'Good News to the Poor'? Socio-Economic Ethics in the Gospel of John

WILLIAMS, MATTHEW,NANTLAIS

‘Good News to the Poor’? Socio-Economic Ethics in the Gospel of John

by

Matthew Nantlais Williams

Abstract

This thesis examines what the Gospel of John has to say regarding socio-economic ethics. It thus seeks to determine the extent to which the Johannine message is good news to the poor. Taking its cue from relevant developments in the contemporary debate, it approaches the text by beginning with its central ethical requirements. Through a literary-theological mode of reading, it establishes both the rationale for these requirements and their socio-economic import.

After setting out the dimensions of the project and its approach (chapter 1), the two main ethical requirements in John are then examined (chapter 2). These are believing (20:30–31) and loving (13:34), with the latter identified as that which deals with social relationships. The meaning of the command to love is developed in relation to its primary exemplar, Jesus’ foot washing (John 13:1–17; chapter 3). Its theological basis is explored in Jesus’ ‘high-priestly’ prayer (John 17:1–26, chapter 4), and its practical outworking is shown to be present in Jesus’ signs (chapter 5).

Such analysis demonstrates that Jesus’ aim in the Gospel is the formation of a divine-human community that is characterised by the dynamics of household. Participating in this community is what lies at the heart of Johannine ethics. It entails cruciform mutual love through addressing one another’s needs within a household-like configuration. In this community all, regardless of status, have equal access to resources (including *material* resources) as children of God. How this works in detail is borne out by a reading of Jesus’ feeding of the five thousand (John 6:1–71; chapter 6), before drawing final conclusions (chapter 7).

‘Good News to the Poor’?

Socio-Economic Ethics in the Gospel of John

by

Matthew Nantlais Williams

Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Durham University

Department of Theology and Religion

2021

Table of Contents

Abbreviations

Where abbreviations are used, they follow the conventions as set out in *The SBL Handbook of Style*, Second Edition (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2014). Where I have used my own abbreviation for a particular text, I indicate this at the point of its first usage.

Declaration

This work has been submitted to the University of Durham in accordance with the regulations for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. It is my own work, and none of it has been previously submitted to the University of Durham or in any other university for a degree.

Statement of Copyright

Acknowledgements

The origins of this thesis go back to my discovery of (or discovery *by*) the gospel, the simple truth of Jesus' love on the cross and the forgiveness of sins. Concern for the exigencies of material poverty has grown alongside my knowledge of this gospel culminating in four years of Bible teaching in Malawi. There I learned far more through my brothers and sisters than I could ever put into writing. It is to a special representative of these that I dedicate this thesis.

All this came to academic fruition in Durham University and the relationships built here. I begin by thanking my primary and secondary supervisors, John Barclay and Jane Heath. Their supervision has been attentive, exacting and professional (in the very best sense), whilst also being manifestly an act of love. In this they reflect a Department that engenders such a culture.

Outside of the institutional structures, I have been sustained and blessed by those who have, somewhat unfortunately, been called the 'prayer boiz'. I can scarcely imagine Durham without Tim, Pete, Jameson, Sam, Luke and Richard (together with the Rohlfing clan, who really taught me about 'household'!). I much appreciated sharing the PhD journey with Lena, Jess and Daniela, as well as the intellectual guidance and encouragement of Wilf and Athanasios.

Several community settings both sustained me and allowed me to put the Gospel into practice. These include St John's College, King's Church Durham, and, most especially, the Monday Night Group. My involvement with Jubilee Farm, in Larne, and Jubilee Centre, in Cambridge, kept my eyes on the bigger picture. This is only appropriate for a thesis funded by the AHRC through Northern Bridge, to whom (and whose staff) I also extend sincere thanks.

None of this would have been possible without the love of my family – Ma, Dad, Jon (with Sarah, Anwen & Lottie) and Bob, who cheered me on with brownies.

And to my wife, Mercedes: finishing this work demanded more than just my body, mind, and heart; it demanded yours too. Becoming one with you, in all the mundane details of life, is the most beautifully Johannine reality. Je t'aime.

Thanks can, and should be, liberally distributed. But glory? *Soli Deo Gloria*

Dedication

In memoriam

Shadreck 'Pieman' Mkandawire (1993–2016)

Tikumanenge mu nyumba ya Fumu

Chapter 1 - From No News to Good News? Approaching Johannine Socio-Economic Ethics

Does John's portrayal of Jesus really evince a message of 'good news to the poor' (cf. Luke 4:16–21)? Scholarly opinion tends towards a negative view. Yet the very existence of this thesis implies that there may be more to say on the matter. Indeed, my claim is not simply that there are vestiges of a holistic form of community life reflected in the text. My claim is not even that the Jewish conceptual background compels us to read John as a materially concerned text. My claim is, rather, that there is socio-economic ethics *in* the Gospel itself, within its very conceptual fibres.

In order to set up the argument to that end, the present chapter does three things: it establishes the dimensions of the question (section one), identifies the scholarly developments that help answer it (section two) and sets out the approach that this thesis will take (section three).

1. A vital but neglected issue

There is no limit to the number of theses that can be written on a given topic, especially one as broad as the Gospel of John. However, my contention is that the question of socio-economic ethics is a particularly important one. Addressing it demands that one keep in mind the pressing nature of real-world concerns around human suffering and, at the same time, the way that texts (such as John) shape the fundamental patterns of thought that inform people's engagement with it. Examining the Bible ethically should (ideally speaking) provide a way to hold these two things together. Thus I begin this section with a clarification of what is meant by 'socio-economic ethics' (1a) before explaining why examining John with this question in mind is particularly timely (1b). I then look briefly at a pericope that is significant in shaping perceptions on my topic, illustrating through it the interpretative challenges to be faced (1c).

1a. What is 'socio-economic ethics'?

Ethics

As is the case with so many commonly used terms, a raft of complications attends the word 'ethics'. Once one tries to get beyond its basic meaning of that which is concerned with what is right, further specificity becomes contentious. This is all the more true in the case of biblical material. Scholars have long since concluded that a 'system', corresponding to the sense of 'ethics' as generically understood, is not an appropriate way to categorise what we find in the New Testament.[1] Moreover, any direct exhortations or implied moral obligations that are found in these 27 documents are inseparable from the theological reality established by the Christ event, which is the framework within which all else must be understood.[2]

Richard Burridge, in the most recent contribution to the debate, observes that that the challenge is not only the correct identification of literary genre but of the historical intentions of Jesus himself.[3] Burridge denies that he was a teacher of ethics, stating that 'any ethical teaching in Jesus' words comes from a preacher looking for a response of following him'.[4] Yet, at the same time, once this starting point is acknowledged, it is possible to formulate a coherent ethics 'emerging from within the biblical material itself' (p. 252). In order for this

---

[1] See the 1986 and 1996 SBL Presidential Addresses published respectively as Wayne Meeks, "Understanding Early Christian Ethics", *JBL* 105/1 (1986), 3–11; Leander Keck, "New Testament Ethics", *JBL* 115/1 (1996), 3–16.

[2] 'The defining feature of New Testament ethics is its orientation to an event, namely, the event of Jesus (including his resurrection and exaltation to God's right hand), and to the community that resulted' so that 'even the *Haustafeln*… have been pulled into the orbit of the christological appeal' (Keck, "New Testament Ethics", 10). Keck had already established that there is no *a priori* reason to dismiss this as a legitimate basis for ethics. For 'studying New Testament ethics requires us to take the stated rationale, mostly theological, seriously instead of transforming it into a religious rationalization for alleged real reasons, usually construed as political strategies for gaining and maintaining power' (p. 8).

[3] "Is "Biblical Ethics" a "Genre Mistake"? Methodological Reflections on New Testament Ethics in Debate with Gustafson and Hays", Volker Rabens et al. (eds.), *Key Approaches to Biblical Ethics: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 237–268. Burridge notes the importance both of Meeks's work (e.g. p. 238) and of Keck's piece (p. 243) as benchmark contributions in the wider debate.

[4] Burridge, "Methodological Reflections", 238. Whilst true, this statement implies a somewhat caricatured contrast with Greek ethical teaching, given role that discipleship played in it.

material to serve as a 'methodology for discussing contemporary concerns' (p. 265), it must be suitably analysed. We return later to a consideration of how this analysis applies to John (3a). For now suffice to say that a basic definition of ethics as that which concerns what is right can be retained, with the complexity arising from the process of discerning its theological rationale rather than the term itself.

Socio-economic ethics

By the term 'socio-economic', I am referring to more than the way society is stratified along the lines of net worth.[5] Instead, I am referring to living rightly in relation to 'wealth and poverty, labour, alms-giving, luxurious living and capital retention', the key topics treated in the recent volume on 'socioeconomic ethics in the Bible'.[6] All of these topics ostensibly have to do with what is economic rather than social, dealing with issues around the production, distribution and consumption of (finite) material resources.[7] However, insofar as these processes (and distribution in particular) involve and impact on

[5] This is the usual sense of 'socio-economic' as used in sociological reference works (e.g. Kathleen Korgan (ed.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Sociology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), although I could not locate a single such work in which the term had its own entry. The Collins dictionary defines 'socioeconomic' more broadly as 'of, relating to, or involving both economic and social factors' (*Collins English Dictionary* 12th ed. London: Harper Collins Publishers, 2014, http://ezphost.dur.ac.uk/login?url=https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/hcengdict/socioeconomic/0?institutionId=1856, accessed 3/2/21).

[6] Markus Zehnder and Hallvard Hagelia (eds.), *The Bible and Money: Economy and Socioeconomic Ethics in the Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2020). This publication nowhere defines 'socioeconomic ethics' and the list, which succinctly expresses the concerns it takes up, is from a separate essay on the same theme (Sarah Dodd and George Gotsis, "Some Economic Implications of Synoptic Gospel Theology: A Short Overview", *History of Economic Ideas*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (2000), 8). The term 'socio-economic ethics' is not, in fact, a commonly used term (note its absence in, for example, Joel Green (ed.), *The Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011); Robin Gill (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012)

[7] The more common adjective in technical discussions of economics is 'scarce' (so, for example, Peter Oakes in "Methodological Issues in Using Economic Evidence in Interpretation of Early Christian texts", Bruce Longenecker and Kelly Liebengood (eds.), *Engaging Economics: New Testament Scenarios and Early Christian Reception* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 11–12). However, the term 'scarce' equates to the everyday understanding of 'finite', since it also refers to resources that are in fact abundant.

people, socio-economic ethics is inherently social and relational.[8] The matter under consideration is thus not only the technicalities of resource management. Instead, we are concerned with the role of material goods in relationships and, conversely, the role of relational dynamics in dealing with finite resources.[9]

The foregoing point leaves us with two directions of travel in approaching our question. Either one can begin from what is said specifically about material goods and examine what one can be said about relationships on this basis, or one can go in the opposite direction. It is the latter option that will be pursued here, since the Gospel of John deals more directly with relational dynamics than finite resources. I will argue that socio-economic ethics emerge from Johannine thought like the tip of an iceberg: whilst they may appear small and hardly worthy of attention, the practical implications come with all the force contained in the immense weight of theological undergirding.[10] At the heart of this understanding is the relationships within the divine persons and between God and the world (both people and non-human creation).[11] In fact, it is only in the closing stages of my argument that practicalities of socio-economic ethics will be broached. With such a theological focus, the title of this thesis may appear to be a misnomer. However, my ultimate concern is to show that one must take seriously practical details of conduct regarding finite resources precisely as a result of theological engagement with John.

---

[8] Oakes recognises that the network of interactions surrounding the provision of resources is intrinsically social in nature ("Methodological Issues", 11).

[9] That these belong together is brought out nicely in Kathryn Tanner's description of the 'spirit' of capitalism as follows: 'Whatever the specific organizational shapes it assumes, capitalism always brings along with it, as part of its normal functioning, cultural forms affecting how subjects relate to themselves and to others' (*Christianity and the New Spirit of Capitalism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019), 9).

[10] Tanner works from this premise, noting how one's relationship (or perceived relationship) to God shapes 'one's ordinary pursuits' (*Spirit of Capitalism*, 3), not least economic ones, connecting fundamental theological positions to a detailed description of finance-dominated capitalism (pp. 9–28).

[11] Paul Griffiths illustrates how one can begin with intradivine relationships and move to matters of everyday exchange of material goods via the notion of the 'economy of gift' (*Intellectual Appetite: A Theological Grammar* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2009), 50–74). He notes that the structuring concept of obligation has so come to be identified with economy since Marx that the alternative notion of gift appears to yield 'no economy at all' (p. 51). I am not arguing for a Johannine economy of gift *per se* and my understanding of gift and giving (chap. 4, 2a) is more exegetically confined than Griffiths's theological one. Nevertheless, Griffiths's point helpfully draws attention to the fact that a distinctively theological starting point can result in a discussion that would hardly be recognisable as dealing with economics to those whose starting point is different.

1b. Why ask this question?

Although a firmer methodological basis for my conception of ethics is yet to be established, this thesis's question can now be formulated more precisely:

> What does the Gospel of John have to say to Jesus-believers concerning the way they relate to others in matters pertaining to finite material resources?

The use of the present tense indicates my constructive as well as historical purview, taking the Gospel to be addressed not only to its immediate readers but all who would later accept its message. This also hints at the impetus for asking my question. For there is a disjunction between the universal human importance of socio-economic issues and their neglect in Johannine scholarship.

Recognising the importance of socio-economic issues

Socio-economic issues are both important and problematic in every society. Indeed, such is reflected in both the Hebrew Bible and the Greek New Testament, in which economic relations play a role in a huge number of texts, both narrative and hortatory.[12] Moreover, the world today bears witness to the intractable and multifaceted nature of the socio-economic challenge, from the tragic stories of lives curtailed by desperate migration attempts to the wealth inequality that underlies such phenomena.[13]

Whatever the experience of individuals within it, these circumstances place a moral burden on the academy. This was well expressed by Fernando Segovia in his 2014 SBL presidential address, where he noted the current socio-economic impact of globalisation and the urgency with which past figures in the guild responded to such crises:

> 'I see no reason why, in the face of our own contemporary times, we biblical

---

[12] This is well illustrated by the variety of topics in the aforementioned *The Bible and Money* as well as the range of around 40 papers on different biblical passages in Gyorgy Benyik (ed.), *The Bible and Economics* (Szeged: Jate Press, 2014).

[13] Oxfam have been particularly active in drawing attention to the latter. See most recently "The Inequality Virus", published in January 2021 (https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/621149/bp-the-inequality-virus-250121-en.pdf, accessed 2/3/21).

critics should not aim for a similar conjunction of the scholarly and the political'.[14]

The burden of response is all the greater in relation to the Christian Church who take the Bible as Scripture. This is especially in view of the use of biblical texts in mission work, which has sometimes fallen foul of colonial dynamics.[15]

A lacuna in Johannine scholarship

Despite calls to action like Segovia's, hardly any Johannine scholars address socio-economic ethics, with the exceptions being marginal in the field.[16] One factor in this must be the general dislocation of the academic world from the reality of poverty, encounters with which foster a sense of urgency.[17] However, this could only be part of the reason since, as mentioned above, there have been numerous attempts to investigate other biblical material in this regard.[18] What we must reckon with, therefore, is the fact that in John itself, unlike elsewhere in the Bible, there are hardly any direct mentions of topics such as wealth and poverty, labour, alms-giving, luxurious living and capital retention. Not only is it devoid of any record that Jesus engaged with such topics but in the one place where he is given an opportunity to do so, he does not take it up (12:1–8). However, before looking at this passage (below, 1c), we need to acknowledge something that is more fundamentally problematic than the lack certain direct

---

[14] Segovia published this address as "Criticism in Critical Times: Reflections on Vision and Task" (*JBL* 134/1 (2015), 6–29) from which this quote is taken (p. 29).

[15] Although few would deny that this has been the case, the way in which this has happened is not necessarily straightforward (as is dealt with in postcolonial work on John, see 2d below).

[16] In the most recent work on this subject, Kathleen Rushton can name only six 'overlooked studies on social justice' in John, though it is too early to judge whether her own book will meet the same fate (*The Cry of the Earth and the Cry of the Poor* (London: SCM, 2020), xix). The only monograph from a socio-economic angle that she mentions is by José Porfirio Miranda, which will be addressed below (2c).

[17] This was already observed by Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza in her own SBL presidential address from 1987 (published in "The Ethics of Biblical Interpretation: Decentering Biblical Scholarship" *JBL*, Vol. 107, No. 1 (1988), 3–17). She points out the dominance of biblical studies by a privileged minority who have often excluded social concerns from their purview on the basis of a 'scientific' approach (pp. 10–13). The fact that she ends on such a similar note of appeal as does Segovia suggests how intractable the situation is.

[18] John is missing from consideration in all of the recent treatments of socio-economic issues in the biblical material of which I am aware, including the aforementioned publications *The Bible and Money*, *Engaging Economics* and *The Bible and Economics*.

injunctions in John. That is the disjunctive way of reading even its positive content.

The Gospel's message can be summed up as a presentation of Jesus as Son of God in order engender belief with the result of eternal life.[19] The scholarly tendency has been to see these features of John as excluding or at least minimising the other side of the equation. Thus emphasising Jesus' divinity has often led to a neglect of his humanity; emphasising belief has often led to a dismissal of the Gospel's ethical content; emphasising eternal life has often entailed downplaying the mundane realm in favour of the 'spiritual'.[20] There is an underlying logic to such a reading that is crystallised in the most influential modern work on John, that of Rudolf Bultmann.[21] For Bultmann, John operates according to a series of dichotomies that effectively (if not *formally*) elevate the categories of divinity, theology and spiritual reality above humanity, ethics and material reality.[22]

Many aspects of Bultmann's contribution to the field have been revised or even rejected.[23] Certainly, more fully-rounded portrayals of Jesus' humanity in John attempted and ethical studies have abounded in recent years, many of which

---

[19] This is taken from its purpose statement in 20:30–31, a text to which we will repeatedly turn in this thesis (particularly chap. 2, section two).

[20] In light of these points, the term 'Spiritual Gospel' coined by Clement of Alexandria is apt. Note, however, that it originally denoted a contrast between the theological aim of John and the historical accounts of the Synoptics rather than a metaphysical judgement (Eusebius, *The History of the Church* (trans. G. Williamson) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), 255 (6.14.5-7).

[21] Marianne Meye Thompson takes Ernst Käsemann's explicit questioning of Jesus' thoroughgoing humanity as her critical point of departure in her *The Humanity of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1988), 3–6, affirming Bultmann's basically 'orthodox' view on this (p. 2). I go back to Bultmann himself because what I wish to address is more fundamental.

[22] Bultmann holds that the Gospel, and especially its discourses, presupposes a 'basic dualistic view', in keeping with which are 'the antithetical terms' of 'light and darkness, truth and falsehood, above and below (or heavenly and earthly)'. Genuine truth is such that 'everything earthly is falsehood' (*Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 2, trans. Kendrick Gobel (London: SCM Press, 1955), 11). As such, qualitative aspects of human and social identity are negated, so that 'Jesus appears neither as the rabbi arguing about questions of the Law nor as the prophet proclaiming the breaking in of the Reign of God' (p. 4) and '"the Jews" no longer appear in their concrete differentiation', i.e. along social lines (p. 5).

[23] John Ashton notes how scholarship has shifted from Bultmann's view of Gnostic origins (among others of his emphases) but upholds the mandate to synthesise theology and history ("Introduction: The Problem of John" in Ashton (ed.), *The Interpretation of John* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark) 1997, 7–26).

deal with the material aspects of life (see below, 2d–e).[24] However, the challenge that Bultmann leaves is more profound than can be met by redressing the balance around individual issues. For he has left us with is a fractured Johannine world in which the ultimate frame of reference is dualistic, however exactly each 'dualism' is construed.[25]

My contention is that the lacuna in scholarship on John around the question of socio-economic ethics is not simply a matter of failure to draw attention to a neglected element. Rather, it can only be addressed by a more fundamentally non-dualistic approach to the Gospel. Jörg Frey has gone part of the way in this, showing how a revision of the conflict-narrative theory of Johannine origins connects to a more nuanced interpretation of its dualistic formulations.[26] Yet even that does not go far enough. For what is needed is an approach to John that is able to incorporate its ostensibly oppositional aspects within an integrated overall view of reality. Only then could the apparently insignificant issues, such as material need, find their place rather than being excluded. The hurdles to be overcome in establishing such an approach are, however, evident from a particularly problematic pericope, to which we now turn.

1c. The problem of Mary in John 12

The clearest textual rationale for a disjunctive prioritisation of divine over mundane concerns is found in John 12:1–8. In this story, Jesus is in Bethany (with his disciples, as later becomes clear) shortly before Passover (12:1). A

---

[24] Although Thompson targets Käsemann rather than Bultmann (see n. 21 above), she does not think that the latter adequately communicates the breadth of the Johannine portrayal (*Humanity*, 1–11).

[25] There is a much deeper issue at work here than a particularity of Bultmann alone. Krister Stendahl connects him to a Lutheran (mis)reading of Paul regarding the 'introspective conscience', which is one intriguing avenue to pursue, though it is beyond my scope to do so ("The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West", *HTR*, 56/3 3 (1963) 199–215, referring to Bultmann on pp. 207–208).

[26] Frey denies that the Gospel's origins should be located in a conflict narrative and, concomitantly, shows that the Gospel is 'far removed from every form of ideologically closed dualism' and that dualistic motifs must be examined according to their 'specific communicative intention' ("Johannine Dualism" in *The Glory of the Crucified One: Christology and Theology in the Gospel of John* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2018), 162).

supper is prepared for Jesus at which Martha is serving and Lazarus is present (12:2). Mary, the third sibling, anoints Jesus' feet with some costly perfume (12:3) but Judas, the soon-to-be traitor, objects. His putative grounds for doing so are that the resources used would have been better given to the poor (12:4–5), a concern that the narrator identifies as spurious (12:6). Jesus defends Mary on the basis that her action honours his death (12:7) and reasons that his presence with them, unlike that of the poor, is time-limited.

On the basis of this episode, the only one in which Jesus says anything about the poor, one would most likely conclude that he is unconcerned with socio-economic matters. He is not only comfortable in what appears to be affluent society, but he defends what others took to be excess in Mary's actions. For he ostensibly minimises socio-economic concern in the face of the greater value attributed to pious devotion. Thus the key line of the pericope:

> τοὺς πτωχοὺς γὰρ πάντοτε ἔχετε μεθ' ἑαυτῶν, ἐμὲ δὲ οὐ πάντοτε ἔχετε (12:8).
>
> For the poor you always have with you, but me you do not always have

This line is especially stark when bearing in mind that the Passover was often a time for almsgiving (cf. 13:29).[27] Such practice is not even acknowledged as laudable in Jesus' reply.[28] Moreover, the framing of the story combines only Christological and political elements in the passage towards Jesus' death, with no hint that this involves addressing social concerns.[29]

Granted, commentators have been more nuanced than simply dismissing any concern for the poor on the basis of these verses.[30] Edwyn Hoskyns even

---

[27] Passover is recognised as a time when giving alms was a special focus (e.g. David Instone-Brewer, *Feasts and Sabbaths: Passover and Atonement (Traditions of the Rabbis from the Era of the New Testament vol. 2a)* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 173–175).

[28] The point is accentuated if one considers the author of John to have abbreviated Mark's statement in 14:7, which includes an encouragement to continue almsgiving (see Wendy North, "The anointing in John 12:1–8: a tale of two hypotheses" in Tom Thatcher and Catrin Williams (eds.), *Engaging with CH Dodd on the Gospel of John* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 226–228).

[29] The former is brought out in the context of Jesus' impending death on Passover (12:1, cf. 13:1) and the latter by Jewish authorities' efforts to quell his growing popularity (11:47, 12:19).

[30] E.g. Craig Keener, who states that 'the context does not permit neglect of the poor, either in Deuteronomy or in John (13:29, cf. 1 John 3:17)' (*The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 865–866), cf. Lindsey Trozzo (*Exploring Johannine Ethics* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 170–174). Timothy Ling argues that the reason for the apparent neglect

contextualises the episode within a general rationale for why the poor should be helped.[31] However, even where it is denied that the Gospel's portrayal of Jesus negates his social concern, there is no explanation of how such concern is integrated with its Christological focus either in this particular episode or more broadly. For it is undoubtedly true that, as Ramsey Michaels puts it, 'the accent in John is not on "the poor," but on Jesus himself'.[32] But does this mean that Jesus, or John, is saying 'focus on me *instead of* the poor'? Could it not rather be taken as saying 'care for the poor only within a more fundamental devotion to me'? Reading John in line with the latter option is possible only if we begin from a starting point other than the assumption of mutual opposition. What openings are there for an integration of the elements of the Johannine world into a holistic theological and ethical framework with socio-economic import? We turn now to examine modern work on the Gospel with this question in mind.

2. Johannine openings for socio-economic ethics

Although the general perception is that John has nothing to say about socio-economic ethics there are several openings for a quite different assessment. In this section I will identify these openings in the Gospel (2a), which yield corresponding avenues of exploration in scholarship (2b). I then turn to look at the scholarly debate itself, tracing how the movement from a theological and historical focus in the twentieth-century (2c) and the ethical proliferation of the early twenty-first (2d) has led to something of a consensus in the most recent work on ethics (2e). I show how these paths converge in a view that the Gospel reflects and perpetuates a holistically concerned, inclusive community that leaves, however, certain theological connections unmade (2e).

---

of the poor in John is that the Gospel is written from the perspective of the poor as part of a 'piety of poverty' (*The Judaean Poor and the Fourth Gospel*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 94–97, 171). He claims that Bethany was at the epicentre of this religious movement associated with the Essenes (pp. 165-81).

[31] Hoskyns opines that 'in Christian piety generosity to the poor springs from the recognition of the love of God manifested in the Passion and Death of Jesus' (Francis Davey (ed.), *The Fourth Gospel* (London: Faber and Faber, 1947), 416).

[32] Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 672.

2a. Openings in the text

Whilst it is true that Jesus does not *talk about* socio-economic issues in John, the fact that he is *engaged* at a socio-economic level is worth noting. This is, of course, implied by his presence within the world (1:10) as a human (1:14). Indeed, his holistic engagement with the world includes celebrating a wedding (2:1–12), disrupting Temple commerce (2:13–25), engaging a marginalised woman whilst weary from travel (4:1–42), feeding a crowd (6:1–15) and causing a political storm at a feast (7:14–52). He also heals people physically, bringing them from dependency to potential economic independence (e.g. 5:1–9; 9:1–7). There is even evidence that the author deliberately draws attention to economic details in narrating Jesus' public career. Gilberto Ruiz points out that John uses technical terms for market (ἐμπόριον, 2:16), treasury (γαζοφυλάκιον, 8:20), and wage earners (μισθωτός, 10:12–13), even where Synoptic parallels employ more general language.[33]

Even in the Passion narrative beginning at 13:1 there are indications of the same level of holistic engagement. The introduction of foot washing as a practical injunction (13:14–15) shortly before the command to love (13:34) countermands any 'spiritualised' conception of discipleship. Indeed, Jesus' physical and social interactions with Judas and the simultaneous working of satanic forces within him (13:2, 27) bespeaks the intertwining of spiritual and mundane life. This interplay corresponds to the broader Johannine conception of 'the world' as an entity defined spiritually by its enmity against God (e.g. 15:19) that is manifest in the socio-political configuration of the Jewish and Roman establishment. Whilst the economic aspect of forces opposing Jesus is not often explicit in the text, the fact that it is so in the paradigmatic case of Judas is significant. The term κλέπτης used to describe him (12:6) reflects the same economic motivation of the leaders that Jesus decries (10:7–14).[34] That

---

[33] Gilberto Ruiz, "Temple Commerce and John 2:13–22" (Emory University; ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2013, #3568968), 2–7.

