Conceptualising holiness in the Gospel of John: The mode and objectives of holiness (part 1)

This article investigates the code of holiness as well as the objectives of holiness in the Gospel of John. The *en route* to holiness will be dealt with in a following article, ‘Conceptualizing holiness in the Gospel of John: the *en route* to holiness and the character of holiness (Part 2)’. In the Gospel of John, the holiness of the trinity constitutes the theological environment for the code of holiness and forms the basis for the exhortation to holiness. The code of holiness is described in the light of the interaction of three levels of relationships: the unity between Father and the Son as the example of holiness, the unity between Jesus and the disciples as the basis for holiness and the unity among the disciples as the inducting objective for holiness. For the Fourth Evangelist, the objective of holiness is fourfold: The first objective is to constitute a unity among the followers of Jesus (17:20–23), although it is not explicitly defined in this context. The second objective refers to the preparation of Jesus’ disciples to continue Jesus’ mission. The third objective for holiness is that the world (ὁ κόσμος) may believe (πιστεύῃ) and may know (γινώσκῃ) that God has sent his Son (δι’ αὐτοῦ με ἀπάντησαν) (17:20–23). The fourth and the ultimate objective is the glorification of God (17:4).

Introduction

Interest in the theme of holiness or spiritual growth in Christianity has grown over the past few decades owing to the emergence of, and interest in, Christian spirituality\(^1\) and Christian mysticism. This interest is observed in the many publications on spirituality, mysticism, holiness, devotion and discipleship, which all relate to holiness. This article investigates how holiness is expressed in the Gospel of John.

The *Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Brown 1976:223) identifies three different adjectives\(^2\) in the Greek language that denote ‘holy’: ἱερός, ὅσιος and ἄγνως. The first adjective, ἱερός, ‘denotes the essentially holy, the taboo, the divine power or what was consecrated to it, for example, sanctuary, sacrifice, priest’ (Brown 1976:223). In Brown’s (1976:235) explanation of the meanings of the New Testament usage of this adjective, only three references are relevant. It denotes a holy person or thing, ‘worthy of reverence’ (ἰεροπρεπής, cf. Tt 2:3). Paul uses this adjective (ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ, sacred, holy) in 2 Timothy 3:15 in reference to the sacred writings. The last reference is found in 1 Corinthians 9:13, where Paul uses τῷ ἱερῷ in the usual sense of sacred actions. Paul also uses the verb ἱεροπραγματεύομαι (to perform sacred rites) in Romans 15:16 to give correct instruction about offering sacrifices. The definition given by Arndt, Danker and Bauer (2000:470) relates to that of Brown: (1) ‘being of transcendent purity, holy’ and (2) ‘belonging to the temple and its service, holy thing’. In their semantic dictionary, Louw and Nida (1996:1, 532, 53.9), influenced by 1 Corinthians 9:13, define ἱερός briefly as ‘something which has been dedicated exclusively to the service of God’.

Another adjective is ὅσιος, which is used only eight times in the New Testament. According to Brown (1976:223), ὅσιος indicates ‘divine commandment and providence’ as well as ‘human obligation and morality’. Zodhiates (2000:#3741) explains that the adjective ὅσιος means ‘[h]oly, 1 This article was a paper read at the annual international conference of the Society for the Study of Christian Spirituality (SSCS) during 20–23 May 2015 at St Augustine College of South Africa, Johannesburg. The conference was very well attended, which verifies the above statement about the interest in Christian Spirituality. Well-known international scholars like Waaqijam, McGinn and Wettten were there as well as well-known South African scholars in Christian Spirituality, such as De Villiers, Kourie and Lombead. The extensive work of Schneiders on the Gospel of John, the publication of Waaijman (2002) as well as the publication of Shildrake (1995) influenced me in doing this research on ‘Holiness in the Gospel of John’. Spirituality can, for the purpose of this research, be defined to refer to ‘living a life of transformation and self-transcendence that resonates with the lived experience of the divine’ (Van der Merwe 2014:374).
2 Another dimension is ἄγνως, which is used only eight times in the New Testament. According to Brown (1976:223), ὅσιος indicates ‘divine commandment and providence’ as well as ‘human obligation and morality’. Zodhiates (2000:#3741) explains that the adjective ὅσιος means ‘[h]oly, 3 Friberg, Friberg and Miller (2000:203) interpret it as ‘[t]he very meaning of what belongs to divinity, sacred, holy (2T 3:15), opposite βαρβαρός (profane); (2) substantively: (a) τῷ ἱερῷ as a sacred enclosed area under the protection of a god temple (AC 19.27); (b) predominately of the temple of God at Jerusalem, including the whole sacred area with its buildings, courts, walls, and gates (Mt 21:12); (c) τῷ ἱερῷ as everything that belongs to the temple and its service the holy or sacred things (1C 9:13).
righteous, unpolluted with wickedness, right as conformed to God and his laws.

