ERRATA

In John Hill’s article in the last number of Pacifica, “Some Disputed Questions about Confirmation” (Pacifica 11 [October 1998] 281-301), two omissions occurred during production.

At the foot of p. 287 the following words were omitted: “hardly surprising that some reformed churches dispensed with episco-” The full sentence bridging pp. 287-8 should thus read: “When the reformation came, it is hardly surprising that some reformed churches dispensed with episcopacy, and that it survived in the others in the jurisdictional form that it had enjoyed in the West for hundreds of years.”

Secondly, the following quoted words and reference should be added to the last line of the quotation at the bottom of p. 301:

present, and must be present, in the faith of the parents and those who surround the child with the atmosphere of faith. 27


THE APPROACH OF A NEW MILLENNIUM seems to intensify the age-old desire for certainty. Before we venture into an unexplored future we seek a firm footing and once compass in order to know where we are now and in which direction we are heading. The Johannine community knew a similar angst as it struggled with its own questions of identity. What is our relationship to Jewish traditions? Do we still shape our lives according to the Mosaic Torah? As a community of Jew and Gentile, are we still “children” of Abraham? Who is Jesus? What is his relationship to the God we have known in our history? These issues come to the fore in the conflict between Jesus and “the Jews” during the feast of Tabernacles (John 7:1-10:21).

In the narrative of Tabernacles, Jesus’ claims to be a source of living water (1:35) and light (8:12) relate very clearly to the main liturgical rituals of the Feast. Similarly the references to Moses (7:19-24) are pertinent given that the Feast celebrates events that occurred during the wilderness experience following the Exodus. What is not so readily explained is the frequent reference to Abraham during the final part of the dispute (8:54-56). Why does Abraham dominate the concluding arguments during this Feast? What is Abraham’s connection with Tabernacles? Since the liturgical symbols have been given a Christological focus, in what way does the discussion about Abraham elucidate the identity of Jesus? What relevance can this discussion have for the Johannine community among their own identity questions? These are the issues addressed in this article.
I begin with an overall discussion of chapters 7 and 8, presenting a structure that shows the focus of this unified narrative upon the issue of Jesus' identity. I then examine the role of Abraham concluding that Abraham functions as a witness to Jesus' identity and his relationship with Israel's God. Finally, I examine the implications of Jesus' identity, vis-à-vis Israel's traditions, for Jesus and for the Johannine Christians.

1. THE OVERALL STRUCTURE OF 7:1-8:59

An atmosphere of growing hostility pervades chapters 7 and 8. The threat of death both introduces and concludes this section: "He could not go about in Judea because Jews sought to kill him" (7:1); and then in 8:59: "They took up stones to throw at him; but he went out of the temple." The section is introduced in verses 1-13, which include background information about geography (v 1) and about the time of the year (v 2) about the request by the brothers to go to Judea (v 3-5); reference to another time-frame governing Jesus' actions (v 6-9); and Jesus' attending the feast (v 10-13).

Following this introduction, the first discussion between Jesus and his audience occurs "about the middle of the feast" (v 14). In the initial discussion the origin of Jesus' teaching is questioned. Jesus, in his argument, appeals to Moses, the great teacher of Jewish law (v 19). Because the Feast of Tabernacles recalled YHWH’s protection during the wilderness wanderings, Moses is a key figure. Through Moses', interaction the people were sustained by gifts of manna (Exod 16) and water (Exod 17:1-7).

The discussion then moves away from Jesus' teaching authority to the question of his identity (v 25-36). Each time this question is raised the audience searches for an answer in terms of Jesus' origins. The participants in the story are limited in their perception of these origins and so fail to accept Jesus' claims of a divine origin in the One who speaks to him and to whom he is going (v 28, 33). The discussion is interrupted by another reference to time: "last day, the great day" (v 37). On this day, and within a feast that has had daily water libations and prayers for rain, Jesus proclaims a new source of living water. In this proclamation Jesus is identified with one of the major liturgical symbols of the feast, namely, living water (v 38).