[34] Jesus contrasts himself with figures described in economic terms: thieves, bandits and hirelings (κλέπτης, λῃστής and μισθωτός, 10:1, 8, 10, 12–13). But despite this, and despite the

such factors are at play in the intrigue of Jesus' trial is also implied. The Jewish authorities realise that their privileged position, which would include its economic benefits, is at threat (11:47) and they act ruthlessly to protect it, pledging unequivocal allegiance to Rome (19:15).

There is no way to separate the economic components from the social and political systemic totality within which Jesus' mundane interactions happen. Furthermore, just as certain socio-economic behaviour marked that which was antithetical to Jesus' own conduct, it is reasonable to assume that the positive counterpart of this was part of his message. The challenge is to explain how this dimension relates to the explicit Christological focus of the narrative and its soteriological shape. For these central features of John have traditionally eclipsed its ethical content in interpretation of the Gospel.

2b. Promising developments in scholarship

None of the observations that I have made about the socio-economic aspect of the Gospel narrative constitutes an argument for a particular stance on ethics. They simply serve to indicate that this issue can be pursued without imposing an alien agenda on a text with completely different concerns. Modern scholarship has, in fact, opened avenues for deeper exploration along the more holistic and integrated lines I am proposing. There are four particular developments that facilitate this. These can be categorised under the thematic headings of theological, historical, literary and ethical issues respectively. They are worth sketching out briefly before commencing our more detailed discussion.

Firstly, the mid-twentieth century saw a reaction against seeing John in too much continuity with its religious environs, emphasising the incarnation as a result. Secondly, however, this historical focus shifted away from Jesus himself to the (socio-political) community purportedly reflected in the text. Thirdly, and as a reaction to perceived over-emphasis on questions of history, there

---

overt socio-economic resonances of the Old Testament background of these figures (Jeremiah 23:1–6, cf. 22:11–17; Ezekiel 34:1–6) no commentator that I have come across has inquired as to the ethical ramifications of this.

developed a literary method of approaching the Gospel in the 1980s. Fourthly, the explosion in ethical interest itself shortly after the turn of the millennium has been characterised by a more conservative reaction to earlier critical impulses. A largely positive approach to the Gospel's ethics has arisen by reconsidering its dualistic rhetoric and apparently exclusive Christological preoccupation within a synchronic consideration of the Gospel as a whole.

What is interesting for my own purposes is that all of these four developments have potential socio-economic import. Even our cursory glance at the Gospel has shown how this is the case for notions of the incarnation, but it is equally so for reconstructions of the text's community setting. Literary approaches can help integrate hitherto under-emphasised aspects of John, such as its technical financial language, with the main soteriological lines of its narrative. And of course, a reconsideration of ethics itself affords an opportunity to address my question directly.

The extent to which these avenues of exploration have been followed up will now be examined in order to sharpen the specific contribution that this thesis seeks to make. Although my chronological approach will reflect the fourfold development set out above to some extent, engagement with specific work will necessarily relativise such a neat division. Indeed, I will not treat literary approaches separately, mentioning them only when they impinge directly on my own ethical concerns.

2c. Mid-20th century: from theology and history to *History and Theology*

Although nineteenth century figures such as Brooke Westcott are still mentioned, Johannine scholarship considered as part of our own era begins with Hoskyns.[35] Hoskyns sees John as a catholic document that expresses the message preached by 'the whole Church, wherever it has seriously preached the Gospel to the poor' (p. 20), with the implication that the concerns

[35] Although he was born a few months after Dodd and a few days before Bultmann (all in 1884), the former's main Johannine work was not published until the 1950s and the latter's commentary was published in German the year after that of Hoskyns (in 1941). The original was published in 1940 but the reprint edition I use here (*Fourth Gospel*, op. cit.) is from 1947.

characteristic of the Synoptic Jesus also apply here. Indeed, far from propagating a kind of spiritualised gnosis, Hoskyns insists that the Gospel emphasises the historical reality of the human Jesus.[36] Moreover, this message must be grasped in its ethical import; it 'does not depend upon knowledge of the truth, but upon doing the truth' (p. 440). Nevertheless, John is 'a strictly "theological" work', which has been aptly described as 'spiritual' (p. 17) because right action results from faith in divine love (p. 54).[37]

Despite the disavowal of a kind of pneumatism 'divorced from the physical world' (pp. 304–5),[38] the socio-economic aspect of Gospel ethics is never raised after his mention of the poor (p. 20).[39] Why is this? Whatever the broader scholarly trends at play, the specific answer lies in Hoskyns's treatment of the relationship of John to the Synoptics. For him, the former relativises social distinctions by making marginalisation – whether poverty, disability or childhood – 'a parable of ultimate significance' (p. 63). Accordingly, the object of Johannine discipleship is to grasp the truth to which this parable points and help others to do the same. How this is pursued in relation to basic human needs is not a direct matter of concern.

Hoskyns represents two paradoxical aspects of the way in which socio-economic ethics is addressed (or, more accurately, not addressed) that endure for much subsequent work. On one hand, Johannine theology depends on the historical reality of Jesus and demands a response to him that goes beyond cognitive belief to a life lived out in the flesh. But on the other hand, socio-economic reality is separated from the spiritual as being of secondary value, having no ethically relevant urgency in the Gospel.

Bultmann, upon whom we have already touched (above, 1b), notably emphasises the reality of the incarnation in opposition to Gnostic dualism. Yet

---

[36] Hoskyns holds that the challenge of John comes not abstractly but 'by confronting us with the precise and bodily history of Jesus' (*Fourth Gospel*, 18, cf. 147, where he addresses 1:14a).

[37] It should be clarified that the moniker 'theological' is set in contrast with 'historical' rather than 'ethical' (p. 41).

[38] See also his earlier affirmation that John is 'concerned not only with spirits, but with flesh and blood, with his readers' concrete thoughts and observable actions' (p. 48).

[39] Hoskyns identifies only martyrdom as its ethical example (p. 424, 479). Although he often reads the Gospel through the Epistles, he does not consider how 1 John applies *dying* for others to *material concern* for others (even in his mentions of 1 John 3:16–17, pp. 53–54).

its quantitative fact as materiality eclipses any talk of its qualitative significance in social particulars.[40] The same applies to the believing response demanded by Jesus, whose totality is defined in relation to the world and, thus, negatively, such as to make its concrete details seem secondary.[41] Dodd is eager to maintains the materiality of life in the Gospel but it is only in reference to 1 John that he sees this as ethically significant.[42] With Ernst Käsemann we have a more straightforward denial of any socio-economic significance in John.[43] However, what he says in his eminently quotable *Testament* must be qualified by his emphasis on the holistic dimensions of the Johannine incarnation elsewhere.[44]

Even the shift in scholarly hegemony from Europe to America in the 1960s and the focus on the sociological reconstruction of the 'Johannine Community' does not substantially change matters.[45] History is still important as the bearer of meaning, only it is the history of the author and his community (much of which comes from the Epistles) rather than that of Jesus that is emphasised. In terms of ethics, the community tends to be defined in terms of its religious understanding and related political implications rather than its socio-economic

---

[40] What is summarised in *Theology* is spelled out at length in Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, trans. George Beasley-Murray (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971). Incarnation is necessarily 'concrete history' (pp. 64–66, 70), God's love is shown in Jesus' whole mission (p. 457) and the encounter with him demands one's whole life (pp. 44–45, 60, cf. pp. 135–8).

[41] What it means practically for Christ's acts to be 'present' in the believers' response to the 'love command' (*John*, 526) is not considered significant enough in Johannine thought to take up. By contrast, the concept of κοινωνία links intra-Trinitarian relationship with a communal form of life with material implications (pp. 105–6, cf. *The Johannine Epistles*, trans. Philip O'Hara et al. (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1973), 12, 55).

[42] For the former point, see Charles Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 150; for the latter, see *The Johannine Epistles* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1946), where he states that 'the incarnate life of Christ fills the concept of eternal life with human, personal, ethical meaning' (p. xliv).

[43] Ernst Käsemann, *The Testament of Jesus*, trans. Gerhard Krodel (London: SCM, 1968), e.g., 53, 73.

[44] "The Structure and Purpose of the Prologue to John's Gospel", trans. W. Montague in *New Testament Questions of Today* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1969), 160–161.

[45] The two names most associated with this development are Raymond Brown and J. Louis Martyn. Whereas the former developed his reconstruction with more imaginative detail (see especially *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1979)), the latter's methodological work has been more decisive (*History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, 3rd edition (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), the first edition published in 1967).

practice.[46]

This latter point runs counter to the stated intention of Martyn to consider the 'daily life in John's church' in all its historical reality.[47] Indeed, one searches in vain through Martyn's or Brown's impressive bibliographies for any mention of the words 'economic', 'poverty', 'politics' or even 'material'. However, all of these themes are integrated in a compelling account of John in the mid 1970s by the far less known scholar José Porfirio Miranda.[48] His work is worth serious consideration both for its uniquely synthetic approach and as a corrective to its being nearly completely ignored. For it does not fit comfortably into any of the four thematic categories that I have identified.

Miranda's *Being and the Messiah*

Miranda begins by positing a situation of universal guilt coupled with gross injustice (relativising the Marxist valorisation of the Proletariat). One must come into existential awareness of this situation and engage with in order to really 'be' (chap. 1). This corresponds to a theological vision (chap. 2) whereby 'Yahweh is essentially the realization of justice' (p. 32) and an eschatology that is fully realisable (chap. 3). As such, theological 'truth' is not 'timeless' but an urgent reality (chap. 4), which is instantiated by Jesus and proclaimed by him as gospel on this basis (chap. 5).

All this Miranda argues on a wider philosophical and biblical basis than just one text. But then he addresses John directly, stating this:

> 'John, the most "spiritual" of the New Testament authors, explains the world's incredulity toward Jesus Christ by its denial of food to the hungry and drink to the thirsty' (p. 99).

This is the negative side of an equation whose positive side is an understanding

---

[46] E.g. Martyn, *History and Theology*, 149–54; Smith, "The Contribution of J. Louis Martyn to the Understanding of the Gospel of John", 14, in Martyn, *History and Theology*. 'Outsiders' are understood to be 'Jews' (as religiously defined) rather than any attention being given to interaction with the (political and economic) framework of Roman imperialism (Martyn, History and Theology, 167; Brown, *The Gospel According to John* (New York, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1966), lxiii).

[47] Martyn, *History and Theology*, 29, 95.

[48] *Being and the Messiah*, trans. John Eagleson (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1973).

of love as being holistic and practically engaged (pp. 100–102) as a response to the demand of God's inalienable otherness (chap. 6). God's nature is not to be thought of in terms of objective existence (chap. 7) but rather 'the commandment or imperative to love our neighbour' (p. 129). Indeed, Miranda insists that conceptual abstractions have distracted Christianity (chap. 8) but that, contrary to this, the Johannine message is thoroughly concrete (chap. 9). Whilst the demanding nature of its revolutionary ideal has seen even those who 'believe' fall away, the Gospel of John brings eschatological justice into the present if only people will grasp it (chap. 10).

The most compelling aspect of Miranda's work is that it thoroughly integrates every dimension of reality in a reading whose ultimate aim is an ethical one. He interprets John not as a document with a limited purview on this or that issue but rather as the bearer of an all-embracing and urgent message. His reading allows one to move from the nature of God to practical action by reconceptualising God's being as love in a way that inherently demands the same in the social and political sphere. There are certainly questions to be asked about his theology, which does not do justice to the salvific role of Jesus' death in the Gospel. Moreover, he makes little attempt at historical contextualisation, jumping rapidly from the Old Testament to trade unions via Jesus.[49] However, with these modifications there is real scope for the kind of holistic and integrated reading of Johannine ethics that I have shown to be needed.

2d. A new millennium: Meeks's minimalism to ethical proliferation

Miranda's work has been nearly universally ignored. Yet Culpepper, generally known for his pioneering work on the literary analysis of John, shows how it can be seen to play into a wider set of ethical concerns. This comes to light in a volume responding to the criticism that literary analysis such as his is socially detached.[50] There Culpepper demonstrates how a literary approach contributes

---

[49] This is legitimated by his general view that socio-economic injustice and suffering are universal problems whose biblical contours are not very different from those of today (p. ix).

[50] The publication in question is Segovia, (ed.), *What is John? Vol.1* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars

to ethical debate by committing to an analysis of the whole Gospel text in its pursuit of ethical questions rather than being caught up in source-critical or composition-historical debates.[51]

This commitment has become axiomatic for recent scholarship on ethics and will inform my own approach. But Culpepper also observes that the questions concerning contemporary (1991) readers of John 'are not primarily theological or historical but ethical'.[52] He sees them as revolving around three central questions:

> '(1) Is the Gospel of John anti-Jewish? (2) Does the Gospel have anything to say to the marginalized and the oppressed? and (3) How should we interpret the theological exclusivism of the Gospel in a pluralistic culture?'

The first and third of these have been more frequent subjects of debate than the second, with marginalisation treated very rarely.[53] There has also been work from a postcolonial angle that sees the ideology of John as itself oppressive, tacitly maintaining the imperial programme.[54] Where the question of oppression has been raised, it has been more often understood in terms of that which is *suffered by* the 'Johannine Community'. This is due to its religio-political character as a missional group, which does not change the latter's identity as a sect, even if it makes it more inclusive.[55]

Press, 1996). Segovia notes the accusation that precipitates it, namely that 'the emphasis on the "literary" dimensions of the text had resulted not only in a neglect of the social conditions of authors and readers of the Gospel but also in the lack of any type of reflection on the part of the authors with regard to themselves as subjects of interpretation' (p. vii).

[51] Although not argued directly, this is an upshot of Culpepper's "The Gospel of John as a Document of Faith in a Pluralistic Culture", *What is John?*, 107–127.

[52] Culpepper, "Pluralistic Culture". This quotation and the questions below are from p. 112.

[53] Whilst debate around purported Johannine anti-Semitism continues, the third of Culpepper's questions has retained less interest after some treatment in Richard Bauckham and Carl Mosser (eds.), *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MA: Eerdmans, 2008). Stephen Barton's essay in that volume takes up the question ("Johannine Dualism and Contemporary Pluralism", pp. 3–18). The only treatment of marginalisation in John engaged with in recent scholarship (and that only infrequently) is Stephen Motyer, "Jesus and the Marginalised in the Fourth Gospel" in Anthony Billington et al. (eds.), *Mission and Meaning: Essays Presented to Peter Cotterell* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1995), 70–89.

[54] E.g. Marie Huie-Jolly claims that its Christological exclusivity carries pretensions to cultural superiority that 'persisted in the religions associated with British imperialism' ("Maori 'Jews' and a Resistant Reading of John 5.10–47", in Musa Dube and Jeffrey Staley (eds.), *John and Postcolonialism: Travel, Space and Power* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002) 94–95).

[55] Johannes Nissen argues that the community is a sect whose inclusivity is expressed in

By far the most influential contribution to this discussion is that of Wayne Meeks.[56] To understand the background of Meeks' mid-1990s piece one must acknowledge the development of his thinking within the sociological trends of 1960s. For he had already formulated a view of the community behind the Gospel as a sect whose religio-political identity made it oppositional rather than 'unworldly' in the sense of being disengaged.[57] Accordingly, "The Ethics of the Fourth Evangelist" contends that neither the Evangelist nor the Jesus he presents are ethically informative. Yet John reflects the attitudes and patterns of behaviour that govern the community from which it hails (pp. 321–322). This he interprets as a social and political stance whose sectarian quality is a necessary product of its distinction from a godless world and is religious insofar as Caesar demanded the ultimate allegiance due only to God (pp. 323–325). It is this solidarity as an *alternative* to this world that constitutes love (pp. 323–325). Nevertheless, what this involves in material or socio-economic terms is not even mentioned by Meeks.

Rethinking Ethics: a new dawn or more of the same?

That the overall effect of Meeks's essay was to dampen the debate around Johannine ethics is evident from the fact that the first full volume devoted to

---

evangelisation ("Community and Ethics in the Gospel of John" in Nissen and Sigfred Pederson (eds.), *New Readings in John: Literary and Theological Perspectives* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 194–212). For David Rensberger, writing earlier, the 'Johannine Community' 'becomes a paradigm for the great struggle that results when God's will to redeem the world engages the world's unwillingness to be redeemed' (*Johannine Faith and Liberating Community* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1988), 138).

[56] "The Ethics of the Fourth Evangelist" in Culpepper and C. Clifton Black (eds.), *Exploring the Gospel of John: In Honor of D. Moody Smith* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 317–320. That Meeks thus led the way is ironic seeing as his earlier more work on the subject in relation to the New Testament as a whole does not even mention John (*The Moral World of the First Christians* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1986), cf. his "Early Christian Ethics" from the same year).

[57] Meeks's thinking on this is already apparent in *The Prophet-King: Moses Traditions and the Johannine Christology* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967), e.g. p. 64, but it is better known from "The Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism", *JBL* 91 (1972), 44–72. There he concludes thus: 'If one "believes" what is said in [John], he is quite literally taken out of the ordinary world of social reality. Contrariwise, this can hardly happen unless one stands already within the counter-cultural group or at least in some ambivalent relationship between it and the larger society' (p. 71).

the topic (in 2012) still feels the need to respond to his critical perspective.[58] Though it certainly reflects interest that had been building for some years, *Rethinking the Ethics of John* represents a truly concerted and even global attempt to rehabilitate the Gospel's contribution to ethics.[59] The volume opens up a wide variety of hitherto unexplored approaches by turning attention from what is *explicit* (i.e. the love command) to what is *implicit* from such subterranean bases as Torah, philosophy and pneumatic experience.[60] Not only does it thus bring into play relevant Jewish, Greco-Roman and Christian historical backgrounds, but it also examines key Johannine concepts on a literary basis that had not hitherto been given ethical import.[61]

A more recent collection of essays from mainly North American contributors addresses some of the same issues and even takes a new direction towards creation ethics.[62] Yet the burden of the volume, if not always stated explicitly, is still to exonerate John from the charge of sectarianism levelled by Meeks et al.[63] Moreover, *Johannine Ethics* is similarly lacking in consideration of the socio-economic dimension and where it is mentioned at all, the conceptual rationale is too thin to build anything substantial upon it.[64]

---

[58] Jan van der Watt and Reuben Zimmermann (eds.), *Rethinking the Ethics of John* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012). Both the introductory pieces in the volume explicitly address themselves to the challenge of Meeks's essay, setting the tone for the rest of the volume (Michael Labahn, "It's Only Love" – Is That All?", 15–16 and Zimmermann, "Is There Ethics in the Gospel of John?", 51). Meeks's impact in dampening the debate is also mentioned by others, e.g. Cornelis Bennema in *Mimesis in the Johannine Literature: A Study in Johannine Ethics* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 2.

[59] The global scope of the volume is indicated by the fact that its contributors hail from four different continents, although it is worth noting that none of them are 'majority world' scholars.

[60] For these approaches, see the essays by William Loader, Volker Rabens and Paul Anderson, respectively (bibliographic details will be provided as and when I engage with these pieces).

[61] See, for example, the essays by Christos Karakolis, Mira Stare and Hermut Löhr (bibliographic details will be provided as and when I engage with these pieces).

[62] See Sherri Brown (whose forename I retain in what follows to avoid confusion with *Raymond* Brown) and Christopher Skinner (eds.), *Johannine Ethics: The Moral World of the Gospel and Epistles of John* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2017), in which Culpepper and Dorothy Lee address creation ethics.

[63] Hence the conclusions of Sherri Brown (pp. 23–24), Skinner (pp. 41–42), Alicia Myers (p. 175), and Lee (p. 259).

[64] Raymond Collins does state that 'to follow Jesus implies that one is drawn into Jesus's concern to feed the hungry – an ethical imperative in Jesus' day and ours' ("Follow Me: A Life-Giving Ethical Imperative", 62), but the rationale for this is a straightforwardly mimetic

These two essay collections certainly evince a proliferation in new angles. Yet, at the same time, they do not free the debate from the preoccupation with whether or not the Gospel is sectarian. What is not recognised is that a response to this must be an alternative community vision, and not simply an affirmation of the abstract value of inclusivity. Indeed, there are developments towards such a communal formulation of ethics which we address below. First, however, I need to draw attention to the way in which the socio-economic context of John has been developed.

Explorations of the socio-economic and communal dimensions of John

Even before the explosion of interest in ethics, the socio-economic dimension of the Gospel was beginning to be explored within more holistic construals of its historical context. In Allen Callahan's monograph, it is this context that shapes the core message of love in opposition to the world.[65] For Callahan, the world is not to be identified with a spiritual or demonic reality but rather 'the partnership of the Judean temple state and the Roman imperium in Palestine.'[66] More in-depth exploration of the imperial situation is undertaken by Warren Carter, who reads the whole Gospel against this backdrop from a notional location of Ephesus.[67] Timothy Ling, on the other hand, starts not from the political situation of the 'Johannine Community' but rather from the religious dynamics of the Palestinian group that Jesus forms.[68]

---

conception of 'following'. Jaime Clark-Soles deploys the concepts of incarnation and love to the treatment of disability in her piece but examines neither in any theological depth ("Love Embodied in Action: Ethics and Incarnation in the Gospel of John", 91–115). Likewise, Francis Moloney's insistence on a flesh and blood ethic is stated in general terms and, correspondingly, based on a general understanding of realised eschatology ("God, Eschatology, and "This World": Ethics in the Gospel of John", 197–217).

[65] Allen Callahan, *A Love Supreme: A History of the Johannine Tradition* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2005).

[66] Callahan, *Love Supreme*, 71. That this is a false dichotomy will be argued in chap. 3, 2c.

[67] Warren Carter, *John and Empire: Initial Explorations* (New York, NY: T&T Clark International, 2008).

[68] In his *Judaean Poor*, Ling uses Capper's 'virtuoso religion' model to portray the kind of life that Jesus and his disciples lived, not least in the group's use of money (see a brief version of his thesis "John, Jesus and Virtuoso Religion" in Paul Anderson et al (eds.), *John, Jesus, and History Vol. 3: Glimpses of Jesus Through the Johannine Lens* (henceforth *JJH3)* (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2016), 271–282.

Whilst Callahan, Carter and Ling all agree that John presents an integrated view of reality that cannot be classified as narrowly 'theological', only Carter takes his analysis in an ethical direction.[69] His conclusion, that John's message retains certain coercive hallmarks of Empire despite its liberating potential, reflects that of the aforementioned work on John and postcolonialism.[70] Taking a more positive view through a combination of a historical and literary approach is William Loader. He actually gets closest to asking the question I am raising in relation to the Gospel, asking how it is that in John there is no explicit proclamation of 'good news to the poor'.[71]

For Loader, any presence of such concerns in Jesus' historical message has been all but covered in John by a 'massive overlay of monochrome Christological reflection' (p. 476). Having given some historical consideration to why this should be the case, he concludes that 'if, however, we remain with the dominant theme of loving one another… it takes little imagination to realize that here the issue of poverty and neediness would have to be highly relevant' (p. 478). Loader's positive estimation is tentatively made because it is based on the inevitability of some degree of poverty in the Johannine situation rather than an inherent aspect of the Gospel's theological rationale. Even where a more holistic ethical stance is taken in 1 John, he explains this on the basis of historical contingency.[72]

Taking the Gospel to *prescribe* and not simply *reflect* a communal life necessarily entails articulating a stronger basis in Johannine theology than that which we have seen thus far. Such thinking has actually been developed most recently in relation to 'theosis' in ecclesiology and missiology by Andrew Byers and Michael Gorman respectively. Their ethical impetus is evident in the fact that both rebut claims to sectarianism with a diametrically opposed social

---

[69] Carter takes this stance as a methodological starting point (*John and Empire*, xi).

[70] Carter, *John and Empire*, 333–335.

[71] Loader, "What happened to 'Good News to the Poor' in the Johannine Tradition?", *JJH3*, 469–480.

[72] Loader argues that 'the author deploys 2:15–17 … not primarily to address social evils, but to serve a more fundamental concern: to challenge the neglect of the ethical obligation of support for the poor, which appears to underlie the repeated statements about "loving the brothers"', "The Significance of 2:15–17 for Understanding the Ethics of John" in Anderson and Culpepper (eds.), *Communities in Dispute: Current Scholarship on the Johannine Epistles*, (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014), 235.

vision.[73] For Byers, John calls readers into a life that is 'explicitly communal, not individualistic' (p. 7) and 'parallels the openness of the divine community' (p. 19).[74] The telos of this vision is union, a gathering understood 'in terms of oneness and family kinship' (p. 142) that undergirds the love ethic of the Gospel.[75]

Gorman, whose ethical impetus is more apparent, starts from the premise of a missional God with whom participation in relationship is 'in part a matter of family communion, in part a matter of family resemblance by receiving (metaphorically speaking) the divine DNA' (p. 21). The resulting ethic is manifest in a Christ-rooted 'community of centripetally oriented love that shares that love centrifugally as they move out from themselves' (p. 101), even in cruciform love for one's enemies (p. 169). Like Byers's work, Gorman's thesis could be categorised under the heading 'Johannine Ethics' and the condensed version of his argument actually appears in a volume on the topic.[76]

Neither Byers nor Gorman address socio-economic issues. There is thus an apparent disjunction between approaches rooted in Johannine theology and those rooted in history, in which the social, economic and political dimensions are intertwined. However, Frey has come up with an ostensibly integrated account of Johannine ethics under the rubric 'family ethos'.[77] Frey states his main thesis as the following:

> '"Love" in the Johannine literature is more practical and life-oriented than the surface level of the texts and the steep theological reasoning suggest … If we start by interpreting Johannine ethics from the perspective of family ethos, the "love" demanded does not lack specification. It is basically linked

---

[73] Andrew Byers, *Ecclesiology and Theosis in the Gospel of John* (Cambridge: CUP, 2017); Michael Gorman, *Abide and Go: Missional Theosis in the Gospel of John* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2018).

[74] This is theological as much as social in that Christology leads to a new 'communal identity'; indeed, 'resocialization and divine-human filiation are one and the same' (*Ecclesiology*, 86).

[75] Byers remarks that 'the love command bound to God's oneness is embedded within the Johannine narrative and … paired with love for others' (p. 127). He has little else to say about the ethical implication of his contention.

[76] "John's Implicit Ethic of Enemy-Love" in *Johannine Ethics*, 135–158.

