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JOHN

D. MOODY SMITH

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ABINGDON NEW TESTAMENT COMMENTARIES:
JOHN

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To W. D. Davies
and
Paul S. Minear
My first teachers of New Testament

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washing of the disciples' feet is the narrative centerpiece of the Last Supper, and its message is underscored once more toward the end of the scene as Jesus issues his commandment that his disciples should love one another.

Jesus' prediction of his betrayal by Judas (vv. 21-30) and denial by Peter (vv. 36-38) are known to us from the synoptic tradition, although both have been subjected to a distinctly Johannine shaping. In the former episode Judas's perfidy is underscored even more strongly than in the other Gospels, even as Jesus' foreknowledge and his initiative are emphasized. Similarly, Jesus proclaims to Peter not only his denial, but his subsequent return. Even Jesus' telling question to Peter (v. 38) could in Greek also be read as a statement: "You will lay down your life for me." The knowledgeable Johannine reader would understand (cf. 21:18-19) that despite Peter's denial, apparently to save his life, he would finally lay down his life as a martyr for Jesus.

Jesus' Farewell Discourses (14:1-16:33)

The farewell discourses of Jesus take place at the Last Supper (chap. 13). No change of venue is indicated at the beginning of chapter 14. Chapter 13 closes with Jesus' prediction of Peter's denial, and although Jesus apparently begins a new discourse at 14:1, he also makes connection with what he has said toward the end of the preceding scene (cf. 13:36, 14:2-3). Although the Last Supper in John contains several episodes with synoptic parallels, so that as a whole it is clearly the counterpart of the synoptic scene, the same cannot quite be said of the farewell discourses. In a very general sense, however, their content corresponds to the synoptic apocalypse (Matt 24:1-44; Mark 13:1-37; Luke 21:5-33) in that Jesus reveals future events to his disciples. (On thematic and other parallels with the Synoptics, see Brown 1970, 595.) What is revealed, and the conversational, dialogical manner are, however, quite different. As far as we can tell, the supper setting continues through chapter 17, the final prayer of Jesus. Yet the discourses are obviously coming to a conclusion in 16:29-33, and there is a clearly transitional statement in 17:1.

The fact that in 14:31 Jesus tells his disciples to get up and depart, but they do not, has suggested to many commentators that there has been some disarrangement of the text (Bultmann 1971, 459, 595) or that chapters 15-16 (17) have been added later (Brown 1970, 586-88; Barrett 1978, 454-55). The latter view is the simpler and more feasible alternative, and the one followed in this commentary. Yet we shall read these discourses as a whole, on the working hypothesis that in their present form they manifest a certain coherence, whether or not they were composed in stages. (See Segovia's important work *The Farewell of the Word* [1991, vii-ix, 20-58, 283-313]; yet Segovia [319-28] also believes that the discourses arose in stages.) We have frequently noted the retrospective character of the Johannine narrative, which is nowhere more evident than in these discourses. Indeed, in the farewell discourses Jesus explains how, through the Spirit-Paraclete, illumination will take place (14:26). Another characteristic of John's Gospel is repetition. Already, fundamental theological themes have been reiterated. Arguably, the farewell discourses offer a culminating example of John's repetitiveness. As far as the composition of the discourses is concerned, their repetitiveness does not necessarily bespeak later, redactional additions. And even if it does, the virtue of repetition may be seen as brought into play by a later editor, for good reason.

