

Spirituality and Transforming Worship? Individual and collective experiences of Jesus’ presence (and absence) in John’s Gospel¹

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Abstract

This session explores individual and collective experiences of Jesus’/God’s presence (and absence) in **John’s Gospel**. References to God’s presence are characterised by the **transferral of “temple” imagery to both Jesus and the Johannine community** as the dwelling place where God’s “tabernacling” presence is experienced (1:14; 2:13–22; 14:1–6). These images, distinctive of the “household” dynamic of the FG (1:12–13, 18), are reflected in Jesus’ engagement with **individuals** (such as Nathanael, Nicodemus, a Samaritan woman, a beggar born blind, Mary Magdalene, Thomas, Simon Peter) and with his **disciples** (in John 13–17) as intimate, mutual indwelling of God, Jesus, Spirit and believers. In the midst of his departing words (13:33; 14:2) and his followers’ disillusion and grief (13:36–38; 14:1, 27; 16:20–22), Jesus invites them to “remain/dwell” in him/his love (15:4, 9) while receiving the other Counsellor/Comforter whom the Father will send in his name (14:26; 16:7, 13). The session is particularly interested in **Jesus’ emphasis on “remaining”** and focuses on two expressions of the community’s spirituality in view of his continuing presence: **holiness and love**. These themes appear to draw on core notions from Torah, particularly Lev 19.

We will finally ask how these notions were/are meant to transform their/our worship as a community, and **how personal commitment and corporate worship may engage and enrich each other. In this session the emphasis will be on the nurturing of a disciplined personal spiritual life** aimed at confirming and strengthening the corporate worship of the community of believers.

Just as I have loved you, you also should love ...
Abide/remain in me ... abide/remain in my love.
(Jn 13:34; 15:4, 9, 12 NRS).

1 Introduction: Household Imagery in the Fourth Gospel (FG)

The Yoruba people of Nigeria have a saying, “To be happy in one’s home is better than to be a chief.” This session of the Winter School is concerned with **the “home” where followers of Jesus are invited to live in light of the “household” dynamic and rhetoric of John’s Gospel.**

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Focusing on tabernacle and temple imagery in the FG has become a popular theme in Johannine scholarship. Through these images, the Johannine community witnessed to **their experience, their “seeing” of God’s presence** in their midst. This awareness is already announced in the Prologue (“And the Word became flesh and **lived among us**, and **we have seen his glory**”; 1:14), and alluded to in Jesus’ discussion with Nathanael in the opening chapter of the Gospel (“**You will see greater things ... you will see heaven opened** and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man;” 1:45–51). For those familiar with the Hebrew Scriptures, this phrase would probably recall Jacob’s dream in Gen 28 and his response in vv. 16–17:

Surely *the LORD is in this place* ... This is none other than *the house of God*, and this is the gate of heaven. (emphasis added)

In two recent monographs, Australian Johannine scholar **Mary Coloe** (2001, 2007) presents remarkably innovative research on temple/household imagery in John’s Gospel. Without “spiritualising” the Gospel—as has often been the case during its history of reception—she reads John through a particular theological-spiritual lens. She concludes that the Gospel’s emphasis on God’s dwelling is to offer hope to the Johannine community in the years after the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in 70 CE.

In her first book, *God Dwells with Us: Temple Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel* (2001), Coloe explores the **development of the community’s identity awareness** through its use of symbolic language—from **their roots in Israel’s perception of the tabernacle and temple as God’s dwelling place (2:16) to its experience of God’s dwelling in Jesus as the incarnate λόγος (1:14)**. For the Johannine community, she argues, the temple was a major symbol representing the identity and mission of Jesus. From here she shows how the Gospel’s temple imagery is developed further, particularly in the final discourse of chs. 13–17, and transferred to the community of believers as God’s dwelling place after Jesus’ return to his Father (13:1; 16:4–7). “Just as Jesus could be described as the tabernacling presence of God (1:14), and as a temple (2:21), so too the Johannine community was a living ‘temple’ in which God continued to dwell” (14:2). In this way, she argues, the narrative creates a symbolic world in which the disciples are given **“a clear sense of identity** and a way of sustaining faith in the absence of Jesus.” Ultimately, they are to find comfort in God’s intimate dwelling in them and they in God (15:4). By retelling the story of Jesus’ presence/absence after the destruction of the temple, with the synagogue no longer accessible (16:2), the Johannine community embodies God’s alternative temple/household as a source of