[77] Frey, ""Ethical" Traditions, Family Ethos, and Love in the Johannine Literature" in Jan Willem Van Henten and Joseph Verheyden (eds.), *Early Christian Ethics in Interaction with Jewish and Greco-Roman Contexts* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 167–203.

with matters of communal life, property and material possessions.'[78]

This appears to be the most promising synthesis of the various scholarly approaches, with Frey combining a literary and theological examination of love with a historical perspective on Diaspora.

However, upon closer examination it emerges that the socio-economic aspect of Frey's Johannine communal vision does not have its own theological basis. Rather, it is imputed via a historical contextualisation supplied by the Epistles.[79] Indeed, this methodological decision also underlies the conception of the 'family ethos' itself, which he understands as being the group practices 'reflected in the narrative of the Gospels'.[80] Thus there remains work to be done to integrate a holistic perspective on the ethics of John with the theological particularities of its own thought.

2e. Fecundity in Johannine ethics: a recent spate of monographs

The most promising arena for an approach to Johannine ethics that integrates the theological, historical and literary developments in scholarship is the recent spate of monographs on the topic. I now consider the four most prominent of these, which provide key dialogue partners in my thesis. As well as giving a general account of their positions, I focus especially on any advances made towards consideration of the socio-economic dimension.

Cornelis Bennema's *Mimesis in the Johannine Literature* argues that the recent revivification of interest in the topic has missed 'the heart of Johannine ethics', which is 'mimesis' (p. 3).[81] This he defines as 'creative, cognitive and volitional actions for which a person is responsible rather than a mindless cloning for which one might not be held accountable' (p. 21). It has a theological basis in that 'the Son–Father mimesis is often paradigmatic for the believer–

---

[78] "Family Ethos", 181–182.

[79] "Family Ethos", 201.

[80] "Family Ethos", 168. Regarding the need to carefully define our terms (i.e. 'ethics' and 'ethos'), we defer further discussion of this until we address the work of van der Watt, whom Frey credits with his terminological understanding (p. 168, n. 7).

[81] Cf., more emphatically, 'Johannine ethics is *mimetic ethics*' ("Mimesis", 169).

Jesus mimesis' (p. 65). Yet this life of God is not merely imitated; ethics begins with 'a mystical, divine communion that affects the believer at every level' (p. 127). The result is a life characterised by 'moral goods' of light, love, truth and honour (p. 152) lived in a family or household community (p. 155). Far from being insular, love is to be directed to all, just as Jesus directed it to the outsider Judas, always with a missional function (pp. 120–5).

Lindsey Trozzo tackles the ethical challenge posed by the Gospel's Christological focus by drawing attention to its deployment of rhetorical strategies found in Plutarch.[82] Like Bennema, Trozzo construes a theological basis for ethics in intradivine relationship (p. 32) in which people participate (p. 81) in (albeit limited) imitation of Jesus. On the latter, she takes some limited strides towards spelling out what this means in practice insofar as his incarnation, foot washing and death inform the social ethics appropriate to engage in the 'material, physical world' (p. 125). Yet this rationale is not developed, with Trozzo turning instead to the Epistles to press home her point (pp. 182–3).

As we turn to the most comprehensive volume on the subject to date, that of van der Watt, there is an opportunity to sharpen the use of ethical terminology.[83] For van der Watt is the name most closely associated with idea of 'ethos'.[84] Covering many perspectives in the debate on New Testament ethics, he draws attention to the remarkable diversity of definitions attached to the terms ethics and ethos (and to a lesser extent, morals), not least the variety of conceptual backgrounds proposed (pp. 20–29). Yet he also shows that this diversity represents relatively minor variations on a very straightforward theme. 'Ethics' can quite simply be defined as '*what* ought to be done… and

---

[82] Trozzo, *Exploring* (op. cit). Whilst Jesus 'appears to be inimitable' (p. 11), this is reassessed by attending to 'rhetorical elements in the narrative as a means to identifying its moral efficacy' (p. 16), especially those of Plutarch (pp. 54–56).

[83] Jan van der Watt, *A Grammar of the Ethics of John Vol. 1* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019). The volume is the first of a projected bipartite project, the second one of which will focus on the Epistles rather than the Gospel.

[84] The introduction of the term to the Johannine debate has come via Michael Wolter's work on Paul, particularly his "Ethos und Identität in paulinischen Gemeinden", *NTS* 43 (1997), 430–444.

why this ought to be done' (p. 23).[85] However, with 'ethos', the case is more complex; at its most abstract it refers to a group's 'general behavioural pattern' but this is elsewhere equated with a 'canon of institutionalised practices' (pp. 27–28).[86] This ambivalence does not prevent van der Watt developing a broad conception of a 'grammar' of ethics, which involves categorising the 'relevant ethical data' (p. 30), both textual (pp. 32–50) and 'socio-cultural' (pp. 50–54). This is finally brought together to form a 'continuum of action formation' that begins from overall worldview and moves through identity, values and principles to the end point of prescribed actions (pp. 59–65).

Whilst it is not always clear how his methodological process serves to structure his discussion, van der Watt does contribute towards the integration of a theological perspective with sociological realism and literary sensitivity.[87] This is particularly apparent in his attention to how the commonly perceived two-level drama (the life of Jesus and that of the author's community) is supplemented with a 'third level of narrative reality' (p. 79). Van der Watt characterises the latter as the 'divine story' of John (p. 79), in which the Son 'comes from the Father to establish the new family of God' (p. 80). The ethical upshot would seem to follow quite naturally from this, being embodied in a family-like group ethos centred on Jesus, who share meals and generally serve one another whilst simultaneously pursuing a missional mandate.[88] However, the connections between the Gospel's soteriological narrative and this mundane outworking are not clearly made.[89]

---

[85] In line with what we already noted about the New Testament in general (above, 1b), van der Watt affirms that 'there is no evidence in John that ethical remarks are systematized' or put in 'lists of what is expected on a practical level' although the Christology does form a 'theoretical base' from which the text can be read ethically (p. 25, cf. his comparison to other ways of construing ethics on pp. 57–58).

[86] Van der Watt seems not to acknowledge the difference between those two notions. Indeed, things become more confused with the additional idea that an 'ethos' is the 'knowledge of the group… expressed in their words and deeds' (p. 29). He does not, in his discussion, mention the one verse in John that uses this term (19:40).

[87] E.g. his discussion of characterisation whereby he links 'social qualities' to particular characters but, instead of keeping this on a social level, he offers a characterisation of God in these terms as 'the One with all authority and power' (*Grammar*, 54).

[88] See the summary in *Grammar*, 533–534.

[89] Van der Watt credits the incarnation with being that by which 'God's divine reality is introduced into this world' so that 'the realities described by the two narratives start to

The most recent publication in the debate is that of Rushton, who sets out to read John in terms of what it has to say about *The Cry of the Earth and the Cry of the Poor*. Written with an expressly devotional intent, the book follows a brief introduction with a series of meditations on passages of the Gospel that fall under two standard lectionary cycles. In her view, the Gospel narrates Jesus' 'ministry of reconciliation across social barriers, creating a new community' (p. 95) and 'completing the works of God by responding *to both the cry of the earth and the cry of the marginalized*' (p. 102). This entails the kind of response to social and ecological issues spelled out in Pope Francis's 2015 encyclical, *Laudato 'Si*.[90] Rushton's chosen format means that it is unfair to expect a sustained argument in positing this claim; indeed, it is not impossible that a coherent rationale could be extrapolated from the book.[91] But as it is, *Cry* amplifies the two tendencies most typical of recent work on Johannine ethics; the consensus that the Gospel evinces a holistic ethic and the lack of requisite theological argumentation to support this contention.

2f. Converging paths and ways forward

On the back of this account of scholarship, it is clear that all the necessary elements for a closer examination of socio-economic ethics are in place. Theologically speaking, there is both an affirmation of Jesus' full humanity in John as well as a recognition that soteriological concerns do not eclipse ethical ones. Moreover, it is clear that, however difficult it is to discern details of the Gospel's historical context, it must be construed as a realistic social situation in which the economic and political are intertwined. And yet, thanks to developments in literary analysis, it is also clear that a reconstruction of

---

interrelate' (p. 79). The relationship between the divine and human realities is described as their being 'integrated', but then that the events of the latter are 'just expressions' of the former (p. 80), which remains inherently 'superior to what is 'below' (p. 81).

[90] The title of her book is taken from this document (*Cry*, xiii–xiv). She mentions it in most of her 24 chapters, all of which end with a brief word on ethical application (e.g. p. 100, 168–169).

[91] The basic underpinnings are provided by the Gospel's Prologue, whose cosmology centres on 'the relationship of the divine, the human and creation' (p. xxv). However, how this works out to forge connections between Christological symbolism and engagement with the mundane issues upon which she focuses is not spelled out.

history must *supplement* rather than *substitute for* a consideration of the full text in its final form. Finally, the recent focus on the communal shape of ethics has turned the focus of discussion towards articulating a Johannine social vision rather than a set of isolated principles.[92]

One may even go so far as to postulating a consensus in the recent discussion of Johannine ethics. The Gospel is understood to engender a community of mutual mundane care that is characterised by close unity but is not exclusionary. This is for two reasons: firstly, because it is formed as something more like a kinship network than a sect and secondly, its openness to outsiders is part of its missional outworking of the unique claims of Johannine Christology, which are inherently invitational rather than exclusive.

However, in none of this is the socio-economic aspect of ethics either specified nor given a firm theological rationale. This is partly because the terms of the debate are still beholden to the problem of the Gospel's purported sectarianism. But it also seems to be because of a lack of confidence that such a rationale can be identified in the Gospel. Assertions of the socio-economic dimension of Johannine ethics generally depend on external evidence with only very thin attempts made at forging internal connections.[93] This is unlikely to be sufficient for a genuine shift in perceptions of the Gospel as a 'spiritual Gospel' without anything to say about material human suffering.

3. Method and Approach

In this section I set out the elements of my own approach in response to the foregoing discussion of scholarship. I begin by setting out the ethical method with which I am working (3a) and outlining my literary-theological mode of reading the Gospel (3b) before delineating my line of argument and main

---

[92] What is not often acknowledged about Meeks's 1996 essay is that it crystallises what was always implicit regarding the Johannine Community hypothesis, namely that a representation of the Gospel's *social vision* is simultaneously a position on the Gospel's *ethics*.

[93] These are drawn from a view of its universality, the Old Testament background (both Miranda), socio-historical premises (van der Watt) or historical context, especially in conjunction with the Epistles (Frey, Trozzo, Loader). Trozzo also attempts to connect the Gospel's theology to material concern, as does Rushton, but neither do so with the kind of rigour necessary to combat a deep-seated consensus that denies such a connection.

interlocutors (3c).

3a. Ethical terminology and method

From my initial discussion of New Testament ethics it was clear that ethical method must be tailored to the text under consideration (1a). Upon surveying Johannine scholarship, it became apparent that the increasing consensus over ethical *content* is not matched by any clarity on ethical *method*. Indeed, such a multiplicity of methodologies are being taken that a certain amount of confusion has resulted. In light of this, I will proceed with as much simplicity as possible rather than attempting to adopt a complex approach. For there will be enough challenges in the *content* without inserting it at the level of *method*. In fact, my procedure will emerge quite organically from a definition of my key terms.

There are three terms that appear in the debate around Johannine ethics. 'Morals', will not appear in what follows because its meaning is not sufficiently distinct from an 'ethical prescription' to merit using it. 'Ethos' is a frequently used term in the debate that is, however, ambiguous for reasons that need to be, though generally are not, disentangled from one another. Firstly, it can either denote a concrete set of actions or the dominant characteristic of those actions, whether that be internal (e.g. an attitude or motivation) or external (e.g. a tone or aesthetic quality). Secondly, it has tended to denote a historical reality *reflected* in the text, but it could equally be something *prescribed* by the text. Thirdly, the word is used nearly exclusively in reference to a community, but there is no reason why it may not also be applied to an individual. Indeed, this application is both common to everyday speech and found in the New Testament (Luke 22:39). This latter point is a reminder that we are talking about a biblical term here, even one found in John (19:40). Therefore, to avoid confusion, I will only refer to 'ethos' if referring to the Greek ἔθος or the use of the word by other scholars.

With the term 'ethics' there is no dispute over the very simplest level of its meaning: it refers to *what* is right and to reflection on *why* something is right. There is actually no need to go beyond this meaning. Working with such a

definition may seem to risk being simplistic and ahistorical. However, it recognises the fact that biblical material in general, and John in particular, does not closely correspond with the genre or systemic form typical of philosophical ethics. Thus it is best to work from as broad an understanding as possible of ethics and develop its particular Johannine content from there.

Ethical method

In terms of what this understanding of ethics means for my method, it is easier to start from a negative observation. I will *not* do as Burridge describes and 'use computer searches like a trawler's drag-net' to find references to socio-economic issues.[94] Neither will I 'work with selected pieces of ethical data that must be interrelated' to form a 'grammar' of ethics.[95] The paucity of directly relevant material militates against both approaches. Moreover, compiling explicitly ethical material into a structure separate to the core Christological message of the Gospel would constitute an abstraction from Johannine thought rather than a representation of it. At the same time, however, my thesis is about ethics and not theology. Therefore, my procedure will be to begin with the identification of the ethical requirements that, on the basis of the text itself (rather than an external point of reference) are closest to the centre of its message (20:30–31).[96] Explicating these requirements fully, without shoehorning in socio-economic issues but allowing these to emerge, will result in a conception of ethics that is truer to the thought of John itself.

Having identified an ethical requirement to examine, I will need to ascertain what *kind* of requirement it is. Burridge proposes an analytical schema according to the fourfold categorisation of explicit prescriptions (or rules), principles (or values), paradigms (or examples) and symbolic worldview (i.e., a

---

[94] "Methodological Reflections", 250. To be fair to Burridge, such an approach does make more sense when one is working with the whole Bible or the New Testament rather than one book.

[95] *Grammar*, 67.

[96] Doing this could already be said to constitute an ethical stance in itself. Thus Keck observes that to 'take the text as seriously as we take ourselves' is to acknowledge that 'what we owe the past … is a serious effort to understand it on its own terms' ("New Testament Ethics", 6).

biblical theology).[97] These categories will suffice for my purposes with the caveat that they are strictly heuristic. As such, the categorisation of the Gospel's requirements will only be useful insofar as they serve the need of explicating John. Where the latter pushes the boundaries of Burridge's schema, I will simply need to find other terms. The key stage, however, comes after this one, namely the process of discerning a rationale for ethical requirements. This is not a formal matter of identifying a mode of argument so as to classify Johannine material as, for example, deontological, consequentialist or teleological (though such terms may be helpful to illuminate something in the text). Rather, the rationale will be explicated in terms of the particular logic at work in the Gospel. To describe what is meant by this, we must move on to consider my mode of reading John.

3b. Literary-theological reading

My intention is to explicate the rationale of an ethical requirement according to the text's own logic rather than that which can be imputed to, or derived from, it.[98] What this means is that I must come to my argument with a sense of how this logic can be construed. This in turn requires an answer to a more basic question, namely what *is* this text? Rather than beginning with the term 'Gospel', I start once more from what the author directly tells the reader: 'these things [the foregoing episodes from Jesus' life] are written in order that you (pl.) may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God' (20:31).[99] What we have, therefore, is a narrative account of a figure who is purportedly both human and divine. According to John, this figure, Jesus, existed with God from the beginning (1:1–2), became flesh (1:14), lived as an itinerant Rabbi (1:19 – 19:29), died by crucifixion (19:30), and rose (20:1–14), promising post-mortem glory to his disciples (14:3, cf. 6:39–40), all in first-century Palestine.

---

[97] The alternatives offered by Burridge, who develops this framework on the back of Richard Hays's and James Gustafson's work, show that he is not wedded to technical terminology, admitting of a certain breadth in his concepts ("Methodological Reflections", 241).

[98] We have seen how tempting it is in the case of socio-economic issues in particular to short-circuit this process by referring to historical context or the Johannine Epistles.

[99] A proper examination of the Johannine purpose statement will follow below (chap. 2, 2a).

Symbolic worldview

This is where another concept discussed by Burridge is useful. For what I have just described is the 'symbolic worldview' of the text within which its ethical requirements must be understood.[100] Because the scope of this symbolic worldview encompasses all of history (it begins before it and ends after it) there is no *a priori* need to posit an external framework within which to interpret the Gospel. As such, my mode of reading is a literary one rather than a historical one. But it is also theological insofar as the text deals not only with human figures but also divine ones.[101] To say that we must engage with the way in which John conceives of God is to advocate theological interpretation. This is not a confessional exercise but, first and foremost, an aesthetic one insofar as one must engage imaginatively with the narrative in order to understand it.[102]

It is in this sense that my mode of reading the Gospel is literary-theological.[103] Its ethical requirements will be analysed strictly according to the text's symbolic worldview. Indeed, building a sense of this worldview itself will be part of discerning the ethical content of John. For this, no specific background knowledge is needed, since the author works with concepts that are generally quotidian in nature (even in reference to divine beings) and whose meaning is built up through narrative development. Inevitably there will be aspects of the historical realia of first-century Palestine that will need to have external light shed upon them in order for the text to make sense. But, again, such investigations will only be made when demanded by my particular ethical

---

[100] "Methodological Reflections", 241.

[101] Whilst the recent major study on John pledges to focus only on characters other than divine ones, van der Watt includes God in his characterisation without differentiation from other agents (*Grammar*, 232).

[102] As Francis Watson puts it, 'the faith of the interpreter is not a prerequisite for an insightful reading of a theologically significant text, for the art of interpretation requires an imaginative sympathy with ideas and perspectives that may be far from coinciding with one's own' ("Putting "Theological Interpretation" in Its Place: Three Models and Their Limits", *Journal of Theological Interpretation*, 14/1, 2020, 66–68). In this I also follow Angus Paddison in wanting to affirm the accessibility of the Bible to public readership ("Theological Interpretation and the Bible as Public Text" in *Journal of Theological Interpretation*, 8/2 (2014), 175–192).

[103] This expression is unusual but not unique. W. Gordon Campbell, for example, entitles his thematic study of Revelation in these terms (*Reading Revelation: A Literary-Theological Approach* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 2012)).

concerns.

By taking a literary-theological approach I am attempting to read John without any preconceptions about what it says or how it connects to other texts, even the Johannine Epistles. It is, of course, impossible to divest myself of all previous experience of the Gospel as part of the Canon of Scripture interpreted through Christian tradition. The task is rather like going to one's home town and trying to navigate it entirely through maps and road signs instead of intuitive knowledge and memory. Things get even more complicated when the Johannine map comes with instructions to read it with pneumatic assistance (16:13). Attempting to do this as well transforms my perspective from that of a 'weak insider' (to use Teresa Morgan's phrase) to something more like 'going native'.[104] But however all these elements play into my reading, the end goal is to produce an interpretation that is demonstrably plausible according to the text itself rather than a particular ideological standpoint. The benefit of my approach is that, by its self-imposed restriction, it pushes the very limits of what can be read from the Gospel text itself.

One note is needed on my use of 'theological' terminology. Whilst I generally eschew any technical language from the tradition, I do need a way of distinguishing between two narrative levels in the Gospel. By the 'divine' dimension, I refer to that in John which pertains to God and the relationship of God to the world. Jesus' 'divine' identity is his being the sent Son of the Father and the 'divine narrative' of John is the story of God (1:1–2), the creation of the world (1:3), the giving of Jesus for the world's life (3:16) and his prospective return to the Father (e.g. 20:17, 21:23). I am opting for this term instead of 'soteriological' or 'salvation-historical' in order to recognise that the Gospel postulates the life of God as that which is logically (if not strictly *temporally*) *prior* to creation (17:5, 24), and thus also prior to salvation.

The 'mundane' dimension denotes that which pertains to the world and its human relationships. Jesus' 'mundane' identity is thus who he is in relation to

---

[104] In her discussion of faith, Morgan says that a weak insider approach involves 'describing the views of insiders without reference to one's own confessional position' (*Roman Faith and Christian Faith: Pistis and Fides in the Early Roman Empire and Early Churches* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 25).

human society. The mundane narrative is the account of these interactions that the Gospel offers. This dimension is not, of course, easily separable from the divine one. Indeed, it is part of the burden of this thesis to elucidate the relationship between the two as it pertains to socio-economic ethics. Precisely for this reason it is important to be explicit about my use of these terms in order to have clarity in the discussion that follows. For the integrative approach to the Johannine world that I have identified as key for socio-economic ethics depends on being able to talk about the divine and mundane dimensions. I pursue this integration not as a separate thematic study but as a sensibility that informs my treatment of all the various topics with which this thesis engages.

Historical reality

My approach as it has been hitherto elucidated avoids a multitude of introductory matters around the conceptual background of John, its historicity and its historical context. Only the latter of two of these three need some comment at this stage. For the author of John clearly means for his symbolic world to be equated with the *actual* world.[105] Indeed, not even the most ardent sceptics of Johannine historicity would deny that the Palestine he describes is basically – give or take a few details – the Palestine of history. Where questions of meaning arise within this historical frame, therefore, I turn to conventional sources about that time and place.

With the question of the Gospel's historical *context* the case is more contentious. On one level, my reading strategy assumes that a precise formulation of this context is unnecessary for the Gospel's symbolic worldview to be comprehensible.[106] However, it is very difficult to read any text at all

---

[105] Cf. Susanne Luther, "The Authentication of the Past: Narrative Representations of History in the Gospel of John", *JSNT* 43/1 (2020), 68.

[106] Indeed, Frey has shown that the historical tradition and symbolic worldview (though he does not use that term) are inseparable. For the Gospel's 'theological interests, aiming at the present of the readers, are the ultimate reason for John's reshaping and creative transformation of the Jesus story' (*Theology and History in the Fourth Gospel* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2018), 203). Thus 'John is a complex web in which both levels are fused' (p. 11). Trozzo expands this aptly, stating that 'not only is the situation of the audience reflected in the narrative world; Jesus's words are spoken as if directly to the audience'. Thus

without its putative historical context (even implicitly) affecting one's perception of it. Thus I begin by accepting what increasingly appears to be a consensus position on the provenance of John: it was written around the late first-century in an urban centre (probably Ephesus) within the cultural environs of Diaspora Judaism in which mutual care for mundane needs was part of the normal way in which such communities would operate.[107] I also assume that the Epistles hail from the same basic social context and that this is reflected in their parallel use of concepts found in the Gospel.[108] Indeed, on this basis, Anderson has sounded the challenge to move in a direction more amenable to my concerns:

> 'What difference would it make for interpreting the Johannine writings if we saw their acute concerns as addressing the physical and social needs of their audiences rather than gnostic perfectionism or incorrigible pneumatism?'[109]

Whilst seeing my own work as part of addressing this challenge, I approach the task from the opposite direction. Rather than letting a presumed context shape my reading, my literary-theological approach works from within the symbolic worldview of the Gospel to elucidate its ethical requirements and their rationale.

3c. The thesis argument and key interlocutors

Each of the chapters represent a movement between concepts, ending up eventually at a clear articulation of socio-economic ethics in John. However, there is a lot of ground to cover between the Christological purpose of the Gospel and a mundane vision for community. The practice of the latter is thus

---

'the Fourth Gospel did not merely repeat past tradition; rather, it connected tradition to contemporary concerns' (*Exploring*, 107, 110).

[107] Here I am especially following Frey, as he sets out the context in "Family Ethos".

[108] This has been recognised since at least Dodd for whom the Epistle's conception of ἀγάπη is not only based upon but also illumines the Gospel's. Thus 'the life of eternity … can be lived only in community' which necessarily involves concern for some fellow human being, which will lead us to serve him at our cost' (*Johannine Epistles*, p. xlv). Loader suggests in relation to 1 John 3:16–17 that 'rather than see this as an isolated example that the author might have supplemented with a range of other ethical misdemeanours… we should see it as an underlying implication running beneath all of his statements about "love" and "hate."' ("Good News?", 478).

[109] Anderson, "Moving the Conversation Forward: Open Questions and New Directions" in *Communities in Dispute*, 285.

the tip of the Johannine iceberg, which can come with the requisite ethical force only so long as the theology beneath has been solidly articulated.

Chapter 2 begins with the ethical requirement closest to the heart of the Johannine purpose, that of believing. It examines the concept in relation to the statement of 20:30–31, which involves taking the whole Gospel's narrative into account. Whilst believing must be socially located, it is the second ethical requirement, love, that deals with social relationships themselves. An analysis of the command in 13:34 concludes that the primary exemplar to which Jesus points there is the foot washing.

Chapter 3 sets out to conduct an exegesis of the foot washing pericope (13:1–17). However, as with the case of 20:30–31, this necessitates taking in the overall narrative of the Gospel insofar as 13:1 has a retrospective as well as an introductory function. On this basis, Jesus' establishment of a divine-human community comes into view as his central purpose. The foot washing is analysed accordingly, with the conclusion that participation in this community is the ultimate goal of this action.

Chapter 4 goes to the intradivine roots of the Johannine conception of love, thus developing the theological aspect of the symbolic worldview. Examining the Father-Son relationship in John 17, it examines the basis for human participation in divine love. It integrates this with the focus of the Gospel on Jesus' death, coming up with an eschatologically shaped conception of ethics in which mundane death is the passageway to eternal life.

Chapter 5 incorporates the understanding derived from John 17 with the foot washing paradigm to expand the practical outworking of Johannine ethics. It does so by analysing the symbolism of the foot washing in a way that is compatible with the other signs in John. This establishes continuity between Jesus' actions in his public ministry and the Farewell Discourse, enabling the former to contribute more to the Gospel's ethics as 'signs of love'.

Chapter 6 looks at the sign of Jesus that both has the greatest socio-economic potential and evinces the most resistance to being read ethically, namely the feeding of the five thousand. Proposing an alternative reading of this episode gives it a significance for holistic communal ethics that emphasises, rather

than minimises, its patent Christological focus.

Chapter 7 is a brief conclusion in which the results of the thesis are summarised and some directions for further development indicated.

My main interlocutors

Since this is a wide-ranging thesis, each chapter will require a different set of interlocutors based on the specific topics being addressed. These will include several pericopes under the main themes of believing, love and signs. However, since the central debate in which this thesis participates is that of Johannine ethics, my main interlocutors will be those partaking in the contemporary debate. As well as several essays by Frey (particularly "Family Ethos", 2013) and Loader ("Good News?", 2016), these comprise two essay collections (*Rethinking*, 2012 and *Johannine Ethics*, 2017) as well as six monographs. The latter are Miranda's *Being and the Messiah* (1977), Bennema's *Mimesis*, Trozzo's *Exploring* (both 2017), Gorman's *Abide and Go* (2018), van der Watt's *Grammar* (2019) and Rushton's *Cry* (2020).

4. Conclusion

In this opening chapter I have endeavoured to set a firm foundation for my thesis. Having demonstrated the importance of my question and located it within the scholarly debate, it will have become clear that only the integration of a wide range of the Gospel's elements will help me address the question of socio-economic ethics. The particular challenge is to integrate the divine and mundane dimensions of John in a way that the Christological reality of the former does not eclipse the ethical mandate in the latter.[110]

As we move into the body of the argument, the nature of this challenge can be sharpened with reference to another quotation from Frey:

> 'The search for the ethics of the Gospel of John cannot be restricted to the notion of love, the love commandment, and the example of the footwashing

[110] Again, this will not be taken on as a separate task but will be a strategy for approaching everything in the Gospel that I deal with.

episode, but must include the Gospel's entire narrative world'.[111]

It is the argument of this thesis that it is precisely these features pointed out by Frey – the combination of the notion of love, love commandment and foot washing episode – that provide the rationale for a holistic ethical vision that he describes as 'family ethos' (though I will not myself be using this term). This vision is in turn given its particular socio-economic significance by 'the Gospel's entire narrative world', which constitutes the symbolic worldview within which I will be working.

