

## **“Consecrate them in the Truth! ...” John 17:17: Consecrated Persons as Agents and Instruments of truth**

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### **Introduction**

That Jesus loves his own (cf. John 13:1) is expressed in the way and manner he prays for them. The prayer(s) of Jesus, despite being the Son of God, tells us more of the importance of prayer. The term “The Lord’s high-priestly Prayer” (*Precatio summi sacerdotis*) for John 17 is a designation that was first used by the Lutheran Theologian David Chytraeus (1530-1600).<sup>1</sup> Chytraeus associates Jesus’ self-oblation with his (Jesus’) disciples, in the sense that Jesus Christ as Priest and victim consecrates himself and consecrates his followers. This includes both his immediate disciples and those who will come to believe through their word.<sup>2</sup>

The priestly prayer can be described as Jesus’ last Will. Ernst Käsemann calls it the “Testament of Jesus.”<sup>3</sup> It is Jesus’ last public accounting before God for his mission, made in the presence of and to the hearing of his disciples. It sums up what Jesus has been saying to the disciples, beginning from the Last Supper in John 13 to John 16. Jesus presents all as a plea to God, which should be granted to the disciples. This is the longest of Jesus’ recorded Prayers. The prayer also concludes Jesus’ final encounter with his disciples before his arrest, trial and crucifixion.<sup>4</sup> Jesus looks up to the cross but with hope and great expectation. He prays that his disciples be consecrated in truth. Jesus, being the eternal *logos*, is himself the truth (cf. John 14:6). The word of God is also the truth (cf. John 17:17).

‘Truth’ is a very important concept in John’s Gospel and it is used in relation to Jesus in this Gospel. For instance, within the prologue in John (1:14, 16-17), the Word became flesh, full of grace and truth. In John 4:23-24, within the context of Jesus’ discussion with the Samaritan woman, God must be worshipped in Spirit and in truth. And Jesus mentions in John 5:33 that John (the Baptist) bore witness to the truth. In John 14:6 and 16:13, it is used within the context of Jesus’ last messages before his eventual Passion and crucifixion, Jesus is truth and he promises that when the Spirit of truth comes, he will lead to the whole truth. In John 17:17-19, within the context of Jesus Priestly Prayer to the Father, which is the theme of this paper, it is the question of being consecrated in truth. All these are examples in John’s Gospel.

Being consecrated in truth, the disciples of Jesus are to bear witness to him in truth, in and through their lives. Within the context of the “Year of Consecrated Persons,” consecrated persons are also contemporary disciples of Jesus. They are thus consecrated to be embodiments and instruments of truth, by bearing witness through their lives to their master Jesus, who is the truth.

The method I have used here is both Intra-textual and Inter-textual. By Intra-textuality, I read and interpret John’s Gospel as John and as the Author presents it. Here it is read in its final form as John’s Gospel not its sources and literary history. It is also inter-textual in the sense

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (Michigan, 1983), 328. See also F. J. Moloney, *The Gospel According to John (Sacra Pagina 4)*; ed. Donald J. Harrington, S. J.; Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1998), 471.

<sup>2</sup> Although it is still subject to discussion if this prayer should be described as the ‘Prayer of Consecration’ since not all the material contained in it relates to consecration in this sense.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Bruce, *Gospel of John*, 328. Bruce quotes Ernst Käsemann’s Monograph on *John 17* (London, 1968). Notably, this view is being criticized in the sense that his Testament should rather be addressed to his disciples as in the preceding passage.

<sup>4</sup> Such a farewell may be compared to Paul’s farewell speech in Acts 20:17-35.

of relation between the texts. I have used this to note the links and connections of the text in question to other texts both in the New Testament (NT) and Old Testament (OT). The contextual significance and application is also not left out in this regard.