The last term is the adjective ἅγιος, which is the most frequently used word group of the three discussed here. Brown (1976:223) interprets it ethically and emphasises that ‘the duty to worship the holy’ is the main principle embedded in the word. In consequence, two facts are fundamental here: The first fact relates to the trinity, which is referred to as being holy. God is denoted as holy (ἡγιασμένος, ἅγιος) in 17:11; 1 Pt 1:15f.; Rev 4:8; 6:10). Jesus is also called holy (Jn 6:69; Rev 3:7; cf. Jn 2:20). The Spirit is referred to as the Holy Spirit, and the concept of spiritual growth and/or holiness is connected to the Holy Spirit. The second fact relates to the sphere of holiness. In the New Testament, the cult is no longer the sphere of holiness – the sphere of holiness is the prophetic expression of the Gospel. The sacred is no longer connected to things, places or rites, as in the Old Testament. It is now connected to the manifestation of life produced by the [Holy] Spirit’ (Brown 1976:228).

In the Gospel of John, only the adjective ἅγιος and the verb ἁγιάζω appear. The adjective, ἅγιος, is used five times (1:33; 6:69; 14:26; 17:11; 20:22) and the verb, ἁγιάζω, four times (10:36; 17:17, 19[bis]). These occurrences constitute the theological environment in which holiness is to be interpreted and understood. This article first explores the theological environment of holiness in the Gospel of John. Secondly, it investigates the code of holiness and lastly the objectives for holiness in the Gospel of John.

Theological environment of holiness in the Gospel of John

All the adjectives (ἁγιός) refer to the holiness of the trinity (Father, 17:11; Son, 6:69; Spirit, 1:33, 14:26 and 20:22). The verbs are connected to the mission of Jesus (10:36; 17:19) and the continuation of Jesus’ mission by his disciples (17:17). These texts are now briefly examined.

The adjective ἁγιός

‘Holy Father’ (πάτερ ἅγιες, 17:11)

The only reference to God as Holy Father in the Gospel of John (17:11) has to be interpreted in the light of two phrases (see italics) in the verse, ‘Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one’. The imperative (τήρησον, ‘protect’) is followed by a η-clause, ἵνα ἐστιν ἐν καθό πάντες (so that they may be one, as we are one).

- ‘Holy Father’: Keener (2003b:1057) points out that ‘Holy Father’ (πάτερ ἅγιες) is expected in this context as it would be in an early Jewish milieu. In the Old Testament, God is also called ‘the Holy One’ (of Israel), and God is addressed as holy in the Jewish prayers: ‘O holy One, Lord of all holiness’ (II Macc xiv 36); ‘O Lord, Lord, King of the heavens, and Ruler of the whole creation, Holy among the holy’ (III Macc 2:2). A Eucharistic prayer found in Didache ix-x refers to God as ‘holy Father’: ‘We thank Thee, holy Father, for Thy holy name’ (cf. Brown 1972:II, 759). Zimmerli (1978:142) is of the opinion that Yahweh, who approaches his children, wishes his nature (τὸ ὅσιον, holy) to be reflected in theirs. This point is ‘clear in the statement that introduces the core of the legal material in the Holiness Code: ‘You shall be holy, because I, Yahweh your God, am holy’ (Lv 19:2; also 1 Pt 1:16). For Zimmerli (1978), the closeness between the gift of Yahweh and his commandment is definite. Keener (2003b:1057) adds to Zimmerli’s argument by stating that ‘God is the measure of holiness’ (cf. Rev 4:8), and whatever is ‘holy’ is ‘separated’ to Him. Consequently, this reference to God as ‘Holy Father’ prepares the way for 17:17–19: the sanctification and consecration of the disciples (17:17) and Jesus (17:19) (Carson 1991:561).
• Protect them in your name: Jesus ‘protected’ his disciples from the world with the name of God (17:11), in this literary context, ‘Holy Father’. According to Keener (2003b:1057; also Brown 1972:II, 759), the preposition ἐν (‘in’) can be both locative and instrumental: the disciples who are in the world are protected ‘in the name of God’ and simultaneously God protects them by means of his name.15 The Father will continue to set the disciples apart from the world as Jesus has separated them from the World (17:12).16 For Borchert (2002:197), the awesomeness and power of God embedded in ‘Holy Father’ provide a sense of security when the disciples need to face the hostile world. The holiness of the disciples will become their unique and transforming characteristic in the world (17:17).