While John 14-16 is the Johannine counterpart of the synoptic apocalypses (see Barrett 1978, 455), on many crucial points it differs. To begin with, the synoptic apocalypses occur before the Last Supper, while the Johannine discourses are set at, or after, the Supper. So their positions in the narrative are different, although similar in that they both occur as the end of Jesus' ministry comes into view. The basic general theme of the future the disciples will face after Jesus' departure may be said to be the same, but it differs in two important respects. First, the vivid apocalyptic language and conceptuality of the Synoptics is missing in John, except that the basic idea of Jesus' coming again, his future presence, is very much at the center of attention, as it is in the culmination of the synoptic apocalypse. In the Synoptics, of course, we read of the coming of the Son of Man (Mark 13:24-27 par.) rather

than Jesus, but it is the assumption of the evangelists and of the narrative, here and throughout the Gospels, that the Son of Man is Jesus. Second, the Johannine narrative is concerned with the manifestation and continuing presence of Jesus among his disciples specifically, and not to the world (14:22). That Jesus should be manifest in glory to the world, including the disciples, is very much the essence of Christian apocalyptic (cf. 1 Thess 4:13-18; Rev 1:7; as well as the synoptic apocalypses).

In this connection, it is also worth observing that the farewell discourses occur in the presence of all the disciples. (The fact that the twelve are not specifically mentioned may imply that more, rather than fewer, disciples are presumed to be present.) In Mark (13:3), by contrast, Jesus takes with him the inner circle of four (Peter, James, John, and Andrew) and goes up on the Mount of Olives across from the temple (only Mark mentions both places). Interestingly, Matthew and Luke omit these names, implying that Jesus addresses all his disciples. This change, which brings them closer to John, is a natural one. That in the Synoptics the disciples are on the Mount of Olives across from the temple is quite appropriate. National and apocalyptic hopes centered about the temple (Isa 44:28; Ezek 40-48; Mal 3:1). John, on the other hand, has the disciples gathered with their teacher and Lord (13:13) at, or after, the meal. What Jesus will reveal concerns them only, or at least primarily, and not the world. Yet while the synoptic apocalypse describes public cataclysms and events, it too is given for the benefit of the disciples. It is a revelation to them only.

Ancient Jewish and other literature provides close parallels to John's farewell discourses in the testament of farewell of a dying hero. Segovia provides a helpful summary of analyses of farewell scenes that fall into a recognizable pattern (1991, 2-19). In Greco-Roman literature the archetypal farewell scene is Socrates' farewell to his disciples as recounted by Plato in the dialogue entitled *Phaedo*. As Segovia points out (6, n. 6), this scene contains elements that become common to most such scenes:

First, there is a conversation between the dying man and his confidants in his last hours. Second, within such a conversation are a

number of fixed and recurring elements: forebodings or prophecies of death, final instructions regarding the care of those left behind, the appointment of a successor, a prayer of thanksgiving to the gods, words of farewell and consolation for the intimate circle, an account of past activities, teachings and exhortations for the wider gathering, and political and philosophical testaments.

Particularly if one includes John 13 and 17, which belong to the total farewell scene, virtually every item mentioned by Segovia is included.

Within the Old Testament the most significant parallel to John's discourses is Moses' address to the people in Deuteronomy. With its emphasis on obeying God's commandments Deuteronomy itself prefigures a similar emphasis in the farewell discourses of John. It is a kind of testament of Moses, as he prepares Israel for his death and departure. After their forty years of wilderness wandering they are about to go over the Jordan and possess the promised land. Moreover, in Deut 18:15-22 there is the promise of the prophet like Moses, which Jesus fulfills in the Gospel of John. Probably the earliest biblical exemplar of this genre is Jacob's blessing of his sons, the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel, just before his death (Gen 49). Such biblical testaments gave rise to a flourishing genre of testaments in the period of Christian origins (see Charlesworth 1983, 773-995). Of these the most notable are the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* (the sons of Jacob), which were in the process of composition about the time when the Gospel of John was being written (Charlesworth 1983, 775-828).

Within the New Testament, Luke comes closest to constructing such a farewell of Jesus (22:14-38), even as he depicts Paul delivering a farewell address to the Ephesian elders on the island of Miletus (Acts 20:17-38). Interestingly, Luke knows, and lets the reader know, that the hearers will never again see Paul alive (20:25, 38). Such scenes, like John's, are in some respects closer to the typical farewell type-scene than to the synoptic apocalyptic discourses.