hope in the world (14:2)—a new Israel in which the risen Jesus lives through the Spirit.

In a second monograph, *Dwelling in the Household of God: Johannine Ecclesiology and Spirituality* (2007), Coloe elaborates on the symbolism explored in its predecessor by focusing on developments in the community's identity and implied ethos between Jesus' first reference to "my Father's house" as a building, a cultic institution (2:16)—thereby "echoing the most frequent name of the Temple in Israel's Scriptures as 'the LORD's house'"—and his second reference in 14:2 to "my Father's house" as a symbol of community, intimacy and mutuality. It approaches the narrative from the Johannine community's post-resurrection perspective according to which they continued to experience God's presence after Jesus' departure, while seeing themselves as God's dwelling place/household. For Coloe, the phrase "my Father's household" in 14:2 "expresses the reciprocity inherent in the invitation: 'make your home in me, as I make mine in you'" in 15:4. In fact, the vine/branches metaphor in 15:1–8, with God as vine-grower, explicates for her the household metaphor with its many dwelling places in 14:2. "Together these two images offer the distinctly Johannine perspective on salvation as a communion of life formed by the mutual indwelling of God and the believer." By analysing various aspects of the community's life, the book critically accounts for her belief "that underlying the Gospel of John is a profound experience, a mysticism of divine mutual indwelling." Through showing how John's tabernacle and temple imagery echoes and reinterprets major themes from the Hebrew Scriptures, she develops a fresh perspective on the living spirituality of the community.

Though not overt, "house(hold)" imagery thus seems to play a fundamental role in the FG's theological thinking. This is already clear from the Prologue, not only from its vocabulary, but also from its structure. In this regard, Alan Culpepper argues that the central notion in the chiasmic structure of the Prologue—namely 1:12b, "But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God"—is pivotal to the Gospel's thinking. Through various writings, the Johannine family witnesses to their identity as "children of God" (3:3–16; 1 Jn 2:29; 3:1–2), and to their implied ethos as "remaining/dwelling" in Jesus as their new "home/household" (13:34–35; 15:4–10; 1 Jn 4:13–16).

What would the implications be of such claims? How did these experiences of God's presence influence their understanding of the world, and of their concrete daily lives? In the rest of the discussion I will focus on two

related yet distinguishable themes characteristic of the community's spirituality (identity and ethos) as dwelling place of God, particularly during Jesus' "absence," namely holiness and love.

2 Sacred Life in God's Household

For the Johannine community, every aspect of life—time, place, people—is oriented and connected to the presence of God, Jesus and the Spirit, and therefore regarded as holy. According to the narrator's perspective, harmonious, abundant life (10:10) is defined in a relation of faith to Jesus of Nazareth—the Holy One of God (6:69), the One consecrated and sent by God (10:36)—and God's Holy Spirit (7:37–39; 14:26; 20:30–31).

John's Prologue announces that *ὁ λόγος*, the eternal, cosmic word, the life and light that was with God and that was indeed God (1:1–5), became flesh and dwelled among people (1:14). The Greek verb *ἐσκήνωσεν* (*σκηνώω* = to take up residence) in 1:14 probably alludes to Israel's tabernacle (Exod 26:1–37; 36:8–38), where the visible glory of YHWH's presence resided. It implies, as Coloe argues, that YHWH's glory that once was found in the tabernacle (and temple) has taken up residence in the person of Jesus, and that this glory can now be "seen" in Jesus (1:14–18). The rest of the Gospel narrates how Jesus revealed and embodied the word—full of grace and truth (1:14)—in ways that would bring surprisingly new light to people's understanding of God.

