

The Raising of the New Temple: John 20.19–23 and Johannine Ecclesiology

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This article proposes to interpret the appearance of the risen Jesus to the community of the disciples on Easter evening in terms of a Johannine theology and spirituality and as integral to the Johannine resurrection narrative as a whole. The scene is a narrative exploration of Johannine ecclesiology, that is, the establishment of the New Covenant with the New Israel and the raising of the New Temple, the body of Jesus, in it midst.

I. Introduction

In 1958 Alf Corell called John 20.19–23, the scene of Jesus' Easter appearance to the community of his disciples, part of the most badly treated passage in the Fourth Gospel,¹ a judgment that ongoing conflicts of interpretation suggest still has some validity. Its mistreatment, it seems to me, is due in large measure to the predominant tendency in the history of its interpretation to divide this passage into two separate events and to interpret each in terms of supposed Synoptic parallels. Verses 19–20 are frequently interpreted as John's version of Luke 24.36–43 and thus as an apologetically motivated demonstration of the reality and miraculous qualities of the body of the risen Jesus. Verses 21–23 are often read in terms of Luke's Ascension–Pentecost material (Luke 24.51; Acts 2.1–4) and Matthew's binding and loosing texts (Matt 16.19; 18.18). This leads to a focus on two questions. First, how is this Johannine scene related to Jesus' ascension and is this John's version of Pentecost?² Second, is the commission Jesus imparts here the

1 A. Corell, *Consummatum Est: Eschatology and Church in the Gospel of St. John* (London: SPCK, 1958) 36. His comment applies to the whole of John 20.19–23.

2 See T. R. Hatina, 'John 20.22 in its Eschatological Context: Promise or Fulfillment?', *Biblica* 74/2 (1993) 196–219, arguing against D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991) 652–4. Hatina rejects Carson's argument that the Lukan Pentecost is the criterion by which other experiences of the Spirit must be considered. I agree with Hatina's position. See also C. Bennema, 'The Giving of the Spirit in John's Gospel – A New Proposal?', *The Evangelical Quarterly* 74/3 (2002) 195–213, who summarizes six currently held positions on the meaning of 20.22 (201–8).

Johannine version of the Matthean commissioning of Peter and of the disciples to 'bind and loose'³ My position on these questions will become apparent, but for the moment suffice it to say that I consider these questions ill-conceived insofar as they are generated by an exclusively historical-critical methodology which is not well suited to the texts in question.

The literary-theological approach I will take to the passage involves four presuppositions. First, unlike Bultmann who hypothesized that because the glorification of Jesus takes place on the cross in John's Gospel the resurrection narrative has no real purpose in this Gospel except as a concession to the established tradition,⁴ I regard the resurrection narrative as a crucial and integral component of the Fourth Gospel even though it plays a very different role in John's theology than it does in the Synoptic Gospels.

Second, I presuppose the theological unity of John 20 and the centrality within the chapter of this pericope which, I will suggest, is the sealing of the New Covenant with the New Israel, in whose midst has been raised up the New Temple, the glorified Jesus. This implies taking very seriously the Old Testament, especially the prophetic literature, as intertext.

My third presupposition is that this passage has no Synoptic parallels. John probably reflects a common tradition that the risen Jesus appeared not only to individuals but also to groups (cf. 1 Cor 15.5–7; Mark 16.14–18; Matt 28.16–20), one of which he commissioned to carry on his mission. There are substantive thematic similarities between Matt 28.16–20 and John 20.19–23, namely, Jesus' empowering his disciples with his own authority received from the Father; the modeling of their mission on Jesus' mission to them; Jesus' remaining with them; and the reference, explicit in Matthew and implicit in John, to baptism. However, there are virtually no verbal contacts which would suggest any textual relationship.

Fourth, and following upon the preceding, I presuppose that the entire passage is to be interpreted in terms of the theology and spirituality of the Fourth Gospel itself, especially as expressed in the Last Discourses (John 14–17), which are pervasively influenced by the Old Testament themes of creation/new creation in Gen 2.7 and Ezek 37.9–10, covenant/new covenant in Exod 19–20 and Jer 31.31–34 with Ezek 37.26–28.

By way of proleptic summary, I will conclude that the passage as a whole is a narrative-theological synthesis of Johannine ecclesiology in which the Church appears as the body of the Risen Lord who is in its midst as the glory of God and

3 For a clear presentation, which he espouses, of the common position on John 20.23 as a parallel of the Matthean texts, see J. A. Emerton, 'Binding and Loosing – Forgiving and Retaining', *Journal of Theological Studies* 13 (1962) 325–31.

4 R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* vol. 2, (trans. K. Grobel; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955) 2.56.

which is commissioned to be in the world the presence of the post-Easter Jesus as the pre-Easter Jesus had been the presence of God in the world.⁵

Since I will be using a predominantly literary-theological rather than exegetical-historical approach to this text, the structure of the chapter as a whole and the pericope in question have special importance. Numerous structural theories, some incompatible with each other and many complementary, have been proposed for ch. 20.⁶ For our purposes I offer two narrative structurings of ch. 20, one concerned with the theology of the Resurrection and the other with the spirituality of Jesus' post-Easter disciples. (see Figures 1 and 2).

A first narrative structure suggests a theological division of the chapter into two interconnected parts, each governed by a thematic question to which the text responds. Part I, vv. 1-18, which takes place in the garden of the tomb, responds to concern of the traumatized community, voiced by Mary Magdalene, 'Where is the Lord?' after his crucifixion. The two-step answer is that Jesus is glorified, that is, that he has, as he predicted, *returned to the Father*. This is intuited in faith by the Beloved Disciple who, confronted with the sign of the face-veil definitively laid aside in the tomb, 'sees and believes' that the predicted glorification of Jesus has

NARRATIVE THEOLOGICAL STRUCTURE OF JOHN 20

JERUSALEM			
<u>GARDEN OF THE TOMB</u> (scene of the New Creation)		<u>WHERE THE DISCIPLES WERE GATHERED</u> (scene of the New Covenant)	
vv. 1-10	vv. 11-18	vv. 19-23	vv. 24-29
Simon Peter & the Beloved Disciple	Mary Magdalene	The Disciples	Thomas the Twin

Figure 1

5 I came to this conclusion before reading the article by R. Kysar, "As You Sent Me": Identity and Mission in the Fourth Gospel', *Word and World* 21/4 (2001) 370-6, which gives an excellent short summary of this position. I disagree strongly with the position of J. Meier, 'The Absence and Presence of the Church in John's Gospel', *Mid-Stream* 41/4 (2002) 27-34, in which he maintains that 'High christology is the black hole in the Johannine universe that swallows up every other topic, including the church' (29). His argument seems to be driven by an understanding of Church as necessarily hierarchical in nature and essentially if not primarily a structure rather than a mystery of relationality.