How many such scenes the evangelist himself knew we can only guess, but he doubtless knew at least the biblical (Old

Testament) precedents. Probably he knew also traditions concerning the Last Supper, at which the discourses are set (as in Luke 22:14-38). The question of whether he knew the synoptic apocalypses is a part of the larger issue of John and the Synoptics, which continues to be much debated. Two points may, however, be made with a high degree of certainty. First, if John had known the Markan apocalypse he would scarcely have taken it up in the way Matthew and Luke did. On eschatology more than anything else John is writing revisionist history. But second, even if John did not know Mark, he surely knew the apocalyptic temper of much early Christianity, which is what he seeks to revise (11:24-25; 14:22; 21:22-23). In all probability the apocalypse of Mark 13 developed over time, and it has parallels and perhaps even some basis in other apocalyptic utterances, particularly 1 Thess 4:15-17 (which Paul ascribes to a word of the Lord) and 1 Cor 15:20-28; then there is the Revelation to John and whatever traditions may lie behind it.

As original as they may seem, the Johannine discourses emerge from, and presume, rich eschatological and testamentary traditions.

Jesus' First Farewell Discourse (14:1-31)

As we have observed, chapter 14 comprises a complete unit of discourse, after which one could easily move to the emergence of Jesus and the disciples into the garden (cf. 14:31; 18:1). In this discourse Jesus assures the disciples that they will not be separated from him, despite his departure to the Father, with whom he lives in closest unity. Their unity with Jesus and the Father will be assured on two sides, the divine and the human. On the one side, God will send the Advocate or Paraclete, the Spirit, who will effect the continuing presence and guidance of Jesus. On the other the disciples must respond by continuing obedience to Jesus' word. Given these conditions, one grounded in God's initiative, the other contingent on the disciples' response, the disciples may be confident that Jesus' peace, which is the peace of God, will abide with them.

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14:1-7: In these opening words Jesus promises his disciples they will always be with him (cf. 17:24). Again in 14:27 he will tell the disciples that their hearts should not be troubled, and when the risen Jesus first greets his disciples he offers them first a word of reassurance (20:19: "Peace be with you").

Right at the outset (v. 1) there is a translation problem, reflected in the NRSV note. The Greek can be translated in either of two ways. The reason for choosing the translation of the text over that found in the note is theological; either is possible since the present indicative and imperative are the same in Greek. In John's view belief in God entails belief in Jesus: access to God is now only through Jesus (cf. 14:6). Belief in Jesus is not an add-on to belief in God.

Jesus next assures the disciples that there is room for them in his Father's house (v. 2). "House" reflects the Greek *oikia* (rather than *oikos*, the building), and can mean "household" or "family." Probably the choice of the term is significant. The dwelling places (*monai*) are denoted by the nominal form of the verb frequently used by John of abiding in or with Jesus (*meno*; cf. 6:56; 15:4-10; also 14:23, where the noun is used again: "make our home with them"). One comes to dwell in God's house, his dwelling place.

The closing sentence of verse 2 presents the more serious translation problem. Again, the translation given in the NRSV note (cf. KJV) is possible and perhaps preferable. The difficulty with the translation adopted in the text is that Jesus has not yet told the disciples in the narrative that he is going to prepare a place for them (so also O'Day 1995, 741). (The Greek conjunction *hoti* can either be translated "for," with the note, or "that," with the text.) In any case John's purpose is to stress the certainty of what is said (Bultmann 1971, 601). Jesus then elaborates his word of reassurance (v. 3), and in doing so alludes to what he has just said to Peter (13:36). Peter, of course, was speaking of the immediate future; Jesus now speaks of the eschatological future, beyond death (as Bultmann 1971, 602, also clearly recognized; cf. 17:24). Jesus then attributes to the disciples knowledge of the way home, to the Father's house (v. 4). The alternative reading in the note, attested in at least one very early manuscript (P⁶⁶), makes

