way that is pregnant with consequences. It would take too long to demonstrate this, and in any case such a demonstration is not relevant to our purpose in this book.

We must content ourselves with a few convergent observations which are based on all that we have said up to this point.

The high priest of the old covenant wore a diadem on which were engraved the words "Consecrated to Yahweh" (Ex. 28:36). This does not mean, of course, that it was only through the diadem that the high priest reminded men of God's holiness and his own consecration. When Peter says that Jesus is "the Holy One of God" (Jn. 6:69), is this an allusion to the high priest's diadem and thus a figurative way of saying that Christ is a priest?⁶¹ In any event, not by any diadem but by his innermost being Jesus proclaims the divine holiness with which he is associated in a unique and strictly incommunicable way. That association is what makes him the one and only priest of the new covenant. But since he has decided that weak men who are sinners like the rest of mankind are to represent him in his priesthood, he also wills that these men, far more than the priests of the old covenant, are to reflect God's holiness in their moral conduct and everyday lives. This is why he asks for them of the Father a "consecration in truth" which is far superior to the priestly consecration known in the former dispensation. Christ himself decided that there should be consecrated priests. And he wanted, not melancholy, fearful souls who would give themselves grudgingly, but joyous men who trust that they are sustained by the word of Christ and who are sure of the love he has for them: "While still in the world I say these things to share my joy with them to the full" (Jn. 17:13).

The priests and victims of the Old Testament had to be without physical defect. Isaiah shifts this requirement to the moral level and shows the suffering Servant to a just and sinless man who is therefore fully acceptable to Yahweh as priest and as sacrificial offering. The Christ of the gospels fulfills in an infinitely perfect way the prophetic statement of Isaiah 53, for he has no connection whatsoever with sin. More than other Christians, priests who represent Christ by reason of

their priestly consecration should be deeply concerned with moral purity; they must "try to be as pure as Christ" (1 Jn. 3:3). This is why in John 17 Jesus offers a special prayer for them that they be protected from evil.

The purification Christ requires of all his disciples and in a special way of his priests is much more far-reaching than that which the sacrifices of the old covenant were thought to effect. Hebrews 9:13-14 brings out this point very strongly. At a much earlier time, Isaiah 53, as we showed earlier, a radical transformation of the sacrificial liturgy of the Old Testament portends, and the transformation is accomplished when Christ dies as expiatory victim for the sins of all mankind.

In keeping with this transformation, John 17 transposes and spiritualizes the solemn liturgy of the Day of Atonement. Jesus' ideal is not simply that of the festival of atonement; namely, that the people of God, through the mediation of its priests, should recover the purity required if they are to be a genuine mirror of God's holiness. There is now a new priesthood which, being consecrated "in truth" and closely linked with Jesus the Truth, shares in the divine love that brought about the incarnation and Calvary. Consequently, the people of God in the new covenant must reflect not only God's holiness but also the love that eternally unites the divine persons with one another.

Bearing in mind the tripartite structure of the prayer in John 17, we see that there are two distinct requests for unity. The first, in Verse 11, looks only to those disciples who will share in the priesthood of Jesus; only toward the end, in Verses 21-23, does Jesus ask, with no less intense a longing, for unity among all the members of the Church. He acts as if the unity of the Church would depend on unity among those whose task it will be to direct the Church.

The basic goal of the prayer in John 17 is that the Church should be as it were a mirror in which the unity of Father and Son is reflected. By this fact the perspectives adopted in

the Old Testament are greatly transcended. Here we have valuable pointers given us as we try to recover an authentic priestly spirituality. To this point we shall return in the Conclusion of this book.

THE WASHING OF FEET (JN. 13:1-20): THE HUMBLE EXERCISE OF AUTHORITY IN THE CHURCH AND THE PREPARATION OF THE APOSTLES FOR THEIR CONSECRATION AS PRIESTS

NUMEROUS INTERPRETATIONS have been offered of the washing of feet in John 13 (Verses 1-20), and we have no intention of examining them in detail.⁶² We need only recall here that the interpretations may be reduced to two types. There are the moralizing interpretations according to which Christ is giving us an example of humility by performing an action usually left to slaves; many commentators add that Christ's act is but a symbol of the great abasement of his passion. Then there are the sacramental interpretations, such as some of the Fathers were already providing:⁶³ these consider Christ's action to be either symbolic or an act of purification or communion, and they connect the action sometimes with baptism, sometimes with penance, sometimes with the eucharist.

Those who back the moralizing interpretation usually accept the passage as a unit. The unity is challenged, on the other hand, by a number of those who defend the sacramental interpretation; we may mention F. Spitta, W. Bauer, R. Bultmann, and M.-E. Boismard.⁶⁴ These critics differ a good deal in their explanations of the passage; we shall restrict ourselves to the arguments offered by Boismard. In his view, the present text of John is a combination of two complete accounts from two divergent and temporally successive traditions concerning the washing of feet. Verses 1-2, 4-5, 12-15, 17, and 18-19 belong to the moralizing tradition, and Verses 3, 4-5, 6-10, 11, and 21-30 to the sacramental tradition. Verses 16 and 20

have no direct connection with their immediate context and were added by the final redactor.

There are several objections to Boismard's conjecture. Verses 1 and 3 do indeed constitute two introductions, but we are not therefore justified in speaking of a doublet. Verse 3 introduces only the washing of the feet, while Verse 1 also serves as an introduction to everything that follows, including the death of Jesus. In fact, the words of the dying Jesus, "It is accomplished" (19:30), seem to be an intentional recall, in the form of an inclusion, of the words "now he showed how perfect his love was" (13:1), the death of Jesus being the supreme proof of that love.⁶⁵ Moreover, since Verses 21-30 are made up of elements that largely correspond to things found in the synoptics, there is no reason for considering them to be an integral part of the episode of the washing of feet and for seeing in them an extension of the sacramental tradition; most exegetes rightly think of Verse 21 as the beginning of a new development.