At the centre of the section (vv 40-52), is a schism (v 43) based on a “worldly” question on the identity of Jesus. Is Jesus "the prophet" (v 40), for others “the Christ” (v 41). However, some, who attribute his origins to Galilee, reject both these titles claiming he is neither the Christ (v 41, 42), nor a prophet (v 52). In refusing to accept Jesus' origins with the Father, they remain ignorant of his true identity. The section continues in 8:17 with a second affirmation of Jesus' identity. In the context of a feast where large menorah illuminate the Temple courtyards, such that the Mishnah records, "there was not a court yard in Jerusalem that did not reflect the light." (m. Sukk. 5,3) Jesus proclaims, "I am the light of the world." (v 12). These two self-revelatory statements of Jesus, as living water (7:38) and light (8:12), bracket and bring into sharp relief the refusal of the participants to accept his claims. The discussion of Jesus' identity continues (vv 13-30) and again the issue of identity is raised in terms of his origins and identity.

The final section (vv 31-36), which is the focus of this study, brings the process of Abraham into the discussion, and leads to Jesus' definitive non-predicted statement of identity — egoimi. Jewish tradition, recorded in the Book of Jubilees, remembers Abraham as the first to celebrate Tabernacles. "And he [Abraham] built booths for himself and for his servants on that festival. And he first observed the feast of booths on earth." (Jub 30:24). The discussion during Tabernacles begins with the figure of Moses and conclude with the figure of Abraham, enabling the two great Jewish forefathers associated with the Feast to bear witness to Jesus' claims.

The Temple and the rituals of Tabernacles provide a cultic context for questions about the identity of Jesus. The participants in the story set the right question, namely, "Who are you?" (v 25). However, because they think he has come from Galilee (v 41), 42), they fail to grasp Jesus' true identity and his origins in the Father. The readers of the Gospel have already been given the answer to this question, "Who are you?" First, in the Prologue, Jesus is in the presence of the divine logos.
now tabernacled among us (1:14), and in the first encounter with "the Jews" Jesus is the new Temple of God’s presence (2:21). As the Feast of Tabernacles unfolds, the knowing reader observes the mounting hostility of "the Jews" who reject a new Tabernacled presence of God in their midst.

Schematically, the structure can be shown thus:

**Introduction:** 7:1-13
- He could not go about in Judea because the Jews sought to kill him.

2. **ABRAHAM’S ROLE WITHIN THE FEAST**

During the final discussions both "the Jews" and Jesus appeal to Abraham.

**The Words of the "Jews"**
- **we are descendants of Abraham 33**
- **I know you are descendants of Abraham 37**
- **Abraham is our Father 39**
- **you would do what Abraham did 39**
- **this is not what Abraham did 40**
- **Abraham died 52**
- **Abraham who died 53**

You have seen Abraham 57
Before Abraham was, I am 58

The initial verses (33-40) raise the issue of the origins of "the Jews" who claim Abraham as their father. However, Abraham is not to be equated with the Jewish nation. In verse 37 Jesus supports this assertion. In a physical sense, they are Abraham’s seed. But in v. 37 the language changes from seed ( sperma) to children (brants): "if you were children of Abraham the works of Abraham you would do." Although physically descended from Abraham, "the Jews" are not true children for they do not do what Abraham did. There is a principle working here that has already been established in the Gospel, that is, even your fathers did.