little substantive difference. Thomas, who has spoken earlier (11:16), admits ignorance and asks the key question (v. 5). The motif of the disciples' misunderstanding or, closely related, ignorance, is something we have seen earlier (13:9, 36-37) and will see again shortly (14:8, 22). Whether Thomas's question reflects some irritation or is simply a straightforward and necessary inquiry is impossible to decide on the basis of the framing of the question itself, but must be determined in the interpretation of the context. (As Segovia 1991, 86, points out, Jesus seems to respect Thomas's question.) It can reasonably be taken as a necessary and important question that allows Jesus to say what he must (see Charlesworth 1995, 262, 316, 319, 335, 429, who emphasizes this way of reading Thomas's question). Indeed, Thomas's question allows Jesus to respond with a definitive revelatory proclamation (v. 6).

Jesus' statement affirms not only the validity, but the exclusivity of his claim. One thinks immediately of Jesus' statement to Martha that he is the resurrection and the life (11:25), but there he does not deny any other valid access to God, as he seems to do here. The terms Jesus uses are typical and important in John, especially truth (*alētheia*) and life (*zōē*). We see them already prominently displayed and emphasized in the prologue (life in 1:4; truth in 1:14, 17). It is no surprise that Jesus says that he is truth and life.

"Way" (*hodos*) is less prominent in John, in fact it is used only here of Jesus, quite clearly because the subject is access to the Father. How does one gain it? Jesus is the way. Interestingly, the same term is used of the Christian movement in Acts (9:2, 19:9, 23, 22:4; 24:14, 22). There it is not a christological title, yet it is not hard to imagine a connection. While the term in Greek, as in English, basically denotes a road or path, it was widely used symbolically to refer to a way of life, a practice. The latter usage has biblical precedent (Prov 4:11; Jer 5:4). In the Qumran literature "way" (Heb. *derek*) is often used similarly (1QS9:16-21), as the members of the community apparently referred to their discipline as the Way. Also in early Christian literature there appears the concept of "two ways" (i.e., of life and death), particularly in the

Diache (especially chaps. 1 and 5). Perhaps closest to John 14:6 in New Testament usage is Heb 10:20, where Jesus is said to open a new and living way through the curtain (i.e., his flesh) into the sanctuary of the tabernacle, which is God's presence. (On the background of "way" here, see Brown 1970, 628-31, as well as Bulmann 1971, 603-7.) Although this background and the Christian and Jewish parallels are relevant to understanding what John means, his use of the term for Jesus, and as a virtual title for him, would seem to be unprecedented, although it is not surprising in John.

The identification of Jesus himself as the way squares with the radical claim of Johannine Christology, which is made quite explicitly here: "No one comes to the Father except through me" (v. 6; cf. Heb 10:20). This statement reflects a severe exclusivity, even intolerance. It should, however, be seen in light of John's presupposing a bitter polemic between Christ-confessing and Christ-denying Jews, in which confessors are being expelled from synagogues for their belief (9:22). Moreover, such polemic and mutual rejection were not unprecedented within ancient Judaism. (On such polemical tensions against and within Judaism see Luke Johnson 1989). One can, minimally, appreciate this statement of Jesus as assurance that he provides access to the Father. That no one else does is, of course, the obverse, but not a necessary obverse. The assumption that there is no way to the Father, and that Jesus has opened one (Heb 10:20) and has become himself that way is probably a more accurate reading of this statement than the assumption that there are many ways to the Father and that the Johannine Jesus is closing off all save one, himself. Jesus, in fact, gives his disciples the assurance that he has done just that (v. 7).

14:8-14: Philip's question again raises the issue of Jesus' relation to the Father. Following Jesus' assurance (v. 7), his request seems to manifest a kind of obtuseness, because Jesus has just said he has shown the disciples the Father (cf. Philip's perplexity in 6:7). All this conversation harks back to 1:18, where the classical Jewish belief that man does not see God is reflected. (See Exod 33:20: "no one shall see me and live," meaning no human being

shall see the face, or presence, of God and live.) In this regard, Exod 24:10 is extremely interesting, for the Hebrew simply says that Moses and those with him "saw the God of Israel," while the Septuagint reads, "They saw the place where the God of Israel stood." The Old Testament does, if rarely, speak of men seeing God—as in Isa 6:1, 5—but as we come down to the period of Christian origins this becomes an intolerable idea in Judaism.