This leaves us with the chief argument proposed by those who deny the unity of the passage and by Boismard in particular. Before speaking of this argument, however, we must take a stand on an important problem of textual criticism. With a number of authors, Boismard among them, we think that in Verse 10 the short reading, "No one who has taken a bath needs washing," is to be preferred to the longer reading, ". . . needs washing except for his feet." The short reading has in its favor the impressive agreement of the Codex Sinaiticus, Origen, Tatian, Tertullian, and the great majority of early Latin Fathers. In itself, moreover, the short reading seems the better, for several reasons: Copyists tend to lengthen rather than abridge; the words "except for his feet" contradict the words immediately following, "he is clean *all over*"; the words were probably added later on to justify Christ's action.⁶⁶

Now to the chief argument against the unity of the passage. According to Boismard, two distinct and irreconcilable

meanings are successively given to Christ's action by the evangelist. According to 13:8, if Peter does not let Jesus wash him, he will not be admitted into the company of Jesus in the next world, but will damn himself; this meaning corresponds to John 3:3: "Unless a man is born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God." But according to 13:12-16 a man need only imitate the humility of Christ and he will have eternal life; there is no allusion here to the need of any sacramental rite. According to 13:8 if one is to be saved, one must be washed and purified by Christ. According to 13:12-16 one is saved by imitating Christ and washing the feet of others; that is (in view of the hidden reference to the Servant of Yahweh and to the passion of Christ), by loving others to the point of giving one's life for them.

What is to be thought of this exegesis? To suppose that the text is incoherent is a solution born of desperation, and it is not to be accepted unless it is absolutely forced on us. In fact, however, no contradiction exists between the two parts of the passage (Jesus' dialogue with Peter and the following discourse), unless we accept a strict sacramental interpretation of the dialogue with Peter. But an objective examination of the text shows that such an interpretation is not necessary.⁶⁷ The whole episode can be understood quite differently if we keep two facts in mind. First, the washing of feet can symbolize the passion not only insofar as the latter is an abasement of Jesus, but also insofar as it is a purifying bath for sinful mankind (with Christ suffering the purification of mankind's sins). Second, the dialogue between Jesus and Peter recalls the dialogue that follows upon the first prediction of the passion in the synoptics (Mk. 8:32-33; Mt. 16:21-23): In both cases Jesus warns Peter that if he rejects the mystery of the cross, he can no longer be a companion of Jesus.⁶⁸

We could rest satisfied with this general explanation of the passage. But several points about the episode urge us to complete the explanation along lines that contribute to our purpose in this book. Moreover, if we do not attend to these

points, we are likely to miss the main purpose behind the writing of John 13.

The first point that invites us to look for a more precise and profound explanation is the twofold fact that Jesus washes only the feet of his apostles and that the lesson of humility is addressed primarily to them.

The washing of the feet is an introduction to the farewell discourses which seem to have been addressed only to the Twelve. This would agree with the fact that according to the synoptics only the Twelve are present at Jesus' last meal (cf. Mk. 14:17; Mt. 26:20; Lk. 22:14). In John 13-17 the only persons who are named or who speak are part of the apostolic group: the traitor Judas, Peter, Thomas, Philip, another Judas (cf. Lk. 6:16; Ac. 1:13), and the beloved disciple. The same conclusion emerges if we compare 13:18: "I know the ones I have chosen," with 6:70: "Have I not chosen you, you Twelve?"⁶⁹

Given such a context, there is no difficulty in understanding that the lesson Jesus himself draws from the washing of the feet is not a general lesson in humility addressed to all disciples without distinction but rather a lesson on humility in the exercise of authority. This is why he insists so strongly on the startling contrast: He, the lord and master, without ceasing to be lord and master, has washed his own disciples' feet. Christ has chiefly in mind those who will exercise his authority in the Church. It is the same important lesson that is to be found in the parallel passage in Luke (22:24-27; cf. Mk. 10:42-44; Mt. 20:25-28): The greatest in the Christian community must, like Christ, act as if they were the youngest and the servants of the others.⁷⁰

The parallel texts in Matthew and Mark are placed after the request made by the sons of Zebedee (or by their mother, according to Matthew). Here is what Mark says:

When the other ten heard this they began to feel indignant with James and John, so Jesus called them to him and said to them, "You know that among the pagans their so-called rul-

ers lord it over them, and their great men make their authority felt. This is not to happen among you. No; anyone who wants to become great among you must be your servant, and anyone who wants to be first among you must be slave to all. For the Son of Man himself did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mk. 10:41-44).

Luke's text is put in the context of Jesus' last meal:

A dispute arose also between them about which should be reckoned the greatest, but he said to them, "Among pagans it is the kings who lord it over them, and those who have authority over them are given the title Benefactor. This must not happen with you. No; the greatest among you must behave as if he were the youngest, the leader as if he were the one who serves. For who is the greater: the one at table or the one who serves? The one at table, surely? Yet here am I among you as one who serves!

Both in John 13 and in the passages from the synoptics there is in the background the poignant figure of Christ the Servant who fulfills to the end the prophecy of Isaiah 53. The idea expressed in all the passages is the very important one that authority in the Church means humble service. Authority is for the service of the community. It can be exercised in the right way only if its possessor tries constantly to share the sentiments that inspired Christ the Servant in his suffering.

Christ is in advance denouncing and fighting against the serious danger that today we call clericalism. The apostles, having their authority from Jesus himself, are certainly not simply delegates of the community. They cannot be conceived in this way because they were chosen by Jesus at the beginning of his ministry to be the nucleus of the Church and they are prior to the fully constituted Christian community. Nonetheless, they must constantly be on the watch not to put themselves outside or above the Church for they are entirely at the service of the Church. This is the basic lesson Jesus is

teaching them in John 13, and he does it by bringing before their eyes in advance the act that can both illustrate and make possible for them the very difficult exercise of authority as service: his own passion.