### **John 17:17: Text, Translation(s) and Structure (of John 17:17 Within John 17:1-26)**

John 17:17: *hagiason autous en tē alētheia; ho logos ho sos alētheia estin* (Greek, transliterated)

John 17:17: Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth (RSV)

John 17:17: Dedicate them to yourself by means of the truth (GNB)

John 17:17: Consecrate them in the truth; your word is truth (NJB)

John 17:17 has no serious textual questions and controversies. The sentence in Greek is simple and straightforward. Although the Good News Bible translation above differs a little from the other two, the majority of the different Bible translations do not differ much on this verse. This paper will adopt the New Jerusalem Bible translation of this verse. In the entire Priestly Prayer, the following verses have some textual questions, namely: John 17:1, 7, 8, 11, 12, 21 and 24. These verses will be examined on the basis of the fact that the concentration and central focus of this paper is on John 17.17.

The priestly prayer can be divided into four (4) subunits. Firstly, John 17:1-5: The glorification of both the Father and the son. Secondly, John 17:6-19: Report (feedback) and request to the father about those whom the Father has given to the Son. Thirdly, John 17:20-23: Report (feedback) and request on those, who, through the words of the disciples of Jesus, will come to believe in him. Lastly, John 17:24-26: Report (feedback) and request as regards the future accomplishment/perfection of those whom the Father has given to Jesus. Other scholars have different structures for the priestly prayer. For instance, Moloney and Morris have the subdivision (John 17:1-5; 6-19, & 20-26);<sup>5</sup> Brown (John 17:1-8, 9-19, & 20-26)<sup>6</sup> amongst others. In any case, John 17:17 falls within the second subunit within the Priestly prayer, namely, the request by Jesus that those the Father has given him be consecrated in truth.

### **Delimitation and Context of John 17:1-26**

The farewell discourse in John 13-16 is followed by the ‘Priestly Prayer’ in John 17. The overall context can be considered as Jesus’ farewell speech in a sense. This text can be delimited and seen essentially as a unit of its own. The markers include the following. The way and manner in which Jesus begins the prayer in John 17:1 is similar to that of John 11:41 in the sense that he looks up to heaven. He prays to the Father without interruption till John 17:26. This further strengthens the fact that the text is a unified whole. Another mark for the delimitation is also evident after John 17:26. We see how the following passage (John 18) begins another event entirely; there we see the change in place, time, event and the introduction of new characters. Jesus sets out with his disciples, crossing the Kidron valley to a garden, which eventually leads to the scene of his arrest.

### **“Consecrate them in the Truth! ...” John 17:17**

#### **Consecration in John’s Gospel: Vocabulary, Meaning and Usage**

The verb *hagiazō* means “1. set aside someth. or make it suitable for ritual purposes, consecrate, dedicate (of things) ... 2. Include a person in the inner circle of what is holy, in

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Moloney, *Gospel According to John*, 459; L. Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, NICNT (Michigan, 1987), 634.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 355-356.

both cultic and moral associations of the word, consecrate, dedicate, sanctify.”<sup>7</sup> *hagiazō* (*make holy, consecrate*) appears 28 times in the NT. The usage in the NT is applicable to the name of God, Christ, those who believe in Christ, those consecrated through/by Christ himself and also to the creatures of God. God consecrates (sanctifies) his Son Jesus Christ (cf. John 10:36); He (God) also consecrates believers (cf. John 17:17) and Christ consecrates himself as well (cf. John 17:19).

Looking at the word *hagiazō* (consecrate) in the sense of “setting aside,” or “separate,” it implies that the disciples of Jesus are not to be worldly people, but people separated from the things of the world. St. Paul also speaks about being in the world and not being of the world (cf. Rom 12:2; cf. also John 15:19f; 17:14-16; 1 John 2:15). Here, Consecration also implies selection from the world and given to God, so that they can be sent into the world. This is possible through the communication of his word, truth itself, to them. The disciples no longer belong to the world, though they remain in the world (cf. John 17:11.14-16). They are sent into the world as agents of the master and messengers and they are to lead the lost back to God. Therefore, the consecration of the disciples involves “their consecration for the task now entrusted to them; it involves further their inward endowment with all the spiritual resources necessary for carrying out their task.”<sup>8</sup> What the disciples will proclaim will exercise its sanctifying effect on the listeners; this is a continuation of Jesus’ mission to them.