6 R. Crotty, 'The Two Magdalene Reports on the Risen Jesus in John 20', *Pacifica* 12 (June 1999) 156-68, summarized and criticized a number of the major attempts to decipher the structure of Jn. 20.

NARRATIVE SPIRITUAL STRUCTURE OF JOHN 20

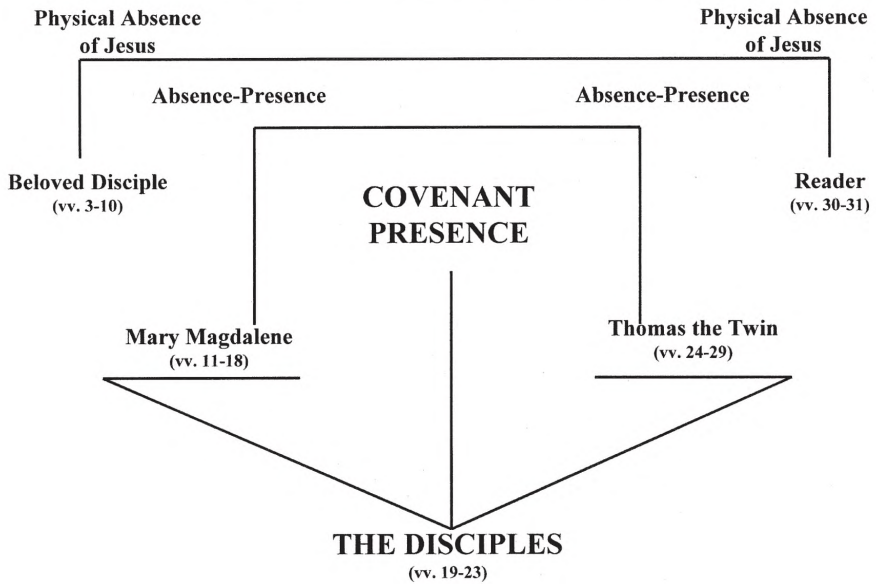


Figure 2

indeed occurred even though, as yet, neither he nor Simon Peter understands the scripture that Jesus must rise from the dead.⁷ The resurrection, that is, Jesus' promised *return to his own* (cf. 16.16–22) is revealed in the next pericope in Jesus' encounter with Mary Magdalene who is commissioned to announce it to the disciples. In John's resurrection narrative, in other words, there is a subtle but significant distinction between the *glorification*, that is, what happened to Jesus on the cross, and the *resurrection*, which is the communication of the effects and significance of Jesus' glorification to his disciples.⁸

Part II, vv. 19–31, responds to the question, 'How can the glorified and risen Lord be encountered?' by his post-Easter disciples. The answer is, in the com-

⁷ I have presented my interpretation of the σοῦδάριον as a Johannine σημεῖον in Chapter 12 of *Written That You May Believe: Encountering Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (New York: Crossroad, 2nd ed. 2003).

⁸ I am suggesting a *theological* distinction between the two aspects of the paschal mystery, not a *chronological* distinction, as does Hatina in 'John 20,22', between two different phases in the gift of the Spirit. See the article by M. J. J. Menken, 'Interpretation of the Old Testament and the Resurrection of Jesus in John's Gospel', in *Resurrection in the New Testament: Festschrift J. Lambrecht* (ed. R. Bieringer, V. Koperski, and B. Latair; BETL 165; Leuven: Peeters, 2002) 189–205, who follows C. H. Dodd in making a distinction somewhat akin to mine. Dodd suggested two modes of the event of resurrection, one occurring outside history in Jesus' death on the cross (what I am calling glorification) and the manifestation of this reality within history in the experience of the disciples (what I am calling resurrection).

munity of those who are now Jesus' brothers and sisters (cf. 20.17), those who have seen the Lord (cf. 20.18, 24), who participate in his life through the Spirit which they receive from the open side of the glorified Jesus (cf. 20.20–22), and who proclaim the Gospel, the 'things that are written' that all may believe and through believing have life in Jesus' name (cf. 20.31).⁹

A second narrative structure, which suggests the spiritual dynamics of the scene, complements the first structure and depends on it. It is a concentric exploration of the changed mode of Jesus' presence to his disciples as the physical, mortal mode of his pre-Easter presence gives way in their experience to his new, equally real and personal, ecclesial mode of presence. The first and fifth scenes take place in what we might call 'ordinary time'. The first scene, vv. 1–10, involves nothing numinous or miraculous. Mary Magdalene, Simon Peter, and the Beloved Disciple are confronted with the kinds of signs that believers of all time will experience, ones in which Jesus is not physically present as he was when he healed the man born blind (John 9) or raised Lazarus from the dead (John 11), but through which he continues to reveal his presence and to act in their midst. The three disciples manifest the range of possible responses to such non-miraculous but revelatory signs. Mary, seeing (βλέπει) the sign of the open tomb, misinterprets it to mean that the Lord has been taken away (20.2, 13, 15); Simon Peter, examining (θεωρεῖ) the grave clothes and face-veil in the tomb draws a blank (20.6–7); the Beloved Disciple, contemplating (εἶδεν) the face cloth sees and believes (20.8).

The balancing fifth 'scene' is the conclusion to the chapter in which the evangelist addresses directly the readers of all time. The implied author tells them that the sign which will be for them what the signs of the pre-Easter Jesus had been for his contemporaries is 'these things that have been written' (20.31), that is, the gospel as Scripture. Scripture, like the open tomb and the face cloth, is the kind of non-miraculous sign through which later disciples will encounter the Risen Jesus in faith.

Moving inward, we read two scenes which take place narratively in the mysterious in-between time of Easter, the time of transition, of conversion from the physically mediated faith encounter with the pre-Easter Jesus to the ecclesially mediated faith encounter with the post-Easter Jesus. In these scenes Jesus is present-absent. Mary Magdalene recognizes her 'Rabbouni' but must be converted from a desire to touch him physically as she had in the pre-Easter dispensation to true communion with 'the Lord' whom she, with Jesus' other sisters and brothers, will encounter in the community.

⁹ Kysar, "As You Sent Me", 375, says, 'In the context of the Fourth Gospel, we are correct...to think of the community of believers as the continuing incarnation of the Word (1:4)'. See also the insightful article of M. L. Coloe, 'Raising the Johannine Temple (Jn 19:19–29)', *Australian Biblical Review* 48 (2000) 47–58, on the community as the New Temple.