It is remarkable to see how temple imagery, distinctive of the "household" dynamic of the Gospel, is reflected throughout the narrative in Jesus' engagement with people—both with *individuals* (such as Nathanael, Nicodemus, a Samaritan woman, a woman caught in adultery, a beggar born blind, Martha/Mary/Lazarus of Bethany, Mary Magdalene, Thomas, Simon Peter) and collectively with his *disciples*, particularly in Jn 13–17—as intimate, mutual indwelling of God, Jesus, Spirit and believers.

Echoing the opening statement of the book of Genesis and the Pentateuch as a whole, the drama of John's Gospel starts with "in the beginning." Whereas Torah narratives were told against the backdrop of Israel's deliverance from Egypt, "the house of slavery" (Exod 20:2), the FG witnesses to God's covenant people in relation to *ὁ λόγος*—a new "house(hold)" in continuation *and* discontinuation with Israel, of which God is "the Father," Jesus the "the only Son ... close to the Father's heart" (1:18), and those who believe in him, "God's children" (1:12; 14:2). The socio-political context within which the Johannine circle makes these claims is that of the Roman

Empire, with a (highly gendered) hierarchical structure and the emperor as its “father” and patriarchs as household heads.

Exploring the reference of John’s household/family metaphors, and identifying possible sources behind the encompassing theological thinking of the FG, is no easy task. Substantial blending probably occurred as the author and community appropriated sources from their environment in the process of remembering and retelling the story of Jesus of Nazareth. What has become clear from Coloe’s work is that the Gospel’s tabernacle and temple imagery is probably rooted in Israel’s understanding of God’s dwelling in the world, first associated with the tabernacle and later the temple.

The first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures (Torah) witness to the people of Israel called to live in a covenant relation with YHWH, to be a holy nation and a blessing to the peoples of the earth. As a symbol of YHWH’s presence *en route* to the promised land, they were to build a holy place, a tabernacle (ἡ σκηνή) containing the ark of the covenant (Exod 25). For Israel, holiness was first of all regarded as “the quintessential nature of Yahweh as God” (John Hartley 1992). And because YHWH is holy, everyone approaching YHWH was to be holy.

According to Judith Wegner (1998), the concept of holiness in Torah is inseparable from the companion concept of cultic purity: “Holiness was not just a spiritual quality concerned with ethics, morality, or religious faith ... For the priestly caste in particular, it involved every aspect of human conduct, from rising in the morning to retiring at night.” The usual way in which the people of Israel experienced God’s holiness was through God’s acts of love, particularly in YHWH’s great and merciful act of delivering them from Egyptian bondage. From their atonement with this holy God (Lev 16), instructions for holy living would flow. The implication of belonging to a holy God would for Israel be the reflection and imitation of YHWH’s divine character.²

The book of Leviticus represents a central moment in the Torah.³ Jacob Milgrom (2000, 2004) identifies Lev 19 as the centre of the book, with

² In fact, cultic purity and moral integrity were intrinsically bound together in Israel’s daily living in YHWH’s presence (Hartley 1992). This is also relevant in the case of the FG, where Jesus challenges the religious leaders on their overemphasis of ritual holiness, often at the cost of ethical holiness (love for the neighbour).

³ The immanent presence of YHWH among the people of Israel is a key theme throughout Lev. While they experienced YHWH through worship at the tent of meeting and through the everyday duties of life, the phrase “I am YHWH,” which features throughout the holiness code, reminded the Israelites of who/whose they were and “that every area of their life ... was of concern to the Lord”

the key motivation for Israel's daily ethos stated in 19:2, "You shall be holy, for I YHWH your God am holy." In contrast to their polytheistic neighbours, Israel's primary identity was that they belonged to YHWH—for them, the only God (Deut 6:4). This identity awareness would fundamentally determine their daily ethos as neighbourhood.