The Father also consecrates his Son, Jesus Christ, and sent him into the world (cf. John 10:36). The Father’s consecration of Jesus is linked with/to Jesus’ mission and sending into the world. In like manner, in John 17:17-19, the consecration of the disciples is linked to/with their being sent into the world as observed earlier. Furthermore, U. C. von Wahlde contributes on John 17:19 that: “From the context, it would appear that the self-consecration of Jesus might refer to his acceptance of his death.”<sup>9</sup> Thus consecrated, the disciples of Jesus too “will be prepared to die in defence of the truth.”<sup>10</sup>

### **Truth in John’s Gospel: Vocabulary, Meaning and Usage**

The disciples are consecrated in Truth. *Alētheia* means: “1. the quality of being in accord with what is true, truthfulness, dependability, uprightness in thought and deed ... 2. The content of what is true, truth ... 3. An actual event or state, reality.”<sup>11</sup> In John’s Gospel, God himself is *alēthēs* and *alēthinos* in the sense that he reveals himself in the Son (John 3:33; 7:28; 8:26; 17:3).<sup>12</sup> “The disclosed character of truth is active in nature: God ‘exegetes’ (1:18) himself as truth in the one whom he sends as the truth.”<sup>13</sup> And whoever is of the truth hears and listens to Jesus and obeys the voice of God (cf. John 8:47; 18:37). As such, truth discloses itself to whomever is open to it. In John, truth is also an event. Grace and truth came through the incarnate logos (John 1:14, 17). He is the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6). Because he is truth, he testifies to the truth (John 8:40, 45f.; 16:7; 18:37). Jesus, being the witness to what he has seen and heard, speaks the truth as it is. Therefore, to speak the *alētheia* entails speaking how it is exactly (cf. John 3:31-36; 5:19).

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<sup>7</sup> W. Bauer, *A Greek- English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Christian Literature*, BDAG (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.; ed. Frederick William Danker (Chicago, 2000) 9-10.

<sup>8</sup> Bruce, *Gospel of John*, 334.

<sup>9</sup> von Wahlde U. C., *The Gospel and Letters of John I-III*, ECC (Grand Rapids, MI: 2010), 727.

<sup>10</sup> T. Okure, “John,” in William R. F. (ed.), *International Bible Commentary*, 1512-1576, here, 1567.

<sup>11</sup> Bauer, *BDAG*, 42.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. H. Hübner, “*alētheia* truth,” in H. Balz and G. Schneider (eds.), *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. I (Michigan, 1999), 57-60, here, 59.

<sup>13</sup> Hübner, “*alētheia*,” 60.

Being consecrated in truth also implies doing what is truthful/true (cf. John 3:21). Truth is eternal and constant. Morris affirms that, “sanctification is not effected apart from the divine revelation.”<sup>14</sup> Therefore this divine revelation is truth itself. The word of God is truth (cf. John 17:17). It is this word that also makes people free (cf. John 8:31-32). J. Beutler notes here that John 17:17 is not about ‘sanctification’ or ‘making holy’ in the cultic sense but through the word of God proclaimed by Jesus Christ (cf. John 14:6).<sup>15</sup> This is made possible through the work of the Spirit. Therefore, truth is the instrument of that work which is to be done as contained in the Father’s word. Jesus himself gave this truth to his disciples (cf. John 8:14; 14:6; 18:37-38).

The fact that *alētheia* is in the singular and carries the definite article must be specially noted. It has a deeper meaning, in the sense that, it is not just a truth among other truths, but the absolute truth. John’s Gospel also speaks about the Spirit of truth, which God will send and which will lead to the complete truth (cf. John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13). The disciples of Jesus are consecrated in truth and are being sent (cf. John 17:17ff.). God is to be worshiped in spirit and in truth (cf. John 4:23ff.).