[111] "Family Ethos", 169.

Chapter 2 – From Believing to Washing Feet: Responding to the Gospel's Relational Purpose

1. Introduction: believing as an ethical requirement?

Unlike other New Testament texts, John only seems to have one explicit ethical injunction, that of mutual love, stated programmatically in 13:34. Furthermore, instead of being expounded through further instruction as we find in the Sermon on the Mount, Johannine ethics are apparently 'reduced to the commandment of love'.[1] Yet the book's Christological purpose as set out in 20:30–31 is not that the reader might *love*, but that he or she may *believe* in Jesus on the basis of what the Gospel narrates (cf. 1:12–13; 3:16). *Within* the narrative, Jesus describes believing as the only required 'work' (6:29) and more frequently challenges people, including the disciples, to believe than to love (e.g. 3:12; 4:21; 5:47; 14:1; 20:27). Therefore, there is reason to start our consideration of ethics with the notion of believing rather than loving.[2]

In what follows I analyse the nature of Johannine believing from the perspective of the statement in 20:30–31 (section 2) before examining the love command in 13:34 (section 3). My argument is that 'believing' is an ethical requirement that is not straightforwardly a 'value, principle or rule' but may be termed a 'relational imperative'. What this means specifically is that it is a decision to accept who Jesus is, which in turn places the believer in a relationship of dependent belonging to God through him. Whilst the cause and effects of believing are not without mystery in John, the rationale is always personal encounter with Jesus and the concomitant knowledge – however partial – of his identity. Whilst believing itself does not entail particular social (or socio-economic) action, it provides the necessary relational context for

---

[1] Frey, "Family Ethos", 167; cf. Labahn "It's Only Love", 4.

[2] I generally use the participle form 'believing' in what follows, both in recognition that the nominal form πιστις does not appear in John and to avoid implying that it ever has the sense of something static, complete or formulaic such as can sometimes be connoted by the word 'faith'.

mutual human love. Where love is most explicitly raised as an ethical requirement, it is couched as a prescriptive command. Although often taken to be a general principle or universal value, it is actually premised on an example, that of the foot washing. The latter thus requires its own analysis in order to discern its ethical significance and potential socio-economic impact, hence the exegetical focus of the next chapter.

The structure and approach of what follows

This chapter will begin by introducing the purpose statement of the Gospel (20:30–31) and the ethically relevant scholarly debates around it (2a). From there I move on to a discussion of believing as it appears in v. 31, which in turn depends on the concept as it is developed in the Gospel narrative up to that point. As such, I go back to the first programmatic statement about believing (1:12).

From this point, my discussion will not engage in detailed exegesis of individual texts but attempt to synthesise the overall message of John. In this, I will build upon a recent study by Frey, which has the advantage of investigating the idea of believing alongside that of loving in a way that helps us sharpen our ethical understanding of both. Having briefly set out his findings (2b), I identify a particular area that needs further development, namely the interrelationship between Christological knowledge and a believer's relationship to God. This will require addressing three subsidiary questions (2c) before I address the main one, namely the way one must construe the connection between the human dimension of believing and its significance within the divine narrative (2d). Following this, I will be in a position to define believing as an ethical concept whose context is necessarily mundane but whose content, being directed towards God, is not inherently social (2e). On that basis, I conclude the section with an interpretation of 20:30–31 as a whole and an indication of how it relates to the discussion of love that will follow (2f). Moving on to this second concept, I begin with a focus on 13:34, setting it within its Farewell Discourse context to show how this shapes its ethical significance (3a). I then turn to look at the text itself, showing how its primary interpretative basis is the foot-washing episode that shortly precedes it (3b). A

brief conclusion (section 4) follows this and leads us into the next chapter.

2. Believing as a 'relational imperative': a dialogue with Frey

2a. The relevance of the Johannine purpose statement to ethics

Basic introduction: text and scholarship

One of the few things about John about which there is consensus is that its purpose, directly addressed to the reader, is summarised in 20:30–31:[3]

> 30 Πολλὰ μὲν οὖν καὶ ἄλλα σημεῖα ἐποίησεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐνώπιον τῶν μαθητῶν [αὐτοῦ], ἃ οὐκ ἔστιν γεγραμμένα ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τούτῳ· 31 ταῦτα δὲ γέγραπται ἵνα πιστεύ[σ]ητε ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστιν ὁ χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, καὶ ἵνα πιστεύοντες ζωὴν ἔχητε ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ.
>
> 30 Many other signs did Jesus do before his disciples, which are not written in this book. 31 But these are written in order that you (pl.) may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and in order that, believing, you may have life in his name.

As it stands in the canonical form of the Gospel, ταῦτα ('these things') can be taken to refer to everything that precedes it and thus to provide 'the hermeneutical key to the Fourth Gospel'.[4] Because of the central importance of these verses to the Gospel as a whole, debates around them generally feed into much broader thematic concerns.[5] The text-critical problem of the verb

---

[3] The first time the author addresses the reader is where he attributes the account of a soldier breaking the dead Jesus' legs on the cross to eyewitness testimony 'so that you may believe' (19:35). This use of a nearly identical phrase (ἵνα καὶ ὑμεῖς πιστεύ[σ]ητε – including the same textual variant) to that which is found in 20:30–31, identifies the event at 19:35 as of one of those things that the author includes in what is written so that the reader may believe. The repetition of the purpose statement in 21:24–25 (albeit with variations) may indicate that 21:1 onwards is a later addition. However, there is no indication that the fundamental purpose of the Gospel is altered and 20:30–31 can be taken, in its canonical position, to refer to all of John.

[4] Gilbert van Belle, "The Meaning of ΣΗΜΕΙΑ in John 20,30–31", *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses. Louvain Journal of Theology and Canon Law* 74 (1998), 300. Even Bultmann, who inspired the idea of a 'signs source', says of these verses 'natürlich blickt die Aussage nicht speziell auf die Ostergeschichten zurück, sondern ähnlich wie 12:37 auf das ganze Wirken Jesu, in das aber die Ostergeschichten einbegriffen sind' (*Das Evangelium des Johannes* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1950), 541).

[5] E.g., Catrin Williams begins her discussion of Johannine soteriology from its expression in 20:30–31 ("Faith, Eternal Life, and the Spirit in the Gospel of John", in Judith Lieu and

πιστεύ[σ]ητε is often attached to attempts to identify the Gospel audience, and particularly whether or not they are thought to be Christian believers already.[6] Another line of inquiry raised by these verses is the relationship of John to other texts with similar purposes. This is not only pursued in relation to Greek rhetorical texts,[7] but also other Christian gospels, whether canonical,[8] or not.[9]

Although some of these debates have peripheral bearing on the ethical significance of believing, they are typically not carried out with this aim in mind. One relevant matter from those just mentioned, however, is that of the disputed verb in 20:31. I accept the evidence in favour of the present subjunctive (πιστεύητε) without that being determinative of either what is meant by 'believing' or who the prospective audience is.[10]

That the role of believing in Johannine thought requires a broader view of the text has been recognised in the contemporary debate on ethics, which has rarely dealt in detail with these specific verses.[11] Whilst there is widespread

---

Martinus de Boer (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Johannine Studies* (Oxford: OUP, 2018), 347–365). Gilbert van Belle examines the Johannine signs from this same perspective in "ΣΗΜΕΙΑ", an essay and topic to which we return in chap. 5.

[6] Donald Carson's debate with Gordon Fee well demonstrates the combination of text-critical, grammatical, historical and theological questions raised by this problem. See Carson's "Syntactical and Text-Critical Observations on John 20:30–31: One More Round on the Purpose of the Fourth Gospel", *JBL* 124/4 (2005), 693–714.

[7] Keener points out how 'widespread this rhetorical convention was', citing several examples in Greco-Roman literature that operate, like John, by taking a persuasive sample from a larger body of known stories to say what they want to say about their subjects (*John*, 1214).

[8] Chris Keith claims, with some hyperbole, that both these verses and those closing the Gospel 'exhibit a near-manic obsession with the *written* status of the Johannine account of Jesus' that is most likely competitive with the Synoptics "The Competitive Textualisation of the Jesus Tradition in John 20:30–31 and 21:24–25", *CBQ* 78/2 (2016), 324.

[9] Francis Watson*, Gospel Writing: A Canonical Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013). Watson argues that 'the Egerton fragments make it possible to recover a theological trajectory away from the Jesus/Moses issue that so preoccupied Christian Jews, towards ever more radical formulations of Jesus' relation to God' (p. 340). He also suggests an open-minded approach to comparisons with the gospels attributed to Thomas and Peter, since 'the canonical judgment cannot be made from any other standpoint other than the one already shaped by the canonical decision' (p. 342).

[10] Carson concludes with Fee that this is the much better reading but puts forward a convincing case that this fact in itself does not necessitate a pastoral over an evangelistic purpose ("John 20:30–31", 705–708).

[11] Byers, who does not address ethics directly, takes from 20:30–31 what amounts to ethical import, saying on its basis that 'the Gospel is regarded as a theological interpretation of an historic figure claiming divine status and written to create and shape communal identity' (*Ecclesiology*, 17). Van der Watt does include a discussion these verses (*Grammar*, 39–43), but no overall clarity about the role of believing emerges from it due to the ambiguity in such claims as 'faith stands central, not only structurally, but also in the argument itself' (p. 41).

agreement that believing is ethically relevant, there is a lack of clarity about *how* it is so, which suggests that care is needed in addressing this topic.

Ambiguity in the debate on ethics

For some scholars, believing itself *constitutes* an ethical act so that statements not normally thought of as moral injunctions can be so taken (e.g. becoming children of God, 1:12, and being told to 'come and see', 1:39).[12] For others, believing *leads to* ethics, even if the former does not prescribe any details of the latter.[13] Yet in much of the recent work on Johannine ethics there is inconsistency about which of the two options is being argued, and how it fits into a larger ethical schema.[14] Part of the reason for this is that the text is read through extraneous ideological frameworks.[15] There has also been a tendency to explain the meaning of believing by associating it with other words (such as 'acceptance' and 'commitment'), perhaps with the justification that the Gospel itself uses terms that seem synonymous with it (e.g. μένω in 15:4).[16] But this does not take us much further towards a conceptualisation of believing in relation to the narrative of John as a whole, which is necessary in forming a sense of its ethical significance. Significant headway has recently been made in this direction by Frey, whose comparison of the concept of believing with that of

---

The pericope plays no part in his eventual decision to start from 'where ethical standards come from', which he identifies as the statement about believing in John 6:28–29 (p. 117).

[12] See, respectively, Sherri Brown, "Believing in the Gospel of John: The Ethical Imperative to Becoming [sic] Children of God" in *Johannine Ethics*, 3 and Toan Do, who maintains that the aim is Christological proclamation but 'the way in which the proclaimers achieve their faith in Jesus' is ethical ("The Johannine Request to "Come and See" and an Ethic of Love" in *Johannine Ethics*, 178).

[13] See Karl Weyer-Menkhoff, "Ethics in John by Considering Scripture as Work of God" in *Rethinking*, 164, and Bennema, *Mimesis*, 144–147.

[14] Trozzo points to 6:28 to argue that 'belief' is itself ethical but also describes it as as the 'bridge' that needs the 'missing link' of imitation for it to constitute ethics (*Exploring*, 94, cf. her similar statement on p. 179). Van der Watt states that faith 'forms the initial entrance into a life that leads to correct moral behaviour' (n. 48, p. 119) but then argues that John, unlike James or Hebrews, sees faith *as* moral behaviour (n. 56, pp. 120–121), an ambivalence that is never resolved (cf. his discussion on p. 131).

[15] Zimmermann points out that 'the separation of theology and ethics, does not correspond to ancient thinking, but instead reflects a structure of perception that was introduced by Rudolf Bultmann in order to describe Pauline ethics as an indicative-imperative schema' ("Is there ethics?", 62).

[16] Van der Watt's eventual definition of faith is as 'self-sacrificing, intellectual and existential acceptance of and commitment to [Jesus]' that 'leads to an obedient life' (*Grammar*, 133).

love makes it particularly amenable to my concern with ethics.[17] His essay will prove useful in drawing out the most challenging areas of understanding. As such I will engage in ongoing dialogue with it in this section. Before that, however, I will briefly set out the chief features of believing as the concept is introduced by the text itself.

2b. Believing in John and the interpretation of Frey

All the basic characteristics of the concept of believing referred to in the purpose statement at the end of the Gospel can in fact be gleaned from its first programmatic words on the topic. In contrast to the world that does not receive Jesus, John 1:12 says:

> ὅσοι δὲ ἔλαβον αὐτόν, ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς ἐξουσίαν τέκνα θεοῦ γενέσθαι, τοῖς πιστεύουσιν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ…

'Believing' is a matter of responding to Jesus himself (ἔλαβον αὐτόν, cf. 13:20), sometimes through another (cf. 1:7; 4:42), that involves recognition of his identity (τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ, cf. 17:11). This results in being given divine filiality (τέκνα θεοῦ, cf. 11:52), not as a result of mechanistic causation but, rather, as gift (ἔδωκεν, cf. 5:26). None of the other 96 occurrences of πιστεύω in the Gospel, or its synonyms (of which ἔλαβον is one) countermand this basic understanding. However, complications inevitably arise when trying to probe them in further detail. What is the antecedent of, and motivation for, the human response of believing? What lies at the heart of Christological identity within its manifold Johannine articulations? What does it involve in practice to 'believe' (i.e. is internal knowledge, public confession or something quite different in mind)? What kind of divine-human relationship is implied by the phrase 'children of God'?

These are the questions that I need to give some attention to in order to provide a frame for the ethical significance of believing. Instead of conducting an exhaustive study of the relevant Gospel texts (a task sufficient for several

---

[17] Jörg Frey, "Glauben und Lieben im Johannesevangelium" in Christina Hoegen-Rohls et al. (eds.), *Glaube, Liebe, Gesprach: Neue Perspektiven Johanneischer Ethik* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2018), 1–54.

PhD theses), I build here on work already done. In "Glauben und Lieben", Frey conducts a thorough analysis of believing in John. It is premised on the stance I am taking on 20:30–31 as representing the 'Ziel und Zweck der Abfassung des ganzen Evangelium' (p. 8). Nevertheless, his aim is a more general explication of believing and loving rather than that pericope itself, or even the matter of ethics more generally.[18] The particular reason for engaging so closely with this essay is that it represents something of a microcosm of Frey's thought on the Gospel, which comprises some of the most prolific and influential work in contemporary scholarship. As such, the key issues to which I draw attention indicate wider trends in interpretation and not just idiosyncratic features of an obscure publication.

From the outset of his essay, Frey recognises that addressing the relationship between believing and loving brings us into some heavy ideological traffic.[19] Yet, whilst acknowledging that this context inevitably shapes interpretative perceptions, he commits to focus on 'Beobachtungen zur Lexik und Semantik sowohl der Rede vom "Glauben"' (p. 1). Accordingly, Frey considers all the occurrences of the word, focusing attention on where they appear 'an Schlüsselstellen des Evangeliums' (pp. 4–8) before showing how these build up into a wider network of meaning (pp. 9–14).[20] The comprehensiveness of the Johannine concept is evident in the fact that '"Glaube"im frühen Christentum zur Chiffre für christliche Existenz überhaupt wird' (p. 19). Although I am not examining love at this point, it is worth mentioning that Frey sees it as playing such a similar role to believing as to make the two virtually synonymous.[21] As such, 'diese Liebe zu praktizieren, ist eben der Modus, in ihr und damit in der Liebe Jesu, in der Christusbeziehung (oder darf man sagen: »im Glauben«?) zu

---

[18] Despite Frey's essay being in a book about ethics, he does not say if believing is 'ethical' or not, and even seems to deny it at one point by comparing it to the 'ethical' speech of love ('Kein einziger Satz im Vierten Evangelium, in dem vom Glauben die Rede ist, ist in irgendeinder Weise mit der 'ethischen' Rede vom "Lieben" verbunden', "Glauben und Lieben", 19).

[19] He notes that these concepts 'stehen in einem weiteren Sinne für das Verhältnis von Gottesbezug und Weltbezug, von Dogmatik und Ethik … im Kontext reformatorischer Theologie' ("Glauben und Lieben", 1).

[20] Frey refers to these stages as 'syntaktische Verbindungen' ("Glauben und Lieben", 9–11) and then 'die Vernetzung der syntaktischen Verbindungen' (pp. 11–14).

[21] On this point, and in his understanding in general, Frey's conclusions are similar to those of Bultmann in his conception of faith, though he does not emphasise the eschatological angle (Bultmann, *Theology,* 70–92).

bleiben' (p. 32).

Frey's essay demonstrates well how conceptually central believing is to John, implying that one cannot understand anything else (including ethics) without it. Moreover, this essay answers, whether directly or indirectly, all of the questions that I raised from John 1:12. Therefore, I will now address those questions, in each case taking Frey's position as the point of departure for the discussion that follows.

2c. What is the antecedent of, and motivation for, response to Jesus?

Frey stresses repeatedly that believing is a *response* to Jesus, hence his term 'Reaktion' becomes the most frequent synonym for believing (p. 8, 11, 12, 15). He states this in more theological terms as he comments that 'wie die Liebe, weiß sich auch der Glaube bei Johannes von Gottes vorgängigem Handeln getragen' (p. 49). Yet one is not merely responding to *works*. One is responding to a *person*, the 'Begegnung' with Jesus (whether directly or through his word) that is so crucial in the Gospel narrative.[22] There is, of course, something ineffable about the impact of any human encounter. However, there is an additional theological factor at work in encountering Jesus insofar as a person's response depends on his or her being drawn in by God (p. 16).[23] This is an indication that believing is inherently mysterious.

A much overlooked aspect of Johannine believing that must be added to this account is the question of motivation. For there are indications in the text that it is love that most profoundly motivates one's decision whether to believe or not.[24] In the programmatic passage from 3:16 onwards, this comes out with special clarity. There Jesus connects his own coming as the light to a negative

---

[22] He uses this term especially in relation to Jesus' interaction with the Samaritan woman in 4:1–42 ("Glauben und Lieben", 6, 17) but also makes it clear that 20:30–31 assumes the necessity of such an encounter (p. 13).

[23] This is most clear in chap. 6, which makes belief a 'work' (6:28) but apparently states that a limited number of people have been given to Jesus by the Father (6:37). Then it is broadened again to say that all may see and believe (6:39) but, again, only when drawn by the Father are people able to come (6:44) (cf. Harold Attridge, "Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility" in John Ashton (ed.), *Revealed Wisdom: Studies in Apocalyptic in Honour of Christopher Rowland* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 188–189).

[24] See Attridge, "Divine Sovereignty", 191–192 for this point.

anthropological judgment (3:19):

> ἠγάπησαν οἱ ἄνθρωποι μᾶλλον τὸ σκότος ἢ τὸ φῶς
> People loved the darkness more than the light

This expands the preceding more general affirmation that one's love is the reason for not believing (3:18). There is not only an ethical but an explicitly social component to how people direct their love. We see this especially in Jesus' dialogue with 'the Jews' who oppose him after healing on the Sabbath (5:16). As the encounter reaches its climax, Jesus equates their lack of love for God (5:42) with their seeking social glory (or honour, δόξα in 5:41, 43). Their misdirected love is, without ambiguity, given as the explanation for their failure to believe (5:44, 41, cf. 12:24–25, 42–43). Whilst not by any means expunging all mystery from the process, there are grounds to think that the immediate antecedent of believing is a yet more fundamental response of love towards (or against) Jesus and God.[25]

2d. What lies at the heart of Christological identity within its manifold Johannine articulations?

The multifaceted character of Jesus' identity is part of what gives the Gospel its distinctive character as a 'Christological spectrum'.[26] As such there is a danger in reducing it to a single statement. And yet the purpose statement suggests that there is some justification in doing exactly that. In fact, Frey contends that the various phrases and combinations of terms in the Gospel amount to one thing: "'Glauben" im johannesichen Sinn ist insofern offenbar weithin austaschbar mit "glauben *an* Jesus" oder "glauben, *dass* Jesus der Sohn Gottes ist"' (p. 12).

---

[25] Attridge raises this conundrum as what he sets out to answer in "Divine Sovereignty" but at the end admits that he cannot answer the question: 'Is there perhaps something that determines what someone loves? Perhaps, but for the evangelist there is nothing more fundamental than love, either as a theological or an anthropological category' (p. 199).

[26] This is the apt subtitle of Craig Koester (ed.), *Portraits of Jesus in John: A Christological Spectrum* (London: T&T Clark, 2019). Williams, in her essay in that volume on Jesus as prophet, notes that John never limits Jesus to this or any other humanly conceived role. He is 'the unique Son who speaks and acts God's words not through his prophetic commissioning but because, for John, he is the living embodiment of God's Word' ("Jesus the Prophet: Crossing the Boundaries of Prophetic Belief and Expectations in the Gospel of John", 107).

This helpfully draws attention to the fact that Christological identity is, at its heart, relational; one always believes in Jesus *in relation* to God. Yet Jesus is frequently designated by his identity *in relation to people*. Such is already clear from the messianic appellation χριστός in the purpose statement, which lends a soteriological inflection to ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ as well as ascribing divinity to the conception of the Messiah.[27] The latter implies a social dimension in that it denotes a salvific figure related in the first place to Israel (1:41–49), then Samaria and the world (4:22–26). Moreover, in the most typically Johannine statements of Christological identity, it is the relationship of Jesus to those whom he saves that is at the forefront. For all the 'I Am' sayings refer to who Jesus is *to people*, emphasising the nature of salvation as 'life-giving'.[28] Jesus' 'I Am' sayings affirm *not* who he is 'in himself' but who he is in relation *to others*. What meaning could there be in identifying himself as 'bread' (6:35), 'shepherd' (10:11) or 'resurrection' (11:25) if it were not for the presence of hungry people, sheep and the dead?

The very sequence of thought in 20:30–31 makes it highly probably that Jesus' Christological designation is primarily as life-giver. Otherwise, the life that results from believing appears somewhat arbitrary, like a commercial transaction using a paper currency long since divorced from the value it represents. Seeing Jesus' relational identity primarily in relation to the believer also mediates the dichotomy of objective and subjective belief that has often troubled interpretation.[29] As Morgan points out, this applies just as well to the formulation πιστεύειν ὅτι as the more ostensibly 'personal' ones.[30] Thus

---

[27] Brown notes that because the purpose statement immediately follows Thomas's confession, there is no doubt that 'Son of God' refers to divinity rather than simply a traditional messianic title (*John*, 1059–60). Yet the fact that the author chose this conventional term and juxtaposed it with an equally conventional term ('Christ') shows that he wanted readers to make the link between the two.

[28] As Thompson puts it in relation to the "I Am" sayings, 'in offering the gift of life Jesus exercises a unique divine prerogative' (*The God of the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 87).

[29] Whilst Frey does not make the point I am making here, he does note that belief is always personal in John. As such, he suggests that the Augustinian 'theologische Unterscheidung zwischen Glaubensakt und Glaubensinhalt, *fides qua creditur* und *fides quae creditur*' is thoroughly unapplicable to this Gospel ("Glauben und Lieben", 12).

[30] Morgan observes that '*pisteuein hoti*… always takes place within relationships, actual or potential, between Jesus and the elect' ("Pisteuein and its Relations in the Johannine Corpus" in *Roman Faith*, 427). It will already be clear that I do not hold to Morgan's thoroughgoing predestinarian account of Johannine thought, which her term 'elect' alludes to.

to believe in Jesus as these things is simultaneously to accept relationship to him as the life-giver upon whom one depends. On this basis, Frey is justified in arguing simultaneously that the *content* of Christology is central and that this does not subsist as 'objective belief' that can be formulated as a body of data.[31] But this still leaves us with the question of what it means to believe in practice.

2e. What does it involve in practice to 'believe'?

Believing as confession

Frey avoids defining believing as a particular action, instead describing its human dimension with a variety of different terms used in John, referring to a number of individual verses that together paint a composite picture.[32] However, what emerges as definitive from his discussion is the idea of confession, which he uses to explicate the meaning of believing on numerous occasions (pp. 6, 9, 11, 41), notably in reference to 20:31 (p. 8). It is the unexpected emergence of confession in his discussion of love and belief in John 14 that shows the weight he is putting on the notion.[33] He engages in some uncharacteristically tendentious exegesis to make this point: he interprets Jesus' challenge for the disciples to love him in 14:28 as a call to make the confession of Christological identity that he had shortly before encouraged them to believe (14:10—11) (p. 50).[34] Such confession is implied to be the *sine qua non* of a response to God, and thus salvation ('Teilhabe am Heil', pp. 16, 19). Frey nowhere talks about where genuine believing has its beginning (an

---

[31] Frey refers to this content as the 'inhaltlichen [Dimension]' of Christology ("Glauben und Lieben", 12). He does on occasion use the nominal form of *glauben* in this essay, e.g., p. 14, 17, 43, signalling that he attaches less semantic importance to the verbal form than I am doing here.

[32] He says that is an 'action' in relation to 2:11 ('Handlung', p. 5), 'obedience' in 3:15–16 ('Gehorsam', p. 6), 'coming to Jesus' (6:35) (p. 6) and an 'attitude' (p. 11).

[33] Frey makes an even more telling statement in direction in another essay on the theme, asserting that 'loving rightly is therefore an 'acceptance of the Johannine interpretation of Jesus' death, and of Johannine theology in general' ("Love-Relations in the Fourth Gospel: Establishing a Semantic Network" in Gilbert van Belle et al. (eds.), *Repetitions and Variations in the Fourth Gospel* (Leuven: Peeters, 2009), 195)..

[34] That the connection Frey is making is a tendentious one is illustrated by most commentators not even mentioning a connection of faith to love in 14:28 (George Beasley-Murray, *John* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 283; Michaels, *John*, 793–794; Brown, *John*, 654). Keener's interpretation is the most helpful here, pointing out that the disciples' love is 'expressed by' their joy, logically implying that their love is *prior* to this expression (*John*, 983).

interesting lacuna in itself) but his association of believing with confession bears close resemblance to the idea of conversion.[35] As such, his interpretation bears the subtle marks of a soteriological schema that claims to identify the decisive point at which one's relationship to God changes.[36]

I have given a rather more detailed account of Frey's view on this point than the previous issues. This is both because it represents a problematic tendency in Johannine interpretation and (not unrelatedly) because it is here that I want to offer my most comprehensive counter-proposal. My argument is as follows: believing has to do with a fundamental change in relational status (from belonging to the world to belonging to God) but the Gospel never identifies a point at which this happens.