According to Milgrom (2004), the command to love the neighbour (Lev 19:18b) serves as the "culminating point" of the holiness code. It is placed alongside the command to care for the foreigner/resident alien (Lev 19:33–34; cf. Deut 10:17–19). Loving one's neighbour would first of all refer to taking care of the socio-economically marginalised in their midst. Lev 19:18 occurs in a setting of rules such as not to reap the edges of the field when harvesting or to strip the vineyards bare, but to leave some grapes for the poor and the alien, not to cheat in measuring length, weight or quantity, not to crush the poor by withholding wages or, more subtly, by showing partiality in the judging of disputes, not to revile the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind.

When the Israelites are warned not to oppress the stranger residing with them, the additional rationale given is that they themselves had been aliens in the land of Egypt (Lev 19:10, 33–34). To this motivation Deut 10:17–19 adds another dimension, namely that God "loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing."⁴ Thus, to honour the holy God in their midst, the covenant people of Israel were to love their neighbour *and* the foreigner through actions that would be worthy of YHWH's character.

The socio-economic and religious-political contexts implied by the origins and early reception of Torah, was that of the Egyptian empire and its gods, from which God delivered the Israelites. Wegner (1998) argues that, in order to maintain their freedom as well as harmony in the cosmos, cultic-ethical practices and rules/codes were designed to preserve the holiness and purity of individual members of ancient Israelite society, as well as the

(Chingota 2006). The formulaic phrase "I am YHWH your God" recurs through the entire book, often with emphasis on God's (and Israel's) holiness.

⁴ Even though the texts of Lev 19:18, 34 and Deut 10:17–19 convey similar messages, Lev 19 has been more influential during its history of reception. Of the two motivations for neighbourly love, Andreas Schüle argues: "Lev 19 emphasizes the first, which is the experience of being a foreigner. This, in my reading, is what the prepositional phrase כְּמוֹךָ 'like you' means: 'Love the foreigner because he/she is someone like you.'" "However," Schüle (2016) continues, "the Septuagint puts a slightly different spin on the love commandment by turning כְּמוֹךָ into an adverbial phrase: 'Love your neighbor as (you love) yourself' ... It is not clear if the LXX intentionally shifted the notion of love more towards self-love, or if the LXX was actually trying to imitate the Hebrew phrasing with Greek words, but inadvertently created a different meaning."

community as a whole. These codes embodied Israel's understanding of unity, wholeness and order. For them, living holy lives in YHWH's presence was about maintaining cosmic order.

With regard to the relation holiness and order, the Gospel of John describes a holy, dissident Jesus turning the Jewish understanding of cosmic order upside down. He "inaugurated a new order which touches every aspect of life" (Hartley 1992). Early in the narrative (2:13–22), Jesus dramatically cleanses the temple. According to Jewish purity laws, he behaves shamelessly by showing compassion to the ritually impure: a foreign Samaritan woman, a woman caught in adultery, a poor beggar born blind. He prevents embarrassment at a wedding in Cana, feeds the hungry, and raises his friend Lazarus from the dead. He radically reinterprets their traditions, often by relativising ritual laws in favour of moral laws with regard to holy people (Pharisees, scribes), places (temple, synagogue), and time (Sabbath, feasts).

According to John's perspective, Jesus' holiness paradoxically becomes visible through the glory of his self-giving love, reaching its peak as he washes his disciples' feet in preparation of his shameful death on a Roman cross. The most dramatic aspect of John's Gospel, is that Jesus is not only named the Holy One of God (6:69), the One consecrated and sent by God (10:36), but also the sacrificial lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (1:29, 36; cf. 1 Jn 2:2; 4:10). In his description of Jesus' death, the Fourth Evangelist, unlike the Synoptics, takes great care in mentioning that Jesus was executed on the same day when the lambs were slaughtered and prepared for Passover (19:14, 31, 42).