Philip's demand therefore seems impertinent against this background, as well as obtuse after what Jesus has just said. But, as is so often the case in the Fourth Gospel, the conversation partner's dullness opens the door for Jesus' clarifying, revelatory statement (v. 9; cf. 14:5 and 6 above). The ignorance of the twelve is a major motif of Mark's Gospel. Yet in a somewhat different form it also appears in John. Philip has been with Jesus all along, since the day Jesus called him (1:43; cf. 6:7; 12:21), yet he can still ask this question. Is Jesus' counterquestion to be read as a reflection of his actual astonishment and irritation with Philip? Possibly, but all along, and even in these final discourses, the disciples, although they have believed and followed Jesus, still do not understand him. Jesus uses the occasion to ask a probing question (v. 10*a*) and reiterate the Johannine Christology (vv. 10-11).

The Christology Jesus reiterates has been stated and restated, most recently in 12:44-45, 49-50. Heretofore Jesus has said it publicly, now he says it to his disciples, who seem to need to hear it as much as anyone. Yet there is now a change, for here Jesus expresses an even closer unity with the Father. Not only does he say what the Father gives him to speak, but the indwelling Father thereby does his works, and Jesus goes on to assert his unity with the Father, their mutual indwelling (Countryman 1987). He asks the disciples to believe him as he asserts that unity. Here (v. 11) the verb becomes plural, as Jesus addresses all his disciples; in verse 10 it is singular, as there Jesus is portrayed as still in conversation with Philip only. Then there is a curious turn as Jesus seems to contemplate the possibility that the disciples will not believe him, and says in effect, "All right, then believe me because of God's works." He has said something quite similar to his opponents already (10:37-38).

This statement puts at center stage the question of God's works. Earlier on Jesus has said that he must complete the work of God (4:34). In his concluding prayer he says he has completed the work God has given him to do. His final word on the cross, as he expires, is "It is finished," doubtless a double meaning in which John delights. Jesus' life is finished; he dies. But at a deeper level his work, God's work, is finished. Jesus' work is so closely aligned with God that he can say that the Father who dwells in him does his work. In Acts, Jesus' miracles are the work of God (10:32; cf. 10:38). Not only does Jesus do the work of God, his works, that is, his ministry, are the works of the God who speaks through him. Bultmann (1971, 609) equates Jesus' or God's works with words, but in the context of the whole Gospel it is more natural to think the works God does through Jesus include deeds, signs. Carson (1991, 495) thinks the reference is primarily to signs. Von Wahlde (1989) believes that the use of "signs," rather than works, and "Pharisees," rather than "Jews," for the religious authorities is characteristic of an earlier form of the Gospel. As the Gospel now stands, "works" often seems a broader category that includes signs, but is not exhausted by signs.

Jesus then turns from his own works, which are the works of God, to the works of his followers (v. 12). The first hint of disciples doing the works of God comes when Jesus is asked how to do the works of God after the feeding of five thousand (see 6:28); the answer is to believe in the one God has sent (v. 29). His disciples do believe in him and thus already do the works of God. Thus Jesus' promise that they will do the works he does comes as no surprise. He does the works of God: God works in him, and as believers they will do the works that he does (v. 12*a*). And they will do greater works because Jesus goes to the Father (v. 12*b*).

Probably a great many readers have been perplexed by Jesus' concluding statements in answer to Philip (vv. 12-14), because he promises his disciples first that they will do greater works than he does and then that anything they ask in his name he will do. The problem is, of course, that these promises exceed and defy any reasonable expectation, not that the promises themselves are hard to understand. In fact, there are similar assurances and promises

of Jesus about answered prayer elsewhere (e.g., Matt 7:7-8; Mark 11:24; Luke 11:9-10; cf. Jas 4:2-3; 1 John 3:22). The interpreter should leave aside the question of whether or not these promises are realistic and ask what they mean in this Gospel.