In the balancing fourth scene, we meet Thomas the Twin. His double identity as ‘one of the Twelve’, that is, one of Jesus’ earthly contemporaries, and as one ‘who was not with them’ at Easter, that is, one of Jesus’ post-Easter disciples who must respond in faith to the witness of the apostolic generation, ‘We have seen the Lord’, works narratively to carry the reader through the Easter transition from physical sight to spiritual insight. Thomas, challenged by Jesus to abandon his faithlessness and believe, is converted from his stubborn fixation in the pre-Easter dispensation of physical sight and touch, and confesses precisely what he cannot see or touch physically – that the Risen Jesus is indeed his ‘Lord and God’.

At the center of the chapter is the scene which narratively presents the establishment of the real presence of the glorified and Risen Lord with his disciples of all time. The conditions of possibility, nature, mode, and effects of this new presence are symbolically unfolded. In this scene the transitional presence–absence of the Easter Jesus is resolved into the definitive covenant presence of the Risen Jesus in his ecclesial mode. Jesus definitively returns to his own, manifests himself to them but not to the world (cf. 14.18–22), gives them the peace the world cannot give (cf. 14.27) which overcomes their fear of persecution and fills them with the eschatological joy of the woman who has come through the labor of the hour (16.20–22). He communicates to them the Spirit of truth whom the world cannot receive. This Spirit will realize in them the abiding presence of the Father and the Son, bring to their minds all that Jesus had taught them and lead them into all truth while convicting the world of sin, justice, and judgment (cf. 14.16–22, 25–27; 15.26; 16.7–11, 12–15).

In short, this pericope stands at the very center of the Johannine resurrection narrative. In it the characteristic ‘realized eschatology’ of John’s Gospel takes on its full ecclesial significance. The long-anticipated ‘hour’ has occurred. The work that the Father had entrusted to Jesus has been consummated. Jesus has been fully glorified through his return to the Father and now takes up his promised abode, with the Father, through the Spirit, in his own, those who believe in him, love him, keep his commandments, and abiding in him as branches in the Vine (cf. 15.1–11) will bear the fruit he commissions them to bear in the last verse of this scene.

II. The Structure of John 20.19–23

A more detailed look at the structure of John 20.19–23 will facilitate our closer reading of this central pericope (see Figure 3). Verse 19a clearly parallels the opening verse of the chapter which narrates that Mary ran to the tomb near Jerusalem early on the first day of the week.¹⁰ This scene takes place in Jerusalem

¹⁰ Although Jerusalem is not mentioned in ch. 20 the opening scene takes place at the tomb which was in a garden ‘in the place where he was crucified’ (19.41); Mary is able to run to the

STRUCTURE OF JOHN 20.19-23

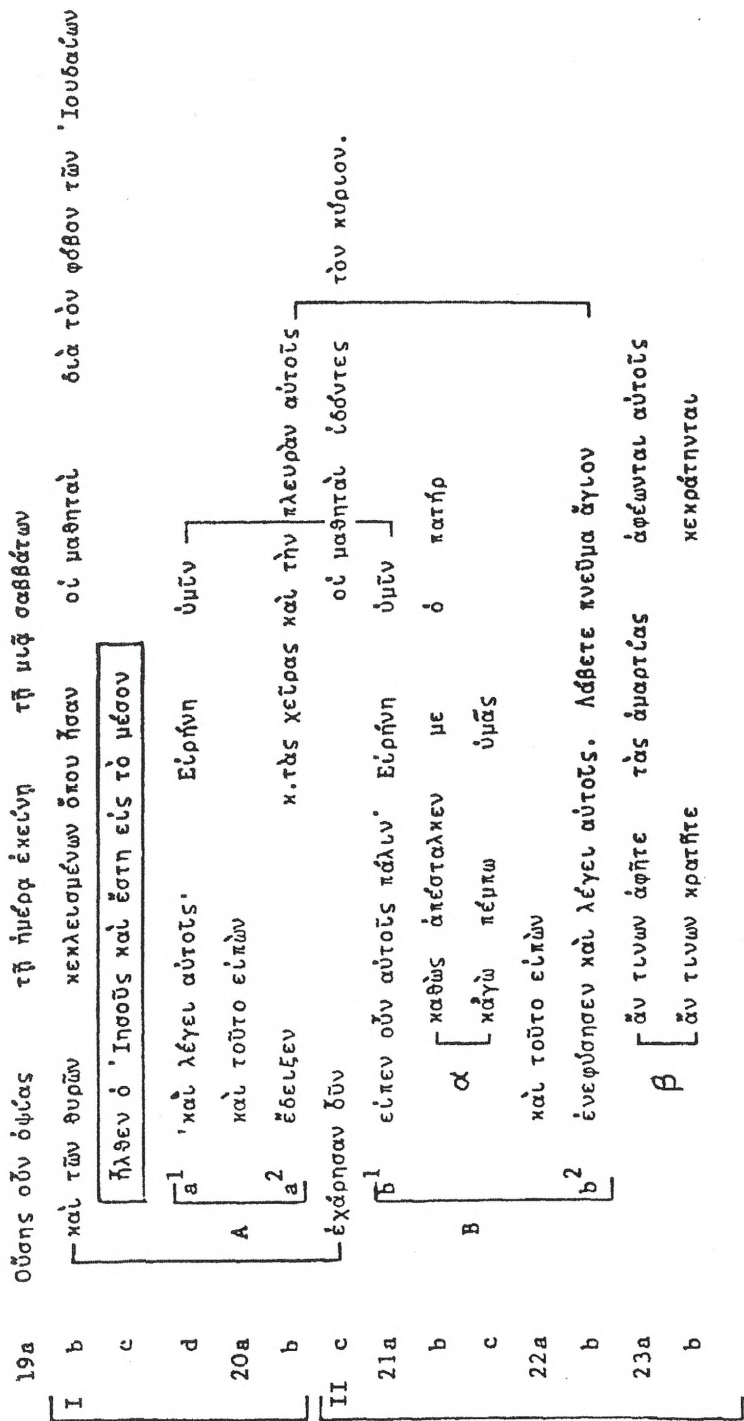


Figure 3

on the evening of that same day, the first of the week. Part II is thus tightly integrated with Part I in the unity of the chapter.

The first part of the pericope, vv. 19b to 20c, is framed by the contrasting states of the disciples: at the beginning they are locked behind closed doors for 'fear of the Jewish authorities' and at the end, having received from Jesus the peace which the world cannot take away (cf. 14.27), they are free of fear, rejoicing 'in seeing the Lord'.