Another expression of the Johannine author and community's understanding of God's holiness, is the metaphorical "I am" sayings in the Gospel. These pronouncements explicate Jesus' embodiment of the eternal, cosmic λόγος announced in the Prologue. They particularly articulate the community's understanding of Jesus' mission as the Holy One of God, the one fulfilling the promises and expectations of the covenant between YHWH and Israel. They act rhetorically to affirm Jesus' identity while strategically recalling God's self-characterisation and revelation to Moses in Exod 3:14 and the many "I am YHWH" statements in the books of Lev and Deutero-Isaiah. In all of these statements regarding Jesus' identity and ethos "is a claim to be the source of that life which comes from God" (LT Johnson 1999). Belonging to, and remaining in, the Holy One sent from God, who was crucified and resurrected, would form the core of the Johannine community's identity awareness, and the deepest motivation for their ethos of holiness and love.

3 Mutual ‘indwelling’ as present reality in God’s Household

The Prologue of the FG proclaims that “the Word was God ... the Word became flesh ... It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known”—1:1, 14, 18. As the story of the λόγος, the μονογενής θεός who exegetes God, begins, John the Baptist testifies in 1:32: “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it **remained** (ἔμεινεν) on him.” From here, the entire narrative **invites worthy discipleship of Jesus and the God whom he represents, encouraging an οἰκία lifestyle (14:2) of belonging, of being loved, and of following—an ethos of remaining with/in Jesus (and the Spirit) as the source of life, love and light** (1:39; 6:56; 13:1, 34–35; 14:10, 17, 20; 15:1–11).

Recurrence of the verb μένω (to remain, stay, abide, live, dwell, reside, wait, continue, endure) is characteristic of the Johannine literature. According to Coloe, the author of the Gospel provides the reader with a hermeneutical key at the start of the narrative by identifying **Jesus as the dwelling place of God**: “The Prologue prepared the reader for this claim when, through the use of the word ‘dwell’ (σκηνώω), it described the incarnation of the Word in terms of Israel’s Tent and Tabernacle traditions (1:14).” Moreover, it is rhetorically significant that the verb μένω “features **most prominently in the farewell discourse and final chapters of the Gospel**” (Shelly Rambo 2010). According to Rambo, it lies at the core of Jesus’ teaching to his disciples in Jn 15:1–17. **“In the midst of his departing words, Jesus speaks about remaining”** (Rambo). Ironically, the mutual indwelling of Jesus and his disciples (15:4) reveals “a **new depth of intimacy**” that would only be possible through his departure (Coloe 2001).⁵

For this purpose, John artfully employs temple imagery not only for the person and mission of Jesus, but also for his disciples (cf. 2:19–22; 14:10, 17, 23, 25). **Through his farewell discourse, and particularly the promise of the Spirit (16:7), Jesus assures them of his continuing presence after his departure while they embody God’s dwelling place on earth.**

Jesus’ core invitation to his disciples to remain in him, in his love and in his Spirit after his departure (cf. 14:15–29; 16:4b–15; 1 Jn 3:24; 4:13)

⁵ Henri Nouwen (1977) comments on this part of Jesus’ farewell discourse by emphasising the importance of *memory* for believers to enter into a sustaining relationship with Christ: “Here Jesus reveals to his closest friends that only in memory will real intimacy with him be possible, that only in memory will they experience the full meaning of what they have witnessed ... The great mystery of the divine revelation is that God entered into intimacy with us not only by Christ’s coming, but also by his leaving. Indeed, it is in Christ’s absence that our intimacy with him is so profound that we can say he dwells in us.”

affirms that he has metaphorically become the new tabernacle/temple where God's presence would be experienced. In Johannine terms, this refers to a **present reality** filled with the life-giving presence of God's Spirit (16:7; cf. 7:37–39)—a reality that will be fulfilled with Jesus' return somewhere in the future (14:3, 18, 28). The nature and purpose of the Spirit is to teach and **remind the disciples** of all that Jesus had said and done (14:26; 15:26; 16:13). As in the case of Jesus' discourses and miraculous signs, his followers would need **time** to gain perspective on the paradox and mystery of these events, of "seeing," discerning, recognising what God was doing in the world (cf. 13:36–38; 20:19–21:19). Ironically, perspective (often) comes after a person's departure or death (cf. n.5). For the disciples to grasp the implications of Jesus' earthly ministry, and to take full responsibility for their calling, would probably **only** be possible in his "absence."