The purpose of Jesus’ coming into the world according to John’s Gospel, is to bear witness to the truth (cf. John 18:37). Although the emphasis in this verse (John 18:37) is not on his person, but rather on the truth, bearing witness to the truth also involves revealing the divine truth, which is closely connected to his person. John 1:14 states that “the word was made flesh and dwelt among us, filled with grace and truth. “Filled with grace and truth” implies an embodiment of truth. Jesus, who is the embodiment of truth, came into the world to bear witness to the truth, the truth of which he is filled with and which he himself embodies. B. Kowalski connects truth and the person of Jesus in John’s Gospel in the sense that truth is personal and has to do with revelation; it is identified with and authenticated by the person and mission of Jesus Christ.<sup>16</sup> In line with this, J. Blank also adds that this truth is embodied and expressed in Jesus himself.<sup>17</sup> In other words, it implies that Jesus embodies the truth in his person and teachings. If Jesus is the embodiment of truth as seen in John’s Gospel, it further implies that the true revealer of truth and the attainment to this truth is possible through him who is the way, the truth and the life (Cf. John 5:19; 14:6).

The very fact that the coming of Jesus is strongly associated to/with his bearing witness to the truth, also tells of his mission in general. The truth heals and leads to salvation. The mission and witness of Jesus to the truth, has found its highest point and it is culminated on the cross (cf. John 18:37). It is the hour that Jesus bore witness to the truth, which is the purpose of his coming to the world (cf. John 18:37). The death of Jesus on the Cross is seen as the death of a true Witness. Jesus was crucified and died on the Cross because he remained faithful to his Mission and bore witness to the truth which is the sole purpose of his coming into this world.

Jesus also prays that the disciples be made holy in the knowledge of God and in the truth. Knowing the truth implies knowing the person of Jesus Christ who is the truth. The intention of the Jews to kill Jesus implies that they do not have the truth in them. And he who listens to his voice has access to eternal life (cf. John 8:40-41). The disciples believed that Jesus is the sent ONE of God (cf. John 17:8). As such, Jesus’ prayer for his disciples also implies that they might live holy lives corresponding to the holiness of God, revealed in and through him

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<sup>14</sup> Morris, *Gospel According to John*, 647.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. J. Beutler, *Das Johannesevangelium* (Freiburg/Basel/Wien, 2013), 456.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. B. Kowalski, “Was ist Wahrheit?” (Joh 18,38a) Zur literarischen und theologischen Funktion der Pilatusfrage in der Johannespassion,” in *Im Geist und in der Wahrheit. Studien zum Johannesevangelium und zur Offenbarung des Johannes sowie andere Beiträge*, Festschrift für Martin Hasitschka SJ zum 65 Geburtstag (2008), 201-227, here, 227.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. J. Blank, “Der Johanneische Wahrheits-Begriff”, in *BZ* 7 (1963),163-173, here, 167.

(Jesus Christ). Since the disciples proclaim a holy God, they too must be holy. In connection to this, F. Moloney writes thus: “It is the mission to make God known that determines the demand for holiness (vv. 17 and 19).”<sup>18</sup> Jesus commits himself to a life of holiness for the sake of his own and he makes known the holiness that is theirs. Just as God sent Jesus who is holy into the world (cf. John 17:18), the disciples must be holy as God is holy (cf. Lev 11:44; John 17:11, 17, 19). The consecration of the disciples “in truth” does not just imply that their commissioning will be a true one but that they are commissioned to stand in the truth and to speak the truth.

### **Understanding John 17:17 within the General Context of Jesus’ Priestly Prayer in John 17:1-26: Exegetical and Theological Analyses**

Jesus’ priestly prayer follows and closes the discourse and his farewell speech at the Last Supper table (cf. John 13:1-4; 17:1). This prayer is a mixture of report (feedback) and request to the Father. Jesus not only prays for the consecration of his disciples but he also prays for their unity. The priestly prayer is seen as Jesus’ Testament or Will. He is aware of the fact that the hour of glorification has come. This is in contrast to other earlier instances where Jesus says, “my hour has not yet come.” For instance in John 2:4, Jesus says that his hour has not yet come, now in John 17 his hour has come (cf. John 13:1; 17:1). Having articulated the structure of the entire Priestly prayer and its subdivision earlier, the paper will now endeavor here to connect John 17:17 to each of the subdivisions within the entire priestly prayer.