Between the contrasting states of fear and joy is the reason for the disciples' transformation, a verse which has no corresponding element in the structure of the pericope. Jesus has risen up in their midst (v. 19c.) We would expect the pericope to terminate, as does the Mary Magdalene scene and the scene of Simon Peter and the Beloved Disciple, with a closure. The disciples, having come to the tomb and played their respective roles, went away. But there is no v. 23c to the effect that Jesus, having accomplished his purpose in appearing, vanished from their sight (as we see, for example, in the Emmaus scene in Luke 24.31). The Risen Jesus is not visiting. He has definitively returned to his own. He will come and come again, but he never leaves. His covenant presence, like that of Yahweh in the Temple, is an abiding glory. He has, as he promised, taken up his abode with them (cf. 14.23). The structural singularity of v. 19c marks it as foundational for the meaning of the entire pericope.

Jesus' coming is revelatory in character. Section A, vv. 19d–20b, is a two-member christophany, evoking the great theophany on Sinai. The Lord shows them the marks of the glorification in his wounded hands, and the source of their participation in its fruits through his resurrection, his open side. Δείκνυμι is a quasi-technical term for revelation in John (cf. 2.18; 5.20; 10.32; 14.8, 9)

The second part of the pericope begins with the rejoicing of the disciples that was the conclusion of the first part, thus integrating the pericope as a unit. Section B closely parallels section A. As section A is composed of the greeting of peace and the revelation of the glory connected by καὶ τοῦτο εἰπὼν, 'and saying this', so section B is composed of the greeting of peace and the gift of the Spirit connected by 'and saying this'.

The great christophany (A) is followed by section B, vv. 21–23, a two-member covenant-commission evoking the giving of the Law at Sinai. Each of the two members of section B is expanded by explication of its essential meaning, sections α and β (vv. 21b-c and 23a-b) respectively. In short, a careful examination of the structure

place where Simon Peter and the Beloved Disciple were; and was able, after seeing Jesus on Easter morning, to go to the disciples with Jesus' message before his appearance to them on Easter evening. These details establish that the place of the Johannine resurrection narrative is Jerusalem, the scene of the 'hour' which is now being completed. This roots the resurrection experience in history while suggesting its history-transcending character which grounds its universality.

of this pericope strongly suggests that it is a carefully constructed literary-theological unity evoking the Sinai covenant narrative in Exodus 19–20. The christophany is the revelation of Yahweh's glorious New Covenant presence (cf. Ezek 34.25 and 37.26–28) in the person of the Risen Lord. The gift of the Spirit fulfills the promise that in this New Covenant the recreated Israel would receive God's own Spirit (cf. Ezek 36.26–28) who would engrave a New Law in their hearts (cf. Jer 31.31–34).¹¹

III. John 20.19–20: The Revelatory Christophany

Let us turn now to a closer reading of Part I, the christophany. I would call attention to the three-part time indication which opens the scene. Most commentators recognize the significance of John's use of time and this instance is particularly important. It situates the New Covenant in respect to history as both immanent and transcendent by its simultaneous evocation of the historical (Easter day), the eschatological ('that day'), and the liturgical which binds them together (Sunday evening, the first day of the week, the time of Christian Eucharist). Furthermore, by overlapping the three so that they become inseparable and only partially distinguishable the evangelist involves the reader in the perspective of realized eschatology characteristic of the Fourth Gospel as a whole and now finally established as the permanent time-frame of the Church. This event takes place in early evening, the threshold moment. The 'day' of the present age which ended with Jesus' glorification on the cross draws to a close as 'that day', the eschatological day of the new dispensation inaugurated by Jesus' resurrection dawns. The disciples are drawn into the mystery of Jesus' promised new presence to them: 'In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you' (14.20). This is the mystery experienced anew in Eucharist on Sundays down through the centuries.

The next phrase continues, in terms of place and personae, the mysterious historically rooted but history-transcending character of this scene. Jesus appears not to the apostles or to the twelve but to 'the disciples', a term that, in John, refers to all Jesus' followers,¹² both those present on Easter and all those who through

11 Although Ezekiel places the new covenant promises in the context of the Davidic rather than the Mosaic covenant, by the time the Fourth Gospel was written Jesus had come to be seen as the fulfillment of all messianic expectations. This seems clear from the blending of all the new covenant themes in the promises of the Last Discourses.

12 Among the standard commentators are those including J. H. Bernard, F.-M. Braun, and A. Feuillet who want to equate 'disciples' with the 'twelve'; others including M.-J. Lagrange, A. M. Hunter, B. Lindars and B. F. Westcott who hold that the twelve were among those present but not the only ones; the majority, for example, C. K. Barrett, R. E. Brown, R. Bultmann, A. Cassien, F. Godet, E. C. Hoskyns, H. Klos, X. Léon-Dufour, R. H. Lightfoot, J. M. Sanders, and B. A. Mastin and most later commentators of a non-fundamentalist bent who believe that 'the disciples' means the community, whoever it includes. Most recently, J. Swetnam,

their word will believe in him (cf. 17.20), those for whom the Gospel is written (cf. 20.31). And Jesus comes not to a designated place, although it is clearly some place in Jerusalem, but simply into the place ‘where the disciples were’ which is where Jesus is always present, namely, in the ecclesial community.¹³ The doors are closed, both in this scene and in the following one of Thomas’s encounter with Jesus (cf. 20.26). The very significant difference between this verse and v. 26 is that here there is a motive for the closed doors which anchors the scene in history, namely, ‘for fear of the Jewish authorities’. After Jesus’ return to his own the doors where the community is gathered are still closed, marking it off from the surrounding ‘world’, but there is no mention of fear for Jesus has given them his peace which the world cannot give or take away.

Jesus’ sudden presence in their midst in v. 19c is not a preternatural demonstration of the miraculous quality of his risen body. (We are not told that Jesus came through the solid doors or walls!) The starkly simple ‘Jesus came and stood into their midst’ (ἔσθη εἰς τὸ μέσον) is perhaps best translated in terms of the Aramaic verb ܩܝܦ which the unusual Greek verb construction of motion suggests stands behind this verse.¹⁴ It can mean ‘stand up’ or ‘rise up’ whether from sleep or from death. In John 2.19–21, Jesus’ opponents had challenged him to show them a sign of his authority over the Jerusalem temple, the place of Yahweh’s abiding presence in Israel. Jesus replied, ‘Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up’, and the evangelist clarifies, ‘he was speaking of the temple of his body’, a saying which his disciples would understand, in the light of Scripture, after Jesus was raised from the dead. Jesus, bodily risen, is the New Temple raised up in the midst of the community which will constitute the New Israel. As Ezekiel had prophesied:

I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; and I will bless them and multiply them, and will set my *sanctuary* in the midst of them for evermore. My *dwelling place* shall be

‘Bestowal of the Spirit in the Fourth Gospel’, *Biblica* 74 (1999) 556–76, revived the suggestion that the gift of the Spirit in John 20.22 was to ‘a restricted group of disciples, possibly only to the “Twelve”’ (572). His argument on this point is clearly motivated by his interpretation of 20.23 as a conferral of juridical authority parallel to Matt 18.18. R. Kysar, on the other hand, in “As You Sent Me” (371) cites with approval Käsemann’s distinction between ‘disciples’ and the ‘twelve’ in John and his conclusion that those who are sent as Jesus is sent are all the disciples (E. Käsemann, *The Testament of Jesus: A Study of the Gospel of John in the Light of Chapter 17* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968] 30–32).