How was the rich yet often ambivalent cluster of utterances in Jn 13–17—mostly unique to the FG—supposed to take Jesus' followers to **a new depth of intimacy in their relation to him**, and to help them **make sense** of his words, "It is to your advantage that I go away"? For the Johannine community, the **sense-making effect of these words is probably to be found in their ultimate reference to the realised prophetic-apocalyptic reality described in Rev 21:3–5, as fulfillment of John 1:14 and 14:2–3:**

See, the home (tabernacle) of God is among mortals. He will dwell (tabernacle) with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more ... And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new."

Jesus' temporary departure occurred on behalf of his followers, for the sake of their wellbeing and wholeness (holiness). **The ultimate purpose of his being away is the reunification of God's household, not its permanent separation. At the same time their present reality is not merely characterised by passive "waiting," but is filled with the dynamic presence of God's Spirit. The Spirit amplifies and universalises Jesus' presence in terms of time and place, and enables them to continue his mission—to be the new dwelling place where his revealing presence as resurrected lord would be experienced (Jn 20-21).** As the "tabernacling" presence of God (1:14) is now accomplished by "another Paraclete" (14:16), Jesus' departure paradoxically becomes a **guarantee of his continuing presence**, and thus of their consolation and hope. For his disciples, this is a crucial transition as his departure highlights their calling as God's ("new") representatives in the world (20:21):

Jesus is leaving, but they will not, in a sense, be homeless. **But that place is not, as it turns out, some place far away.** Instead, in the course of his talk, he tells them that **they will *be* that residence; they become the site in which God will come to dwell** (Rambo 2010).

4 Mimetic Ethos in God’s Household

Remaining in God’s presence, remaining in fellowship with Jesus through the Spirit-Paraclete would necessarily lead to a new ethos—of loving God and one another (13:34; 14:15, 21, 23–24, 28; 15:9–10; cf. 1 Jn 2:3–11; 3:11–24; 4:7, 21). In fact, Jesus promises that—after his departure—those who believe in him “will also do the works that I do and ... will do greater works than these, *because I am going to the Father*” (14:12; cf. 1:50). It is particularly in his position as resurrected, glorified lord that he would enable (pave “the way” for) his followers to live God’s life of love, light and truth in the world (14:6). His going away thus introduced a new phase in God’s commitment to the world, and their commitment to God, one another, and the world.

Believing in and loving Jesus, according to John, is a **prerequisite for God dwelling/making God’s home with them** (14:23; cf. 20:31; 1 Jn 2:5; 3:9; 4:13, 16). **Jesus’ preparation of his disciples for his death and subsequent departure therefore culminates in his invitation to them to remain in him, and in his love** (15:4, 9). From this intimate, inward focus on their primary identity and ethos, Jesus would send them out into the world (3:16), to every tribe, nation and language, as the Father had sent him (17:18; 20:21).