The problem raised already by Jesus when he tells the disciples, "Where I am going, you cannot come" (14:33), leads into the theme of the discourses. Seemingly, the disciples are told exactly what Jesus has told the Jews (7:34). So the discourses address the fundamental question raised by the separation of Jesus from his disciples by death. From their standpoint this problem may seem insurmountable; from Jesus' standpoint, to which the reader is introduced also, it is no problem at all. Only Jesus' departure presents the possibility of his abiding with them eternally, a possibility that otherwise, or heretofore, did not exist. Eschatologically speaking, the disciples still live in the present age, which is passing away (cf. 1 Cor 7:31), while Jesus speaks from the standpoint of the coming age, into which he has already passed. He invites disciples to join him there, but they have not as yet.

Jesus is now about to promise them the Spirit-Advocate, really the means of his continuing presence with them (vv. 15-17). In light of this promise, with all that it entails, what Jesus says about the works they will accomplish and the fulfillment of their petitions is not surprising. Key phrases in this connection are "because I am going to the Father" and "whatever you ask in my name." It is Jesus' unity with the Father that will enable his disciples to do "greater works," which are really the continuing works of Jesus. Not anything they ask will be granted, but only what they ask in Jesus' name. The name in biblical and Johannine thought is the empowering reality and presence of the divine.

Jesus' promise raises the issue of what should be asked in his name. Seemingly Paul struggles with such a question in Rom 8:26; almost certainly 1 John 5:14-15 deals with this issue in light of Jesus' promise in the Gospel. Two thousand years of praying more or less perfunctorily "in Jesus' name" may be based upon this text, but it scarcely does justice to its profundity. Jesus is addressing disciples whom he has invited to live in, and out of, the resources of another age. There, in unity with him and the Father,

they will do "greater works" and receive "whatever they ask." This reality sets aside all other, worldly conceptions of what believers will pray for and what may be realistic.

14:15-26: Now for the first time Jesus promises the disciples the Spirit or Advocate (see also 14:25-26; 15:26-27; 16:7-15). The future tense (v. 16) means this promise will be fulfilled after Jesus' departure. Indeed, in the Gospel narrative the risen Jesus, meeting with his disciples, will bestow on them the Holy Spirit (20:22). Of course, at the very beginning the Spirit has descended (and will remain) upon Jesus, who, it is said, will baptize with the Holy Spirit (1:33). The promise of the Spirit now fulfills the word of God to John the Baptist, as the disciples will be baptized with the Holy Spirit. One need not suppose that John believed, or intended to say, that otherwise God's Spirit had never been present in Israel or among human beings. Now, however, Jesus speaks of a new and distinctive manifestation of the Spirit. (See Burge 1987, especially 3-45, 205-15. More briefly, D. Moody Smith 1995, 78-80, 139-44, on Spirit and *paraklētos* in John.)

Jesus first states the condition of the Spirit's coming: the disciples must love Jesus by keeping his commandments (v. 15). Loving Jesus has been mentioned, if only fleetingly (8:42), but now becomes the central theme (as Bultmann 1971 notes, 612): To love Jesus is to keep his commandments. (Bultmann's insight has been taken up and developed by Miranda 1977, who gives full credit to him and emphasizes the importance of his insight.)

Jesus will return to the theme of love, but now he gives the promise of the Spirit-Advocate. Jesus' confidence that the Father will give him what he asks should not surprise us at this point. That he speaks of "another Advocate" may. Who was the first? The answer seems to be Jesus himself, who in 1 John (2:1) is called "an advocate with the Father." So already there is the suggestion that the Advocate will continue Jesus' work. (Note that in 1 John 2:1 "advocate" is not capitalized in the NRSV because it denotes a function; it is capitalized in John 14:15 because it is a title or proper name.)

There is, however, a problem of translation. As we noted, the