Dwelling in the Household of God:
Johannine Ecclesiology and Spirituality

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The author of this work, is an Australian Presentation Sister, holding most recently a joint teaching position at the Australian Catholic University and St Paul's Theological College, Brisbane. This present book follows on her original ground-breaking study, *God Dwells With Us: Temple Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel* in 2001, based on a doctoral thesis under the supervision of Francis J. Moloney. Consequently, MC is calling on a rich tradition of Johannine scholarship, but at the same time she contributes creatively to it as she develops her ecclesiological and spiritual insight into the character of Christian community from a Johannine perspective.

The God's presence to the community of faith has, it can be argued, suffered from being exclusively interpreted as "the divine indwelling", either as a mystical experience or as an eschatological fulfilment yet to be realised. Without denying these interior or proleptic dimensions of the divine presence, MC here highlights its social and communitarian aspects. While her first study concentrated on Christ and the Christian community as the new temple of God amongst us, her present study calls on the multidimensional Johannine symbolism associated with the "household" of God in ways that are particularly suggestive for the theologian.

MC has chosen the Trinitarian icon of Andrei Roulev to feature on the front cover of her book [ix]. It provides a clue to what "dwelling in the household of God" might mean, as believers are drawn to share in the vitality of the God present amongst them. With its emphasis on ecclesiology and spirituality, the traditional topic of the divine missions is nicely complemented by the ingathering character of God's grace—incarnate in Christ and active in the Spirit. It suggests a fruitful play on the term, "household" (*oikos*), leading to a deeper grasp of the divine *economia* ("the order of the household") and the *ecologia*, a term suggesting the whole ensemble of living inter-relationships that make up the life of the household.

It is possible that MC's method may be considered too theological for the exegete, and even too biblical for more abstract versions of systematic theology. But it is decisively Johannine, designed "to bring home", in a literal sense, the many-leveled symbolism of John's Gospel on the themes here treated. Aware of the methodological problem, MC takes some trouble in justifying her technique of symbolic association [11-15]. Here, she has made an option; and it is against a flat, analytical interpretation of isolated symbols in favour of something far richer: the whole evocative field of mutual symbolic resonances. Symbols and metaphors— the Johannine Father-Son relationship, marriage celebrations,
the temple, union and mutual indwelling, meals and foot-washing, Mary and the Beloved Disciple, the eucharist and so much else. These never stand alone, but all converge as dimensions of “the household of God.”

The holistic nature of this mode of interpretation is a courageous, given the present scholarly climate of minute specialisation. It is not unknown that erudite specialists, with no concern either for ecclesiology or spirituality, peering into the deep well of John’s Gospel, see only themselves looking up as masters of the Gospel’s meaning. For MC it is different. As a biblical scholar in the Church, and as formed by the spirituality of her own religious order, she looks down into the mysterious depths to see them stirring in new ways. When the image settles, she sees herself certainly, but in the company of a great household, with all this silhouetted against the luminous sky of God’s presence as the Gospel portrays it.

Her chosen focal symbol/metaphor of the household, with its ecclesiologal and spiritual resonances, enables her to highlight the communal nature of the inter-relationships existing between God and Christian believers. This book suggests dimensions of the reciprocal indwelling of God and the community: God dwells in the community, and the community of believers dwell in God. The climactic expression of this is the prayer of Jesus in John 17: the Father and the Son dwell in one another; they dwell in the Christian community, and it dwells in God to participate in the union existing between the Father and the Son. The current interest in ecologically-attuned theology can enrich itself to good effect with this model of being and living by dwelling in the other. No instance of the universe of God’s creation exists in an atomized isolation from the whole.

Understandably, given the potential fertility of her approach, the author adumbrates further studies [193-201]. She is aware that any oppressively patriarchal view of church or community will be countered by her presentation of the household of God animated with the spirit of self-giving love. Similarly, her study promises at many points a deeper theology of women's leadership in the community of faith, and the "Marian" character of the household. With its evocation of the deeply mystical and contemplative depths of faith and its communitarian relationships, I would expect that this study will be important for a theology of inter-faith dialogue, especially if MC can guide her readers to reflect more deeply on the manner in which the Father is seeking out true worshipers, "in spirit and in truth" (Jn 4:23-24). The role of the Spirit in relation to the whole theme merits further attention, and no doubt this will follow in due course. Obviously, too, the theme of "eternity-life" and the eschatological expansion of "the household of God" [83-103] would merit a further book-length treatment.

But as it is, this book is a richly theological and meditative text. Though "not all the books of the world" (Jn 21:25) would contain what John is trying to present, this book, in its presentation of the "household of God", helps us realize exactly that point.

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