13 C. H. Cosgrove, ‘The Place Where Jesus Is: Allusions to Baptism and Eucharist in the Fourth Gospel’, *NTS* 35 (1989) 522–39, says that the risen Jesus is present only in the community and ‘nowhere else’ (529). I think this is a slight over-statement but the Church is certainly the normal and habitual place of Jesus’ presence in the post-Easter dispensation.

14 Cf. Mark 5.41 where Jesus uses the Aramaic verb transliterated into Greek, κοιμη, in raising the daughter of Jairus whom the bystanders regard as ‘dead’ and whom Jesus says is ‘sleeping’.

with them; and I will be their God and they shall be my people. The nations will know that I the Lord sanctify Israel, when my *sanctuary* is in the midst of them for evermore. (Ezek 37.26–28 [emphasis added]; cf. 34.25 and Isa 54.10)

In 20d it is precisely this New Covenant peace which Jesus bestows on his disciples, his own peace that the world cannot give which he had promised them on the night before his death (14.27; cf. also 16.33 in relation to the ‘fear of the Jews’).

The connective phrase, ‘and saying this’, or ‘having said this’ is frequently used in John (e.g. 9.6; 11.43; 13.21; 18.1, 38; 20.14) to mark the close causal relation of what follows to what has just been said. In this case it marks the dependence of the New Covenant of peace on its source in the death/glorification of the Son. Jesus immediately ‘shows’ them (δείκνυμι) the marks of his glorification in his hands and the source of its fruits, his open side. The verb δείκνυμι signals the revelatory rather than apologetic character of this action of Jesus. It is not a parallel of Jesus’ proof, in Luke 24.36–43, of the reality of his body. It is a revelatory identification of himself as the one who was glorified on the cross and whose glorification is the source of the peace he has just imparted and the Spirit which he is about to bestow.

The significance of Jesus’ showing his open side (not his feet as in Luke) lies in the relation of Temple, water, and Spirit in the Fourth Gospel. This symbolism is too extensive and complex to be detailed here but it is important to recall the three key texts which illuminate this revelation of the open side in 20.20b. Jesus had predicted in the Temple in 2:19 that his risen body would be the New Temple. In 7.37–39, again in the Jerusalem Temple at the feast of Tabernacles commemorating the making of the Covenant and the dedication of the Temple, and in a clear allusion to Ezek 47.1–12 describing the life-giving water that would flow from the side of the New Temple, Jesus offers the living water that would flow from within him and which the evangelist says refers to the Spirit that will be given when Jesus is glorified.¹⁵ Finally, in 19.34–37, after Jesus has ‘handed over his Spirit’ at his glorification, blood and water flow from his side.¹⁶ In this scene, Jesus’ manifestation of his open side reveals the full significance of Jesus as the New Temple.

15 G. Bienaimé, ‘L’annonce des fleuves d’eau vive en Jean 7,37–39’, *Revue théologique de Louvain* 21 (1990) 281–310, 417–54, supplies a thorough review of the scholarly discussion of this passage and convincingly defends the position that the water of which Jesus speaks in 7.37–39 flows from his (Jesus’) side. Bennema, ‘The Giving of the Spirit in John’s Gospel’, 200, takes the opposite position. I believe that the primary reference is to the Spirit flowing from within Jesus but a deliberate ambiguity need not necessarily be ruled out since the effect of the gift of the Spirit is assimilation of the post-resurrection disciples to Jesus and their participation in his life-giving mission.

16 J. Kremer, *Die Osterbotschaft der vier Evangelien: Versuch einer Auslegung der Berichte über das leere Grab und die Erscheinungen des Auferstandenen* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1969) 104 made this point unequivocally over thirty years ago.

He is the presence of God's glory in their midst,¹⁷ and the source of the life-giving water of the Spirit.

The character of this christophany as the New Creation is evident in the response of the disciples. They exult with the joy Jesus had promised them in 16.20–22: that their weeping would be turned to rejoicing as is the sorrow of a woman giving birth when life has come forth.¹⁸ In Isa 66.7–14 the New Creation was described as the birth from Jerusalem of a New People whom God will cherish as a mother comforts her child. The prophet says, 'You shall see, and your heart shall rejoice', a prediction taken up by Jesus in 16.22, 'I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you'. It is fulfilled here in the birth of the New Israel in whose midst stands the New Temple and which will be enlivened by the gift of the Spirit and commissioned to carry on Jesus' mission.

If this interpretation of Part I as the great christophany of the New Covenant has any merit it implies that the questions often raised about whether Jesus, in this scene, has or has not yet ascended are misconceived.¹⁹ Ascension, in the Lukan sense, is not a Johannine category. Jesus is exalted to God in his glorification on the cross. There is no time interval in which Jesus is risen but not yet ascended. On the contrary, his exaltation/glorification is the condition of possibility of his rising up into the midst of his disciples. In John, the glorification on the cross is the condition of possibility of the resurrection, not the other way

17 See the excellent article of C. C. Newman, 'Resurrection as Glory: Divine Presence and Christian Origins', *The Resurrection: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Resurrection of Jesus* (ed. S. T. Davis, D. Kendall, G. O'Collins; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) 59–89, in which he argues that it was the early Church's faith in the resurrection as the assigning to Jesus of the glory of Yahweh, rather than high christology as such, that precipitated the alienation between Christianity and Judaism.

See also A. T. Lincoln, 'I am the Resurrection and the Life': The Resurrection Message of the Fourth Gospel', *Life in the Face of Death: The Resurrection Message of the New Testament* (ed. R. N. Longenecker; Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans, 1998) 122–44 who says that '...believing that the divine glory is manifest in the temple of Jesus' risen body makes possible the attaching of that glory to the whole of Jesus' mission (cf. 1:14, 2:11), as well as, specifically, to his death as the supreme moment of glory rather than shame' (127).