#### **17:1-5: The Glorification of the Father and the Son and the Share of this Glory by the Disciples**

John 17:1-5 is the first subunit. *Doxazō* (glorify) both opens and closes this subunit (vv.1 and 5) as an *Inclusio*. Within this short subunit, one notices glorification on both sides, the Father to the Son and the Son to the Father. This glorification is further seen and connected to other passages within the Book of Glory (John 13-20; see 13:31-32 where the Father glorifies the Son and vice versa). In addition, the notion of glorification found in the Book of Glory is foreshadowed by presence of the same notion in John 12:23, 27-28. The Son glorifies the Father in whom he gives eternal life to the people (cf. John 17:2). This brings to light the Son’s authority to give life just as the Father does (cf. John 5:26). “The glorification of the Father and the Son flows from the Son’s gift of eternal life to those entrusted to him (v. 2; cf. 5:21, 24)”<sup>19</sup> This shows how the Son also shares in the Father’s authority. The Son also cares about his disciples, both the immediate and the future disciples. This love for his disciples can be seen later in the plea for the consecration of his disciples in truth (cf. John 17:17). The disciples of Jesus will always share in his glory.

The knowledge of God and his Son, Jesus, whom He (God) has sent, will lead to eternal life. Jesus has power/authority given him by God to give life. To know (*ginōskō*) God is an important Johannine thought (cf. John 10:14-15; 14:7; 17:25). Despite the perceived gnostic influences within John’s Gospel, knowledge of God in this sense is not understood in the gnostic sense but one that leads to salvation, thus salvific. This thought already has its background in the OT (cf. Hos 2:18-22; 6:5-7; Isa 11:19; Jer 31:34; Wis 15:3). The knowledge of God also means recognition of God, confession to Him, and a personal relationship with him. Knowledge of God is also achieved through the Son, the only one who has seen the Father and makes him known.<sup>20</sup> God’s attribute as ‘Only’ and ‘True’ is clearly expressed in the Decalogue and in the *Shema* and also in the NT (Exod 20:3; Deut 6:4-5;

<sup>18</sup> Moloney, *Gospel According to John*, 469.

<sup>19</sup> Moloney, *Gospel According to John*, 461.

<sup>20</sup> The following references will be of help in this regard: John 1:14, 16-18; 3:14-15, 16-17, 31-36; 4:13-14; 5:24-25; 6:35, 51; 7:37-38; 8:12; 9:5; 10:27-29; 11:24; 13:18-20; 14:6-7.

Mark 12:29-30; John 5:44). The disciples, who are consecrated in truth, must know the “One,” “True,” and “Only” God. This personal relationship will enable them bear true witness to Him.

In John’s Gospel, moments of Glory are seen in the past, present and even in the future. Jesus prays to the father to restore the Glory that pre-existed before the world was made (John 1:1-2; 6:62; 8:58). In this sense, Jesus will return to his initial glory (John 17:5). “This prayer for glorification is necessitated by the reality of Jesus’ humanity that now needs to be taken up inseparably into the glory of the pre-existent God/*logos* (1:1-2).”<sup>21</sup> The Son’s glorification is also seen in the present, this is evident in passages within the Book of Glory, for example, in John (13:31-33; cf. 11:4; 12:23). And thirdly, the moment of Glory is also in the future as evident in the following passages: John 3:13-14; 7:39; 8:28; 11:4; 12:23, 32-33; 13:18-20, 31-32.

