

Chi Rho Lectures 2015

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## Daring Spirit: The Gospel of John for the Twenty-first Century

### Lecture 2

# Learning to Read the Gospel of John

#### Paul Griffiths on 'religious reading':

'So far as I can recall, I have always been able to read, to make sense of and be excited by written things. I know, of course, that there was a time when I could not read; it's just that I cannot remember it. But I was never taught, and have still not properly learned, how to read with careful, slow attentiveness; it is difficult for me to read with the goal of incorporating what I read, of writing it upon the pages of my memory; I find it hard to read as a lover, to caress, lick, smell, and savor the words on the page, and to return to them ever and again. I read, instead, mostly as a consumer, someone who wants to extract what is useful or exciting or entertaining from what is read, preferably with dispatch, and then move on to something else... I'm not alone in this condition. Most academic readers are consumerist in their reading habits, and this is because they, like me, have been taught to be so and rewarded for being so. But I've also spent a good portion of my life trying to understand what it means to be a Christian, as well as much time studying literary works composed by Indian Buddhists. Both of these practices have gradually led me to see that consumerist reading isn't the only kind there is. It's also possible to read religiously, as a lover reads, with a tensile attentiveness that wishes to linger, to prolong, to savor, and has no interest at all in the quick orgasm of consumption. Reading religiously, I've come to think, is central to being religious. Losing, or never having, the ability so to read is tantamount to losing, or never having, the ability to offer a religious account of things.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Paul J. Griffiths, *Religious Reading. The place of reading in the practice of religion* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) pp. ix-x.

## **'As...so...'**

'And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.' (1:14)

'For just as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself' (5:26)

'I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father' (10:14-15)

'So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you' (13:14-15)

'I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another' (13:34)

'As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love' (15:9)

'As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me . . . so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.'  
(17:21-23, 26)

### **Parallels between the 'Lord's Prayer' of Matthew and John 17**

One rich possibility, which chimes with my first lecture, is John's use of 'as' (ὡς), encapsulated in the endlessly generative hermeneutic of 'as...so', responding to the 'as' of the Lord's prayer in Matthew ('on earth, as in heaven', 'forgive us...as we forgive'). Detailed comparisons between Matthew 6 and John 17 have been suggested by Wm. O. Walker Jr., who is largely followed in a recent study by Frederick Bruner<sup>3</sup>.

Walker suggests the following parallels, based on a division of the 'Lord's Prayer' in Matthew chapter 6 into **six petitions**, consisting of three 'thou' petitions, 'hallowed be thy name', 'thy kingdom come', 'thy will be done', and three 'we' petitions, 'give us this day our daily bread', 'forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors', 'and lead us not into temptation'.

Arguing that the prayer of Jesus in John 17 represents a Midrash on the petitions of the Lord's Prayer, Walker suggests that it largely follows

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<sup>2</sup> Wm. O. Walker, Jr. (1982) 'The Lord's Prayer in Matthew and in John', *New Testament Studies*, vol. 28, pp. 237-256.

<sup>3</sup> *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans 2012), pp. 960-1025.

Matthew structurally, with vv. 1-8 echoing the three 'thou' petitions of Matthew, vv. 9-19 the three 'we' petitions, and vv. 20-26 recapitulating the themes developed earlier in the prayer. Nevertheless, the Johannine echoes are less distinct than the words of Matthew, but woven together and recapitulated throughout the chapter.

A basic account of the parallels, following Walker, is as follows:

### **The Address**

Πάτερ – Both Matthew and John begin with this address, repeated in John at verses, 5, 11, 21, 24 and 25, and at verse 11 as πᾶτερ ἅγιε ('Holy Father') and at verse 25 as Πάτερ δίκαιε ('Righteous Father'). John's reference to Jesus' 'having lifted his eyes to heaven' in verse 1 functions as a possible allusion to Matthew's phrase 'who art in the heavens'.

### **'Hallowed be thy name'**

This is echoed in the repeated references to the divine name, to its glorification in the Father and the Son, and in the disciples, in the uses of the terms ἅγιος ('holy') and ἁγιάζειν ('to hallow'); and the references and allusions to Jesus' faithfulness and martyrdom.

### **'Thy kingdom come'**

This is not repeated directly in John, but is echoed in 'the hour has come', a reinterpretation, Walker suggests, of 'thy kingdom come' in the light of John's 'realized eschatology'. The 'Kingdom' may also be seen reflected in the references to 'eternal life', the 'authority over all flesh', the 'glory that you have given me' (v. 22), and the people who have been given to the Son (v. 24).

### **'Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven'**

This might be seen reflected in Jesus' words 'having finished the work that you gave me to do' (v. 4), which recalls Jn. 4:34, 'My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to complete his work', and Jn. 6:38-40, 'for I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but to do the will of him who sent me.' Walker further suggests that the ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς of v. 4 echoes the 'on earth' - ἐπὶ γῆς - of the Lord's Prayer.

### **'Give us this day our daily bread'**

The echo here is rather indirect, and must be heard through the 'eternal life' that is given by the Son, alongside the unity of the disciples in their union with the Father and the Son and the 'words' given the disciples by the Son. Walker suggests reading these references through the 'bread of life' verses in chapter 6, in which Jesus himself is 'the bread of life', or 'the living bread which came down from heaven'. This then constitutes a fully Johannine Eucharistic reading of the 'daily bread' of the Lord's Prayer, the 'daily bread' here becoming 'eternal life' (vv. 2-3), and the 'words' which Jesus gives, which are 'spirit and life' (6:63) are here in the 'words' given by the Father to the Son and by the Son to the disciples (vv. 8, 14).

**'And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors'**

This does not appear directly in John 17. Walker, following Bultmann, suggests the expression of a similar idea to forgiveness in terms such as ἁγιάζειν ('to sanctify'), and καθαρός ('pure'), which at 15:3 is connected to the 'word': 'you have already been cleansed by the word I have spoken to you'.

Walker suggests that the second part of the petition 'as we have also forgiven our debtors' might be echoed in the bonds of responsibility and fellowship that Jesus institutes among his disciples, and between his disciples and others: 'As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. (18), and "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word..." (20). Thus Walker claims 'Forgiveness of one another thereby is transformed into witnessing to the divine love, love for one another, and oneness in Christ.' (p. 246)

**'And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil/the evil one'**

The final petition is the clearest Matthean echo in John, verses 11-15 speak for themselves:

'And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled. But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. I am not asking you to take them out of the world, **but I ask you to protect them from the evil one.**'