This analysis of the passage explains several points that at first reading surprise us in the scene of the washing of feet. The washing is much more than a lesson in humility, despite what the explanatory discourse following it (Verses 13-16) may suggest; it is first and foremost a symbol of the very source of our salvation, as the dialogue with Peter (Verses 6-11) suggests. Yet when Jesus comments on his action, the only lesson he draws is that of humble service. Comparison with the parallel passages in the synoptics explains the anomaly. In Mark 10:42-44 the passion in which the Son of Man will give his life as a ransom for the multitude is proposed to the disciples as an example for them, and we might say that it is brought in only as an example for the sake of comparison (cf. Mt. 20:28: "*just as the Son of Man . . .*"), whereas in fact it is infinitely more than that, being the very source of sinful mankind's reconciliation with God.

It is too quick and superficial a judgment to say that Verse 16 does not belong in this context; this is the verse in which Jesus says that a servant is not greater than his master nor a messenger (literally an apostle) greater than the person who sent him. For, even if the word "apostle" is not to be taken in its technical sense, Jesus is always thinking of his apostles and trying to make them understand that their seemingly privileged position in the Church must not prevent them from humbling themselves as he had done.

It is more difficult to connect the unexpected Verse 20 closely to its context. Christ here states the dignity of the apostles, which is measured by his own dignity: "Whoever welcomes the one I send welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me." There is, however, at least this connection with the washing of the feet, that Jesus

is still addressing his apostles. Lagrange supposes that Jesus was going "to begin a discourse on the apostolate and its dignity . . . But this new discourse was interrupted by the feelings which swept over Jesus when he thought of his betrayal by one of the apostles, and his instructions, like his consolations, moved on to a different path."⁷¹ Whatever we may think of this hypothesis, there is in any case no need of regarding Verse 20, much less Verse 16, as later redactional additions.

The rest of what we have to say on the washing of the feet is newer. The threat Jesus utters to Peter if he refuses to let himself be washed by the Master takes a quite significant form: "you can have nothing in common with me" (13:8), or, more literally, "you have no share with me." The words are a Hebraic formula (*haya heleg le or im*) often found in Deuteronomy (cf. 10:9; 12:12; 14:27, 29; 18:1-2; cf. Nb. 18:20), and always and exclusively refer to the Levites who have no share or inheritance with the rest of the Israelites, since Yahweh himself is their share and inheritance. R. Bultmann rightly notes that the formula on Jesus' lips should not be given a psychological interpretation; in other words, the threat is not that Peter will be deprived of the friendship of Jesus or communion with him, but that he will not share in a specific blessing that belongs to Jesus.⁷²

M.-E. Boismard argues from the fact that in Deuteronomy "share" and "inheritance" go together and that in the New Testament the concept of inheritance is spiritualized by being identified with the blessings of that eternal life which is promised to the just (for *klēronomein*, cf. Mt. 5:5; 19:29; 25:34; 1 Co. 6:9; etc.; for *klēronomia*, cf. Ga. 3:18; Ep. 1:14, 18; 5:5; etc.).⁷³ He concludes that the words, "you have no share with me," in John 13:8 mean, "you cannot share eternal life with me in the Father's presence."⁷⁴ But we must point out that the word "part" (*meris* or *meros*) has not acquired this limited meaning in the New Testament. On the

other hand, the word "inheritance," which elsewhere in the New Testament does mean eternal life, is absent from John 13:8. What is the justification for supplying it?

A rather different explanation comes to mind when we realize that Jesus' language is inspired not by the Old Testament texts on inheriting the promised land but only by those passages that define the lot or share of the Levites. In an incomparably deeper sense than the Levites, Jesus can say that he has no share except God the Father. That the apostles are in principle "to have a share with him" or "to have the same share as he" can mean that they will share in a special way in his mission and priestly consecration.⁷⁵ Thus, their lot is comparable to that of the Levites: Like the Levites and like Christ, the apostles have God alone for their inheritance.

If this interpretation be accepted, the passage contains the equivalent of and a preparation for what is said in 17:16-19 in a way that is both negative and positive: "They do not belong to the world any more than I belong to the world. Consecrate them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world, and for their sake I consecrate myself so that they too may be consecrated in truth." It is striking that immediately after the passage in Luke that corresponds to the washing of feet and ends with the words, "Yet here am I among you as one who serves!" (Lk. 22:27), Jesus goes on to foretell a very special (even if not easily definable) participation of the apostles in his own privileges: "You are the men who have stood by me faithfully in my trials; and now I confer a kingdom on you, just as my Father conferred one on me: you will eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and you will sit on thrones to judge the twelve tribes of Israel" (Lk. 22:28-30).⁷⁶

The application to the apostles of the Levites' share, which seems to us in the background of John 13:8, leads to a further conjecture along the same general lines. Struck no doubt by the fact that from the washing of feet Jesus draws a lesson

for the apostles on how authority is to be exercised in the future Church, Max Thurian would see in the washing "a kind of ordination of the apostles to their ministry, which will be the sign and instrument of the ministry of Jesus himself."⁷⁷

E. Lohmeyer had already suggested something similar: In his view, through the washing of feet Jesus makes his apostles the priests and leaders of the eschatological community and his own associates in the final kingdom.⁷⁸ These interpretations, however, return by a different way to a strictly sacramental interpretation of Jesus' action; but the sacramental interpretation, as we have noted, makes the text as a whole incoherent and is in no way necessary.

Yet we can retain something of Thurian's idea, especially if we bear in mind the close relations between Chapters 13 and 17; Bultmann has brought out these relations, although with some exaggeration. In Chapter 17 Jesus asks the Father to consecrate his apostles, and he consecrates himself as a victim so that they may be consecrated. We may argue that the washing of the feet is a symbolic preparation for this consecration.