Questioning the priority of confession

Looking first at confession itself, there is no doubting that it is a key requirement. It distinguishes the 'martyr' John the Baptist (1:19–28) and the 'secret believers' of 12:42, who (unlike John) are more concerned about their relationship to Jewish authorities than to God (12:43, cf. 9:22). However, there is evidence to show that confession is neither the most important aspect of response to Jesus nor is it definitive when it does happen.

In episodes that appear to narrate a dramatic passage to believing, 'confession' is not always prominent. To give just three examples, the Samaritan woman's personal experience of Jesus determines a relational response to him before there is any indication that her Christology is well developed (4:25–29). Likewise, what sustains the man born blind in faithful relation to Jesus is his fidelity to his personal experience of him (9:25), which is operative *before* his eventual confession (9:38).[37] Mary's action in 12:1–8 is surely the pinnacle of

---

[35] The only place where Frey even acknowledges a distinction between 'initial' and 'continued' believing is in relation to the text-critical problem at 20:30–31. He states that it cannot be solved but, in any case, the Gospel is written for the deepening ('vertiefen') of extant belief but could conceivably serve as 'der grundlegenden Initiation' ("Glauben und Lieben", 15, n. 22).

[36] Williams notes the tendency in Johannine scholarship to impose an 'overly fixed model of 'stages of faith" on the text ("Faith", 351).

[37] Van der Watt gives the Christological confession in 9:38 such a direct role in the man's salvation as to say that he could not have been 'saved' without it (*Grammar*, 131). Again, John

believing response to Jesus, even though there is no 'confession' or any reason to assume that she knows the significance of what she is doing. Such examples speak *against* the priority of theological knowledge. Conversely, confessions themselves, where they are highlighted, are never said to mark a decisive shift from 'not belonging' to 'belonging' to Jesus. Again, to give just two examples, Peter's confessional statement in 6:69 does not protect him from the risk of being disqualified from relationship with Jesus should he persist in his refusal of the foot washing (13:8). His confession also precedes his denial of Jesus (13:38) and it is only in hindsight that one can be assured of his restoration (21:15–19). An instance of the opposite movement is Thomas. His identification as one of Jesus' own (13:1) comes long before his famous confession in 20:28, so that there are no grounds for positing a relational change at the latter juncture.[38]

Therefore, one cannot equate the fundamental relational change that the Gospel demands with the act of confession. Indeed, no such point can be identified in the narrative at all. Broader evidence for this is in the use of the verb σῴζω, which is used in John to refer to the consequence of Jesus' salvific work in general (3:17; 5:34; 10:9; 12:47) but is never applied to a particular narrated incident. In fact, there is something inherently mysterious in the human relationship to God as told from the divine perspective right from the beginning of John. The world goes from being Jesus' own (1:3) to rejecting him (1:5, 10) without any account of how this happens. As Rensburger puts it, 'John gives no etiology of evil'.[39] This also works the other way around; there is no indication of when those who are ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου (8:23; 15:19; 17:14) become Jesus' own (13:1), although it is clear that this has happened (17:2).

---

gives us no reason to think that such temporal identification of divine action with a specific human deed is warranted.

[38] Carson, in his otherwise very careful analysis of the minutiae around the verb πιστεύω in John, states the importance of the idea of 'conversion' as 'coming to faith' in relation to Thomas, presumably referring to his confession in 20:28 ("John 20:30–31", 708). But earlier he has referred to the disciples addressed at 13:19, again presumably including Thomas, as 'believers' (p. 705), which is surely correct since he was among Jesus' 'own' (13:1). So when was Thomas 'converted'?

[39] *Johannine Faith*, 146.

Mystery working through the mundane

What we have seen repeatedly is that there is an element of mystery in the Johannine notion of believing. It is not a lacuna in the Gospel that we are to fill in; rather it is part of its positive content. This emerges from paradoxical elements in the discourse around believing: on one hand, it is demanded of people as something salvifically determinative (3:16; 20:30–31); on the other hand, it is demanded regardless of whether or not people are in relationship with Jesus already (e.g. 3:12; 4:21; 5:47; 14:1; 20:27). There are two main approaches one could make to this paradox. One would be to see 'believing' as a completely unfathomable work of God that bears no ultimate relation to human activity.[40] However, this not only flies in the face of the manifest assumption of the whole Gospel's purpose but countermands the specific statements regarding the culpability of unbelief (e.g. 16:9). An alternative approach is thus necessary.

My contention is that believing is a response to Jesus, which entails an absolute decision that is only in fact attained by sustained or repeated believing over one's whole life. What this means is that each believing response that a person makes is significant as part of a whole-life commitment to Jesus in which no single negative or positive response is of itself determinative. This makes more sense of the fact that people (including the disciples) are repeatedly exhorted to believe, rather than the idea that 'inadequate' instances of believing are meaningless. At the same time, this allows us to see the 'work' to which Jesus refers in 6:28 as a whole-life commitment rather than something that can be fully achieved by the first-century equivalent of an altar call. A whole-life understanding of believing in John does not invalidate such public confession but puts it in a wider context, incorporating a range of different believing responses (or *Glaubensakt* as Frey calls them, p. 13). Whilst some of the most commonly mentioned of these do denote elements of cognition (such as 'knowing' and 'seeing'), others have to do with movement ('entering', 10:9, 'following', 8:12) and ingestion ('eat', 6:35 and 'drink', 4:13).[41] Indeed, the

[40] This is, in fact, consonant with Frey's own reading of the statement in 12:39, which puts ultimate responsibility in the 'Wirksamkeit Gottes' ("Glauben und Lieben", 7).

[41] Bultmann acknowledges the variety of such terms but, in line with his Lutheran standpoint

most simple form of the call is to come to Jesus (5:40). Although individual spiritual experiences are included in this idea, its more direct analogue would be to joining the community of believers (17:20–21). Being 'with' them could happen well before Christological comprehension had reached maturity.

Concerns that relativising the intellectual aspect of believing makes it too nebulous miss the fact that Johannine thought guards against precisely the opposite danger.[42] The problem the Gospel confronts is much more akin to a rationalistic reduction of Christological understanding to private consent with no social (or socio-economic) consequences. Equating believing with love, and putting these under the banner of confession as Frey does, constitutes such an over-rationalisation.[43] Granted, Frey's rejoinder to this is that pre-Easter disciples are not exemplars because they cannot yet make pneumatically enabled Christological confession.[44] But this separates such confession from its wider narrative context, rendering the other activity of the characters in relation to Jesus meaningless. Precisely such activity is valued in John *as well as* confession, not simply as a preparation for the latter (again, Mary in 12:1–8 is the classic example).

It is no coincidence that the main exemplars of believing in John 1–12 are marginalised figures whose believing shows no signs of intellectual prowess. Marginalisation of this kind could, as Rushton points out in relation to 7:49, have included ignorance of the Torah.[45] On this basis, the conception of believing we adopt is ethically significant, even if we cannot say at this point what social *content* it may or may not have. The importance of the

---

on such matters, reduces them all to responses to the word or Word (*Theology*, 70).

[42] Frey claims that 'die Annahme eines rein aktualen, nicht mit spezifischen Inhalten verbundenen Glaubens erscheint als eine textlich nicht begründbare, eher aus modernen theologischen Erwägungen inspirierte Konstruktion' ("Glauben und Lieben", 12–13).

[43] Miranda sees this as a danger but responds in the exact opposite way. He argues on the basis of John 5:24 and 1 John 3:14 that belief and love *are* identical (*Being and the Messiah*, 74). However, he sees this assertion as a vital defence against 'the mistake known as Christianity' in which idea of 'pure truths' associated with faith 'constitute an ivory tower where the mind takes refuge from the imperative to struggle against the world as it is' (p. 78), a struggle that he argues is equated in John with love (e.g. in relation to 1 John 3:16–17, p. 102).

[44] This point is most clearly expressed in reference to 2:22 whereby "'glauben" mit "(richtig/in der Tiefe) verstehen" zusammenhängt und dass gerade hinsichtlich dieses Verstehens zwischen der Situation in der Zeit Jesu und der nachösterlichen Zeit der vom Geist erinnerten Gemeinde… zu unterscheiden ist' ("Glauben und Lieben", 5–6).

[45] *Cry*, xxviii.

understanding that I have developed here is that it shows how believing is a response to Jesus whose Christological knowledge cannot be separated from a whole-life commitment. This retains a both the priority of actual encounter with Jesus and a space for the element of mystery in divine action, whether through the Spirit (e.g. 3:8) or the Father (e.g. 6:44).

2f. What kind of divine-human relationship does 'children of God' imply?

Frey takes John 1:12 as a significant verse for the meaning of believing, asserting on its basis that:

> 'Die Gotteskindschaft, die Zugehörigkeit zur *familia Dei*, ist hier durch die Rede vom »Glauben« »an seinen Namen« näher bestimmt' (p. 5).

Quite apart from the fact that the relationship between 'believing' and 'belonging' is not spelled out (see below, 2g), this statement raises a number of weighty theological issues. The first set surround the idea of *familia Dei*.[46] Who is included in this group? And is it an eschatological reality awaiting further realisation in the future or the life in relation to Father and Son that one experiences already (17:3)? If the latter, is it to be equated with the community embodied in the 'Familienethik' (p. 32), an 'ethisch konkret praktizierte Solidarität der *familia Dei* in materiellen und geistigen Dimensionen, in einer oft feindlichen Welt' (p. 37)?[47] One may also inquire as to whether the relationships in it are ones of ontological kinship between human and divine parties. If so, can such relational configurations really be described with such mundane terms as 'relationship' ('Verhältnis', pp. 27, 33, 'Christusbeziehung', p. 32) and 'attachment' ('Verbundenheit', pp. 12, 25)?[48] These are used as if

---

[46] Although mentioned twice more (pp. 32, 37), it is not footnoted. As far as I can tell, Frey has not written anything on the concept and does not base his work in any theological treatments of it. According to his earlier work ("Family Ethos", 189) he derives the idea from van der Watt's work on family metaphors in John (*Families of the King* (Leiden: Brill, 2000).

[47] The phrase 'Familienethik' does not seem to mean anything different from what Frey talks about in his piece "Family Ethos", hence the term 'Familienethos' on p. 32. He is not concerned to maintain the terminological distinction between ethics and ethos that I am working with.

[48] It is a seldom noted point that our English term 'relationships', though it does have a modern Greek equivalent (σχέση), has no approximation in the New Testament. It generally goes without question that the term can be used to speak of human-divine interaction and connection. But it is worth bearing in mind that its general usage as a sociological concept does not carry the same necessity for ontological or covenantal significance as theological understanding would demand.

they describe what is happening in John without further theological explication.[49] Similar questions arise with the idea of 'belonging' ('Zugehörigkeit', also used on p. 18), which suggests something akin to 'participation'. Indeed, the word 'Teilhabe' is used elsewhere (pp. 16, 19) but, again, without indication of its precise meaning.

My point is not to criticise Frey for failing to produce a volume on systematics to accompany his essay on this single biblical topic. Rather, I am trying to illustrate what is involved in understanding the nature of divine-human relationship implied by the term τέκνα θεοῦ. The importance of this for my own ethical concerns is especially stark when it comes to the challenge of working out how something like Frey's concrete *Familienethik* arises from John as a theological necessity and not just a historical contingency. Pursuit of a clearer conception of the divine-human relationship will be in two stages that can only be mentioned here but will be taken up below. Firstly, I will need to ask what kind of community the Gospel seeks to engender, whether it be best articulated as *familia Dei* or something else (chap. 3, section 2). Secondly, I will need to examine how intradivine relationships work in relation to divine-human (and indeed intrahuman) relationships. This will be a more weighty task than the first; it will require my developing the notions of participation and ontology in relation to Jesus' prayer in John 17 (chap. 4). For now it suffices to say that the divine-human relationship into which believing brings one requires more sustained explication if this element of Johannine thought is to bear ethical fruit.

2g. Defining believing as an ethical concept

Having now built up an initial picture of believing in John, I am in a position to venture a definition of the concept and draw out its ethical contours.

Believing in John is a response to Jesus that accepts his identity as the one

---

[49] Morgan makes a similar complaint: 'When divine–human relationships involving *pistis/fides* (and therefore trust) are discussed by classicists, they are usually assumed without argument to be analogous to intra-human relationships, perhaps because the analogy is taken to be entailed when human beings conceive of the divine anthropomorphically' ("Introduction" in *Roman Faith*, 24).

> who gives life and thus, in conjunction with an imperceptible work of God, commits oneself to belong to him within a wider divine-human relationship.

Several things militate against a straightforward incorporation of this concept within a standard way of understanding ethical requirements. The strong element of mystery attendant with divine encounter gives the concept an unfathomability that some have found incompatible with the way ethics is ordinarily conceived.[50] Indeed, even the human side of the equation is difficult to categorise. Believing is not a prescribed rule, value or paradigm, and although it does involve the adoption of a worldview (see below, 2h), this is too cognitive a way to characterise it. Bennema, adopting a virtue ethic framework, suggests that 'belief is a *meta-virtue* that links the Johannine virtues and the supreme moral good of life'.[51] But even this suggestion is not quite satisfactory, since it is insufficiently relational as a concept. One cannot get away from the *sui generis* element in Johannine believing, bound up as it is with Christological identity. However, this does not mean that it is thoroughly inimical to all recognisably ethical terminology.

I would propose the term 'relational imperative', which is both idiomatic and, as Morgan notes, connects it with comparable contemporary notions.[52] Moreover, the understanding I have developed here is fairly consonant with a mainstream interpretation of the concept, which is that of Bultmann. His famous formulation is apt here: 'der Glaube ist nichts anders als die… Entscheidung gegen die Welt für Gott'.[53] This 'Entscheidung' may well sound too dramatic and heroic for the Gospel's portrayal as it is depicted in the foregoing discussion. But this impression is mitigated by two qualifying factors. Firstly, the decision necessarily has an initial passive moment (in acceptance).[54] Indeed, this is part of what gives it its offence. Secondly, the

---

[50] Meeks sees unfathomability as part of what makes Johannine belief is impossible to analyse ethically ("Ethics", 318–320).

[51] Bennema, "Virtue Ethics and the Johannine Writings" in *Johannine Ethics*, 266.

[52] Morgan agrees in that 'Pistis is a relational concept' but argues, contra Bultmann, that this does not make it entirely unique ("Introduction", 4). My intention is not to claim such absolute uniqueness for the Johannine concept since, as she points out, a 'relational imperative' fits with the 'relational concept' of faith/trust in its milieu. Yet at the same time, the definition of Johannine believing in reference to Jesus makes its *sui generis* element unmistakable.

[53] Bultmann, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1953), 423.

[54] Cf. Sherri Brown's conclusion on the basis of John 1:12 that belief is ethical in that it is a

character of believing as an absolute decision can only be worked out through the whole life of an individual. One's often apparently inconsequential decisions all contribute to (if not strictly *add up* to) the whole. Its fulfilment only comes about through the commitment of one's life to Jesus and the divine-human relationship that he is establishing. This is indeed the life that Jesus brings, hence believing has an eschatological purview (to be explored further below, 2h).[55]

Bultmann's formulation also draws attention to a final aspect of believing in John. For up to this point in my explication, the concept has no inherently social dimension. Yet this changes when we see the decision in its negative aspect as a decision *against the world*.[56] Moreover, because of the necessity for believing to happen within the mundane realm, it has consequences for one's existence socially. For all who believe within the Gospel account do so on the basis of encounter with the man Jesus' actions and words. There is no encounter with him as Son of God that is not mediated through the mundane.[57] Likewise, those who believe later do so through the testimony of the disciples' words (17:20) and actions (17:21).[58] This does not change when we take the work of the Paraclete into account; for whilst it cannot be *reduced to* these things, there is no indication that it happens *apart from* them.[59] At the same time, we cannot ignore the fact that πιστεύω is only ever used of people in relation to the Father or the Son. Making and sustaining the decision to belong to Jesus has social consequences that are part of what it means to believe; these are both negative (such as those suffered by the man born blind, 9:33,

---

matter of receiving – 'receiving the Word of God, receiving one another' ("Believing in John", 23).

[55] Hence the similarity of my interpretation with Bultmann's 'Annahme der christlichen Botschaft' that is at once an 'Übergang in die eschatologische Existenz' (*Theologie*, 417, 424).

[56] Insofar as Meeks sees ethics in the Gospel at all, it is in such a stance towards the world, which Meeks sees as 'sectarian' ("Ethics", 323–325).

[57] Frey apparently acknowledges this in reference to 20:29, where he says that John aims not for a 'sightless' faith but for one that perceives the world 'nicht nur auf der weltlich-"irdischen" Ebene' but in the revelation of Jesus through it ("Glauben und Lieben", 16).

[58] Although he is speaking within the frame of the narrative, Frey recognises this in the statement that 'Glaube entsteht im Zusammenspiel des Zeugnisses von bereits Glaubenden und einer eigenen Begegnung mit Jesus' ("Glauben und Lieben", 17).

[59] This point is strengthened if we interpret the words of 14:17 about the Paraclete (ὑμεῖς γινώσκετε αὐτό, ὅτι παρ' ὑμῖν μένει καὶ ἐν ὑμῖν ἔσται) to mean that it has already been with the disciples through being in and acting through Jesus (cf. 1:33).

and feared by his parents, 9:22) and positive (joining the community along with whom one believes). But believing never refers to a social relationship. As such, to understand the social outworking of a person's relationship to Jesus, we must turn to the concept of love itself, as we do below (2i).

2h. Life within the Johannine purpose

The Johannine concept 'life' has come up at a number of key junctures in this chapter so far. It lies at the heart of Christological identity as the 'life-giver', can be identified with the divine-human relationship that Frey labels *familia Dei* and, finally, it is the eschatological fulfilment of the whole-life decision by which I have characterised 'believing'. From this we have the beginnings of an understanding whereby 'life' is connected to believing as its object (in Jesus) and telos (in the life that he brings). We need now to cement this understanding by looking briefly at the concept of life itself before setting out its connection to believing in a final reading of 20:30–31.

ζωή in John

The word ζωή appears in nearly half of its occurrences with the modifier αἰώνιος but, as Dodd notes, 'without any apparent difference of meaning'.[60] It first denotes a *theological* reality, being a property of the Son (specifically the Logos, 1:4) shared with the Father (5:26, cf. 12:50). As such, we must qualify the assertion that Jesus' Christological identity as life (stated most explicitly in the I Am sayings of 11:25 and 14:6) is life-*giver*. For although the *modes* of his giving life (e.g. as bread, shepherd, and resurrection) only have meaning in relation to people, *life itself* is inherent in his divine being. By the same token, 'life' is never explicated in the Gospel with relation to God; instead, it is defined soteriologically in 17:3:

> αὕτη δέ ἐστιν ἡ αἰώνιος ζωὴ ἵνα γινώσκωσιν σὲ τὸν μόνον ἀληθινὸν θεὸν καὶ ὃν ἀπέστειλας Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν.
>
> This is eternal life, that they may know you the only true God and the one

[60] *Interpretation*, 144.

whom you sent, Jesus Christ

The use of the verb γινώσκω is noteworthy here. Although it is often nearly synonymous with πιστεύω, it here denotes an eschatological reality that is ill-fitted to the intrinsically liminal connotation of believing; there 'knowing' does not simultaneously imply a decision *not* to 'know' a competing object of allegiance. Rather, the focus in 17:3 is on the divine-human relationship itself, whose establishment is at the heart of the Johannine narrative. This theme will be developed in the following two chapters, the latter of which will take up the context of John 17 itself.

For the present argument it is important to observe that believing and life have in common that both refer to being in relationship with Jesus and God. Indeed, since believing in Jesus entails accepting him as the life-giver, too stark a differentiation between the two concepts is unwarranted. Yet there is a distinction; believing is characterised by liminality and has to do with decision, whereas life is the reality of divine-human relationship itself. It denotes the qualitative dimension of this life.

The eschatological telos and present reality of life

Life can therefore be thought of as the telos of believing, even though the former is already present in the latter. There is thus a way in which it functions teleologically in an ethical sense, as is evidenced by the number of statements (including 20:30–31 itself) where the goal of believing is that a person may have life (e.g. 3:16, 5:24; 6:47; 11:25). However, the notion of teleology must be qualified by the fact that, rather than being earned, life comes by divine initiative (10:10) as a gift (as per the specific language used to convey this in 10:28 and 17:2). This puts the onus on a person to receive by drinking from Jesus' water (4:14), coming to him (5:39–40), following him (e.g. 8:12).

These images illustrate how such receiving is, as we already saw in our discussion of believing, active. Despite the use of gift language, we must bear in mind that what the Gospel means by 'life' is a not an object to possess but a relationship. Neither is the knowing that constitutes life some kind of nebulous

mutual intertwinement nor is it static or timeless (as per Dodd).[61] It is a knowledge of identity and 'moves towards a mutual, lasting bond, to reciprocal immanence … which is based on the unity and mutual bond between the Father and Jesus'.[62] This unity, moreover, cannot be detached from the *narrative* identity of God, which includes knowing Jesus Christ as the sent one. As such, eternal life involves knowing the divine narrative and, moreover, being part of it. It is this that has made it amenable to narrative ethics.[63] At the same time, life is not, strictly speaking, an ethical requirement, unlike the 'relational imperative' of believing by which one receives it.[64]

My description thus far may imply that the notion of life in John is irrelevant to mundane reality. However, it must be remembered that the relationship with Jesus and God to which it refers is experienced now *in* the mundane. The context of 17:3 gears this statement towards life in its nature as partaking of *intradivine* relationship, in which, as I will argue below (chap. 4, 3e) death is not inherent. But because life must be received now within the mundane sphere, it involves death rather than being exclusive of it.[65] There is a clear reference to this moribund reality in the contrast between receiving eternal life and hating one's mundane life in 12:25.[66]

Therefore, eschatological life is lived out in the concrete reality of the present. Moreover, it has explicitly social consequences insofar as it is lived out as a

---

[61] Lincoln notes that even the eschatological gift of God is not 'spiritual' only for 'eternal life is not to be conceived by readers as simply an ethereal spiritual experience but rather remains inextricably linked to the Second Temple Jewish concepts of resurrection and the transformed embodied existence which they entailed' ("The Lazarus Story: A Literary Perspective" in *The Gospel and Theology*, 217).

[62] Mira Stare, "Ethics of Life in the Gospel of John" in *Rethinking,* 221.

[63] It has been noted that John is amenable to schemas developed in 'narrative ethics', where one's enactment of ethics involves becoming part of another larger story (Zimmerman, "Is there Ethics?", 63–66). Whilst this is a good way to *describe* what is happening in John, it does not *explain* how a person enters the divine narrative.

[64] One may characterise Johannine ethics as 'ethics of life' to refer to its relational quality. But it is not strictly accurate to say, as Stare does, that people are 'challenged … by the Johannine Jesus …to act according to his ζωή-ethic' ("Ethics of Life", 227).

[65] Whilst the present reality of this relationship weights the concept towards realised eschatology, the relationship it entails also involves a process of dying and resurrection and thus has a future element (5:29 and especially 6:35–40). Thus Stare comments that 'life cannot be limited to just the present or just the future. It brings a connection and a certain commonality and continuity between the present and the future' ("Ethics of Life", 220).

[66] Contra Williams ("Faith", 349), This is not just a synonym for believing, but is involves the more fundamental question of love (cf. above, 2c).

community. It is therefore impossible to separate believing from eternal life absolutely insofar as both refer to the relationship of people, as individuals and a group, to God through Jesus lived through the mundane realm.[67] This means that all mundane interactions, including socio-economic ones, happen *within* the eternal life into which those who believe have passed from death (5:24). But life, like believing, does not have social *content*. As such, it directs us once more to the examination of love that will occupy the latter part of this chapter.

2i. Believing, life and love in relation to 20:30–31

In order to conclude this section, we must incorporate our understanding of believing as an ethical requirement into a reading of 20:30–31. The purpose of the Gospel is to facilitate the readers' encounter with Jesus so that they accept his identity as the life-giver and (concomitantly) commit themselves to belonging to him within a wider divine-human relationship. Frey's work on believing has helped focus our discussion on this relational dimension. However, in accepting Jesus, a decision in favour of this relationship is made on an absolute basis without any specific instance of human believing actually equating to this relational change. With this qualification in mind, we can affirm Frey's description of believing in 20:31 as 'ein Akt, der eine personale Verbindung impliziert'.[68]

Because believing entails becoming part of the divine narrative, albeit in a mysterious way, it already attains to its telos of eternal life, which is synonymous with the divine-human relationship. Again, this necessarily qualifies our understanding of 20:30–31 as a schema whereby believing leads to life as a 'presupposition'.[69] Believing is conceptually distinct from life; the

---

[67] The kind of 'spiritualising' interpretation of John that I noted in chap. 1 is evident in Williams's short piece, despite her efforts to eliminate it by affirming how life is multi-dimensional in John, 'embracing the material and the spiritual, the human and the divine, the present and the future' ("Faith", 354). For elsewhere she distinguishes between 'natural/physical' life and 'spiritual life', with the former being 'physical' and the latter a 'timeless form of existence' (p. 353). There is no indication in John that human life, either that which all live or the eternal life for the children of God, is disembodied or 'timeless'.

[68] "Glauben und Lieben", 13

[69] Frey refers to believing at one point as a 'Voraussetzung der Teilhabe an dem durch Christus

former is a 'relational imperative' upon which one's receiving the latter depends. Insofar as this ethical requirement towards Jesus is to be met within the mundane sphere as part of a community, it must have concrete social consequences. As such it is connected to the concept of love for God and others. Such a relational understanding of believing has frequently been noted as significant for ethics in the contemporary debate.[70] What has been lacking, however, is a precise account of the relationship between this concept and love. Initial evidence would suggest that insofar as all three concepts – believing, life and love – function theologically to denote one's belonging to the divine-human relationship, they can be said to refer to this relationship synecdochically, as distinct aspects of this relationship that also denote the whole.[71] But in order to assess such a claim, we must turn to the second ethical requirement to be dealt with in this chapter by addressing the command to love at 13:34.

3. The Love Command

Our examination of believing has begun to establish a theological framework for Johannine ethics. But for many who have approached this topic, the starting point is love. Love is explicitly commanded three times in John (13:34; 15:12, 17), with the first of these being the programmatic one upon which the others are premised. Udo Schnelle expresses a widely held sentiment when he says that 'in diesem Kontext muss das johanneische Liebesgebot interpretiert

---

geschaffenen Heil' ("Glauben und Lieben", 16). Yet shortly afterwards, he gives a more integrated perspective in the statement that 'der Bezugsrahmen von "glauben"… geht nicht um das Fürwahrhalten von distinkten Sachverhalten, es geht vielmehr um das Ganze der Zugehörigkeit der Menschen zu Christus, in der das Heil (»ewiges Leben«) verbürgt und jetzt schon gegeben ist' (p. 18).

[70] Van der Watt's asserts regarding ethics that 'the whole process hinges on entering into a relationship with Jesus, and thus with the Father' (*Grammar*, 133). Weyer-Menkhoff notes that believing is 'a mode that enables humans to act in such a way that God becomes co-actor. This means that believing cannot be an autonomous action' ("Ethics in John", 164). Chrys Caragounis points out that this also has a pneumatic element. It is the internal condition that must change in order for there to be ethical fruit; the 'cleansing' that takes place is ethical. This happens through mutual indwelling, a new development of the New Testament, and is the basis for the believers' ethical lives (""Abide in Me": The New Mode of Relationship between Jesus and His Followers as a Basis for Christian Ethics (John 15)" in *Rethinking*, 260–3).