• They may be one: Throughout this prayer (Jn 17), the overarching concern is mission (Borchert 2002:197). Separation from the world generates internal communion and cohesion. The idea here is that mutual unity with the ‘Holy Father’ and the Son (‘the One of God’, 6:69) yields unity among the followers of Jesus (cf. 17:21–23) and enables them to continue Jesus’ mission so that the world may believe and know the Father has sent his Son.

‘The Holy One of God’ (ὁ ἅγιος τοῦ θεοῦ, 6:69)

Peter’s Christological confession that Jesus is ‘the Holy One of God’17 occurs in a situation where Jesus asks his disciples if they also want to leave him, as many of the other disciples have (6:67). Beasley-Murray (2002:97) states that the term ‘holy’ in this context refers to that which belongs to God. He was influenced by Bultman’s (1971:449) interpretation that ‘Jesus stands over against the world simply as the One who comes from the other world and belongs to God… he is the Holy One of God’. Carson (1991:304) equates the adjective ‘holy’ used to describe Jesus with the adjective ‘in Holy Father’.

For Peter to confess that Jesus is the ‘Holy One of God’ is a faith response to Jesus’ utterance in 6:21: ‘I am’. Within the context of the entire Gospel, the confession ‘Holy One of God’, who has been consecrated by the Father and sent into the world (10:36) with a specific mission, is the culmination point of his God-ordained mission (cf. Beasley-Murray 2002:97).

With the confession of Peter, the Evangelist replaces the ‘Christ’ confession of the Markan tradition (Mk 8:29) and the ‘Son of the living God’ in Matthew 16:16, referring to Jesus as the ‘Holy One of God’18 (see 3:31–34; 10:36; also cf. Ac 3:14; Rv 3:7).19 For Brown (1975:298; also Carson 1991:304), the closest parallel to these references in the Gospel of John is 10:36, where Jesus speaks of himself as ‘the one whom the Father has sanctified (ὑιοῦντα, make holy). Before Jesus and his disciples go to Gethsemane where Jesus is captured, he says to his disciples, ‘I sanctify (make holy) myself’ (17:19).20 This can indirectly relate to Jesus’ statements that he speaks the words of God, does the works the Father has shown him and endeavours to do the will of the Father.21 If so, then it relates to his God-ordained mission.

The Holy Spirit (πνεῦματα ἅγιω, 1:33; 14:26; 20:22)

The expression ‘Holy Spirit’ is found in each of the major sections (1:19–12:50; 13:1–17:26 and 18:1–21:25) of the Gospel: 1:33; 14:26; 20:22 (Koester 2008:134; also Keener 2003a:458). The most significant of the three texts is 1:32–3:22 ‘I saw the Spirit descending from heaven… and it remained on him (ἐμείνεν ἐπ’ αὐτόν).’23 … He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain (μένει) is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit’.24 This term ἐμείνεν is used elsewhere in the Gospel to denote ‘mutual indwelling and continuous habitation’ (e.g. 14:25, μένει)25 (cf. Keener 2003a:460).

The verse identifies the Spirit as God’s Spirit. More meaning than the historical Baptist is probably intended is embedded in the designation ‘the Holy Spirit’. What the Evangelist is saying is that “the coming one” will inaugurate the age of God’s salvation when God’s Spirit will purify mankind (Newman & Nida 1993:39). This reference to the ‘Holy Spirit’ in 1:33 implies that Jesus (and his disciples) are sealed with a divine mark. As the Baptist could recognise Jesus by the descending and indwelling of the Spirit, so could his followers be recognised as anointed by God through their indwelling of the Spirit (Keener 2003a:461).