In the Old Testament we find Moses being ordered to wash Aaron and his sons in preparation for their consecration as priests, the point being that physical purity symbolizes the purity of soul required for liturgical service: "You are to bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting and they are to be bathed" (Ex. 29:4; cf. Lv. 8:6; Nb. 8:6-7). Elsewhere, regular ritual ablutions are connected with the exercise of priestly functions (Ex. 30:17, 21; 40:30-32). It is permissible to think that the washing of feet represents a transposition of the ritual bath that prepared Levitical priests for their consecration, just as in John 17 we have a transposition of the liturgy for the Day of Atonement. The washing done by Jesus has, of course, a much deeper meaning than that of the bath required in the Old Testament of candidates for the priesthood; Jesus' washing of feet prefigures his purifying passion.

In the light of all the points we have been making, we can express the significance of Jesus' threat to Peter in this way: If you do not agree to let me wash you, and if you rebel against the redemptive abasement that will win for you the dispositions needed for sharing in my priesthood and especially for overcoming your pride and your desire to dominate; in short if you reject the mystery of the cross that will purify you, then you will not share in my priesthood. Q

Clearly, this is only a working hypothesis. We have no intention of offering these partly new views as certain; they are worth as much as the arguments that back them up. They do have two advantages. They make clearer the connection between the washing of feet, which is an introduction to the farewell discourses, and the priestly prayer that concludes the discourses. They also clarify Christ's choice of this particular symbolic action. The idea that Christ washes men of their sins is, of course, an authentically scriptural theme, but the image of the purifying bath, which is relatively rare, is more Pauline (cf. 1 Co. 6:11; Ep. 5:26; Tt. 3:5) than Johannine, especially since the reading, "he . . . has washed away our sins with his blood" (Rv. 1:5) is uncertain and disputed.⁷⁹ Consequently, if the allusion is to the ritual bath of the Levites, we can make sense of the somewhat unexpected symbolic action in John 13. 1106

From the christological viewpoint, the scene of the washing of feet reminds us of the christological hymn in Philipians 2:6-11 in which we see Christ humbling himself without losing his divine prerogatives, just as in John 13 he washes his apostles' feet while remaining lord and master. A good number of modern exegetes, ourselves among them, find in this hymn, no less than in John 13, allusions to Isaiah 53.⁸⁰ The hymn is also to be connected with the transcendent Son of Man in the gospels who becomes a servant and humbles himself to accept death by crucifixion for the salvation of sinful mankind.

The *pastoral* significance of the washing of the feet is best illustrated by the recommendations of St. Peter:

Now I have something to tell your elders: I am an elder myself, and a witness to the sufferings of Christ, and with you I have a share in the glory that is to be revealed. Be the shepherds of the flock of God that is entrusted to you: watch over it, not simply as a duty but gladly, because God wants it; not for sordid money, but because you are eager to do it. Never be a dictator over any group that is put in your charge, but be an example that the whole flock can follow. . . . All wrap yourselves in humility to be servants of each other (1 P. 5:1-5).

In the final recommendation, "wrap yourselves in humility," the Greek text uses the verb *egkombōsasthe* (tie something on oneself; wrap oneself by tying or buttoning), which is quite unusual in such a context. The text should be translated literally, with C. Spicq: "tie around yourselves the overall of humility." The image is probably of the coarse apron workmen and slaves donned so as not to dirty their tunics. But the word almost certainly also alludes to the slave's garment Christ put on in the astounding scene of the washing of feet. Peter, who had initially been repelled by this gesture of humility, did not forget the lesson he learned.⁸¹

THE COMMUNICATION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT TO THE APOSTLES (JN. 20:19-23) AND THE PRIESTLY MINISTRY OF RECONCILING MEN WITH GOD

ACCORDING TO JOHN 20:19-23, on the evening of Easter day Christ appeared to the gathered disciples ("the doors were closed . . . for fear of the Jews") and communicated the Holy Spirit to them. The appearance must be the same as the one recounted in Luke 24:36-46. But in Luke the manifestation of Christ seems intended for the Eleven and "their

companions," at least if we are to rely on Verse 33 just before. In any case, it is only in John that we can seek the identity of those to whom the Spirit is given, for only he speaks of this giving. The account in the fourth gospel is independent and must be interpreted in its own terms. The case is quite different from the account in the third gospel.⁸²

As most commentators recognize, the beneficiaries of Christ's appearance in John 20:19-23 are identical with the men who heard the farewell discourses. In other words, those present on Easter evening are the apostles alone, except of course for Thomas whose absence is explicitly stated in 20:24 and motivates the well-known episode concerning the incredulity of this apostle. Moreover, the manifestation of Christ in 20:19-23 certainly is to the apostles alone, for it corresponds to the promises made to them during the farewell discourses.

Jesus had told the apostles he would come to them: "I am going away, and shall return" (Jn. 14:28). Now, while Luke (24:36) says only that the risen Jesus stood in the midst of the disciples, the fourth evangelist makes event correspond to promise by writing: "*Jesus came and stood among them*" (Jn. 20:19).

Jesus had said: "My peace I give you" (14:27); the risen Lord brings with him the peace that abides. Of course, the words "peace to you" could, of themselves, be a simple everyday greeting. But the solemnity of the occasion requires that we give the word "peace" here the deep religious meaning it often has in Scripture, both in the Old and in the New Testaments. A few biblical parallels come more readily to mind. "Yahweh answered him [Gideon], 'Peace be with you; have no fear; you will not die.' Gideon built an altar there to Yahweh and called it Yahweh-Peace" (Jg. 6:23-24). "'Do not be afraid,' he [the angel] said [to Daniel], 'you are a man specially chosen; peace be with you; play the man, be strong!' And as he spoke to me I felt strong again" (Dn.