[71] Cf. Williams's comment that 'the centrality of the *relational* aspect of faith … largely overrides attempts at categorizing its vocabulary of faith' ("Faith", 349).

werden, es ist das Zentrum der prinzipiellen Ethik des 4. Evangelisten'.[72] Yet the actual meaning of the command has sometimes been taken for granted in much of the recent scholarly debate.[73] Two steps will be taken in order to analyse this text. Firstly, I will contextualise it within the Farewell Discourse (John 13–17) in a way that shows how it relates to the broader concerns of that section of the Gospel. Secondly, I will look at the formal features of the verse itself in order to identify how it may be expounded, focusing especially on the way it establishes an exemplary basis in Jesus' own love. The latter will then be subject to its own investigation in the next chapter, since it necessarily involves dealing with earlier parts of John, and one episode (the foot washing) in particular.

3a. The Farewell Discourse in relation to ethics

Introducing the Farewell Discourse

Although the setting of John 13–17 as the final words of Jesus before his death provides clear reasons for the appellation 'Farewell Discourse', its appropriateness must be qualified on two grounds.[74] Firstly, there are serious doubts over the unity of this section due to the aporias and apparent dislocations therein (most strikingly 14:31–15:1). In response to this, it must be acknowledged that these may indicate ruptures in the composition process.

However, there is ample cause to see its current form as a unity. There is general thematic and linguistic continuity within the section that consistently deals with one issue, namely how the presence of Jesus amongst his community can continue despite his bodily absence.[75] Hartwig Thyen shows

---

[72] Udo Schnelle, "Die Johanneischen Abschiedsreden und das Liebesgebot", in *Repetitions and Variations*, 598. Frey calls it "der Kernsatz johanneischer Ethik" ("Glauben und Lieben", 28).

[73] For example, *Rethinking* briefly addresses the command in its introductory discussion of love (see Labahn, "It's Only Love", 21), but the volume nowhere examines it in detail.

[74] These need only be mentioned briefly here, with Schnelle's basic position in "Abschiedsreden" the one being adopted on both. This is fairly standard in contemporary interpretation (cf. Keener, *John*, 891–898). For a more detailed discussion of these points, see Bincy Mathew, *The Johannine Footwashing as the Sign of Perfect Love: An Exegetical Study of John 13:1–20* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 152–165.

[75] 'Die Abschiedsreden behandeln ein grundlegendes theologisches Problem des frühen Christentums: *Die Anwesenheit Jesu Christi in und bei seiner Gemeinde bei körperlicher* Abwesenheit' (Schnelle, "Abschiedsreden", 489, emphasis original).

how this framing functions literarily in 13:1–4 and the end of chap. 17 to form an *inclusio* around the whole scene.[76] Indeed, looking at the wider narrative structure, the unit comprising Jesus' private interaction with his disciples in John 13–17 stands in clear juxtaposition with his public encounters on either side of it. Overall, therefore, there is nothing to prevent us taking it as a cohesive unit with a clear role in the Gospel narrative as a whole.[77] Although there are inevitable variations in the structural outlines proposed by scholars, the standard way to divide these chapters is into four parts: the foot washing narrative (13:1–30), the first discourse (13:31–14:31), the second discourse (15:1–16:34) and Jesus' prayer (17:1–26).[78]

The second potential problem with the nomenclature 'farewell discourse' is that it implies a certain generic identity that may not be appropriate. Certainly, this section does not sit comfortably with any extant model, whether Jewish or Greco-Roman. This is of course typical of many features of the Gospel and, indeed, Johannine thought more broadly, which consistently eludes precise conformity with the precedents ostensibly providing its background. Its ambivalence only serves to invite a more careful reading of the internal unfolding of the text's meaning and is driven by its peculiar theological design, even if such a literary procedure is not altogether unique.[79]

However, with this caveat in mind, the fact that the *general purpose* of John 13–17 – that of final instruction – is comparable to that of other 'farewell discourses' (which is why Schnelle and others retain the term *Abschiedsreden*) means that we may retain the term without distorting our reading of these chapters.[80] Before turning to look at its *specific* purpose in more detail, however, there is an important qualification to bear in mind about the appellation of this section: the 'discourse' is not simply a monologue but has dialogical moments and is, moreover, based on an initial deed of Jesus, that of

---

[76] Hartwig Thyen, *Das Johannesevangelium* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 585.

[77] '...ein konstitutiver Bestandteil des Johannesevangeliums' (Schnelle, "Abschiedsreden", 489).

[78] E.g., Brown, *John*, 545–547.

[79] See Attridge, "Genre Bending in the Fourth Gospel", *JBL* 121/1 (2002), 3–21. He concludes that 'John's genre bending is an effort to force its audience away from words to an encounter with the Word himself' (p. 21).

[80] Keener points to several ancient parallels in *John*, 896–898.

washing feet.[81] As such, these chapters are part of the action-discourse model that characterises the first part of the Gospel's *sign* narratives (chap. 5 will show the significance of this).

The purpose and form of the Farewell Discourse

At the heart of the final instruction that Jesus gives his disciples is an answer to the problem of how they are to live in his (physical) absence in a way that their relationship with him is continued. That this answer entails ethics has already been indicated by what Frey pointed out in relation to John 14 (above, 2c). There we saw believing (14:1) and loving (14:15, 21) are inseparable as aspects of the response to Jesus, and particularly his reassurance that he will accomplish his life-giving purposes in conjunction with the Father (e.g. 14:1, 10–11, 21) and the Paraclete (eg. 14:15, 26). Now we may also add the element of presence to which Jesus attaches his ethical injunctions:

> 15 Ἐὰν ἀγαπᾶτέ με, τὰς ἐντολὰς τὰς ἐμὰς τηρήσετε· 16 κἀγὼ ἐρωτήσω τὸν πατέρα καὶ ἄλλον παράκλητον δώσει ὑμῖν ἵνα ᾖ μεθ' ὑμῶν εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα, 17 τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας… 18 Οὐκ ἀφήσω ὑμᾶς ὀρφανούς, ἔρχομαι πρὸς ὑμᾶς… 21 ὁ ἔχων τὰς ἐντολάς μου καὶ τηρῶν αὐτὰς ἐκεῖνός ἐστιν ὁ ἀγαπῶν με· ὁ δὲ ἀγαπῶν με ἀγαπηθήσεται ὑπὸ τοῦ πατρός μου, κἀγὼ ἀγαπήσω αὐτὸν καὶ ἐμφανίσω αὐτῷ ἐμαυτόν.
>
> 15 If you love me, you will keep my commands. 16 And I will ask the Father and he will give another Paraclete to you in order that he may be with you forever, 17 the Spirit of truth… 18 I will not leave you as orphans, I am coming to you… 21 The one who has my commands and keeps them, that one is the one who loves me; the one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and reveal myself to him.

Here we see that loving Jesus and keeping his commands are connected to the continuation of divine presence amongst the disciples. Jesus will be present with them through the Paraclete, which thus at least part of what it means for the Father to love them too.[82] Even if one does not read the connection between verses 15–16 as straightforward cause and effect that implies a negative converse (failure in obedient love results in the denial of the Paraclete), the

---

[81] Hence Keener concludes that one should regard 'the foot washing as the narrative introduction to the Farewell Discourse that prefigures the Passion' (*John*, 891).

[82] The absolute distinction between Jesus and the Spirit is difficult to maintain in this passage; 14:18 can be read as saying that Jesus himself 'is promising to come to them in the person of the "advocate"' (Michaels, *John*, 785).

stakes for ethics are high. More specifically, the 'commands' to which Jesus points include a maximum of two injunctions as well as believing: to love one another (13:34) and wash one another's feet (13:14–15). Therefore, how the disciples live in relation to one another is inextricably bound to the divine presence with them and their participation in the divine-human relationship that Frey refers to as the *familia Dei*. This is a particularly important point for the significance of the Gospel for the readers addressed in 20:30–31, for it means that the command to mutual love is to be understood not only as something for those disciples who physically encountered Jesus. On the contrary, it is addressed directly to the situation of believers *after* the physical departure of Jesus.

Indeed, this observation from chap. 14 retrospectively clarifies the progression of thought that leads from the beginning of the Farewell Discourse (13:1) up to the command itself. After introductory framing by the narrator that points as far ahead as Jesus' death (13:1), Jesus washes his disciples' feet at a meal (13:2–11) and embarks on an explanation that dovetails with an identification of his traitor, Judas, who then departs (13:12–30). Jesus sees *Judas's* departure as precipitating *his own* departure, which is in fact his glorification (13:31–32). Following this comes his most poignant statement of what his absence will mean:

> τεκνία, ἔτι μικρὸν μεθ' ὑμῶν εἰμι· ζητήσετέ με… Ὅπου ἐγὼ ὑπάγω ὑμεῖς οὐ δύνασθε ἐλθεῖν (13:33).
>
> Children, I am with you yet for only a little time; you will seek me… where I go, you will not be able to come.

This leads directly to the love command, whose function as Jesus' means of addressing how the disciples should deal with his absence is then confirmed by the next verse, albeit not as one might expect. For Jesus states the result of their obedient mutual love as the universal knowledge of the disciples' belonging to him (13:35). Because Peter ignores both the command and its missional correlative, returning to the issue of departure (13:36), some have suggested that the love command has been inserted from another context.[83]

---

[83] This disjunction has tempted some to hypothesise a previous form of the text whose

However, from what we have seen in chap. 14, the logic here becomes clearer. Jesus words of 13:35 do not ignore or deflect attention from the crisis that those he leaves behind will face; rather, they emphasise the impact of the command in 13:34: it will be so powerfully bound up with his presence that the whole world will be able to see that, not just the disciples. On this basis, we now turn to look at the command itself.

3b. The form and meaning of 13:34

With such a familiar text it can be difficult to offer a fresh reading. My contribution here is not to connect Jesus' words to a particular traditional background but rather to identify the example to which they point. This is chiefly a literary point that is best achieved by arranging 13:34 as follows:

Ἐντολὴν καινὴν δίδωμι ὑμῖν,
    ἵνα ἀγαπᾶτε ἀλλήλους,
καθὼς ἠγάπησα ὑμᾶς
    ἵνα καὶ ὑμεῖς ἀγαπᾶτε ἀλλήλους.

A new command I give to you,
    that you might love one another;
Just as I loved you,
    that you also might love one another

The basic meaning of this verse is clear, apart from the slightly unusual use of the particle ἵνα where ὅτι would be more expected.[84] Arranging the Greek as I have done above brings out its formal features more clearly. The parallelism between the two couplets and the whole saying being rhythmically complete make it seem designed to be memorised, which does not countermand its

---

progression was less awkward. Taking a similar line to the one I am taking here, Moloney shows how such a postulation is unnecessary when adopting a literary approach (*Love in the Gospel of John: An Exegetical, Theological and Literary Study* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 114–116). Besides, the fact that Peter (and perhaps other less vocal disciples) failed to see the connection between Jesus' absence and the imperative of mutual love should not be surprising given the prevalence of misunderstanding in the exchanges narrated in the Gospel (e.g. 6:60–69; 11:11–16).

[84] I thus take the meaning as epexegetical (cf. Brown, *John*, 607). That this, rather than the more usual causative sense, is meant can be deduced from the parallel formulation in 15:12 (cf. 15:17), where ἵνα can only be taken epexegetically.

aforementioned narrative embeddedness.[85] Indeed, it has been common throughout Christian history (as it still is today) to expound this command in terms of a wider theological frame that often bore little relation to the immediate context.[86]

In more modern scholarship the historical approach has been favoured whereby comprehension of the 'old' commandment is, in the absence of other references to it in John, sought in contemporary Jewish thought or the relationship with the Synoptics' "Great Commandment".[87] Yet these theologically and historically oriented steps are secondary insofar as, as Schnelle observes, the command in John is grounded not primarily in the Scriptures (as it is in the Synoptics) but in Jesus himself and his love as the Gospel has narrated it.[88] One may hold this without downplaying the significance of the Old Testament more broadly.[89] Furthermore, there is no reason why this, the only command in John, should not be found to assume much of what is found in Torah.[90] Be that as it may, the matter brings us to the question of content, and particularly the starting point of what it means for Jesus' love to be somehow exemplary.

Identifying Jesus' example

The words καθὼς ἠγάπησα ὑμᾶς point the disciples back to Jesus' prior treatment of them. But to what exactly is he referring? There are three main options. Firstly, the verb could reflect a post-Easter view of the cross, a reading

---

[85] Hans Weder affirms both its later insertion and its narrative continuity ("Das neue Gebot: Eine Überlegung zum Liebesgebot in Johannes 13" in Andreas Dettwiler and Uta Poplutz (eds), *Studien zu Mattäus und Johannes/ Études sur Matthieu et Jean* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2009), 193–194). However, that this command probably existed as an independent *logion* in the church does not make it any more likely to be a later insertion.

[86] Joel C. Elowsky (ed.), *John 11–21, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 81–89.

[87] See, e,.g., Oda Wischmeyer, "Das alte und neue Gebot: ein Beitrag zur Intertextualität der johanneischen Schriften" in Dettweiler et al. (eds.), *Studien*, 207–220.

[88] 'Während in der synoptischen Tradition das Liebesgebot in der Gestalt des Doppelgebotes aus der Schrift abgeleitet wird ... begründet es hier Jesus selbst' ("Abschiedsreden", 602).

[89] It is problematic to posit a break between Old Testament understanding and Jesus' words, as with Nissen, for example, who speaks about the command being grounded in Jesus himself rather than the Old Testament, ignoring the assertions in John of the continuity between the revelation of Jesus and the Scriptures, e.g. 5:44 ("Community", 202–3).

[90] Though this is the one explicit commandment in John, this need not at all imply an abrogation of Torah in Johannine thought (see Loader, "The Law and Ethics in John's Gospel" in *Rethinking*, 144–158).

that is shared between some of the earliest interpreters and the most recent. Attridge states in this regard that 'by connecting that command so closely to the cross, the evangelist innovatively fused a theoretical foundation of ethics and a doctrine of revelation'.[91] Yet although it is true that post-resurrection perspectives arise at different points throughout the Gospel, examples such as 2:22 and 12:16 actually provide counterevidence. For these asides work on the basis of there being both internal narrative continuity *and* external reference and not just the latter, as there would be if 13:34 were purely a forward pointer to his death on the cross. Moreover, it is a methodological principle that we established in chap. 1 (see 3b) that internal coherence should be sought before assuming a post-Easter perspective outside the narrative's own chronology.

A second option for the reference of the verb ἠγάπησα would be that it encompasses all of the love that Jesus has expressed up until that point in an undifferentiated way. In this case, however, the aorist would be a strange choice since the notion could be more clearly communicated by the perfect or present tense. Brown's inconsistency on this point reveals the problem; on the one hand, he argues that the ἠγάπησα in 13:34 refers to the whole narrative of the Gospel, but on the other he claims that the same form of the verb in 13:1 'indicates a definite act'.[92] Since Brown's commentary was written it has emerged that the aorist need not have such a definite reference. But because this is the general tendency, and it applies in the Gospel, it is worth considering whether a more specific action may be indicated here.

This brings us onto the third option, which is to consider Jesus to be pointing to the foot washing. It is not only the most recent, but in fact the *only* episode in the Gospel that is presented as an instance of Jesus loving those to whom he speaks in 13:34. This is made clear in 13:1, even if it also assumes that he has loved them before that point too (see below, chap. 3, section 2a–2c).[93] The importance of this latter verse is only heightened through its echo of the love

---

[91] "Johannine Christianity" in Margaret Mitchell and Frances Young (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Christianity vol. 1* (Cambridge: CUP, 2008), 140.

[92] Brown, *John,* 607, 550.

[93] One can still read the commandment as a reference to Jesus' love in the whole Gospel, exemplified primarily on the cross, and thus expressed in relation to all people rather than simply those disciples present. However, this is a theological extension rather than an exegetical identification of the primary level of meaning, with which I am concerned here.

command by the use of the exact same aorist verb.[94] But it is the formal parallel between 13:34 and 13:14–15 that presents the strongest case for the foot washing as the primary referent of the former. This can be brought out by arranging the verses with 13:14–15 on the left and 13:34 on the right.

εἰ οὖν ἐγὼ ἔνιψα ὑμῶν τοὺς πόδας…	*34c* καθὼς ἠγάπησα ὑμᾶς
καὶ ὑμεῖς ὀφείλετε ἀλλήλων νίπτειν τοὺς πόδας·	*34d* ἵνα καὶ ὑμεῖς ἀγαπᾶτε ἀλλήλους
ὑπόδειγμα γὰρ ἔδωκα ὑμῖν ἵνα καθὼς ἐγὼ ἐποίησα ὑμῖν	*34a* Ἐντολὴν καινὴν δίδωμι ὑμῖν,
καὶ ὑμεῖς ποιῆτε.	*34b* ἵνα ἀγαπᾶτε ἀλλήλους,

Jesus' words in 13:14–15 are formally nearly identical to what we find in 13:34, albeit in inverted form.[95] We have the same pattern of Jesus' example being a basis for a moral imperative, with the connection signaled by the conjunction καθώς as well as imperative to reciprocity. Moreover, there is a continuity between the foot washing and the love command that reflects a broader theological pattern to which I have already drawn attention, namely the positing of ethical injunctions on the basis of God's (or Jesus') prior action.[96] It therefore cannot be taken as a general moral principle applied universally because it is inescapably a *response*, though it should be stressed that this irreducibly theological basis does not make it inappropriate to posit a concrete exemplar for the love commanded.[97] Furthermore, the connection that I am arguing here is bolstered by the narrative continuity between 13:30 and 13:31–

---

[94] For Johann Michl, 13:1 and 13:34 provide a frame for the foot washing, whereby 'in diesem Rahmen steht die Fusswaschung als beispielhafte Handlung' ("Der Sinn der Fusswaschung", *Biblica*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (1959), 700).

[95] Michaels also draws attention to aspects of this parallelism without going as far as to claim that 13:34 refers first and foremost to the foot washing (*John*, 759–760).

[96] That this is the theologically cogent way to read these words in light of Johannine thought does not mean that the word καθώς itself means 'on the basis of' (contra Mathew, *Footwashing*, 116). Nissen does not even turn to the Greek terms, implying that the English 'as' means that the thing referred to is source and not just exemplar ("Community", 202). Apt here is James Barr's famous warning against the fallacy whereby the sense given by the context is imputed to an individual lexical item argued in *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961).

[97] Bultmann's discussion of the command (*John,* 526–547) is conducted nearly entirely on the theological plane. He mentions the need for the command to be applied in 'the concrete decisions called for by the claims of his brother in everyday life' (p. 546) but does not recognise the extent to which the example of Jesus gives more specificity to the nature of these claims and the proper response to them.

38 as well as the formal observation made by Thyen (following Moloney), whereby the whole of chapter 13 should be seen as a unity.[98] None of this necessarily restricts the eventual significance of the love command to this one incident. On the contrary, my analysis in the next chapter will show why this *cannot* be the case. However, there are enough textual indications to take the reader of 13:34 back to the foot washing as its primary referent, and it is thus to this pericope that we turn in our next chapter.

4. Conclusion

Believing is clearly an ethical requirement in John, with the term 'relational imperative' best describing its character. Whilst clearly constituting a key aspect of a person's relational response to God through Jesus, the cause and effects of believing retain elements of mystery. What is clear, however, is that its significance in relation to the divine narrative is bound to its necessarily mundane context, which entails social consequences. The social aspect of a believer's relationship with God is denoted by the idea of mutual love. Though framed as a prescriptive command in the Gospel, it must also be seen as part of a relational response to Jesus. This comprehensive theological context can push the balance towards a more abstract construal of love, as its frequent interpretation as a broader principle suggests. However, closer attention to the text of 13:34 reveals its connection not only to Jesus' example but to the concrete action of the foot washing that shortly precedes the love command. As such, the necessary context for mutual love is, like believing, a mundane one. It remains for us now to develop the ethical significance of Jesus' example by an analysis of the foot washing pericope (13:1–17).

[98] 'Das gesamte Kapitel 13 von V. 1–38 als Einheit gelesen sein will' (Thyen, *Johannesevangalium*, 608).

Chapter 3 – From Enactment to Participation: The Relational Significance of the Foot Washing

The aim of this chapter is to conduct a close analysis of 13:1–17 with a view to articulating the primary meaning of the example Jesus gives in 13:34. This requires first setting the pericope in textual and scholarly context (section 1) before approaching it in what should be a fresh way, opening up hitherto unacknowledged potential for Johannine ethics. A threefold reading of the foot washing as enactment (section 2), revelatory foreshadowing (section 3) and example (section 4) of love will provide an initial understanding of the socio-economic engagement entailed in Johannine ethics. It will also sharpen the questions that need to be dealt with in the following chapters, especially in relation to the theological conception of participation in John (chap. 4) and the extension of Jesus' ethical example beyond the single episode of foot washing (chap. 5).

At the heart of my argument here is that Jesus' foot washing is geared towards establishing a divine-human community that can be described as the 'divine household'. Both in its own social dynamics and the way in which it relates to the cross, the episode constitutes the ethical example of what it is to participate in the divine household. The hermeneutical key to my reading is the role of 13:1 in framing both what came before and what comes afterwards as a narrative of Jesus' love in which the divine and mundane dimensions are intertwined.

1. Introducing the foot washing pericope

1a. The pericope and its narrative context

The title Farewell Discourse encapsulates something of the purpose and unity

of John 13–17, even if it is more strictly an action followed by a discourse. However, its opening verse (13:1) sets this section of the Gospel within a wider narrative frame. This has a particular significance for the interpretation of the foot washing pericope itself that will be argued in detail below (section 2). The episode proper begins with a supper (13:2) which, like the similar event in Bethany (12:1–8), has a subplot in Judas' betrayal (cf. 12:2, 4). During this meal, Jesus rises and washes his disciples' feet (13:3–5). In response to protests over his action from Simon Peter (13:6–9), he then teaches about cleanness. Regarding this topic, at least one of the disciples – whom the reader knows to be Judas – falls short (13:10–11).

After the washing is done (13:12), Jesus goes on to explain what he has done and what should be learned from it. At this point, the event has finished and the discourse based on it has begun. Indeed, there is something arbitrary in demarcating the pericope's end too strictly anywhere beyond this. Both the statements at 13:17 and 13:20 seem like conclusions, but then 13:21 carries on the theme of Jesus' betrayal that has been intertwined with the foot washing from 13:2. Moreover, 13:31 combines this theme with that of glorification and departure, motifs introduced from 13:3 (cf. 13:1). It is worth pointing these things out to illustrate just how tightly bound this episode is with what is going on around it, an interweaving that is typical of John. However, since we need to demarcate our pericope for the purposes of our discussion here, an end point at 13:17 (the first of the two standard options) is a reasonable choice, being where specific reference to the foot washing ends.[1]

1b. Scholarly debate around the episode

Particularly for those in cultures that no longer practise foot washing, the

[1] The two Anglophone monographs on the topic choose 13:20 as their end point (John Christopher Thomas *Footwashing in John 13 and the Johannine Community* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991) Bincy Mathew, *The Johannine Footwashing as the Sign of Perfect Love: An Exegetical Study of John 13:1-20* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018). However, neither argue the point, which is surprising considering the weight on the side of those who hold to a 13:1–17 structure. Elowsky indicates that this was the normal way of dividing the passage for the ancient commentaries which he cites (*John 11–21*, 80) whilst Brown and Thyen both adopt 13:1–17 as the division of the foot washing pericope.

socio-historical significance of Jesus' act must always be considered in approaching this episode. However, matters of structure and composition history have occupied at least as much of the debate, mainly because they have more than strictly literary moment. The most keenly debated question is the relationship of what appear to be two different interpretations of the incident, one in 13:7–11 and the other in 13:12–17 (or 13:12–20). Some have argued that we have here what were originally two different explanations juxtaposed with one another.[2] Others are happy with the form of the text as it is but deny that both symbolic and moral meanings co-exist equally, either collapsing one into the other or making one subordinate.[3] Early interpreters had no problem with a multi-layered reading of the passage, combining these ideas with that of sacrament.[4] A minority of more recent interpreters also invest the foot washing with sacramental import, whether or not this is seen to coexist with passion symbolism and moral example.[5]

Within this category of interpretation as sacrament, the foot washing has been read as a symbolic presentation of the Eucharist, of baptism, or as the establishment of an independent sacrament. Much impetus for the Eucharistic interpretation comes from the apparent parallel between this episode in John and the Last Supper of Matthew, Mark and Luke, classically taken as institution.[6] In terms of baptism, the complexity of the issue is compounded by the textual question surrounding 13:10, which may or may not refer to a

---

[2] Thomas, *Footwashing,* 76–78.

[3] E.g. Otto Hofius "Die Erzählung von der Fußwaschung Jesu Joh 13,1-11 als narratives Christuszeugnis" in *ZTK* 106/2 (2009), 156–176.

[4] It was often characterised as a Passover event of cleansing and protection whose power came from the death of Jesus and which simultaneously served as the establishment of a model of humility (Elowsky, *John 11–21*, 81–89).

[5] For Hoskyns, 'the *Pedilavium* was … originally both an example of Christian humility and a means of post-baptismal sanctification' (*Fourth Gospel*, 446). Thomas's *Footwashing* gives the most extended defence of a sacramental reading.

[6] The connection with the Synoptic material is, not surprisingly, one of the other most widely discussed issues in relation to the episode. This is particularly the case with the question of chronology, since the placement of the event in relation to the Passover feast (13:1) is difficult to square with what is written in the other three canonical Gospels. Carson produces a vigorous engagement with this issue on the basis of its purported significance for historicity in *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester: Apollos, 1991), 455–458.

'washing' other than that narrated in this story.[7] Finally, the possibility that this establishes a discrete sacramental practice of foot washing relies on bolstering Jesus' words in 13:14–15 with external evidence for its historical practice.[8] The question of historicity is, indeed, taken up in its own right, notably by Bauckham.[9] He argues on the basis of the Johannine and the Synoptic portrayals of Jesus' 'whole ministry as self-giving service' that the author of John was unlikely to make up stories if there were traditional ones available to him to make this theological point.[10] None of what I argue in the following presupposes the historicity of the foot washing or otherwise, but some such argument would need to be made to test an interpretation such as the one I will offer here in relation to the evidence of early Christianity.

Two monographs are particularly worth mentioning, those of John Thomas and Bincy Mathew. Thomas's *Footwashing in John 13 and the Johannine Community* (op. cit.) offers the most in-depth exposition of a sacramental interpretation to date. In it, Thomas argues both that the text itself points in this direction and also that this was the way in which the earliest Christian communities took it. After an introductory chapter, he considers textual (chap. 2) and historical (chap. 3) evidence before conducting his literary-critical exegesis (chap. 4) and then compiling an array of early church sources to bolster his reading (chap. 5).