Concluding verses of chapter 8 contain some of the harshest words in the Christian scriptures about "the Jews" and it is essential that the term be understood in its narrative context. The conflict in the Johannine narrative is best understood as a struggle between adolescent siblings trying to establish their own self-identity in the aftermath of the destruction of Jerusalem. Therefore, the term the in the Johannine gospel must be read as a narrative device rather than as a description of members of the Second Temple Judaism. According to Bultmann the Jesus portrayed the Jews “from the standpoint of Christian faith as the representatives of unbelief” and “the unbelieving world in general.” They are, in John Ashon’s words, an “archetypal symbol of the sinful-

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6. In speaking of Jesus as the Temple and Tabernacle there is no dichotomy as the two are biographically related as the flesh (1:14) is related to the body (2:23). The Tabernacle and Temple were the same symbolic function even though they recall different historical eras. Both were central in Israel’s collective awareness of God’s presence. In the Gospel, the images of the Tabernacle and Temple (and) are applied to Jesus in his humanity. Given the biblical Semitic notion of the human person, the Hellenistic dichotomies of "body" and "soul" do not apply. There is therefore a sameness in the Johannine use of the metaphors Tabernacle and Temple as images of God’s presence in the historical person Jesus. In the flesh/body of Jesus the divine image becomes part of the human story. Temple is also the more appropriate historical image once the Prologue concludes and the narrative proper begins.

7. The story of the woman taken in adultery (7:53-8:11) is part of the narrative of Tabernacles. It is described as a non-Johannine interpolation that is part of the gospel tradition even though there is uncertainty as to which gospel it belongs. For further comments on this passage and its place in the Fourth gospel see Brown, the Gospel according to John, 1:332-36, R. Schneidersheim, Die Gospelaccord f 46 (Ed. 4.5.); W. Boy, London: Burns & Oates, 1968-1982, 1:58-82, 2:66-87. A recent analysis of this evidence with bibliographic references to current discussions can be found in F. J. McManus, The Gospel of John: Sacra Pagina (Collegeville: Michael Glazier Liturgical Press, 1998) 258-68.

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ness of all humanity." The Jews in the gospel narrative are a caricature of the unbelieving world that rejects Jesus, and in their rejection they show they are not true sheep of Abraham.

What is it that Abraham did, that "the Jews" are not doing, so they cannot be true children of Abraham? In v 56 we are told, "Abraham rejoiced that he was to see my day." The action of rejoicing in the day of Jesus is what "the Jews" fail to do. Frequently Abraham is described as a man of faithful obedience; that is the key memory in the Jewish tradition (Gen 12:4; 22:14; 26:5), and also in the early Christian writings (Rom 4:3; 13:16; Gal 3:6; Heb 11:8; 17; Jam 2:23). However, in this feast, it is Abraham's joy rather than his faith or obedience that is commended by Jesus. The book of Jubilees and the celebration of Tabernacles provide an appropriate context for this unusual emphasis.

Tabernacles is the most joyful of Israel's three pilgrimage festivals (Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles), when Israel is told to rejoice before the Lord for seven days (Lev 23:40). As already mentioned, Abraham is named in the book of Jubilees (ca. 100 BCE) as the first to celebrate the feast of booths (Jub 16:21). Abraham's joy in this feast is striking. The text of jubilees repeatedly mentions joy:

He built an altar there to the Lord who delivered him and who made him rejoice in the land of his sojourn. And he celebrated a feast of rejoicing in this month (16:20).

He observed this feast seven days, rejoicing with all his heart... (16:25).

And he blazoned and rejoiced and called the name of this feast the joy of the Lord, a joy acceptable to God Most High (16:27).

The cause of Abraham's joy and blessing lies in the future that he is permitted to see. For he knew and perceived that from him there would be a righteousness for eternal generations and a help and salvation. (Jub 16:26).

Abraham's perception enables Jesus to say, "Your Father Abraham rejoiced that he was to see my day; he saw it and was glad." (John 8:56). In failing to rejoice in Jesus as Abraham did, "the Jews" reveal that they are not true children of Abraham. In this confrontation where "the Jews" call upon Abraham to add legitimacy to their argument (v 33), Jesus shows that their claim is not true. The post-70 Christian readers of this dispute may at this point be thinking that the narrative is going to reveal that they are the true children of Abraham because they have responded positively to Jesus. But there is more!