In 14:26, the ‘Holy Spirit’ is identified as the Paraclete:24 ‘But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name …’. The Father sends the Spirit (14:16), although Jesus also sends the Spirit (15:26; 16:7). The position of this verse in the Gospel points out that the mission of Jesus is on the brink of fulfilment and will soon be completed. The work that the Holy Spirit has to come and do, as the other Paraclete, is to continue Jesus’ mission. Although the Holy Spirit continues the mission of Jesus, Jesus remains the patron of that work in his heavenly mode of existence (Ridderbos 1997:510). The Spirit was never intended to replace Jesus. He ratifies the continuing presence of Jesus (cf. 14:17) and his involvement with the mission of the disciples (Neyrey 2007:249). ‘The Paraclete makes possible, continued access to Jesus after Jesus has departed … In the Discourses Jesus’ exclusive

15.Malina and Rohrbaugh (1998:247) point out that in the New Testament there exists a custom that reference to a specific person was to refer to that person’s name. Thus, in John 17:4, the making known of the name of the Father was to manifest the Father himself.


17.Keener (2003a:697) mentions that this reference to God as ‘the Holy One’ was in particular used as a title for God himself in the Old Testament and in early Judaism.

18.This expression relates closely to 10:36 and 3:31–34.

19.In his commentary on this passage, Brown (1975:298) refers to the Old Testament occurrences where references such as ‘God’s holy one’ or ‘the Lord’s holy one’ refers to men consecrated to God (Jdg 13:7; 16:17; Samson; Ps 106:16; Aaron).

20.Joubert (1968:51–60) argues that the title has a more exalted meaning: King, Son of Man, Suffering, servant and Son of God (cf. also Neyrey 2007:134).

21.This may also refer to the Logos who was with God (1:1–5) and Jesus’ statement in 17:20–23 that he and the Father are in each other.

22.In John 14:23, the noun ‘stayin’ (ἐμείνα) is used for ‘indwelling and continuous habitation’ (Keener 2003a:460).

23.The verb form μένειν (μένω, 14:25) is a present active partciple and μένει (14:17) a present active indicative that means ‘continuing habitation’.

24.Prior to its use by the Evangelist, Paraclete has meant ‘mediator’ or ‘broker’ (Brown 2003:170–186) or has been translated as ‘patron’ or ‘supporter’ (Grayston 1981:67–82). See Keener (2003b:951–972) for a thorough discussion of the Paraclete.
The verb ἁγιάζω

Disciples (ἁγιάσαν αὐτούς, 17:17) ... Jesus (ἁγιάζον ἐμαυτόν, 17:19; also 10:36). The first verb reference is found in 10:36. In 10:36, Jesus asks the Jews a rhetorical question (Ridderbos 1997:374; also Newman & Nida 1993:346), namely 'can you say that the one whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world is blaspheming because I said, “I am God’s Son”? With these words, Jesus declares that the Father has sanctified him (ὅν ὁ πατὴρ ἡγίασεν) before sending him to the world to do the work the Father has given him to do (see 17:4, 6-8). Here, his consecration is connected with his mission.

Jesus refers to his consecration again in 17:19. He consecrates himself so that they (his disciples) may also be sanctified in truth (καὶ ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν ἐγὼ ἁγιάζω ἐμαυτόν, ἵνα ὃν ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν ἐμαυτόν ἐγείρῃ) and to separate themselves from the world (Brown 1972:766).

According to Keener (2003b:1060), God sanctifies his people by making them like himself (17:11; also Lv 11:44-45; 1 Pt 1:6). In 17:11, Jesus addresses the Father as ‘holy’. To the Jewish mind, this suggests something about the holiness to be expected from the disciples gathered around Jesus when he is praying this prayer. The principle in Leviticus (11:44; 19:2; 20:26) is that the children of God must make themselves holy because God is holy (cf. also 1 Pt 1:6). The disciples of Jesus actually belong to God (17:9); therefore, they should separate themselves from the world (Brown 1972:765). For John, the holiness of the disciples is to separate them from the values of the world and not the world. Jesus, the Holy One of God (6:69), wants his disciples consecrated and sent into the world (17:18; 20:21; Keener 2003b:1060f). Their consecration is directed towards their mission. In the Gospel of John, sanctification is always connected to mission. After Jesus’ imperative appeal for the sanctification of the disciples (17:17a), the mission of the disciples is spelled out (17:18); it is
the continuation of Jesus’ mission.\textsuperscript{34} 17:17b focuses on the \textit{means} of the sanctification: ‘Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth’ (Carson 1991:566).