Jesus seeks the glory from the only God (cf. John 5:44). He will glorify his Father by doing his Will even by accepting death on the cross. Therefore, the cross is Jesus’ path to glory. The Cross proclaims Jesus’ Kingship (cf. John 19:19; 6:37, 39). It is the sum total of whom the Father has given him. Jesus gives his flesh for the life of the world. Faith in him is the condition for giving this life (John 6:40). As a result, this prayer is Jesus’ prayer of consecration in view of his sacrifice on the cross. Jesus was oriented towards doing the Will of the Father (cf. John 4:34; 5:36). He makes his Petitions to the Father based on the accomplishment or perfection of the work given by the Father. The self-giving of Jesus Christ is his total obedience to the Will of the Father even to accepting death on the cross in which the Father will be glorified. Jesus consecrates himself to it and he is convinced it is already accomplished (cf. John 13:32). Jesus loves the Father, he also loves his own whom the Father has given him (cf. John 13:1, 18-20; 14:30-31; 17:1-2). The followers of Jesus, having been consecrated in truth, will also share in this glory. This becomes possible if they follow the footsteps of the master.

### **17:6-19: A Summary of the Report (Feedback) and Request to the Father about those (Disciples) Whom the Father has Given to the Son**

In the report Jesus gave to the Father, he looks backward and gives a summary of his earthly life and ministry, this is seen especially in John 17:6-8. Also, his request/petition is basically for the believers. Jesus reports to the Father that he has made the Father’s name known. This is in line with John 1:18: “No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known.” In John 17:6-13, he prays mainly for the protection of the believers in unity. And in John 17:14-19, he prays for their protection against evil and also for their mission and sending. Jesus offers two prayer points for his followers: Firstly, that they remain uncontaminated by the world. Secondly, that they and future disciples may remain perfectly in love, even as he and the father are one. This union between Jesus and his disciples will even be seen in heaven vv. 20-24. Jesus also prays for the oneness of his followers, this prayer of oneness also pictures Jesus as the Shepherd, for he is the good shepherd (cf. John 10:16). Jesus’ prayer for the consecration of his disciples falls under this subunit, which has been treated earlier in detail in the section above.

### **17: 20-23: Report (Feedback) and Request on Those Who will Come to Believe in Him Through the Words of the Disciples of Jesus**

Jesus prays not just for his immediate disciples but also for the future ones. This subunit can be divided into two further subunits (John 17:20-21; 17:22-23). He prays for their unity, “May they all be one taking the model of unity between the Father and the son. As you are in

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<sup>21</sup> Okure, “John,” 1567.

me and I am in you, so that the world may believe it was you who sent me” (v. 21). Here, the stress is maintained that unity among the believers has the model in the unity between Jesus Christ and the Father (cf. John 10:30, 38; 14:10-11; 17:10). The believers are taken into Jesus’ relationship with the Father.

There is a similar usage of “just as,” “so that,” “in order that” in vv. 22-23 as in the previous verse. These two verses speak about the unity of the believers which recalls John 11:52 where Caiaphas “prophesied” that by Jesus’ death he would gather into one the dispersed children of God. Furthermore, this is in connection to the theological thought that Jesus and the Father live in the believers. Being consecrated in truth, Jesus’ disciples also carry within them the truth and are to be instruments of the truth. The life of the disciples also has a missionary function, through them the world should come to know Jesus and believe in him (cf. John 13:34-35).

### **17:24-26: Report (Feedback) and Request as Regards the Future Accomplishment/Perfection of Those Whom the Father has Given to Jesus**

In this subunit, one can also see the usage and change in, and between, request and report. The wish expressed here is seeing the accomplishment of the glory, which will be given by Jesus. Seeing the glory of Jesus also means and implies a participation in His God-relationship. The usage of “so that” or “in order that” in v. 24 also show the connection between glory and love.

Jesus made the name of God known; this was already said in John 17:6. The entire sending of Jesus can be seen in the theme of making the name of God known (cf. John 1:18). The name here is seen as the nature of God, his person. The making of God’s name known is already seen in the OT (for example, Exod 3:13-15; 34:4-5). To know God’s name also means knowing and having access to him. Also the future work of Jesus entails making the name of God known (cf. John 16:25; 17:26).