For the Johannine community, Jesus’ incarnation introduced a new beginning, a renewal of God’s covenant with Israel, the present reality of a new household ethos. For them, Jesus physically represented **the hospitality of ἡ οἰκία τοῦ πατρὸς** (14:2; cf. 13:3–5). His entire ministry is regarded as the **embodiment of the self-giving love of God for the world** (cf. 3:16–17; 12:47; 16:27; 17:26)—from reinterpreting their traditions and healing the sick, to washing the disciples’ feet and dying on a shameful cross.⁶ **Paradoxical narratives of a compassionate, crucified yet liberating, healing messiah** would

⁶ In contrast to the hierarchical structures of first-century societies under Roman rule, dominant values of honour and shame, and the aspirations of Jesus’ own disciples to be in positions of power (Jn 12:4–5; 13:6), Jesus takes on the role of a slave and washes the feet of his disciples (13:1–17). When using the image of “household” in John as a way of speaking of divine/human relationships, Coloe does not find its **primary reference** in patriarchal Jewish or Graeco-Roman households, but **in the mutual indwelling of God, Jesus and the Spirit**. It is in the intimate relationship with his Father that Jesus finds a model for human relationships (cf. 13:34; 15:9), she states. This correlates with Carter’s description of the Gospel’s “rhetoric of distance” as its distinctive way of negotiating Roman imperial power in provincial Ephesus.

challenge the early Jesus followers to rethink God in terms of Jesus' σάρξ, *vulnerability, humility*. While such characteristics would not necessarily be associated with deity in the first-century imperial context, this “weakness” according to Graeco-Roman moral standards would ironically represent God’s very nature and identity, revealed in Jesus for the advantage of others. Jesus’ response to the context of his time was that of *seeing* distressed people, of stopping by the roadside, acknowledging their humanity and need, *having compassion* for them, and touching them, more often than not against society’s socio-cultural and political grain (Jn 4:1–26; 6:1–15; 7:53–8:11; 9:1–41, etc.).⁷

All of this serves as an **example** (13:15) to his followers **as he encourages them to do likewise**: “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. **Just as I have loved you**, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (13:34–35).⁸ **This mimetic ethos is a distinctive characteristic of the Fourth Gospel as John seems to reconfigure Torah, and particularly Lev 19:18, in significant ways.** In contrast to the Septuagint’s phrase “like you” in Lev 19:18b (ὡς σεαυτόν; cf. n.5), Jesus encourages his disciples to love one another **καθὼς ἠγάπησα ὑμᾶς** (“as I have loved you,” cf. repetition of the comparative particle καθὼς in 15:4, 9–10, 12; 17:11, 16, 18, 22–23). The Synoptics probably quote from Lev 19:18b^{LXX}, retaining the notion “as (you love) yourself,” **while John reinterprets the love command from the radical perspective of Jesus’ example.** In this way John profoundly reimagines and reimages notions from Torah in the liminal space between σάρξ and δόξα—between the incarnate and glorified λόγος. By dignifying σάρξ and (literally) embodying δόξα, the narrator proclaims that Jesus dramatically and paradoxically weaves notions of flesh and glory together into **a new home, a new house(hold) for God’s children/friends.** Their identity of belonging to, and of remaining in him/his love/his Spirit, of being a *communio Dei*

⁷ As in Lev, the relation between holiness/purity and love is evident here. God’s holiness is expressed in Jesus’ acts of love towards people (cf. Jn 13:1; 14:31; and 13:4–5 as an act of hospitality referring to the ethos of his Father’s house; 14:2–3).

⁸ This ties in with the collective mindset of the first-century Mediterranean world, which is based on a parental socialisation process through which people would learn and live in terms of the norms and meaning of social interaction. **Jacqueline Lapsley** (2016) distinguishes as follows between *imitatio Dei* and *mimesis*: “Our problem is that we consciously try to imitate God, as we might try to imitate a dancer in a dance class. The results are usually clumsy and we often give up because we feel uncoordinated. **Mimesis is much more powerful: it is mimesis for example, when a small child ... unconsciously does what the parent does, and so becomes more and more like that adult.**”

characterised by love and compassion, would be the foundation of their ethos in the world (14:2).

How are these notions meant to transform our worship as Christian communities? How are we supposed to *remain/dwell* in Jesus, in his Spirit, in his holiness, and in his love—collectively but also individually? And finally, how may personal commitment and corporate worship engage and enrich each other?