3. ABRAHAM AS A WITNESS TO JESUS' ORIGINS

It is not just a question of the identity of the son/daughter; also at stake is the question of the identity of the father. "The Jews" insist that their father is Abraham (v 33, 39) and even God (v 41). A claim Jesus challenges by pointing to what they do to him (v 40), and showing that therefore they cannot have their origins in either Abraham or God. By contrast, Jesus does the will of his Father. He speaks what he has seen and heard with his Father (v 38, 40). Jesus is a true son and his Father is none other than the one "the Jews" claim as their God (v 54). There is a contrast established between "our"/your father Abraham: (vv 53, 56) and "my Father"/"God" (vv 49, 54). The sonship Jesus claims goes far beyond the sonship of belonging to the "seed" of Abraham; his is a divine sonship.

"The Jews" question, "Are you greater than our father Abraham?" (v 53), recalls an almost identical question asked earlier in the Gospel by the Samaritan woman, "Are you greater than our father Jacob...?" (4:12). The site of Sychar in chapter 4, was linked in the Scriptures to Jacob and, for the Samaritans, was a sacred place close to the remains of their Temple. True "the Jesus", their holy place was the Temple Mount chosen by David, a site which also has associations with Abraham and the sacrifice of Isaac. At two sacred places, both associated with Israel's patriarchs, Jesus' identity is challenged: "Are you greater than our father Jacob/ Abraham?" Jesus concludes both discussions with the affirmation, "I am" (4:50; 8:58). The site of the divine anointing ego eimi asserts Jesus' claims to transcend Israel's sacred traditions. The manifestation of the incarnation who dwells with God from all time (1:1) brings to the human story one who far surpasses the founding fathers of Israel, and does away with their legacy of cultic sites and actions.

Many scholars trace the Johannine unprincipled use of "I am" to the self-revelatory formula of Deutero-Isaiah (44:4; 45:10, 25; 46:4; 46:12; 51:5). The phrase ego eimi appears to be a Greek translation of the Hebrew phrase ashu hu. In Isaiah, the first occurrences of the phrase ashu hu occur in trial scenes where, over and against the gods
of the world, YHWH asserts his singular sovereignty. "I am YHWH, the first and the last; I am (am hu)" (Isa 44:6). In these trials scenes YHWH summons his servant Israel to bear witness, to know, believe and understand. "You are my witnesses, says the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am (am hu)" (Isa 43:10).15

In the context of a juridical dispute the Phariscees reverse roles and demand that Jesus produce witnesses (8:13). Jesus’ first witness is none other than Israel’s ego eimi. "I am (ego eimi), the one witnessing to myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness to me (v 18). The phrase ego eimi is repeated two more times in words that recall YHWH’s words to Israel. "You will die in your sins unless you believe that I Am" (v 24, see Isa 43:10). "When you have lifted up the Son of Man then you will know that I Am" (v 28, see Isa 43:10).16

The rituals of Tabernacles may also explain the strong concentration of the phrase ego eimi within this particular chapter, where it occurs five times (8:12, 18, 24, 28, 59). A variant of the Hebrew and hu was used in the Festival of Tabernacles as an oblique way of referring to YHWH and thus avoiding saying the sacred name. During a procession with willow branches the suppliant would pray "anu nahu (literally I and He) come to our aid."17 Having celebrated the feast and hearing the daily recitation of anu hu, Jesus’ use of the phrase “Am I” as a term of self-designation would be both striking and offensive to his opponents.

The mention of the final ego eimi in 8:24 and its association with Abraham show considerable verbal links with the targumic version of Isaiah (43:10-12).18

17. The possibility for the expression having its background in Deuteronomy is further strengthened by the uniquely Johannine word form (I am) which has the double sense of being "lifted up in the midst of the congregation, and in elevation (John 5:14; 8:28; 12:32, 34). The Servant of Deuteronomy, whom YHWH calls to witness will also be lifted up (Isa 52:13).
19. Dating of targumic material is particularly difficult, since a text will frequently combine material from the Second Temple era with later rabbinic material. In the Isaiah passage given here, the reference to Abraham’s future knowledge is also documented in the book of Jubilees (ch. 47:8-9) which often suggests that this passage may pre-date the Johannine literature. C. Evans develops four criteria for the dating of targumic material. See C. E. Evans, was and Time: On the Linguistic and Theological Background of John’s Gospel (JSNTSup 89. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1995) 114.
The similarities between the Gospel and Targum suggest that both draw upon a common source of traditional material concerning Abraham available to a first century author.