18 See also John 15.11; 16.24; 17.13 on the fullness of joy that Jesus predicts and promises to his disciples.

19 For example, Bennema, 'The Giving of the Spirit in John's Gospel', 198, 203–4, argues that Jesus cannot fully confer the Spirit/Paraclete in 20.22 because one condition for the gift of the Paraclete is that Jesus have 'gone away' (16.7), which requires an ascension like that in Luke 24.51 and Acts 1.8. This position, held with various nuances by many scholars of more conservative bent, contrasts with that of the majority of scholars, typified by Hatina ('John 20.22 in its Eschatological Context'), who hold that this scene is a 'Johannine Pentecost' in which the giving of the Spirit on Easter night is the fulfillment of the Last Discourses promises of the gift of the Spirit-Paraclete.

around. The relevant distinction is between Jesus' glorification on Good Friday and his resurrection, that is, his revelatory return to his disciples, on Easter. The time interval is in the experience of the disciples who are still conditioned by history and who require time to experience Jesus' death as real before they can fully assimilate the reality of the resurrection.

IV. John 20.21–23: The Sealing of the New Covenant

Part II of the pericope, vv. 21–23, parallels in structure Part I. It begins with a second conferral of peace. The first gift of peace and resulting joy overcame the fear that had gripped the disciples at Jesus' death. The second gift is the peace which will undergird their mission which he is about to confer.²⁰

Verse 21b-c, that is, section α , is the foundation of the great commission. As Bultmann pointed out, καθώς in John often has a foundational rather than simply comparative function.²¹ De Dinechin, decades later, did a detailed and persuasive study of all the occurrences of the καθώς–καθώς (or κάγω), the 'as...so' construction in John, and concluded that it is Johannine theological language, a 'privileged synthesis' of the entire revelatory dynamic in the Fourth Gospel.²² The relation of the Father to the Son, in this case God's sending of the Son into the world as salvific revelation of God, is the foundation and pattern of the Incarnate Son's sending of his disciples into the world. In other words, their mission, like his, will be one of salvific revelation.

Most commentators have taken some position on the significance or lack of significance of John's use of two different words for 'send'. In 21b-c ἀποστέλλω is used for Jesus' sending by the Father and πέμπω for Jesus' sending of his disciples. It would lengthen this paper unduly to summarize the debate on this subject, but,

²⁰ This gift of peace follows the pattern of those Old Testament passages such as Judg 6 (the Gideon vision) and Dan 10–11 in which a terror-inducing theophany is followed by a gift of peace which reassures the recipient and serves as prelude to or confirmation of a difficult commission. Here there is no experience of religious terror because the theophany is the coming of Jesus who is now their 'brother'. The fear is of persecution and Jesus' gift of peace overcomes it.

E. Coye, 'Sent to be Scarred: John 20:19–23', *Expository Times* 113/6 (March 2002) 190–91, says the first greeting of peace is to allay their fear, the second to prepare them for missionary suffering. His point is that persecution is a prominent theme in John and it continues after Jesus' resurrection.

²¹ R. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray et al.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971) 382 n. 2. The English translation says that καθώς in John often has an 'explanatory' rather than merely comparative sense. I would translate 'begründenden Sinn' as 'foundational meaning'.

²² O. de Dinechin, 'ΚΑΘΩΣ: La similitude dans l'évangile selon saint Jean', *Recherches de Sciences Religieuses* 58 (1970) 195–236.

differing from Francis Gignac's recent statement on the subject,²³ I subscribe to the position that sees a significant distinction between the two words in the Fourth Gospel. In classical as well as koine Greek there does seem to be a difference of nuance between the terms and John exploits the philological distinction for theological purposes.²⁴ Ἀποστέλλω emphasizes the relation of the *sent to those to whom one is sent* with a consequent insistence upon the content of the mission to be accomplished and the authority for its accomplishment whereas τέμνω emphasizes the relation of the *sent to the sender* or the representative character of the mission. The ambassador, in other words, is not only an agent of the sender's will but also the presence of the sender in the midst of the recipients. Most often it is the second meaning that is emphasized in regard to Jesus. Twenty-four times in John τέμνω is used in participial form to refer to God as 'the one sending' Jesus, that is, the one indwelling him and generating his words and works from within. God is in Jesus doing his works (cf. 14.10 and elsewhere). Whoever sees Jesus sees the Father (cf. 14.9). Jesus is the great symbol who renders God present and active in the world. Only twice, in 5.36 (in which Jesus refers explicitly to the works he was sent to accomplish) and the present verse 20. 21 is ἀποστέλλω, in the perfect tense used of Jesus and the context suggests that the emphasis is on the fact of the incarnation, Jesus' being sent from God into the world at a particular point in time to accomplish a specific mission.

In v. 21b-c Jesus, having completed the work for which he was sent into the world, hands over to his disciples its continuation. They will do the works he has done and even greater works will they do (cf. 14.12). Only twice in the Gospel, in 13.20 and here, is τέμνω used for the disciples. In 13.20, Jesus says that those who receive the disciples, receive Jesus, and those who receive Jesus receive the one sending him. The representational sense of the verb, used for both Jesus' sending by God and the disciples' sending by Jesus is clear. The situation is the same in this verse. In other words, Jesus' completion in 'the hour' of his mission from God in the incarnation grounds the ongoing representational mission, only now possible, of his disciples: to render him present and active in the world as he had revealed God.

This verse is crucial for understanding the meaning of the commission which follows. The mission Jesus entrusts to his disciples is not, as some have suggested,

23 F. T. Gignac, 'The Use of Verbal Variety in the Fourth Gospel', *Transcending Boundaries: Contemporary Readings of the New Testament* (FS F. J. Moloney; ed. R. M. Chennattu and M. L. Coloe; Roma: Salesiano, 2005) 191–200. See 192–3.

24 See W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1957): ἀποστέλλω (98); τέμνω (647). G. R. Beasley-Murray, 'The Mission of the Logos-Son', *The Four Gospels 1992* (FS Frans Neiryck, vol. 3; ed. C. M. Tuckett, G. Van Belle, J. Verheyden; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1992) 1855–68, 1857 calls attention to the two facets of the sending of a messenger in the ancient world: the representative character of the messenger and the messenger's obedience.

a rather anemic version of the great commission in Matt 28.18–20. It is Jesus' conferring upon them of the mission to continue his own mission as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (cf. 1.29). The καθώς verse is connected to the commission verse by the phrase 'having said this' marking the dependence of the commission on its foundation in Jesus' own mission from the Father.