10:19). In John 20:21 we should translate "Peace is yours," rather than "Peace be with you," as though the risen Christ were simply expressing a wish, for as a matter of fact he intends to confirm the priceless gift of Messianic peace which he had already conferred upon them in 14:27. He says, "Peace is yours," twice (Verses 19 and 21), just as he had used the word "peace" twice in 14:27.⁸³

Jesus had also predicted: "You will be sorrowful, but *your sorrow will turn into joy. . . . I shall see you again, and your hearts will be full of joy*" (16:20, 22). The words certainly have a very comprehensive meaning which can be fully matched only by the eternal happiness of heaven; but they receive their initial fulfillment in 20:20: "*The disciples were filled with joy when they saw the Lord.*"

When Jesus was speaking to the Father in his priestly prayer, he was anticipating and thinking of himself as already back with the Father. For this reason he spoke of the sending of the apostles as having taken place in the past; in addition, he must have been thinking of the preparation for that mission that went on during his public ministry: "As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world" (17:18). In John 20 Christ expresses himself in the present tense, but he uses almost the same words as earlier (there is no difference of meaning between *apostellein* and *pempein*), and the same turn of phrase (a comparison between his own mission and that of the disciples). It is evident then that the reality of which he speaks is the same in both passages: "As the Father sent me, so am I sending you" (20:21). This last-mentioned correspondence is significant: Coming as it does after the other three correspondences already cited, it is a valuable confirmation of the structure we discovered earlier in John 17. That is, contrary to what some commentators have claimed, the consecration and mission of 17:17-19 are meant not for all the disciples without distinction but only for the apostles, as is the mission in 20:21.

The scene we have been analyzing is a highly important one, for it provides the decisive proof that Jesus intended to bestow upon his apostles powers reserved strictly to them and a ministerial priesthood essentially distinct from the common priesthood of all the faithful. For this reason we must give careful attention, first to the details of the Johannine text, then to the various parallel passages. The latter consist, first of all, in Matthew, in which Christ himself forgives sins (9:1-8) and in which he confers special powers on Peter and the Twelve (16:19; 18:18). There is, secondly, the account of Pentecost in the Acts of the Apostles; a number of commentators believe that John 20:19-23 corresponds to, or is a transformation of, the account of Pentecost in Acts. Finally, we shall say a few words about 2 Corinthians 5:17-6:1.

In John 20:22 Jesus breathes upon his apostles. The action is described in the rare verb *emphusaō*, which had been used by the Septuagint in translating Genesis 2:7 which tells of Yahweh breathing a breath of life into the first man. The verb occurs again in Wisdom 15:11, which also speaks of the creation of the first man: "he misconceives the One who shaped him, who breathed an active soul into him and inspired a living spirit." Once again referring to Genesis 2:7, Ezekiel describes the eschatological resurrection of the dry bones with the same word: "Come from the four winds, breath; breathe on these dead; let them live!" (37:9).

These verbal parallels cannot be coincidental; they teach us to see in the symbolic action of Jesus in the Supper room an act of eschatological creation that corresponds to the original creation. The risen Christ shows himself, in dependence on the Father, the source of a new creation, which completes and goes infinitely beyond the original since the Holy Spirit is now given whereas originally only the spirit that gives bodily life was infused.⁸⁴

The idea we receive of the Holy Spirit in this passage is

rather different from the idea that emerges in the promises after the Last Supper in which the Spirit Paraclete is presented to us as the interior master, the divine teacher who will instruct the disciples from within their hearts and enable them to penetrate into the truth Jesus has brought. On the other hand, we should not conclude that there is in John 20 a special conception of the Spirit not found elsewhere in the fourth gospel.⁸⁵ In fact, the Spirit in John 20 is closely connected with the new birth through water and the Holy Spirit of which Jesus speaks in the conversation with Nicodemus (Jn. 3:3-8). We may note that the prediction in John 3 is also inspired by the prophecies of Ezekiel and especially by the one that occurs just before the vision of the dry bones: "I shall give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I shall remove the heart of stone from your bodies and give you a heart of flesh instead. I shall put my spirit in you, and make you keep my laws and sincerely respect my observances" (36:26-27). We may refer also to Ezekiel 11:19 and to the *misérere* (Ps. 51:9, 12-13), which in all probability depends upon Ezekiel.

Once again in dependence on Ezekiel, a similar role of eschatological purification is attributed to the Spirit of God in the instruction on the two spirits, which is part of the Manual of Discipline, or Rule of the Community, in the Dead Sea scrolls:

Then, too, God will purge all the acts of man in the crucible of His truth, and refine for Himself all the fabric of man, destroying every spirit of perversity from within his flesh and cleansing him by the holy spirit from all the effects of wickedness. Like waters of purification He will sprinkle upon him the spirit of truth, to cleanse him of all the abominations of falsehood and of all pollution through the spirit of filth; to the end that, being made upright, men may have understanding of transcendental knowledge and of the lore of the sons of heaven, and that, being made blameless in their ways, they may be endowed with inner vision. For them God has chosen

to be the partners of His eternal covenant, and theirs shall be all mortal glory. Perversity shall be no more, and all works of deceit shall be put to shame.⁸⁶

J. Schmitt sums up nicely the similarities between the Qumran text and the fourth gospel:

In both, the theme of eschatological purification is further determined by the idea of a new creation which represents the victory of Light over Darkness. In both, the disciple's purity has its source in the Holy Spirit, while its agent and model is the risen Christ or the Messianic man. In these respects the pericope in John is almost a replica of the Zadokite passage.⁸⁷

Schmitt points out that the parallelism will not surprise anyone who bears in mind the links of the apostle John with baptist groups and even with Qumran:

There is nothing extraordinary about such a convergence of thought. . . . The Jewish idea of holiness must have played a much more important part in the reflection that went on in various apostolic circles than the exegesis of bygone years would lead us to believe. That idea underlies the exhortations in the gospels and letters and is also attested in the earliest traditions of Jerusalem or Palestine (cf. Ac. 5:3; Rm. 1:4). In its Judeo-Christian expression, it seems to go back beyond Jesus (cf. Mt. 5:3) to John the Baptist (cf. Mk. 1:8 par.). That it therefore became a category of Johannine thought (cf. Jn. 3:5) is at least an extremely probable hypothesis for anyone who remembers the strong links between John, author of the traditions recorded in the fourth gospel, and John the Baptist, the baptist groups, and even the Zadokites. The Palestinian theme of the *Geber-Anthropos* suggests analogous remarks. . . . This theme was very soon applied to the risen Christ, and to a large extent it dominated the postresurrection reflection of the early Christ. Romans 1:3-4 and 1 Corinthians 15:42-52, among other passages, provide clear testimony on this point. They are controlled by the idea of Christ as "second Adam" (cf. 1 Co. 15:45-46) and

emphasize that Jesus owes his prerogative as eschatological man to the "spiritual" condition (cf. *ibid.*) or "spirit of holiness" (cf. Rm. 1:4) which is his due to his resurrection from the dead (cf. *ibid.*).⁸⁸

The Council of Trent has quite legitimately applied John 20:21–23 to the sacrament of penance.⁸⁹ But the foregoing observations on the passage lead us to assign a much broader meaning to the power of forgiving sins that Christ is here bestowing on his apostles. As a matter of fact, the Church Fathers of the first three centuries related the forgiveness of sins in John 20:23 to baptism. And we recall the Creed: "one baptism for the forgiveness of sins."⁹⁰ We may say, then, in general terms, that in John 20:19–23 Christ is associating his apostles with the great work of creating a new race of men, a work that necessarily requires the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The association is equally evident in the cure of the paralytic at Capernaum as recounted in Matthew 9:1–8. Here we see Christ claiming for himself the power to forgive sins which was regarded as reserved strictly to God himself. The latter belief is expressed by the scribes more fully in Mark's account of the scene: "How can this man talk like that? He is blaspheming. Who can forgive sins but God?" (2:7; the parallel text in Matthew has simply, "This man is blaspheming"). But this does not prevent Matthew from ending his account with the implication that the power to forgive sins had been granted to men generally, to every man: "A feeling of awe came over the crowd when they saw this, and they praised God for giving such power *to men*" (Mt. 9:8). How is such a statement to be explained?

The history-of-forms school has taught us to look upon the gospels less as biographies in the modern sense of the term than as testimonies to the faith of the early Christian community. Provided that the proper limits of such an approach be respected, it can be a fruitful way of reading the gospels. When

Matthew shows us the crowds praising God "for giving such power to men," a power which in the context can only be that of forgiving sins, he is not for a moment losing sight of the difference between the Son of Man and his fellow men any more than Daniel identifies purely and simply the Son of Man with the saints of the Most High. The point is rather that for Matthew as for Jesus the idea of a Messiah and that of a Messianic community or people of God are inseparably connected. We think, therefore, with R. Bultmann, A. Schlatter, P. Benoit, and numerous other exegetes, that the evangelist has in mind the Christian community of his day and the ministers who continue to exercise in the Church the power of forgiving sins in Jesus' name.⁹¹

Following Luther's lead, some commentators have wanted to limit the forgiveness of sins in John 20:23 solely to the ministry of preaching.⁹² But the text itself makes such a limitation untenable since it adds to the power of forgiving sins the power of retaining them as well: "For those whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven; for those whose sins you retain, they are retained." The act of retaining sins implies the exercise of a genuinely juridical power, such as exercised, for example, in the sacrament of penance. To the sacramental interpretation the objection has been raised that in the best Greek text the verb *apheōntai* ("they are forgiven") is in the perfect passive tense, as though the apostles' role were simply to proclaim a forgiveness of sins that has already been effected; but the objection has no validity.⁹³ In a conditional proposition such as we have in John 20:23 (cf. the initial Greek particle *an*), a perfect tense in the apodasis or main part of the sentence can well refer to an action that is still in the future; such a tense in such a position need not express an action that takes place prior to the action named in the protasis or "if" part of the sentence.⁹⁴

There is evidently a relationship between the power of forgiving and retaining sins in John 20:23 and the power of

binding and loosing in Matthew 18:18, and it raises many complicated problems. Both passages use a literary device found in all languages: the statement of two contraries as a way of expressing a totality.⁹⁵ We shall limit ourselves here to such aspects of these two antitheses as directly relate to our purpose in this book.

First of all, the two antitheses must be compared. It would be inaccurate and simplistic to maintain that the Johannine antithesis forgive-retain is simply a transcription into good Greek of the Matthean antithesis bind-loose. In John, the Greek verb that expresses the idea of forgiveness (*aphienai*) offers no difficulty, but the same is not true for its antithesis, the verb *kratein*; the sense in which the latter is used here ("to retain [sins]") is quite unusual; it is difficult to determine what its Hebrew equivalent would be (*shamar* or *natar?*). The Matthean antithesis, on the contrary, has its equivalent in rabbinic literature (*'asar* and *hittir* [hiphil of *natar*] or *sharah*).⁹⁶ Moreover, the Matthean antithesis is more comprehensive than the Johannine for it means not only to forgive or refuse to forgive sins, but also to authorize or prohibit a teaching and to allow or exclude a practice.

With P. Benoit,⁹⁷ we must distinguish two successive uses of the bind-loose antithesis: in Matthew 16:19 and 18:18. In the incident at Caesarea Philippi, the power of binding and loosing goes with the power of the keys; that is, of opening or shutting the door into the kingdom of God; this power is given to Peter alone as steward of the house of God.⁹⁸ In such a context, the antithesis bind-loose becomes as comprehensive as possible.