John 17:17b also refers to the medium of sanctification. In this context, the Evangelist points out that ‘holiness is not simply a human achievement’ (Borchert 2002:203). It is an act of God who consecrates people to be like God. (The disciples are to be sanctified in the truth, that is, the \[W\]ord of God (17:17a).) Therefore, Jesus requests the Father to sanctify his disciples as he has sanctified Jesus and sent him into the world (10:36). In Jewish prayer, it is declared that God sanctifies people through his commandments (Strack & Billerbeck 1969:566). This notion resonates with John’s partly similar notion that ‘word’ and ‘commandment’ are almost interchangeable. In Johannine theology, Jesus is identified as both ‘Word’ and ‘the Truth’ (14:6). This implies that sanctification in truth (the word of God) is basically an aspect of belonging to Jesus. According to 17:10,\textsuperscript{35} belonging to Jesus is belonging to God, and they are both holy (Brown 1972:766).

\textbf{Conclusion}

Thus far, it is evident that the economic and strategic use of the verb \textit{ἁγιάζω} and the adjective \textit{ἁγιός} in the Gospel creates an environment in which the Johannine understanding of the sanctification or holiness of the followers of Jesus is embedded. This implies that holiness belongs to God. He is the owner of himself,\textsuperscript{36} his being, God’s holiness is connected with his presence and mission in the world. As a result, the identity and character of all the three divine persons (FSS) are linked to the existence (\textit{das ein}) of holiness. Jesus calls imperatively (\textit{ἀγιάζων}, 17:17) on the Father to sanctify his followers. According to John, holiness includes more than only ethical aspects. In fact, holiness is connected with the mission of Jesus and the continuation of this mission by his disciples. The rest of this article focuses on the \textit{code} of holiness and, finally, the purpose of holiness.\textsuperscript{37}

\textbf{The code of holiness in the Gospel of John}\textsuperscript{38}

The cryptogram of holiness is explicitly explained in John 17:20–23, where the following extended parallelism\textsuperscript{39} is found:

\begin{center}
\textbf{FIGURE 1:} Unity the essence of holiness.
\end{center}

\small
\begin{verbatim}
\textsuperscript{34}According to Strach 45:4 (in KJV), ‘God selected him [Moses] from all mankind, Now, in Exodus 28:41, God tells Moses to consecrate others so that they may serve God as priests. Similarly, the disciples of Jesus are to be consecrated in order that they may serve as apostles (Brown 1972:765).

\textsuperscript{35}All mine are yours, and yours are mine …

\textsuperscript{36}The expression ‘I am who I am’ indicates that he belongs totally to himself.

\textsuperscript{37}The en route to holiness will be dealt with in a follow-up article.

\textsuperscript{38}In this subsection I rely on a previous publication of mine, Van der Merwe (2002a).


\textsuperscript{40}The function of this parallelism is, firstly, to emphasise the unity aspect and, secondly, to relate the purpose of the mission of Jesus (salvation and revelation) with this concept of unity. This refers implicitly to 17:1–5, where the glory of God and Jesus is explained and emphasised.

\textsuperscript{41}The unity among Jesus’ disciples has already been introduced to prepare the reader in 17:11.

\textsuperscript{42}The modifications in the second cluster provide new perspectives. This is clear from the introduction of new themes: δόξαν, ἠγάπησας, τετελειωμένοι (Van der Merwe 2002a:228).

\textsuperscript{43}The clause ‘in order that they may all be one’ appears in 17:11, 21, 22 and 23.