Verse 22b closely parallels 20b. As Jesus *revealed* to them his glorification manifested in his hands and side, now he *breathes* on them and says, 'Receive the Holy Spirit' who could not be given until Jesus was glorified (cf. 7.39). The verb 'breathe' (ἐμφυσάω) is a *hapax legomenon* in the New Testament and occurs substantively only twice²⁵ in the Septuagint. In Gen 2.7, God, at the first creation, breathes life into the earth-creature and it becomes the first living human being. In Ezek 37.9–10, God commands the prophet to breathe upon the dry bones 'that they may live', that is, that the people Israel might be recreated. In this Easter scene, Jesus, in an act of New Creation, breathes the promised Spirit of the New Covenant into the community of his disciples, making them the New Israel, in whose midst he is present as the New Temple.

Jesus' symbolic action of breathing accompanied by the effective word, 'receive the Holy Spirit', has suggested to many commentators an explicit sacramental meaning in this verse. Indeed, the institution of five of the seven sacraments (baptism, confirmation, eucharist, penance, ordination) has been discerned in this verse by various scholars! Discussion of the Johannine sacramentary would take us too far afield and I tend to be reserved about 'institution' claims. However, the structure of effective word accompanying symbolic gesture does suggest a sacramental allusion here and in a moment I will take up the question in relation to the forgiveness of sins.

The majority of commentators (with whom I agree) see in this verse the gift of the fullness of the Spirit who is the Paraclete promised by Jesus in the Last Discourses.²⁶ This Spirit is the substantial gift of the New Covenant promised in

25 Actually, the verb appears four times in the LXX, the two instances adduced here, plus Wis 15.11, which recalls the enlivening of Adam and thus is not an independent third instance, and 1 Kgs 17.21, recounting the prophet Elijah's reanimation of the son of the widow of Zarephath. The LXX inaccurately (but perhaps deliberately) translates the Hebrew for 'stretched' or 'measured' as 'breathed', perhaps alluding to the creation narrative.

26 Hatina, 'John 20.22', offers an excellent argument for this position from the texts in the Gospel itself which indicate that the gift of the Spirit/Paraclete is immanent to the Gospel, against Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 652–4, who thinks the Spirit is not given until Pentecost. Bennema, 'The Giving of the Spirit', 207–13, suggests a middle position, that the Spirit sustaining the relation between Jesus and his disciples is given in 20.22 but not as Paraclete until Pentecost. Bennema summarizes six theories on the meaning of 20.22 and in n. 36 supplies a list of scholars who hold the position I espouse, that 20.22 is the full and definitive gift of the Spirit-Paraclete. Many of these scholars speak of this scene as the 'Johannine Pentecost', a formulation I think is misleading.

the prophets, the New Law written on their hearts, the water of purification removing all sin and uniting them with God and one another. The relation of this account to the Lukan Pentecost scene, however, is not one of literary or theological dependence and I do not think the term 'Johannine Pentecost' is particularly helpful. This is one of a number of accounts in the New Testament of 'comings of' or 'gifts of' the Spirit, to individuals or to groups, during the first days of the Church's existence. Trying to harmonize these accounts, relativize all of them in terms of the Lukan event, or reduce them to one is neither necessary nor helpful.²⁷ This scene is important precisely because it gives us the particular Johannine take on the role and meaning of the Spirit's presence in the community.

Verse 23, which explicates the community's mission, has been the subject of vigorous debate among scholars for centuries. Catholic commentators have historically tended to see in it the foundation if not the institution of the Sacrament of Penance within which the ordained minister has authority to forgive sins or to refuse absolution.²⁸ Protestant scholars tend to see it as a more general conferral of ecclesiastical authority to give or withhold spiritual benefits. But both tendencies are rooted in what, in my opinion, is a mistaken assumption that John 20.23 is the Johannine parallel of Matt 18.18,²⁹ 'whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven'. Most commentators remain uneasy about this interpretation but it has proven amazingly tenacious. The problems it presents are formidable.

The first member of the verse, 23a, is perfectly straightforward. All the parts of the sentence are explicit and grammatically unproblematic. The second person plural verb identifies the disciples, mentioned in v. 19 as the subject.³⁰ The meaning of the verb ἀφίημι, which can mean 'cancel, remit, abandon, release, etc.', is clearly determined to mean 'forgive' by the explicit direct object, 'sins', And the presence of the indirect object αὐτοῖς, 'to them', makes it clear that τινῶν is a subjective genitive referring to those forgiven. Thus the literal translation, 'Of whomever [or "if of anyone"] you forgive the sins they are forgiven to them' is hardly disputable.

The problem arises in relation to v. 23b in which there is neither a direct nor an indirect object and the traditional translation of the verb as 'retain' is highly

²⁷ See Hatina, 'John 20,22', 201, on this point.

²⁸ This interpretation of John 20.23 was dogmatically defined by the Council of Trent in 1551. (See H. Denzinger, *Enchiridion symbolorum definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum* (37th ed.; Freiburg: Herder, 1991) 1710, on the ordained minister of the sacrament and 1703 which defines John 20.23 as the institution of the sacrament of Penance.) However, for a balanced interpretation of the force of these decrees, see R. E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John* (Anchor Bible 29A; Garden City/New York: Doubleday, 1970) 2.1044–5.

²⁹ In Matt 16.19, the 'power of the keys' is given to Simon Peter but in 18.18 it is conferred on the community. Thus, the latter verse is a clearer possible parallel to John 20.23.

³⁰ See n. 11 above on the identity of the 'disciples' in John.

questionable.³¹ The verse is usually translated on the assumption that v. 23b is in elliptical antithetical parallelism with 23a which rests on the hypothesis that John 20.23 is the parallel of Matt 18.18. Needless to say, this is a clearly circular argument: John 20.23 is the parallel of Matt 18.18 because κρατέω is the opposite of ἀφίημι and κρατέω is the opposite of ἀφίημι because ‘bind’ is the opposite of ‘loose’ in Matt 18.18. So, the translations supply from 23a a direct object, ‘sins’, and an indirect object ‘to (or in) them’ and then construct a meaning for the verb κρατήτε which would be antithetical to ἀφήτε. The weakness of the entire process appears in the translation of κρατέω as ‘retain’ in relation to sins. Virtually everyone admits that there is no such meaning for this verb attested anywhere in classical or koine Greek. So John presumably assigned this meaning to the term here and never used this meaning again nor did anyone else before or afterward. Furthermore, there is the theological problem of what ‘retaining sins’ in another person could possibly mean. The Church might claim the authority to refuse juridical absolution to a sinner or bar a person from membership in the institutional church by refusing baptism, but the sins of a repentant sinner are always forgiven by God and those of the unrepentant are not, regardless of juridical ecclesiastical processes. So the notion of ‘retaining sins’ interior to another is both grammatically and theologically highly problematic.³²