In light of these challenges, I make some very brief remarks on nurturing a **disciplined, faithful (personal) spiritual life** aimed at confirming and strengthening the corporate worship of the church.

- Christian Spirituality is about a **living relationship** with God in Jesus Christ through the indwelling of the Spirit. “It is an invitation to life ... a call to rediscover our humanity in the presence of God and the Christian community in order to live as credible witnesses of God ... in the context of a challenging and, often, broken world” (Kourie & Kretzschmar 2000). It’s about intimacy and honesty, about **yearning** for the simple presence of God (Thomas Merton).
- The Spirit disciplines us, enlightens our minds and **forms us into the image of Jesus**. “In the experiences of the Spirit we perceive a much more intimate relationship than the relation between father or mother and child. It is the intimate fellowship of mutual indwelling: God in us and we in God ... This fellowship is for us an inexhaustible wellspring of strength” (Moltmann 1997)
- The Bible as life-giving source for our Spirituality **invites us to become great listeners** of God’s Word, to **dwell** in it, *reflect* on it, *consider* it, to **meditate** on it. For this to happen, we need the precious gift of **silence**. The mere idea of being silent is for many unthinkable, even threatening. Its purpose is an encounter with the Word as God’s Word for us, and for me personally. “There is a wonderful **power in being silent**—the power of clarification, purification, and focus on what is essential” (Bonhoeffer 1996).
- The consideration of Scripture leads into **prayer**. “Prayer means nothing else but the readiness to appropriate the Word ... to let it speak to me in my personal situation, in my particular tasks, decisions, sins, and temptations ... Offering intercessory prayer means nothing other than Christians bringing one another into the presence of God” (Bonhoeffer 1996).
- The intimate relation and **interdependence between personal commitment and corporate worship** is phrased as follows by Bonhoeffer: “Whoever cannot be alone should beware of community. Whoever cannot stand being in community should beware of being alone ... Both belong together. Only in the community do we learn to be properly alone; and only in being alone do we learn to live properly in the community.”

5 Conclusion

The Fourth Evangelist narrates how Jesus reversed, reordered and upset the familiar, conventional preconceptions of God and humanity **in the first-century imperial setting, by practising an ethos of compassion and mercy.** By establishing God's dwelling place among people as incarnate λόγος—the Holy One through whom all things came into being (1:3), **he wove time, place and people into a new cosmic network of relations.** God's λόγος brought together heaven and earth (1:51), past, present and future, Jew and Gentile, male and female—that is, creation and human story—in an interconnected, coherent whole, with life-sustaining implications for the here and now that were unthinkable even in contemporary apocalyptic discourse.

Right through the FG, Jesus reaches out to **individual people** to ensure that they hear God's invitation (and challenge) to dwell in him and to worship God 'in Spirit and in truth' (4:23). But then, in a final speech, probably during their last meal before his crucifixion, Jesus prepares **his disciples (as a group)** for his physical absence as he returns to the Father. He promises not to leave them orphaned (14:18). Instead, he speaks of **"remaining"—of intimate, reciprocal fellowship among them, God and the Spirit.** Amidst the reality of his absence, Jesus assures them to be present in new ways. Even though his invitation "Make your home in me, as I make mine in you" (15:4) and pledge "We will make our home with them" (14:23) are filled with mystery and paradox, it would be to their advantage, for their good, that he went away (16:7).

In continuation with YHWH's covenant with Israel and his own ministry of remaining, Jesus invites the community of believers to follow him **in being a house(hold), a sanctuary where God's holiness and love would be experienced.** The question is: Where do I live/dwell? And what kind of a home-maker/host(ess) am I? In the final analysis, it's about home-coming and belonging. It's about warmth and light, about mindfulness and hospitality, food and shelter—it's about wholeness and life in abundance.

Today, the narrative continues to invite Christian communities to do likewise: to *be* a home for alienated, grieving, despairing, displaced and "homeless" people—a symbol of God's sacred, life-giving love in the world.