4. THE DIVINE FILIATION OF JESUS—ITS IMPLICATIONS

On the Temple mount, the place that recalled the obedience of Abraham and his sacrifice, and during a feast which remembered Abraham’s perception and joy, Jesus confronts the seed of Abraham with their disobedience and true paternity disclosed in their seeking to kill the “only son” of the Father. The Father of Jesus is the one “the Jews” claim as their God (8:34; 54) and whom, every morning during the feast of Tabernacles they proffer to worship. According to the Mishnah every morning before sunrise the Priests would assemble at the East gate of the Temple facing Mount Olives. At the moment of sunrise they would turn to the West to face the Temple and say:

Our fathers who were in this place turned with their backs toward the Temple of the Lord and their faces toward the east, and they worshipped the sun toward the east (Ez 8:16). But as to us, our eyes are to the Lord.

The challenge to believe that Jesus is “I am” speaks precisely to this ritual profession of faith carried out each morning during the feast. Will the Israel of Jesus’ day repeat the sins of their fathers or accept a new manifestation of God’s tabernading presence? Will they move beyond their identification with “our father Abraham” (v 33, 39) to perceive in Jesus the one Abraham “rejected to see” (v 56), and their true Father (v 41) whom Jesus’ reveals (1:18; 8:58)?

The reaction of “the Jews” to Jesus’ final “I am” testifies that they have understood his words even though they reject them as blasphemy. Jesus’ response is to leave the Temple. The departure of the one who is “the light of the world” is ominous. Once before the glory cloud of God’s presence departed the Temple and it heralded the forthcoming destruction of the Temple (Ez 10:18-19; 11: 22-23). The departure of one who has, during this Feast, consistently affirmed his relationship with the Father (7:16, 28, 29; 8:18, 19, 24, 38, 42, 54, 55) and so revealed himself as the tabernading presence of Israel’s “I AM” (8:12, 58) acts as a judgement on Israel’s cult. As their fathers once “turned their backs to the Temple” (Ez 8:16), now “the Jews” turn from the true Temple of God (2:21) and drive him from his Father’s House (2:16). Neither the witness

22. Pharisaic Judaism respected both the written law (Torah) and the oral traditions of the Rabbi. Early in the third century CE, the oral teachings of the great Rabbis were compiled into the text known as the Mishnah. Even though the Temple had been destroyed in 70 CE, a large part of the Mishnah is concerned with Temple rituals and maintenance, possibly drawing on pre-70 traditions.

of Moses (7:14-24), nor Abraham (8:31-59) has changed their original intention to kill Jesus (7:1).

CONCLUSION

For the Johannine Christians, living in their own time of conflict with emerging post-70 Judaism, the confrontation at Tabernacles offers clarity and hope in their struggle for identity. Abraham, the great father of Israel, testifies to the coming of Jesus (8:56), thus demonstrating that the traditions of Israel now find their fulfillment and perfection in Jesus. When the Temple Mount has become rubble, and the Synagogue is no longer accessible, a Christian community finds it has lost nothing. Their Jewish Festivals can still be celebrated; celebrated now in their fulfillment and no longer as promise. In and through their faith in Jesus, they still have the Tabernading presence of God and they still have a filial identity. While “the Jews” claim Abraham as their father (v 39, 53), the Father of Jesus is revealed as none other than Israel’s God (8:54). Christians, who participate in Jesus’ sonship, no longer need turn to Abraham as their father but in Jesus a new and greater filiation is possible, the gift to become children of God (1:12).