### **John 17 and Consecrated Persons as Agents and Instruments of Truth in the Nigerian Context**

#### **Consecrated Persons Must Strive Towards Perfection/Holiness**

Jesus prays for his immediate and future disciples. Like the disciples of Jesus Christ, consecrated persons are also consecrated in truth. The context of the consecration of Jesus’ disciples in truth within the priestly prayer should be understood in this light. Consecrated persons are consecrated to God, and they dedicate their lives to God through the vows or promises they make and that are expressed in the evangelical counsels. Since the disciples proclaim a holy God, they too must be holy. Be holy for I your God am holy (cf. Lev 19:2; 20:7; 1 Pet 1:16). Consecrated persons must strive for holiness and be committed and dedicated to their life and calling. They must consciously strive for perfection and not merely be comfortable remaining at an average level. Consecrated persons take the vow of celibate chastity; the call to a life of holiness should be seen clearly expressed by living chaste lives. Based on their state of life, a lot is expected of/from consecrated persons in this regard. They must, therefore, live up to expectation. The worship of God should be holistic, both by confession and practice. In Jesus’ encounter with the Samaritan woman in John 4, Jesus brings out the fact that God is to be worshiped in spirit and in truth (cf. John 4:23ff.). True and sincere worship of God in Spirit and truth furthers the spiritual and moral lives of consecrated persons.

#### **Consecrated Persons should not be People of the World**

Consecrated persons should not be overtaken by or engrossed in the things of the world. Understanding the meaning of *hagiazō* in the sense of “separate,” it implies that consecrated persons are not to be worldly people, but men and women separated from the things of the world. Though in the world, consecrated persons are not of the world (cf. John 15:19; 17:16). As such consecrated persons, consecrated in truth, must guard against the materialism. They take the vow of Poverty. Living in a world engrossed in many facets of materialism, consecrated persons must stand out and show a difference amidst all odds and situations. Consecrated persons must respond to the ideal needs of the people in the world. Pope Francis writes in this regard thus: “A whole world awaits us: men and women, who have lost all hope, families in difficulty, abandoned children, young people without a future, the elderly, sick and abandoned, those who are rich in the world’s goods but impoverished within, men and women looking for a purpose in life, thirsting for the divine.”<sup>22</sup>

In John 18:36 Jesus distinguishes between his kingship and the kingship of this world. On the one hand, the world, in its injustice and corruption, is opposed to the truth. Jesus Christ, on the other hand, in John 18:37, bears witness to the truth, a witness of what he himself has seen and heard (cf. John 3:31-36). As such, Jesus’ witness against the falsehood, insincerity of the world, also implies the witness of God against the world. Jesus presents himself in his testimony as the true witness, fully engaged and involved in bearing witness.<sup>23</sup> This is opposed to the falsity of the Jews who never wanted to seek the truth and who have also acted against the truth, for they have always sought to plot against Jesus. All who are on the side of truth hear and listen to the voice of Jesus (cf. John 8:43). In like manner, consecrated persons being consecrated in the truth must bear witness to the truth, learning from their master, Jesus, who bore witness to the truth, even to the point of accepting death on the cross.

### **Consecrated Persons are Consecrated and Sent on Mission**

Consecration in John 17 implies selection from the world and given to God. As such consecrated persons, having been consecrated in truth, are also consecrated and given to God, so that they can be sent into the world. Just as Jesus sent out his disciples (Apostles into the world), consecrated persons are also sent out on mission. In other words, the consecration of the disciples involves “their consecration for the task now entrusted to them. In John 10:36, the Father’s consecration of Jesus is linked with/to Jesus’ mission and sending into the world. In like manner, in John 17:17-19, the consecration of the disciples is linked to/with their being sent into the world on mission. Pope Francis in his Apostolic Letter, calls on consecrated persons to be true Prophets in their mission. He writes:

Prophets receive from God the ability to scrutinize the times in which they live and to interpret events: they are like sentinels who keep watch in the night and sense the coming of the dawn (cf. *Is* 21:11-12). Prophets know God and they know the men and women who are their brothers and sisters. They are able to discern and denounce the evil of sin and injustice. Because they are free, they are beholden to no one but God, and they have no interest other than God. Prophets tend to be on the side of the poor and the powerless, for they know that God himself is on their side.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Apostolic Letter of his Holiness Pope Francis to all Consecrated People on the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life, II, 4.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. J. Beutler, *Martyria: Traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zum Zeugnisthema bei Johannes* (FThSt 10; Frankfurt 1972) 324.