The discourse on the Church in Matthew 18 repeats the antithesis but in a rather different context. Here there is question of sins committed in the community and of brotherly correction. Jesus requires that the offender be reported to the community. He then adds: "I tell you solemnly, whatever you bind on earth shall be considered bound in heaven; whatever

you loose on earth shall be considered loosed in heaven" (Mt. 18:18). We have every reason for thinking that in this context the bind-loose antithesis acquires the same specific meaning as the forgive-retain antithesis in John. The passive construction used in the fourth gospel ("are forgiven," "are retained") is a roundabout way of designating God as the source, just as in Matthew heaven ratifies what has been done on earth. Commentators ask in connection with Matthew 18:18: To whom is Christ here giving the power of binding and loosing? Some (chiefly Catholics) answer: to the apostles alone. Others answer: to the community as a whole or even to each Christian. The immediate context does not resolve the dispute. But we must add that the connection of the saying in Matthew 18:18 with this context is very loose and evidently secondary; like the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-8, the discourse on the Church in Matthew 18 is a synthesis of teachings that Christ gave on various occasions. In fact, as we read Matthew 18:18 we cannot help but be reminded of the ending of the first gospel (Mt. 28:18-20) where, just as in John 20:19-23, the risen Christ, invested with "all authority in heaven and on earth," gives the eleven apostles (Mt. 28:16) a share in his mission of teaching and sanctifying. Moreover, the close parallelism between Matthew 18:18 and John 20:23, crowns our conviction that in the Matthean text only the apostles are the recipients of the power to bind and loose.⁹⁹

A very important problem in regard to John 20:19-23 is the relationship of this passage to the outpouring of the Spirit on Pentecost as narrated in the Acts of the Apostles (2:1-13). No one today would accept the opinion of some commentators of the distant and not too distant past (Theodore of Mopsuestia, Euthymius, Theophylact, Grotius, Tholuck, Lampe) that John is depicting only a preparation for and pledge of the future gift of the Spirit on Pentecost. Such an interpretation goes counter to the explicit language of the

fourth gospel which points to a real reception: "Receive the Holy Spirit." This interpretation was condemned by the Fifth Ecumenical Council.¹⁰⁰

Two interpretations are upheld today. A number of modern exegetes see in John's account a scene that corresponds to or is the equivalent of the Pentecost which Luke narrates. These exegetes maintain that John is describing the same event as Luke; Luke paints a more brilliant scene, John a more spiritual one. According to X. Léon-Dufour, "the same event is evidently being presented in two different ways; there is contradiction between the two accounts only on the point of the date when the gift was given."¹⁰¹ Archimandrite Cassien Besobrasoff tries to eliminate the discrepancy in date: He claims that John, like Luke, puts the sending of the Spirit fifty days after Easter; in his view, the words "that day" in John 20:19 are a technical formula referring to the return of Christ in the person of the Holy Spirit.¹⁰² No serious commentator will allow such a forced harmonization, but it is certainly true that today, even among Catholics, the opinion is becoming ever more widely accepted that despite the considerable difference between the two accounts not only as to date but even as to content, John and Luke are both relating the same event. These exegetes think that it would be artificial to distinguish two successive gifts of the Spirit to the apostles and that, if the two descriptions are as divergent as they are, it is because they have quite different theological perspectives behind them.¹⁰³

Nonetheless, some excellent commentators are unconvinced and maintain that the two accounts report different events. M.-J. Lagrange observes: "The act described here by John does not fulfill the conditions John himself had mentioned (14:16, 26; 16:7, 13) for the mission of the Spirit, since the Spirit is to be sent by the Father (or by the Son) but after the Son's return to the Father and in order to make up for the absence of the Son."¹⁰⁴ But the ever more numerous exegetes

who think that in the perspective adopted by John the Christophanies of the Easter period are manifestations of a Christ who comes from his place at the Father's side, will not be persuaded by Lagrange's argument.¹⁰⁵ There is good reason for preferring the view expressed by P. Benoit:

How does it come about that, according to John, the Holy Spirit is given to the apostles on the very evening of Easter Day? This is really a false problem since there is no opposition between the Holy Spirit of John who pardons sins and the Holy Spirit of Luke who presides over the universal proclamation. They are two different aspects of the same infinitely rich reality, which is the breath, the power, of God.

John emphasizes the inward and sanctifying aspect of the Spirit who in fulfillment of the promises of the prophets comes to purify the soul of the sinner, to restore him to innocence and give him that justice, that life with God which is the life of Grace. It is the Spirit promised by Ezekiel (36: 25-27), a promise renewed by Jesus in his discourse after the Supper, the Spirit who comes to the inward soul of every Christian to enlighten him, to remind him of the words of God, and to purify him by pardoning his sins.

Luke, on the other hand, in the story of Pentecost, is talking about the Spirit under his "charismatic" aspect. It is the Spirit that God gives the faithful for the welfare of the Church as a whole, not now for inner holiness, but for outward action and the spreading of the gospel.¹⁰⁶

Approaching the matter from a different angle F.-M. Braun stresses the considerable difference between the *imperceptible* gift of the Spirit in the fourth gospel, and the *ecstatic* experience of Acts that brings about the preaching of the gospel.¹⁰⁷

These various answers require a complement, for they leave obscured the most important difference of all between Acts 2:1-13 and John 20:19-23. In Acts, the beneficiaries of the wonderful event of Pentecost (a group not composed exclusively of the apostles¹⁰⁸) are personally transformed by the Spirit and "filled" with him: "they . . . began to speak

foreign languages" (2:4). This amazed those who heard them and caused the apostles to be taken for drunken men. The circumstances of the gift of the Spirit (to the apostles alone) in John 20:19–23 are very different. The gift does not throw the recipients into ecstasy; moreover, it does not correspond exactly to the promises of the Paraclete as made by Jesus after the Supper, for the gift is directly intended, not for the transformation and interior sanctification of the apostles, but for the transformation and sanctification of others who through their mediation will believe in Christ. We have here a paradox. The action of Jesus in breathing on the apostles undoubtedly symbolizes the coming into existence of a new race of men. Yet the apostles, to which the action is directed, are considered by Jesus, not as the nucleus of this new creation, but rather as the collaborators of Christ and the Holy Spirit in carrying out the great plan, inasmuch as in the normal course of events they will be the intermediaries through whom men will be rescued from the captivity of sin and will receive divine life. B. F. Westcott rightly observes that the absence of the definite article before "Holy Spirit" justifies us in taking "Receive the Holy Spirit" to mean: "Receive a gift of the Holy Spirit, a spiritual power."¹⁰⁹