\textsuperscript{44}The unity among the disciples and Jesus (God) is not an ‘ontological’ unity but a ‘functional’ unity. This unity lies in: obedience (say and do, will of God), love, glorification, abiding in and laying down one’s life (die in oneself).
\end{verbatim}
In other words, certain aspects of the Father–Son relationship (unity) form a template (καθώς, see 17:21, 22) for the character of unity or holiness that the Christian community should display.45 This view, then, values the community as an ongoing locale that was decisive in the historical revelation of God in Christ; it is where holiness is constituted (Kysar 2007:136). Thus, according to the context of John 17, unity and holiness can be interpreted semantically as synonyms.

In order to understand the code of holiness, the unity between the Father and the Son has to be understood. In addition, we must understand what it means that Jesus and the disciples are in one another.

The Father-Son relationship as the example of holiness

According to Poelman (1965:62), the unity between Jesus and the Father is a constant theme in the Gospel of John. The unity between the Father and Jesus is further articulated in the following mutual formula (17:21; cf. also 14:10–11, 20), which forms a chiasm:

σὺ, (πάτερ), ἐν ἐμοί κἀγὼ ἐν σοί

Beasley-Murray (2002:253) calls this a ‘formula of reciprocal immanence’. Schnackenburg (1968:143) describes it as ‘a linguistic way of describing … the complete unity between Jesus and the Father’. Beasley-Murray (2002:254) writes: ‘[H]e says the depths of the being of God there exists koinonia. A “fellowship” between the Father and the Son that is beyond all comparison, a unity whereby the speech and action of the Son are that of the Father in him and the Father’s speech and action come to finality in him’.

The first phrase (σὺ, πάτερ, ἐν ἐμοί) of this chiasm refers to the presence of the Father in the life of Jesus. The second phrase (κἀγὼ ἐν σοί) refers to the desire of Jesus to do the will of the Father. Although Poelman (1965) focuses the attention on the relation between 17:11, 21 and 22f., he neglects to pay attention to Jesus’ statements that he speaks the words the Father has heard the voice of the Father, whoever sees Jesus sees the Father (14:9) and whoever experiences Jesus experiences the presence of the Father (cf. 12:45, 49, 50; 14:9).46

It can therefore be deduced that the unity between the Father and the Son, as displayed throughout the Gospel, discloses the character of their holiness. This unity between the Father and the Son comprises mutual indwelling, mutual revelation, mutual love and mutual glorification.

The Jesus-Disciple relationship as the foundation for holiness

Beasley-Murray (2002:302) points out that in 14:20 (also 11, 12),48 the statement ‘On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you’ refers to a mutual indwelling of persons. Believers become one through participation in the koinonia of the Father and the Son. In 17:21–23, the disciples’ participation is constituted through their union with the Son. This resonates with representations throughout the Gospel of the intermediator role of the incarnate Son of God (e.g. in 17:21–22). In the parallelism of clusters, a second chiasm is present:49

17:21 καθὼς σὺ, πάτερ, ἐν ἐμοί καὶ ἐν τῷ πατρί μου καὶ ἐν σοί
17:22[καθὼς] ἐγὼ ἐν αὐτοῖς, καὶ ὑμεῖς ἐν ἐμοί καὶ καὶ σὺ ἐν ἐμοί

The first chiasm (17:21), as discussed in the previous subsection, states that the Father and Jesus are in each other. This second chiasm refers to three personae: the Father (σὺ), Jesus (ἐγώ, ἐμοί) and the disciples (αὐτοῖς). In both relationships, Jesus is present and part of. In other words, Jesus is the mediator between the Father and the disciples. The statements in the two chasms make it clear that (1) Jesus and the Father are in each other (17:21) and (2) that he is also in the disciples (17:22). It can therefore be reasoned that the Father is present in the disciples because he is present in Jesus (cf. Malatesta 1971:207). Functionally, these two chasms complement each other; they determine and indicate the nature of the ‘unity’ as well as the holiness’ implied here. This signifies the nature of the relationship that exists between the disciples and Jesus (even the Father). The implication is that the disciples will take on the character of the Father (e.g. holiness) in Jesus (Van der Merwe 2002a:232).

This explanation shows that the unity claimed by Jesus to be among believers is to be modelled on the ‘unique interrelationship of the Father and Son (Word) vividly portrayed in both the pros ton theon (“towards God”) and the theos en ho logos (“the Word was God”) of the Prologue (1:1–3)’ (Borchert 2002:206). In the relationship between Jesus and the disciples, the disciples’ functioning is

45. For example: ‘As (καθὼς) the Father has loved me, so I have loved you’ (15:9) … This is my commandment, that you love one another as (καθὼς) I have loved you’ (15:12). Thus, as the Father loves the Son, so the believers are to love one another. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as (καθώς) I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love’ (15:10).