Mathew's *The Johannine Footwashing as the Sign of Perfect Love: An Exegetical Study of John 13:1-20* (op. cit.) is too recent (2018) to have played much of a part in the debate. However, its sheer comprehensiveness makes it

---

[7] Detailed discussion of this issue is not necessary for my own argument; two brief points suffice to set out my stance on the issue. Firstly, I agree with the majority scholarly opinion that manuscript evidence counts against the longer reading carried by the Nestle-Aland 28th edition, which includes the words εἰ μὴ τοὺς πόδας νίψασθαι (Beasley-Murray, *John*, 229; Thomas, *Footwashing*, 23; Georg Richter, *Die Fusswaschung im Johannesevangelium* (Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 1967), XIII, 36–38). Secondly, whichever reading one chooses, the theological problem raised is the same as that which I am foregrounding in my interpretation: how can this mundane action of Jesus be soteriologically and not just pedagogically efficacious for his disciples?

[8] Mathew gives a review of recent interpretative trends covering all the above in *Footwashing*, 11–39.

[9] Richard Bauckham, "Did Jesus Wash the Disciples' Feet?" in Bruce Chilton and Craig Evans (eds.), *Authenticating the Activities of Jesus* (Boston: Brill, 1999), 411–429.

[10] "Did Jesus?", 421.

suitable for serious engagement. In its nearly 500 pages it covers all the scholarly issues and a vast amount of secondary literature, making it an update of Georg Richter's *Die Fusswaschung im Johannesevangelium* (op. cit.) from 1965. As well as the standard *status quaestionis* (chap. 1), text-critical (chap. 2), historical (chap. 3) and literary-contextual (chap. 4) discussions, Mathew has five exegetical chapters (chaps. 5–9) dealing with different aspects of the pericope and drawing heavily on Synoptic material. Unlike Thomas, she does not adopt one of the conventional interpretative positions but concludes that the foot washing is 'the ultimate σημεῖον of Jesus' perfect love in action'.[11]

1c. The debate in contemporary ethics

The fact that 13:14–15 constitutes a clear moral injunction (however exactly one connects it to the love command), would seem to make the foot washing a crucial site for ethical reflection. Yet this has not been borne out in the contemporary debate. Neither of the two main essay collections – *Rethinking the Ethics of John* and *Johannine Ethics* – feature an examination of the episode and none of the monographs under consideration gives a full chapter to the issue, even if it does relate to some of their particular interests.[12] Certainly, some give the incident a central place in relation to the Gospel's ethics in general and the love command in particular.[13] However, a challenge remains to establish a framework for the way in which its soteriological themes and its quotidian aspects are integrated.

---

[11] Mathew, *Footwashing*, 417. The challenge of the connection with the Johannine σημεῖα will be addressed in chap. 5.

[12] Skinner, who devotes a few pages to it, sees the foot washing within the larger ethical frame of the Farewell Discourse ("Love One Another: The Johannine Love Command in the Farewell Discourse" in *Johannine Ethics*, 28–33) with the intention of demonstrating the scope of Jesus' love as 'both local and universal' (p. 42). For Gorman, the focus is again on the question of scope, arguing that it promotes enemy-love, albeit as an outworking of 'the intimacy of the divine household' (*Abide and Go*, 98). For Bennema, his interest in mimesis draws him to ask whether Jesus' action demands 'cloning or creative articulation' (*Mimesis*, 91). Van der Watt views its historic Christian performance as part of the community's ethos (*Grammar*, 451).

[13] Trozzo points out that 'the examples of love provided (the foot washing and Jesus's sacrificial death) were concrete, lowly, and gruesome physical acts' (*Exploring*, 125). Van der Watt sees it as key to the Johannine conception of love 'forming a ring composition' between 13:1 and 13:34 (*Grammar*, 303) whilst Rushton comments that 'Jesus' commandment to love one another as I have loved you… is expressed in his example of foot washing' (*Cry*, 135).

Once again, the underlying question is that of the interrelation between the divine and human narratives. And, once again, Frey provides a particularly informative example of the work needing to be done on this score, since his intention and general *modus operandi* is to strive for precisely such integration in his account of this episode. Having noted its sacramental reception and Christological dimensions, he concludes as follows:

> 'Not in its literal meaning, but in its symbolic value, the footwashing episode becomes an ethical example for the Johannine community, in close correspondence with the commandment of mutual or communal love in John 13:34–35, which is, in some way, prepared by the preceding episode of the footwashing'.[14]

As cogent as this might appear, confusion emerges as to what kind of 'ethical example' this is. The logic of downplaying the 'literal meaning' – and thereby denying that Jesus' foot washing is to be replicated – is that Frey considers it to symbolise his death (pp. 196–197). This would imply that such death is what is exemplary, but Frey later states that 'the Gospel's exhortation should not be read as a call for martyrdom' (p. 200). Instead, he claims that it should result in a 'family ethos' (p. 201) without showing how this arises from the Christological significance of the foot washing. More broadly, there is a problem here in integrating the divine narrative with the mundane events of Jesus' life and their putatively mundane ethical significance.[15] Closer attention to this is needed in order to establish a sound ethical basis for the latter that is not undermined by the assumption that the former reality is more important or 'deeper'.[16]

1d. My own approach

The crucial question for me is how this pericope helps us understand the example of love that Jesus sets out in 13:34. My ethical conclusions will not

---

[14] Frey, "Family Ethos", 197.

[15] Indeed, Frey himself recognises that the basic challenge is to 'combine the christological and the ethical aspect' ("Family Ethos", 195).

[16] Frey refers to the Christological interpretation as 'deeper' than the exemplary one ("Family Ethos", 196).

require a straightforward choice between the various interpretative options for the passage. For any or all of the aspects mentioned in the scholarly review can be included together in a reading of the text; generally, the concern that interpreters have is one of emphasis.[17] Accordingly, my exegesis begins not from the desire to choose one traditional interpretation or identify a hermeneutically crucial socio-historical background. Instead, the aim here is to focus on how, within the Gospel's thought as a whole, Jesus actually loves through the foot washing. This requires that we begin not by asking about the symbolism or ethical significance of the act but what it is achieving in itself as an act of love. I will show how 13:1 provides the reader with this starting point before moving on to integrate it with the two standard emphases, namely Christological symbolism and exemplarity. I refer to these three elements as Jesus' *enactment*, *revelatory foreshadowing* and *example* of love, with the rationale for this terminology unfolding as the argument progresses. These will be treated in the three main sections below, with a brief summary of the argument in each being given in the section introductions.

In terms of interlocutors, the foot washing is a frequent topic in the contemporary debate on Johannine ethics but is treated there only cursorily, making it more beneficial to engage with Thomas's and Mathew's monographs. These, along with the aformentioned articles by Hofius and Bauckham (and one by Culpepper), will be our main interlocutors in what follows.[18]

A brief note is also warranted on my terminological choice of 'foot washing' rather than 'footwashing', the more frequently used compound gerund (cf. the German '*Fußwaschung*'). There is not much riding on this choice except that giving the action its own special term makes it more amenable to the kind of technical and even sacramental sense that came about later. Such an impression is nowhere indicated in the Greek of John, which comprises a prosaic description. Indeed, part of the difficulty in unravelling the text-critical issue of 13:10 (cf. above, 1b) is precisely that the *lack* of technical vocabulary in

---

[17] For example, in Schnelle's estimation, the problem with a sacramental interpretation is what it excludes, rather than what it includes, since it is 'nicht nur ein liturgischer oder symbolischer Akt' ("Abschiedsreden", 600).

[18] Culpepper, "Hypodeigma", *Semeia* 53 (1991), 133–152.

the Greek makes it difficult to know what kind of washing is being referred to by the author. Therefore, I use the phrase 'foot washing' rather than 'footwashing' in my discussion of the episode except when quoting others.

2. The foot washing as *enactment* of love

It is well recognised in scholarly debate that the foot washing is symbolic, and thus somehow *revelatory* of the nature of love; it is equally well recognised that it is *exemplary* of love, even by those who do not draw such a strong connection as I do between 13:14–15 and 13:34. But the difficulty in integrating the two to which I have pointed, and the resulting lack of coherence in ethical conclusions, has its roots in failing to identify another, and in fact primary, way in which the foot washing is about love, as an *enactment*.[19]

By this concept of enactment I am arguing for the logical priority of a stage before examining Jesus' action in Christological-symbolic terms as an *illustration* or, in ethical terms as a *lesson* for the disciples, or even as initiating a sacramental rite. For the first way in which the event is presented to us is as Jesus *actually loving*, not simply using a deed to communicate something exterior to it. Since my deployment of the concept 'enactment' is somewhat novel and requires a broad engagement with the Gospel to spell it out, I will develop my own reading in relation to the text itself before showing how it relates to others' interpretations. It will emerge that I am discounting neither the symbolic nor the ethical relevance of the passage but rather providing the proper conceptual context within which these can be understood.

The argument proceeds as follows: beginning by looking at the introductory verse, I show how it is key not only in indicating a climactic stage in continuity with the Gospel narrative up to this point (2a) but in reframing what came

[19] No word is completely ideal to communicate what I mean by this, which is that in the foot washing Jesus is actually *loving* and not using the foot washing merely to do something else. Gail O'Day uses the word similarly in her discussion of Jesus as a friend in John as a way of emphasising that he does not only talk about love but *enacts* it so that 'Friendship in John is the enactment of the love of God that is incarnate in Jesus and that Jesus boldly makes available to the world' ("Jesus as Friend in the Fourth Gospel", *Interpretation* 58/2 (2004), 157). Any associations of 'enactment' with 'acting' in the theatrical sense are thus ruled out.

before in terms of the particular relational telos of divine love (2b). Paying special attention to how this entails the integration of the divine and mundane dimensions, I demonstrate this proposition in relation to the disciples (2c) and the Bethany family in particular (2d). This sets up my reading of the foot washing episode itself, both in its positive dimension as relational transformation (2e) and its negative one as subversion of the world (2f). The final sub-section locates my conception of 'enactment' in relation to other scholarly approaches and sets up the discussion of the other two main elements of the episode (2g).

2a. Climactic continuity with the Johannine narrative

There are indications in 13:1 of how Jesus' foot washing relates to the rest of the Gospel narrative, making it an important verse:

> Πρὸ δὲ τῆς ἑορτῆς τοῦ πάσχα εἰδὼς ὁ Ἰησοῦς ὅτι ἦλθεν αὐτοῦ ἡ ὥρα ἵνα μεταβῇ ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου τούτου πρὸς τὸν πατέρα, ἀγαπήσας τοὺς ἰδίους τοὺς ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ εἰς τέλος ἠγάπησεν αὐτούς (John 13:1)
>
> Before the feast of the Passover, Jesus, having seen that his hour (whereby he would depart out of this world towards the Father) had come, having loved his own in the world, loved them to the end.

This introduction heralds the arrival of the hour that marks Jesus' departure, which, in conjunction with the Passover, is portrayed as happening through his sacrificial death on the day of preparation (19:28–31). Jesus is first introduced as a sacrificial lamb (1:29, 36) shortly before we encounter the motifs of the hour (2:4) and the Passover (2:13), which together reach special intensity with the ramping up of the threat to Jesus' life that surrounds the events at Bethany (11:53, 55; 12:1, 7, 23–24, 27). At 13:1 we have the first direct combination of these two motifs, indicating that these lines have come together in a climax. As such, the transition from the 'public' to 'private' setting in this chapter is not so much a new stage as a hiatus in Jesus' engagement with the world. The subplot involving Judas provides the bridge between Jesus' audience with the disciples and his next encounter with the public, which will be the fatal one.

Therefore, the introductory line provides a frame for both the Farewell Discourse and the climactic events of the whole Gospel that follow, culminating at the cross.[20] The latter is also connoted by the connection of the phrase εἰς τέλος to the three occurrences of the verb τελέω in 19:28–30 as Jesus dies. The same phrase also means 'to the utmost', a typically Johannine double entendre that cannot easily be translated into English.[21] Yet the crucifixion is not only the narrative climax in a general sense; the repeated verbs ἀγαπήσας… ἠγάπησεν make it clear that we are talking about temporal continuity in the same divine narrative of love to which the programmatic statement of 3:16 refers.[22]

The fact that 13:1 refers to the Passion does not negate its function in framing the events that immediately follow. Indeed, the resumptive καί at 13:2 (which begins the story of the foot washing) indicates that the author is beginning to narrate what has just been introduced.[23] From the outset, therefore, the foot washing is embedded into the Gospel's divine narrative of love. However, 13:1 is actually more specific than that. For the continuity between what came before and what is about to follow is Jesus' love *for his own in the world* (τοὺς ἰδίους τοὺς ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ). Jesus' 'own' in this episode most likely denotes the Twelve, a traditional designation used in 6:66–71 and assumed in 11:7.[24] At the same time, the phrase ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ implies a more theological conception of a

---

[20] The hour of departure can be stretched even to the very end of chap. 21, since Jesus has still not yet returned to the Father at that point (cf. 20:17). However, this is a secondary sense of 'the hour', which refers most explicitly to Jesus' crucifixion, which, via the verb ὑψόω, refers also to glorious exaltation (12:27–33). This is the case even if the multiple announcements of its arrival complicate the picture (12:23; 13:1, 31; 17:1). Neither the resurrection nor the ascension (which is not even narrated at all) are described in this way.

[21] Keener sees it as an example of this device (*John*, 899) with Thyen equally happy to assume this without argumentation (*Johannesevangelium,* 585).

[22] Although Daniel Wallace points out that this is not always so where the main verb is also an aorist, the fact that both of the verbs in 13:1 are forms of ἀγαπάω means that there is no doubt that a sequential meaning is in view (*Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 624–625).

[23] There is widespread scholarly consensus that this is so. Even Brown, who sees 13:2 as the introduction to the episode proper, states that 'if we interpret the footwashing as a prophetic action symbolic of Jesus' death, by introducing Jesus' death vs. 1 also introduces the footwashing' (*John*, 563).

[24] The connection to the group in 6:66–71 is strengthened by the recurrence of the betrayal motif in 13:2. To limit those present to the explicitly named disciples is overly cautious in light of the overall context (cf. Keener, *John*, 900).

portion of a generally hostile humanity who have received Jesus as the emissary of salvation (1:10–13).[25] Therefore, Jesus' love for his own, both before and during the foot washing, is possessed of both divine and mundane dimensions, which must be understood in order to grasp what is happening in this episode.[26]

It is here that we encounter a methodological problem. For if we approach the question of how Jesus loves his own in John 1–12 with a focus on the language being used there, we find no instances where Jesus is the subject of the verb ἀγαπάω and 'his own' are the object. Indeed, there is only one situation in which Jesus is described as loving anyone, that which arises towards the end of his public ministry with the Bethany family recounted in chaps. 11–12.[27] How can 13:1 indicate continuity in something that has not even been mentioned before? This is the challenge I now take up.

2b. Relationally reframing the Johannine narrative

My argument is that the solution to this challenge lies in the way we construe the divine narrative itself. For it is not only comprised of the love programmatically indicated by the words of 3:16, but already has the establishment of God's own (1:10–13) in mind and culminates with the divine-human relationship portrayed in 17:20–26. Frey comes to a similar conclusion through following the same procedure as he did with the concept of believing (chap. 2, 2b). Analysing 'the sequence of varying love expressions and the merging network of love relations' he sees 17:20–26 as the culmination of 'the

---

[25] Lars Kierspel puts the case well in his *The Jews and the World in the Fourth Gospel* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006). He notes that 'when placed into the macrostructural perspective (prologue, discourse), then all occurrences of "the world" function to translate the particular hostilities between Jesus and the Jews to a universal level' (p. 179).

[26] The general observation that 13:1 entails a retrospective moment for the reader is not unusual; Thomas, for instance, recognises the need for 'a brief overview of [the disciples'] role in John 1–12… to suggest an appropriate context for reading 13.1–20' (*Footwashing,* 79). But my particular focus on the combination of mundane and divine dimensions in relational interactions is not taken up in readings of the foot washing.

[27] Both the verbs φιλέω (11:3) and ἀγαπάω (11:5) are used in this episode and I begin without any assumption of what kind of semantic distinction may exist between the two. Moreover, I will argue that no such distinction persists in my treatment of the Bethany episode.

movement of love from the Father through the Son towards the community and the world within the Johannine text'.[28] Thus, despite the infrequent use of the word itself, love characterises the story of Jesus' ministry and is expressed in his establishing relationships throughout the Gospel. This, according to Frey, includes relating to others as Rabbi (1:37–51) and messianic bridegroom (e.g. 3:29 and the encounter narrated in chap. 4); the theme is apparently less of a focus in chaps. 5–9 (Frey neglects to mention 10 for some reason) but arises again in relation to the Bethany family and is prominent from 13:1 onwards.[29]

In order to build on this basic idea as I now want to do, we need to clarify a point that we have already seen to be ambiguous in Frey's work (chap. 2, 2f). This is the question of the specific nature of the divine-human relationship, or community, that Jesus is forming. Frey uses the term *familia Dei*, with 'Family Ethos' as well as 'Famlienethik' describing its ethical shape. But what we need is a concept that is able to integrate the divine and mundane dimensions together in a way that can account for the theological coherence of Johannine thought. This is provided by the idea of the 'divine household', which Mary Coloe in particular has shown to shape the progression of the Gospel's narrative.[30]

The divine household

Coloe's conception draws on a socio-historical reality but is not, as she emphasises, merely a theory of how the text purportedly *reflects* such a reality. Indeed, 'the household model for the Johannine community is not to be found in the [patriarchal] social sphere of the first century, but must be located in the world of divine relationships'.[31] She devotes each chapter in her book to tracing the theme in relation to a character or institution in the Gospel story, including John the Baptist (chap. 2), the Feast of Weeks (chap. 3) Nicodemus (chap. 4),

---

[28] Frey, "Love-Relations", 172, 175. This corresponds to his procedure in his "Glauben und Lieben", which comes to much the same conclusion.

[29] "Love Relations", 179–81.

[30] Mary Coloe, *Dwelling in the Household of God* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007).

[31] Coloe, *Dwelling*, 11.

the Bethany family (chap. 5–6), the foot washing (chap. 7), the Farewell Discourse (chap. 8) and the resurrection (chap. 9).[32]

In what follows, I will build on this proposal of divine household as essential to the relational telos of the Gospel's divine narrative.[33] I do so by showing how Jesus moves towards this telos through enacting his love as Rabbi and friend. My aim is not to mount an argument for the predominance of the divine household in Johannine literary symbolism, far less to conduct a detailed examination of the way in which Jesus' relationships conform to cultural convention.[34] Rather, I wish to show how the Rabbi-disciple and friendship dynamics in John 1–12 integrate divine and mundane dimensions in a way that John 13–21 (and the foot washing in particular) draws together in the notion of divine household.[35] At the same time, an important part of this process is the counter-reaction that it incurs. For whilst conventional enough to be culturally categorisable, Jesus' relational interactions are evidently subversive of the socio-political order and lead to the final confrontation with the authorities precipitated in our pericope. Despite associations of 'household' with harmless domestic spirituality, it is not, as some have claimed, inherently non-political as an idea.[36] On the contrary, I will show that it is precisely the endorsement of certain 'household' qualities (not least that of intimacy) as social norms that makes' Jesus' enactment of love so offensive.

---

[32] She recognises in her final chapter that this symbolic schema is not on the surface of the text but requires repeated reading (pp. 197–201).

[33] Cf. Trozzo, who puts it thus: 'As the narrative unfolds, Jesus, who is presented as the unique "Son of God"… institutes a new extended family.' The scene at the cross with Mary 'introduces a new family that is not based on natural relation' (*Exploring*, 118).

[34] For these, see, for example, O'Day, "Jesus as Friend"; Andreas Köstenburger, "Jesus as Rabbi in the Fourth Gospel", *BBR* 8 (1998), 97–128.

[35] This argument is similar in structure to Bruce Chilton in "The Gospel according to John's Rabbi Jesus", *BBR* 25/1 (2015), 39-54, though he focuses on the establishment of Jesus' own identity as 'son of man'. He shows how the term *Rabbi* is 'as an agreed identity, is a provisional indicator, intended to lead to a revelation that subsumes "*Rabbi*" within another identity' whereby 'the generic and heavenly son of man are fused' (p. 53).

[36] Morgan's view is that 'the frequency with which God is called Father in this gospel and the relative paucity of language of political community (mainly visible in occasional uses of *kyrios* and 'Messiah') give the listener a stronger sense that the divine– human community is ultimately a family, household, or abstract unity than that it is a quasi-political unity' (*Roman Faith*, 435–436).

2c. Jesus' love for 'his own in the world' in John 1–10

From the very outset, in the Prologue, it is apparent that there are no fixed categories of Jesus' 'own' and 'the world'. Everything is inherently the possession of the λόγος (cf. 1:3) and the world (1:10) with its people (1:11) reject him. This creates a strong distinction between the κόσμος as an entity opposed to God and those from it who accept Jesus to become children of God and thus constitute the divine household (1:12–13). Whilst this theological context frames the introduction and characterises the initial narrative appearance of Jesus as 'the Lamb of God' (1:29, 36), the relationships he establishes are described within mundane categories. He is a Rabbi with disciples who come to him through ordinary associations of kinship and geography (1:38–51) and is embedded in domestic life and local community (2:1–12) as well as national 'religious' (2:13–25) society.[37] Yet it is clear at the same time that his divine mission to 'take away the sins of the world' (1:29) shapes his interactions (e.g. 2:4).

Indeed, it is not possible to completely distinguish between the divine and mundane dimensions of Jesus' relationships. This is especially well illustrated in overlapping concepts such as 'dwelling with', which refer both to conventional practice and theological reality (1:39, cf. 1:33; 14:2). A similar example is the whole pattern of Rabbinic teaching, which functions as revelation when pneumatologically interpreted. This is complemented from the other direction as Jesus describes intradivine love in terms of a master making his work known to an apprentice (5:20).[38] But what brings these together is the cultivation of intimacy. This happens not only through making himself known and displaying extraordinary knowledge of those to whom he relates (e.g. 1:47–48), but also through his willingness to address holistically the various needs of

[37] His familial relationships are not determinative for belonging (7:5) and yet are by no means arbitrary for what it meant to be 'his own' (19:25–27).

[38] Because I reject Frey's contention that there is no true development in understanding in the pre-Paraclete situation, the logic of my position is that the Spirit is already at work in Jesus' ministry by being in or on him (cf. 1:33). This is a pneumatological assumption that can be stated here rather than argued since the force of my argument does not depend on it.

those whom he encounters.[39] Whilst often miraculous, these interactions are not 'spiritual' in the sense of being able to be reduced to supernatural demonstration (for more on the signs as acts of love, see below, chap. 5). Indeed, Chilton shows that even the supernatural elements functioned within the frame of expectations for a Rabbi, as per Nicodemus' association of this title with performing signs (3:2).[40]

Likewise, the intimacy being cultivated is not 'sectarian' in that it maintains a public and constantly invitational character. This results in a great number of people believing in him (e.g. in Samaria, 4:39–42, and Jerusalem, 12:9–11) and sometimes showing greater comprehension than the disciples.[41] This invitation entails the mysterious combination of divine and mundane dimensions that is encapsulated by Jesus' image of a shepherd calling out his sheep (10:27). Indeed, the formation of the twelve disciples, whose narrated elements (which are scant) make it appear almost haphazard (1:36–51), is attributed to Jesus' own choice (6:70).

Yet the invitational nature of Jesus' ministry is simultaneously an establishment of distinction from people's extant social location insofar as it constitutes a call to join 'his own'. In fact, this conjunction of intimacy, invitation and distinctiveness from the world is what gives Jesus' love for his own a subversive quality. For he loves in a life-giving way that addresses real need, which is holistically conceived and thus includes the 'spiritual' relationship to God with its physical and social effects. As such, Jesus' love

---

[39] For Bultmann, revelation is in fact the main way in which the programmatic statement of 3:16 is played out. God's sending of his Son is, as he asserts in relation to this verse, 'itself the divine ἀγάπη' (*John*, 457). His famous characterisation of Jesus as the 'Revealer' thus stands in continuity with the conception of love insofar as God's missionary action also constitutes his self-revelation.

[40] "Rabbi Jesus", 39, 49. Köstenburger seems to underestimate evidence for the exalted status of such figures and takes this verse to highlight Jesus' *distinction* from other Rabbis who did not have such divine authority ("Jesus as Rabbi", 109). In line with this he concludes that 'the Jesus of John's Gospel is therefore a religious teacher with a difference—issuing startling claims and performing powerful "signs"—but a religious teacher nonetheless' (p. 128).

[41] After his initial encounter with the disciples, Jesus generally dialogues with those who are not (yet) disciples (e.g. 3:1–21; 4:7–26; 6:22–58), with clear progress in understanding being exemplified in the story of the man born blind (9:1–38), along with its opposite (9:39–41). There are indications later in the narrative that progress in the disciples' understanding is more complex than the end of the first chapter would imply (14:1–11; 16:29–33) (cf. Thomas, *Footwashing,* 71–76).

works in contrast to a socio-political structure that operates according to a different logic (more on which below, 2e).

The offence that Jesus provokes from the establishment increases with the popularity of his ministry and is manifest in his conflict with the Jewish status quo. Kierspel's careful study judges the Johannine concept of κόσμος to be used to 'translate the particular hostilities between Jesus and the Jews to a universal level', thereby serving as a cipher for the real problem during the time of the Gospel's writing, namely Rome.[42] Kierspel's motivation to ameliorate any hint of anti-Semitism, though understandable, is ultimately unnecessary. Just as the disciples are both the concrete instantiations of Jesus' 'own' and, simultaneously, representative of a wider reality, so is the case with the 'Jews' and the world. Indeed, the universality of the latter is only ever encountered in the particularity of socio-political entities, of which the former is the chief one in the Gospel narrative.[43] This conflict with the world reaches its climactic encounter in what is, correspondingly, Jesus' most stark enactment of life-giving love in relation to the Bethany family, to which we now turn.

2d. Jesus' love for his own in Bethany

What we have seen so far suggests a pattern whereby Jesus establishes relationships of love that are conventional in form but are, at the same time, the means by which he loves his own, undertaking the mission of God to bring up children out of a hostile world. The Bethany episode is the place where Jesus' love for his own is most directly expressed and indeed where what I have described as the 'divine narrative' of John is encapsulated.[44]

---

[42] *The Jews and the World*, 179–182.

[43] That this entails a symbolic operation whereby the symbol is present in, rather than merely illustrative of, the thing symbolised is an important feature of Johannine thought that will be explored in chap. 5.

[44] Thus Lincoln remarks that 'as regards Jesus' mission, the plot of the Lazarus story mirrors that of the overall Gospel' and even that it 'deserves to be called the Fourth Gospel in miniature' ("Lazarus", 214, 232). For similar observations about individual features of this text in relation to the Gospel as a whole, see Michaels, *John*, 629, 633.

Jesus, uniquely in the Gospel up to this point, is said to love Lazarus (11:3) and also his sisters (11:5), using two different verbs in the process.[45] Such verbal variation confirms that the concept of Johannine love is not bound to one particular term.[46] Moreover, it sets up the rest of what follows as a loving action on the part of Jesus, with the nature of the relationship being explicitly designated as friendship (Lazarus is referred to as ὁ φίλος ἡμῶν, 11:11).