We are thus in a very clear way brought back to the basic theme of the prayer in John 17, where the apostles are consecrated to carry on the work of Christ. We can only agree, therefore, with F. Prat when he sees in John 20:23 "the complement of the priesthood" that Christ had bestowed on his apostles in sacrificing himself, the complement of their priestly consecration.¹¹⁰ We ourselves remarked at an earlier point in this book that while the Holy Spirit seems to be absent from the priestly prayer, his intervention is presupposed at every point. It is presupposed especially by the consecration in the truth, since it is the Spirit Paraclete who leads men into the whole truth. It is also presupposed by the consecration in truth which is inseparable from the consecration

in spirit, just as worship in truth is inseparable from worship in spirit. In the pericope we are now studying, the action of the Holy Spirit is, of course, set forth in explicit and powerful fashion.

It would be very interesting to compare John 20:19–23 with the way in which St. Paul describes the apostolic ministry throughout his second letter to the Corinthians. We may cite at least one text:

For anyone who is now in Christ, there is a new creation; the old creation has gone, and now the new one is here. It is all God's work. It was God who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the work of handing on this reconciliation. In other words, God in Christ was reconciling the world to himself, not holding men's faults against them, and he has entrusted to us the news that they are reconciled. So we are ambassadors for Christ; it is as though God were appealing through us,¹¹¹ and the appeal that we make in Christ's name is: be reconciled to God. For our sake God made the sinless one into sin, so that in him we might become the goodness of God. As his fellow workers, we beg you once again not to neglect the grace of God that you have received (2 Co. 5:17–6:1).

There are evident similarities between John 20:19–23 and the passage just quoted which deal with the role not only of Paul but also of "all his fellow apostles and fellow workers."¹¹² In both passages the redemptive work is thought of as the creation of a new race of men. In both, the apostles are associated with the divine work as messengers or ambassadors of Christ; Christ or, what amounts to the same thing since Christ is God, God himself acts in them and through them appeals to men. In both, the apostles carry out in Christ's name (cf. the two *hyper Christou* phrases in 2 Co. 5:20) the strictly priestly ministry of reconciling men with God. While the fourth gospel shows us the apostles invested with the power to forgive sins, St. Paul tells us that God has

put into their mouths "the news that they [men] are reconciled." Paul, too, is speaking of a message that is effective, for it is a fruit and application of the great reconciliation of mankind with God that Christ brought about on Calvary. In this passage Paul does not actually mention the Holy Spirit, as John does, but a little earlier Paul had laid great stress on the fact that the ministry of the new covenant is essentially a ministry of the Spirit and not of the letter (2 Co. 3).

CHRIST THE PRIEST AND THE "ANGELS" OF THE CHURCHES IN THE APOCALYPSE • THE PROBLEM OF APOSTOLIC SUCCESSION • THE HIERARCHIC LEADERS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE SPIRITUAL STATE OF THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

IN CHAPTER 3 we dealt briefly with the Apocalypse; the time has come to speak of it at greater length. We want especially to draw attention to the splendid letters to the Churches (Chapters 2–3), concerning which W. Bossuet wrote: "Despite their awkwardness of expression, these letters are among the greatest things in the New Testament."¹¹³ The letters are closely connected with the subject of this book, for they show us Christ the Priest holding in his hand seven stars which are the "angels" of the Churches; that is, in our view, the hierarchic leaders of these Churches—men who are in turn ruled by apostolic authority. The fervor of these leaders and the fervor of their communities are intimately linked. It seems to us that there is a substantial doctrinal contact between these letters and John 17, even if this contact has hardly been noticed by the commentators. These are the points we shall now explain as briefly as possible, limiting ourselves to the essentials.

The opening vision (1:13–20) of John is usually offered as a sign, if not a compelling proof, that in the Apocalypse Christ shows himself to us clad in his priestly dignity. And,

in fact, the Son of Man there appears to John dressed in a long robe (*podērēs* or garment reaching to the feet), such as the high priest of the Old Testament wore (Ex. 28:4). We may refer to Zechariah 3:4 (LXX), which tells of the robes of state worn by the high priest Joshua, and especially to Wisdom 18:24, which says that the greatness of Aaron the high priest—a man united in a special way to the creator of the world—was symbolized by his long robe on which the whole universe was represented.¹¹⁴ The fourth gospel furnishes a valuable confirmation of this exegesis. For, as we noted above at the end of Chapter 1, the "seamless" garment of Jesus, "woven in one piece from neck to hem," which the soldiers decided not to tear (Jn. 19:23–24), has also been taken as a sign of his priestly dignity.

J. B. Caird attributes priestly significance also to the golden girdle which the Son of Man wears in the opening vision of the Apocalypse (1:13).¹¹⁵ But in Exodus 39:29, to which Caird refers, the high priest's girdle is actually made of fine twined linen. Other commentators think the golden girdle of the Son of Man is rather a sign of his royal dignity; Allo refers to 1 Maccabees 10:89, where King Alexander sends Jonathan a golden brooch of the kind usually given only to princes of the royal blood.¹¹⁶

It is usual, of course, for the Apocalypse to link closely the priestly and royal dignities; thus, elsewhere it lays great stress on Christ being a king. It teaches us, in addition, that Christ makes kings and priests of his disciples (1:6; 5:10); he must himself, therefore, be both priest and king, for in the Apocalypse, perhaps more clearly than elsewhere in the New Testament, we see him rewarding his faithful followers with a share in his own privileges. Once again the fourth gospel is enlightening: In the account of the Passion the scene of the seamless robe follows directly on that in which Pilate unwittingly proclaims the royalty of the crucified Jesus, by having a trilingual inscription (in Hebrew, Greek,