<sup>24</sup> Apostolic Letter of his Holiness Pope Francis to all Consecrated People on the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life, II, 2.



As such, consecrated persons must see their mission in this light in the various apostolates at which they are called upon to serve.

### **Consecrated Persons must be Humble, Obedient, Loving and United**

Just as Jesus did not seek his glory but the glory of the one who sent him, consecrated persons must be humble in their duties and in the conduct of their lives in general. Jesus recognized the authority from the Father and acknowledged that he received this authority from the Father (cf. John 17:1-5). In John 5:44, Jesus warned against those who seek human praise and glory. He considered that as a hindrance to true faith and belief in him. Rivalry amongst consecrated persons is a scandal. Within the context of the priestly prayer, Jesus prays about the unity of his disciples. “May they all be one, just as you and I are one” (cf. John 17:11.21). The love and unity felt, experienced and expressed in the various religious houses or communities must also be extended to the larger society. In line with this, Pope John Paul II writes that consecrated persons must “spread the spirituality of communion, first of all in their internal life and then in the ecclesial community, and even beyond its boundaries.”<sup>25</sup> The Second Vatican Council speaks on the unity of consecrated persons, thus: “They are bound together in communion in the army of Christ. Their Christian freedom is fortified by obedience.”<sup>26</sup> Summarily, there are a lot of lessons to be drawn from Jesus’ Priestly Prayer for consecrated persons in order to live out their vocation ideally.

### **Conclusion**

Jesus’ priestly prayer in John 17 has a lot of themes compressed in it, themes that run through the entire Gospel. Likewise, the prologue to John’s Gospel (John 1:1-18) also contains a summary of the major themes in the entire Gospel. This fact is evident in the fact that there are similarities between the Prologue and Jesus’ priestly Prayer. This is seen in the aspect of Pre-existence: John 1:1-2, 15; 17:5, 12; Truth: John 1:14, 17; 17:17, 19; The knowledge of God by the world: John 1:10; 17:25; Seeing the glory of Jesus: John 1:14; 17:24 (Seeing the glory of Jesus is also in connection with his presence among the believers and their being by him); Jesus making the Father’s name known: John 1:18; 17:26; and Belief: John 1:12; 17:8. All these go a long way to show how rich the priestly prayer is in content and in relation to the entire Gospel of John.<sup>27</sup>

The evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience are contained, implied and expressed in the priestly prayer. Consecrated person are consecrated to the service of God and freed from distractions and hindrances of the world. As consecrated persons reflect on this Year of the Consecrated Life, the words of Pope Francis in his Apostolic Letter speak on what is demanded of consecrated persons. He writes:

The consecrated life will not flourish as a result of brilliant vocation programs, but because the young people we meet find us attractive, because they see us as men and women who are happy! Similarly, the apostolic effectiveness of consecrated life does not depend on the efficiency of its methods. It depends on the eloquence of your lives, lives which radiate the joy and beauty of living the Gospel and following Christ to the full.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (25 March, 1996) 51.

<sup>26</sup> Vatican II’s Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 43.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Okure, “John,” 1566-67. The priestly prayer is also very relevant in the liturgical circle for instance on Holy Thursday at chrisom mass where ordained priests renew their vows. Ecumenically, it is also known as the prayer for Christian unity.

May this year, dedicated to consecrated persons, be a year of renewal, dedication and responsibility for consecrated persons for they are consecrated in truth!

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<sup>28</sup> Apostolic Letter of his Holiness Pope Francis to all Consecrated People on the occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life, II, 1.