46. Borchert (2002:206) describes the oneness of believers in the community as ‘modelled on the interrelationship of the Father and the Son (you are in me and I am in you)’. Also see Appold (1978:157–93).

47. He speaks (3:34; 8:28; 12:49, 50; 14:10) what the Father has told him to say, he does (4:34; 5:36; 14:10; 17:4; cf. 10:25, 37) what the Father has shown him. He does the will of God (4:34; 5:30; 6:38; 8:29).

48. Compare this chiasm (17:21–22) with the chiasm in 14:20. (Also consider 14:10f.)

49. The comparative particle καθώς is implied at the beginning of 17:22.
contingent upon Jesus, as Jesus’ functioning is contingent upon the Father. They only function in relation to the other. Thus, the unity of the disciples with Jesus enables them to perceive the will of God and to live their lives in accordance with his will (Van der Merwe 2002a:232).

The question that arises now is how this ‘unity’ between Jesus (also the Father) and his disciples, and the unity among the disciples, would be established. Unfortunately, no systematic or even practical modus operandi is given in John 17. We find the answer to this question in the actions that constitute the unity between Jesus and the disciples, which we see throughout the Gospel: their lives must imitate the life of Jesus. This question is addressed in a following publication entitled ‘Conceptualising holiness in the Gospel of John: the en route to holiness and the character of holiness according to the Gospel of John’.

Closely connected to the environment and code of holiness is the question: ‘What are the objectives for being holy?’

The objectives for being holy in the Gospel of John

The objectives for sanctification in the Gospel of John are to be found in the following four references:

In each text cluster (17:20–21; 22–23), there are three clauses introduced by the subordinating nominal particle ἵνα (‘in order that’) stating objectives (see Beasley-Murray 2002:303). The first objective (‘that they may all be one’) refers to the unity to be constituted among the followers of Jesus, which is referred to in 17:20–23 but not defined in this context. The constitution and character of this unity are defined in 15:9–17, namely to abide in Jesus and to love one another (obedience). This is suggested in the phrase at the end of 17:23, ‘and loved them even as you loved me’ (καὶ ἠγάπησας αὐτούς καθὼς ἐμὲ ἠγάπησας). The objective ‘to love God and to love Jesus’ (ἐν τῷ Θεῷ καὶ ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ) introduced by the subordinating nominal particle καὶ is an expression of the disciples’ obedience to Jesus, which is referred to in 17:20–23 but not defined in this context. To ‘love God and to love Jesus’ (ἐν τῷ Θεῷ καὶ ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ) is connected to the phrase ‘that I may glorify you on earth’ (ἵνα δω καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐν ἡμῖν ὄνημα δώσω) (17:4). This means that the participle ‘that I should do’ substantiates the ‘holiness’ to which the believers are called. The unity of Christian believers resembles the unity between the Father and Son and reflects its ‘ground and character’ (Ridderbos 1997:560).

Here, Jesus does have the ontological unity that exists between the Father and the Son in mind. He has in mind the unity and the reciprocal immanence between him and the Father as it comes to light in their holiness in the performance of the divine work of salvation. Throughout the Gospel, it is evident that ‘the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing’ (5:19) and ‘what he has heard from Him’ (cf. 8:26). With these statements, Jesus emphasises ‘the complete harmony and concurrence’ between him and the Father in carrying out the work of redemption assigned to him by the Father (cf. 2–4,6–13) (Ridderbos 1997:561).

The following two phrases are parallel, connected and stand in a close relationship:

ἵνα καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐν ἡμῖν ὄνημα δώσω (‘may they also be in us’, 17:21)

ἵνα ὀσίον τετελειωμένον εἰς ἐν (‘that they may become completely one’, 17:23)

This implies that the participle τετελειωμένοι (‘completely’, 17:23) is connected to the phrase αὐτοὶ ἐν ἡμῖν ὄνημα (‘may they also be in us’, 17:21) which means that ‘complete unity’ among the disciples can only be achieved when they are being taken into the unity of God, to be ‘in us’ (cf. Köstenberger 2004:498).