Since neither sins nor sinners are mentioned in 23b and the verb does not mean retain, on what does the traditional interpretation rest? The only textual basis is the anaphora, ὃν τινῶν, in each member. However, if one translates the verb according to its normal meaning, namely, ‘hold fast’ or ‘take hold of’, and treats τινῶν in the second member as an objective genitive which this verb would normally take (see, e.g., Matt 9.25 and Heb 4.14), the verse would read, ‘Anyone whom you hold fast is held fast’. In other words, what is held is not sins but

31 J. A. Emerton, ‘Binding and Loosing – Forgiving and Retaining’, *JTS* 13 (1962) 325–31, is typical of those who argue for the translation ‘retain’ even though he admits that κρατεῖν ‘is not here used in any of its normal Greek senses’ (327). Even A. Feuillet who represented the most rigid of Catholic positions about this text as the conferral on the hierarchy alone of the power to forgive and retain sins (‘Le temps de l’église selon saint Jean’, *Études Johanniques* [Bruges: Desclée, 1962] 152–74, 160) elsewhere noted that ‘le sens dans lequel il [κρατέω] est ici utilisé (retenir les péchés) est tout à fait inhabituel (*Le sacerdoce du Christ et de ses ministres d’après la prière sacerdotale du quatrième évangile et plusieurs données parallèles du Nouveau Testament* [Paris: Editions de Paris, 1972] 138).

32 It is worth noting that in the first three centuries of the Church when there was heated debate about whether sins committed after baptism could be forgiven, none of the Church Fathers evoked John 20.23 on either side of the argument. According to T. Worden whose two-part study of the history of the sacrament (‘The Remission of Sins’, *Scripture* 9 [1957] 65–79, 115–27) is still valuable, the first Father of the Church to use the text in reference to the sacrament of Penance seems to be Cyril of Alexandria (fifth century) in his commentary on the Fourth Gospel; see Worden, 67, n. 3.

people. I would suggest that, if this verse is interpreted not as a parallel of Matt 18.18 but in the context of Johannine theology and spirituality, this is precisely what the text does mean. It is a synonymous, synthetic parallel. 'Anyone whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven to them and those [the forgiven] whom you hold fast [in the communion of the Church] are held fast'.

In John's Gospel Jesus is identified by John the baptizer on the first day of his public ministry, as 'the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world' (1.29). In the Fourth Gospel 'the sin', in the singular, which Jesus comes to abolish is the refusal to believe in him as the revelation of the Father. 'Sins' in the plural, for example, in 8.21–24 where Jesus tells his opponents, 'you will die in your sins' 'unless you believe that I am', are the moral fallout of the foundational 'sin' of unbelief. The disciples in 20.23 are commissioned to continue Jesus' mission, not by taking away the 'sin of the world' which Jesus has accomplished once for all on the cross, but by making available the results of Jesus' victory over the world (cf. 16.33) in the lives of those who will become members of the community. The distinction between 'the sin' and 'sins' appears in the Gospel itself. The disciples who were already clean because of the word Jesus had spoken to them would nevertheless continue to be pruned by the Father (cf. 15.1–3) and Simon Peter whom Jesus declared clean (cf. 13.10) denied Jesus and had to be forgiven by him (cf. 21.15–17). So, later disciples who have been cleansed from 'the sin' by believing in Jesus would have to be purified of their 'sins', probably originally a reference to baptism but perhaps also to sins committed after baptism. And, just as Jesus not only called disciples to himself but also held them fast for eternal life, the community will not only admit people to the ecclesial community, that is, forgive their sins, but must hold them fast in that communion. In John there are thirteen occurrences of the verb ἀφίημι outside v. 23a and in every case with two possible exceptions (11.48 and 18.8) it is paired with a verb which is not antithetical to but synonymous with it, which suggests that the same would be the case here.³³ To hold fast in the ecclesial community is the ongoing dimension of the punctual forgiving of sins. Furthermore, Jesus repeatedly describes his mission from God in terms of preserving in union those who have come to him:

'All that the Father gives me will come to me; and the one who comes to me I will not cast out' (6.37).

'This is the will of the one having sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me' (6.39).

'I give them eternal life and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than

³³ John 4.3, 28, 52; 8.29; 10.12; 11.44, [48]; 12.7; 14.18, 27; 16.28, 32; [18.8]. In 11.48 the Sanhedrin declare that if they 'leave' Jesus doing as he is doing 'everyone will believe in him' and in 18.8 Jesus says to the police come to arrest him, 'If you seek me, let these go'. Even in these verses the parallelism is more reinforcing than oppositional.

all and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one' (10.27–29).³⁴

'While I was with them, I kept them in thy name...I guarded them, and none of them is lost' (17.12).

'Of those whom you gave me I lost not one' (18.9).

If the mission conferred on the disciples is the continuation of Jesus' own mission, it is well expressed as the charge to forgive sins and to hold fast in ecclesial communion those whom the community has received. Consequently, if baptism was the way in which new members were incorporated into the Johannine community, and there are good reasons to hold that it was, and Eucharist was the community's celebration of its communion with Jesus, this could well be a sacramental text. However, it is wider and deeper in meaning than simply authorizing or instituting particular rituals. It is the establishment of the Church as the ongoing presence of the glorified Jesus in the world carrying on his salvific work throughout all time.

V. Conclusion

This close examination of John 20.19–23 has led to interpreting this passage as integral to the Johannine resurrection narrative and as a unified pericope reflecting the structure of the Sinai covenant, that is, the great theophany followed by the gift of the Law through Moses making Israel God's people. In this scene the christophany of the Easter Jesus is followed by the gift of the Spirit, the New Law which constitutes the sealing of the promised New Covenant with the New Israel. Jesus, glorified and risen, has raised up the New Temple of his body, the dwelling place of the glory of God, in the midst of this New People. It presents the Johannine understanding of the Church not as an institution replacing the departed Jesus, nor even as his commissioned representative or agent, but as the ongoing presence and action of Jesus in the world through his corporate body, the ecclesial community, which will salvifically reveal him as he revealed God. Jesus had prayed to his Father that 'they may be one as we are one...*so that the world may know that you have sent me...*' (17.23 [emphasis added]). As the Father has sent Jesus, so Jesus sends his disciples to do the works that he has done and even greater works through which the Father will be glorified (cf. 15.8).

³⁴ It is interesting that Beasley-Murray in 'The Mission of the Logos-Son' (1866) invokes this very text as a special example of the 'ontological' unity of the Sent One with the Sender. I am pursuing that line of reasoning in seeing 20.23b as a way of speaking of the 'holding fast' of disciples in the Church as an expression of the ontological union between Jesus and the disciples he sends to continue his mission.

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