The third objective for holiness is ‘so that the world may believe/know that you have sent me’. This seems to be the consequence of the petitions for the unity of the followers of Jesus (cf. Beasley-Murray 2002:303) mutually and with the divine (Jesus and the Father). Where the first two objectives focus on the disciples of Jesus, the third objective focuses on the world per se.

50. Berchel (2002:206) points out that the idea of ‘indwelling’ of believers in the Godhead can be understood from the indwelling of the vine and branches described in John 15:1–11.

51. This is the opposite of the understanding of Käsemann (1968:56ff) who refers to a participation of believers in the ontological unity of the Father and the Son (see also Ridderbos 1997:560).

52. Cf. Beasley-Murray (2002:303) for a discussion on whether this third ἵνα-clause should be regarded as a consequence of the first two ἵνα-clauses or not.
If holiness is linked to the mission of Jesus (17:18, 19) and the mission of the disciples (17:17, 18), then the purpose of the mission of Jesus will be the purpose of the mission of his disciples. John 1:9 states that the purpose of the mission of Jesus is to give light to everyone. Here, light is a compound word, referring to salvation and revelation in the mission of Jesus and disciples as stated in 17:21, 23.

The function of the chiasm (ό κόσμος πιστεύῃ ὅτι σὺ με ἀπέστειλας (salvation) ἵνα γίνοῃ ὁ κόσμος ὅτι σὺ με ἀπέστειλας (revelation)) in this parallelism is to emphasise this objective.

The fourth objective is indirectly connected to the glory motif in John 17. This objective of the consecration of believers focuses on the glorification of the divine. It relates to the mission of Jesus, who reports to the Father as follows: ‘I have glorified you on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do’ (17:4). The subjective component in John regarding holiness is subordinate to the objective component. The focus is not on the self but rather on the Other (the divine) – the glorification of God when the world (ὁ κόσμος) believes (πιστεύῃ) and knows (γινώσκῃ) that God has sent his Son (ὁ ζόο σὺ με ἀπέστειλας)54. Although the notion ‘glory’ has a variety of meanings,55 in John 17 (cf. Van der Merwe 2002b:226–249), I only focus on two of these meanings that are relevant to this research (17:4; 24).56 Firstly, If Jesus glorifies the Father by completing the mission the Father has given him (17:4), then those who continue with this mission glorify the Father first because they are holy and connected to Jesus (15:8). Secondly, those who live in unity with the divine (17:22) will see the glory of Jesus because they will be with him (17:24).

Conclusion

John regards holiness as (1) a matter of identity (to be identified and united with a specific God), (2) a matter of character (to imitate the life of a specific person, the Son of this God) and (3) an empirical matter of revelation, salvation and glorification (in which the holiness of Christian believers has a revelatory-salvific effect, through the critical involvement of the Holy Spirit).

Because the community is the locus of the manifestation of God (Kysar 2007:135) in this world, John regards holiness as the revelation of God in this world – to make this being visible, so that when people hear the Christian believer they should hear God speaking; when they see the conduct of the Christian believer they will see God acting in this world; when people experience the presence of the Christian believer they should experience the transcendence and the imminence of this God.

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Competing interests

The author declares that he has no financial or personal relationships which may have inappropriately influenced him in writing this article.

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53 In 1:14, 18 it is written that Jesus will reveal (make known) the Father and glorify the Father (17:4). In 9:39, judgment is given as purpose for the coming of Jesus (also 15:22); in 10:9–10, he came to give salvation and abundant life. In 12:47, it is written that the purpose of his coming is salvation and not judgment and in 18:37, it is the witness of Jesus to the truth. All these relate to salvation.

54 The verb ‘believe’ refers to the salvation which Jesus brought and the verb ‘know’ refers to his revelation of the Father. The subjective mode of both of these words verifies this statement. The two verbs know (γινώσκει) and believe (μαθητεύεται) are collective verbs. The verb ‘believe’ (μαθητεύεται) refers to the entire process of salvation described in the Gospel, and the verb ‘know’ (γινώσκει) refers to the entire process of revelation as described in the Gospel.

55 See my publication, Van der Merwe (2002b).

56 17:4, ‘I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do’; 17:24, ‘Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory’.