Raising Lazarus and laying down life for a friend

Although there is no indication of how Jesus knew the family, the relationship is described as something quite ordinary.[47] Consequently, he is expected to love Lazarus as any other friend would (even if the plea for his presence is an acknowledgement of his extraordinary healing ability). When Jesus seems *not* to act as a friend, therefore, the sisters' disappointment is no less part of ordinary human interaction for being closely juxtaposed with Christological confession (11:25). The reader already knows from Jesus' earlier words (11:4, 14–15) that the consequence of Jesus' delay, if not necessarily its purpose, is revelatory benefit for his disciples.[48] Indeed, his actions at the tomb constitute the most dramatic public revelation up to that point, and thus teach about his identity. And yet this itself does not make it any less a loving act of friendship,

---

[45] The phrase used of Lazarus in 11:3 is ὃν φιλεῖς, whilst 11:5 says ἠγάπα δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς τὴν Μάρθαν καὶ τὴν ἀδελφὴν αὐτῆς καὶ τὸν Λάζαρον (Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus). Despite the former being in the mouth of a servant and the latter straight from the narrator, there is no reason to posit a difference in meaning between the two, hence Michaels's comment that 'the two verbs for "love"… appear to be used interchangeably' (*John*, 615, n. 6).

[46] Whilst the usage in John 1–10 shows a preference for ἀγαπάω, it and φιλέω can both be used in exactly the same way to refer to the Father's love for the Son (cf. 3:19; 5:20; 10:17). Even when the rest of the Gospel is taken into account, there is no convincing evidence that the author meant something different by each word. A preference for usage in certain contexts such as that postulated by Moloney (*Love*, p. 3) would only be significant if it fit a pattern, which it does not. Hence we may conclude with Frey that between the two verbs there is 'no semantic difference' ("Love Relations", 176).

[47] Perhaps, as Michaels comments, 'John's Gospel presupposes here an acquaintance... [with] Luke's story (or some story) about these two sisters and their "village"' (*John*, 613).

[48] Lincoln opines that 'Jesus' deliberate delay, incomprehensible for normal human timetables, is to be understood… as an indication that his love is operating according to a divine timetable and plan' ("Lazarus", 219). Strictly speaking, the text is silent about Jesus' actual purpose, hence the speculative explanations offered by Michaels (*John*, 617–618). Yet even if the purpose *were* revelation, the priority of 'making known' still works within a 'normal human' idea of friendship.

at whose heart is mutual knowing and an intimacy demonstrated through his tears (11:35).[49] The fact that the author repeats the affirmation of Jesus' love for the family immediately after the reference to the end goal in God's glory (11:5) and has Jesus refer to his intended action as raising up his *friend* (11:11) suggests that his Christological revelation is woven into his act of friendship.[50] Moreover, the public context of the event illustrates how Jesus' love has always included both those who already belong to him and those who are prospectively 'his own' in his revelatory action.

The whole episode is summed up as a concrete instantiation of the divine mission of love to the world as Jesus calls Lazarus out from the tomb, recalling not only 10:27 but the more eschatologically explicit words of 5:28. Indeed, this is emphasised by the Gospel's most explicit statement regarding the relational telos of Jesus' mission, ironically revealed through the unwitting prophecy of his enemy Caiaphas (11:51–52):

> ἐπροφήτευσεν ὅτι ἔμελλεν Ἰησοῦς ἀποθνήσκειν… ἵνα καὶ τὰ τέκνα τοῦ θεοῦ τὰ διεσκορπισμένα συναγάγῃ εἰς ἕν.
>
> He prophesied that Jesus was to die… in order that the scattered children of God might be gathered into one

This verse not only encapsulates the mandate of establishing the divine household but also draws attention to another way in which the raising of Lazarus instantiates the Gospel's divine narrative. For it brings into focus what has cast its shadow over the whole episode, namely Jesus' death. This is most obviously achieved through the bookending of the Lazarus scene with talk about dying (11:8, 16) and the official decision to kill Jesus (11:53) against the ominous backdrop of the Passover (11:55).[51] It is not only that what Jesus does

---

[49] O'Day explains the exchange that prepares the way for this event (11:11–15) in this regard, saying that 'Jesus treats the disciples as equals by speaking plainly to them' ("Jesus as Friend", 155). However, she overemphasises the egalitarian element without showing how it combines with the structure of teacher-disciple relationships, despite the fact that she herself had only just mentioned the role of παρρησία 'in the instruction of the philosophical schools, where frank speech was encouraged as a mark of honest instruction, dialogue, and training' (p. 153).

[50] That Thompson does not acknowledge this connection is the more surprising since she makes an explicitly theological reading centred on the Gospel thesis 'God confers life to the world through his Word' ("The Raising of Lazarus in John 11: A Theological Reading" in *John and Theology*, 236).

[51] Hence 'the human decision has been co-opted for God's purposes' (Lincoln, "Lazarus", 214).

illustrates his dying for the sins of the world; in precipitating the heightened hostility of the authorities, it *leads inexorably to it*.[52] Therefore the journey to Bethany to raise Lazarus is an act which prefigures the epitome of love as stated in 15:13.[53] The divine and the mundane are perfectly brought together in this incident; as Bauckham says, 'it is in this thoroughly human love of Jesus for his friends that the divine love for the world takes human form'.[54]

Bethany as the hinge from public to private

What we have seen regarding Jesus' interactions with his own during his public ministry is brought to special clarity in relation to the Bethany family. This is not only the case with the raising of Lazarus but also the incident that follows it, where Mary anoints Jesus. Her loving devotion is part of an intimacy that portrays the relational telos of the divine household. As Coloe notes in relation to the Bethany family, 'the fact that they are a household is not incidental to the theology of the narrative'; indeed, they are 'imaging the post-Easter relationship between Jesus and his disciples… who will be children of the Father'.[55] Furthermore, Mary's act of anointing not only portrays this telos but simultaneously (if unknowingly) indicates the means by which it is to be achieved, namely Jesus' death.[56] More specifically still, it draws attention to the immediate cause of his death in the betrayal of Judas (12:6, cf. 13:2).

The figure of Judas also opens up an economic angle on this motif. For Judas's proclivity to unscrupulous greed is part of his animosity to Mary (12:6), and

---

[52] Whilst it is true that there are prior indications of Jesus piquing the ire of the authorities and, indeed, his public ministry as a whole can be taken to precipitate his rejection, this feature is especially present in the Lazarus story.

[53] The fact that 15:13, where this notion is expressed, is couched as a conventional maxim already suggests this overlap.

[54] Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory: Themes in Johannine Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), 69.

[55] *Dwelling*, 120.

[56] This does not mean that Mary's actions are purely illustrative. Michaels argues that the only reason Mary is said to dry Jesus' feet is to create a parallel with the chap. 13 foot washing (*John*, 666). However, it is easy to imagine another explanation: being perfume, the cleansing and aromatic effects will remain when the initial wetness, unpleasant if simply left, is dried. Seeing things thus allows the mundane aspect of the narrative to retain its integrity along with the literary and theological aspects.

thus, indirectly, to Jesus. I have deliberately not raised the question of socio-economic significance directly up to this point in order to set a more basic foundation of the intertwining of mundane and divine dimensions within the establishment of the divine household. But I will argue below (chap. 5) that Jesus' interactions in his public ministry must be understood in their holistic capacity, not least their socio-economic impact. This will include a reading of this very incident in Bethany (chap. 6). For now it is simply worth mentioning that Jesus' love for his own not only brings physical life to Lazarus as an individual, but impacts the holistic wellbeing of Mary and Martha. For this is at the heart of what it means to establish the divine household, as our examination of the foot washing episode itself will demonstrate.

2e. A relationally transformative enactment of love

To take stock of the argument of this section so far: the introductory words of 13:1 function to help the reader understand John 1–12 as an account of Jesus' love for his own.[57] Now, from the retrospective ἀγαπήσας τοὺς ἰδίους τοὺς ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ, we can turn to look to the outworking of the phrase εἰς τέλος ἠγάπησεν αὐτούς, which introduces the foot washing. In doing so, we may approach this episode with the anticipation of a certain amount of continuity. Indeed, it is worth recalling that in all of the public ministry, not least the Bethany incident, the disciples are present as learners as well as those through whom the relational transformation that Jesus enacts is taking place. As such, we may expect Jesus to develop the intimacy of the Rabbi-disciple relationship whilst at the same time carrying out the divine mission to the world.

The announcement of a shared meal such as is depicted in 13:2 (albeit with sparseness of description) confirms the expectation built up by the divine narrative as I have portrayed it.[58] Even if not technically a Passover meal, its

---

[57] This is the logic behind Frey's claim that in John 1–12 'the interpretation of Jesus' death as revelation of his true love and, finally of God's primordial love, is already established' ("Love Relations", 191). My rejoinder would be that this awareness is only established retrospectively in view of what we read in chap. 13–21.

[58] There are very few details about the location and setting; the tendency to associate this scene

association with the feast gives a familial feel to the occasion.[59] Eating together thus befitted the relationship already established and heightened the sense of intimacy. This crucial point is often ignored, as if the interaction between Jesus and his disciples narrated here starts from a *tabula rasa*.[60] By the same token, however, when Jesus begins to wash the feet of those present, it is highly unexpected. To see why this is, and what exactly is happening, we must again bracket out the question of other aspects of Jesus' work that are being symbolised and what is being taught ethically. Instead, we must begin by asking what Jesus is *actually doing in this event*, focusing on the relational dynamics of the action itself.[61]

The relational dynamics of foot washing

Washing feet was not in itself unusual in such a setting; the author refers to the necessary paraphernalia (13:5) without suggesting anything special about their presence. What *is* unusual is that Jesus, the one in the room who was of highest social rank, should discard his garments and don a towel in a manner associated with subservience (13:4).[62] Various options for the precise

---

with an upper room (ἀνάγαιον) comes from Mark (14:15, cf. Luke 22:12) and not John. But we will see below how Jesus' actions bring the incident more into this relational frame than the Rabbi-disciple one already operative.

[59] Keener argues that this was not a Passover meal on the basis that it would likely be the more intimate one of a household (*John*, 900, cf. Michaels, *John*, 720). But the fact that 13:1 sets it within the context of Passover preparation also suggests that the feast is by no means irrelevant to the character of the meal (Brown, *John*, 556). As such, the private, almost familial character sets up what follows as situation of 'communion' where 'mutual bonds' are established (Mathew, *Footwashing*, 307–308).

[60] Brown considers this aspect irrelevant to the interpretation because 'there is no mention of bread, wine, eating, or drinking' (p. 559). Thomas does not address the importance of the meal fellowship; isolating the event from its relational context is characteristic of his sacramental interpretation. For Thyen it is the unusualness of the act happening in the middle of the meal rather than the relational context that it implies that is notable (*Johannesevangelium*, 586). Michaels clearly considers the fact that the mention of the meal is 'relegated to a subordinate clause' as a mark of its interpretative peripherality (Michaels, *John*, 722) and for Mathew it is the symbolic significance of the Passover, rather than the intimacy of a meal, that is key to interpreting the passage (Mathew, *Footwashing*, 203). This is despite her earlier affirmation of the cultural importance of table fellowship (pp. 118–122).

[61] Absolutely separating action from symbolisation is artificial, since anything done within a cultural context already has symbolic meaning. However, there is a distinct way in which the foot washing is symbolic: it connotes Jesus' crucifixion. This is the aspect I bracket out for now.

[62] Whilst being the most significant, Thomas lists this among other discrepancies between the John 13 account and those typical of foot washing in antiquity, not least the timing of the

significance of what he goes on to do have been proposed, though there is general agreement that his taking the normal role of a slave is part of it (cf. 13:14–16).[63] Jesus can additionally be seen as a devotee expressing loving devotion, or a host offering hospitality, both of which are notable for having feminine connotations.[64] None of these options can be discounted; it is likely that all these cultural associations could enter the minds of the disciples and later readers. Yet this is not to suggest combining them into a conglomeration of all possible connotations. Rather, we should observe the standard Johannine practice of employing allusion to bolster an understanding based on the contours of the narrative itself. To see how this is so, one must attend to its physical, social and theological aspects.

First, we cannot pass over the most obvious feature of Jesus' actions; he is washing the dirt off eleven men's feet with his bare hands.[65] Whilst physically removing dirt was clearly not the ultimate aim of his action, neither would it have made any sense as an action revelatory of divine love without this basic material circumstance.[66] From a full recognition of this sheer physicality, something of its social radicalness becomes apparent: Jesus, a respected (if controversial) Rabbi is tending to his disciples' mundane needs. In so doing, he is reconfiguring his relationship with them through giving them profound honour. None of the three socio-historical options mentioned above quite explain how this works relationally, for Jesus is not simply or straightforwardly becoming their slave, devotee or host. In fact, Jesus has neither abrogated his authoritative status as Lord and teacher nor denied their

---

incident apparently in the middle of the meal rather than beforehand (*Footwashing*, 122–127). Thyen sees the unusual timing of the act (in the middle of a meal) as an indication that this was an exceptional act of love-service (ein außergewöhnlicher Liebesdienst, *Johannesevangelium*, 586) yet this already presupposes a view of it as 'love-service' rather than arising logically from its disjunctive position in the meal.

[63] Van der Watt sets out the scholarly consensus on this, along with its main evidential basis and that for the other two main suggestions of devotee and host (*Grammar*, 303–308).

[64] Whether to show special devotion or a regular concern for the ritual cleansing of house guests, it was usually women who would perform this act (Mathew, *Footwashing*, 91–96). As well as John 12:1–8, the New Testament attests to this in Luke 7:36–50 and 1 Timothy 5:9–10.

[65] Brown, somewhat understatedly, observes that this part of one's body would 'get dusty on unpaved roads' (*John*, 564), but with animals around, there would be a lot more than dust.

[66] Only Bauckham, as far as I have read, even hints to the relevance of this point in his comment that it the fact of washing feet being 'natural and necessary' was relevant to its significance as early Christian practice ("Did Jesus?", 427–429).

subordination to him (13:14, 16). And yet, what he has done has been relationally transformative. This becomes clear when he addresses his disciples collectively (minus Judas) as τεκνία (children, 13:33).[67]

Conventionality and radicalness in the divine household

By this stage we seem to have arrived straightforwardly at the theological denouement of the episode, which is the inclusion of the disciples within the divine household. However, there are certain relational dynamics at play that complicate the situation. For the Rabbi-disciple relationship has not actually been abrogated and, moreover, Jesus takes on the role of slave, host and devotee rather than one directly associated with kinship. In fact, in the discourse that follows this incident, Jesus apparently identifies his relational aim as being the ultimate friend (15:13) and making his disciples friends (ὑμεῖς φίλοι μού ἐστε, 15:14). In this he is explicitly negating the subservience suggested by the term 'slave' (οὐκέτι λέγω ὑμᾶς δούλους, 15:15), apparently countermanding his earlier designation of the disciples as exactly that (13:13–14).[68]

If we are to interpret the foot washing in terms of the establishment of divine household we need to account for the aspects of the story mentioned above, which suggest that the formation of a family-like structure is not what Jesus is interested in. Two arguments can be marshalled in response to this. Firstly, a contemporary household was neither restricted to the nuclear unit, nor even to kin.[69] Its boundaries would have been more permeable to slaves, disciples and friends (even if on a temporary basis) than is typical in the West today, thus the difference between this 'household' ethos and that of 'family' suggested by

[67] Despite the role that Frey gives this episode in establishing 'family ethos' or 'Famlienethik', the fact that he has not integrated it theologically with a notion of divine household is apparent from his neglecting this verse in "Glauben und Lieben", "Family Ethos" or "Love-Relations".

[68] O'Day notes that this verse and 16:25–31 puts the notion of 'making known' at the heart of friendship ("Jesus as Friend", 155), but does not recognise that it retains the structure associated with the idea of instruction.

[69] As Coloe notes, 'the Bible does not even have a word for family' (*Dwelling*, 140).

Frey.[70] Conversely, the life of children would involve activity also associated with some of these other categories, including service, learning and even being 'friends' (the English word does not quite communicate the Greek here) to parents.[71]

Secondly, the cultural norm of household is only informative of, but not determinative for, Johannine theological thought. Indeed, the latter is part of what advanced such norms even on a social level.[72] Certainly, some elements of the Gospel's portrayal or Jesus' relationships are without radical departure from convention: as Son he serves his Father (e.g. 14:31), learns from him (e.g. 15:15) and is in his intimate acquaintance in 'friendship' (5:19–20). He has permanent belonging as a child, as opposed to a slave (8:35), with a permanency of dwelling that is parallel to that of the Spirit (14:16–17; cf. 1:33).[73] Other elements, however, go well beyond any cultural precedent (cf. above, 2c).

With the foot washing itself such steps towards a 'radically new order of human relationships' are seen in Jesus' willingness both to be subservient to his disciples and to take on a feminine role in relation to them.[74] Indeed, Jesus washing his disciples feet inaugurates a multifaceted yet intimate divine household (14:2) that culminates in a unity (17:21) where Jesus is both brother

---

[70] Frey does not seem to take this distinction into account and thus contrasts the two too strongly. For example, he states that 'die Freundschaftsethik ist noch mehr als die Familienethik dadurch gekennzeichnet, dass die Hinwendung zu einem Freund freiwillig und ungeschuldet, nicht aus natürlichen bzw. genealogisch vorgegebenen Zusammenhängen heraus begründet ist' ("Glauben und Lieben", 32).

[71] David Konstan argues for a greater distinction between kinship and friendship than most scholars impute ("Greek Friendship", *The American Journal of Philology* 117/1 (1996), 71-94). However, even he conludes that there was enough ambiguity not to absolutely exclude the terms φίλος and φιλία from references to kin (pp. 91–92).

[72] As O'Day points out, Christianity does not simply reflect convention but 'helped shape the discussion of friendship in antiquity' ("Jesus as Friend", 145); indeed, 'the Gospel of John is a pivotal text for the discussion of friendship in the New Testament' (p. 148).

[73] One can assert the Spirit's membership of the divine household without necessarily claiming its divinity in the Johannine schema. Important for our purposes here is that there is here a member who is both permanent and not described in terms of kinship relation

[74] The phrase is Rushton's (*Cry*, 136). There she denies that Jesus retains any element of hierarchy at all but seems to miss the point that his authority in setting the precedent he does depends precisely on *retaining* his hierarchical position in relation to the disciples.

(20:17) and Lord (20:28).[75] That this has disarmingly straightforward practical application is dramatically expressed by Jesus' final words to his own from the cross (19:25–27). Seeing his mother and the beloved disciple, he says to the former 'woman, behold your son' (Γύναι, ἴδε ὁ υἱός σου) and the latter 'behold your mother' (Ἴδε ἡ μήτηρ σου, 19:26). A new household is formed (19:27). Indeed, only when the positive purpose of his action is grasped can its subversive nature, to which we now turn, be understood in proper context.

2f. Subverting the status quo

The relational passage mapped out above is not without friction. For although inaugurating a divine reality that *transcends* the mundane, Jesus does not *bypass* worldly categories of interaction. Instead, he rubs up against dearly held social values. Furthermore, in destabilising principles underlying structures that were taken for granted, his actions become political. Washing feet may not be as dramatic as raising the dead, but it is equally subversive of the status quo. This is clear not only by the offense expressed (13:6, 8) but by the fact that the whole event (capped by an explicit offer of friendship, 13:26) is catalyst for Judas's final move to betrayal (13:27–30).[76] But what made the incident so subversive? To answer this, we must look more closely at Peter's reaction to Jesus here.

Initially it could appear that Peter's protest is an acknowledgement of Jesus' identity that is similar to what Gospel commends John the Baptist for (1:35–37; 3:27–30; 5:33–35; 10:40–41).[77] However, Jesus' stern response (13:8) suggests another explanation. What emerges is a power struggle where Peter wants to assert his own will rather than submit to that of Jesus (13:9) (though

---

[75] Coloe points out that 'in its theological sense *kyrios* acknowledges the divinity of Jesus. In its social sense it names the community as members of his household' (*Dwelling*, 195).

[76] Cf. Weder, "das neue Gebot", 187–192. The progression in intensity between what is stated in these verses about Judas and the statement in 13:2 (τοῦ διαβόλου ἤδη βεβληκότος εἰς τὴν καρδίαν ἵνα παραδοῖ αὐτὸν) makes it unnecessary to suggest that these two statements say the same thing and are thus evidence of redactional activity, as scholars have often done. See Mathew, *Footwashing*, 277–311 for a narrative account in response to this suggestion.

[77] Peter's reaction is more directly reminiscent of John's expression of incredulity at Jesus wanting to be baptised by him in Matthew 3:14 than anything in this Gospel, however.

the implication of 13:12 is that he eventually acquiesces). Peter is not just acting out of the stubbornness of his personality, although this doubtless was a factor. Underlying his attitude is fidelity to a conventional morality in which one sought honour by performing acts of courage for one's friends, superiors or nation. This sentiment surfaces again in 13:37, where Peter insists that he will go as far as laying down his life for Jesus. He is flatly informed that, instead of carrying out a supremely honourable deed (cf. 15:13), he will do what is most shameful and deny Jesus (13:38).[78]

As Thomas's previous call for the disciples to die with Jesus suggests (11:16), a call to lay down life in a heroic manner would not have been met with disdain.[79] Such an act was highly valued according to both Greco-Roman and Jewish cultural sensibilities.[80] In fact, the offensiveness of Jesus' foot washing is twofold. Not only does it set a pattern of mutual service that would be considered servile and feminine; it communicates to the disciples that they cannot even do this kind of action without first being the passive recipients of it from their master.[81] As a result, Peter's master was not behaving as the heroic figure he expected to go into battle with (cf. 18:10–11). Even worse, he would not have the chance to do what he most desired, which was to earn honour (the equivalent for the more economically minded Judas was financial benefit).[82] Jesus' love turns out to be a comprehensive systemic challenge to his society

---

[78] Frey comments that 'the Johannine school adopts an aspect of the ancient ethics of friendship: giving one's life for the *polis* ("Family Ethos", 180). However, Jesus' unconventional behaviour in the Gospel alerts us to the fact that even at the social level, the dictum of 15:13 is insufficient.

[79] Michaels makes a strong grammatical argument for seeing the third person pronoun in 11:16 as a reference to Lazarus since he was the subject of the third person pronouns in both adjacent verses (11:15, 11:17), see Michaels, *John*, 624–625. However, Michaels misses the force of the combination of three factors. Firstly, John often switches between implied subjects in a way that wider context rather than the grammar of the immediate surroundings dictates. Secondly, the wider context is about the disciples' consternation about Jesus going to Judea because of the danger to his life. Thirdly, Thomas is speaking to his fellow disciples and thus it is likely that the 'him' refers to the Lord whom they are deliberating over accompanying.

[80] 'It is widely recognised among Johannine scholars that the notion of laying down one's life for one's friends represents a classical motif of friendship' (O'Day, "Jesus as Friend", 149). Comparable Jewish exemplars are found in the Maccabees (see below, 4a)

[81] Since there is no evidence in antiquity for foot washing in the middle of a meal rather than before, the implication is that the task should have already been done by somebody else but nobody was prepared to lower themselves to do it (Mathew, *Footwashing*, 122–127).

[82] Unlike the patriarchal contemporary reality, 'the divine household [is] governed by the singular dynamic of self-giving love' (Coloe, *Dwelling*, 164).

with the implicit charge that pretended concern for others is often no more than a mask for one's own gain.[83]

Just as the raising of Lazarus was both a microcosm of the Gospel narrative and a catalyst for the actual socio-political mechanisms that would bring it to pass, so is the case here.[84] An apparently harmless domestic incident leads via personal betrayal to political intrigue involving the national (Jewish) and imperial (Roman) authorities.[85] As such, Jesus' genuinely self-giving actions not only provide an ideological critique of the whole world order but lead to the event in which it will be decisively overturned in salvific consummation.[86] Indeed, from the outset, the author makes it clear that Jesus was aware of the broader significance of his actions, though it is in relation to the Father rather than the world that this significance is expressed (13:1). This is re-emphasised in 13:3 with the additional idea that all things have been given to the Son.[87] Thus the author presents Jesus' awareness of divine authority as the basis of behaviour that subverts the mundane hierarchies usually associated with such authority. This shows once again not only how the divine and human dimensions of Jesus' love are intertwined but, additionally, how his love for the Father is enacted through love for the disciples.

---

[83] Richard Cassidy argues that the implication of (the Lord) Jesus washing slaves' feet was that Christians should not buy or keep slaves but that 'this subversive perspective on slavery would hardly be apparent to any Roman official' (*John's Gospel in New Perspective: Christology and the Realities of Roman Power* (2nd ed.) (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015), 122). Although this is certainly a coherent deduction, given that neither the protagonists in the story nor most readers would have been slave owners, it is unlikely that this should be taken as the primary message.

[84] Bauckham opines that the crucial place the foot washing occupies in the narrative is one of the factors that speak in favour of its historicity ("Did Jesus?", 421).

[85] Weder comments that 'der Verrat leitet die Kette der Ereignisse ein, die für Jesus mit dem Tod enden wird' ("Das neue Gebot", 188).

[86] 'Die gesamte Weltordnung von Herrschaft und Knechtschaft" (Thyen, *Johannesevangelium*, 592).

[87] Questions naturally arise from 13:3 concerning the nature of 'all things' (πάντα), when and how these are given to Jesus (ἔδωκεν) and how their being given corresponds to the knowledge thereof (εἰδώς). Such theological issues receive relatively little attention in commentaries. Brooke Westcott, *The Gospel According to St John* (London: James Clarke & Co., 1958), 190, Beasley-Murray (*John*, 233) and Michaels (*John*, 724) only partially address them, whilst Thyen (*Johannesevangelium*, 585) does not do so at all. Brown gives a succinct treatment of the issue which I am happy to adopt. He says that 'all things' comprise salvific power that was already given before 13:1 (cf. John 3:35; 6:38; 10:29), meaning there is no necessary connection between Jesus' knowledge of his authority and it being given (*John*, 564).

2g. Enactment as the basic mode of love in the foot washing

It should now be clear why it is necessary to see the foot washing first as an enactment of love. For before it functions as a symbolic prefiguration of the cross (this element would only be grasped after Jesus' death, 13:7) or becomes an example (as it did in 13:14–15), it is already fulfilling the salvific plan laid out in the divine narrative of the Gospel. It is doing so both by inaugurating a new relational order through the disciples and by catalysing the socio-political opposition to this order that would – with supreme, though humourless, irony – finally establish it through Jesus' sacrifice. Thus the divine narrative is enacted not in some hermetically sealed 'spiritual' domain removed from the mundane sphere that somehow reflects it, but rather *through* the mundane interactions of Jesus.

A caveat is needed at this point, however. For even if one cannot meaningfully draw a line of demarcation between the divine and mundane dimensions, none of what I have argued entails that the latter be made transparent to the former. With believing, the connection of a human act to one's relationship to God is not straightforwardly one of cause and effect (above, chap. 2, 2e). There is a similar dynamic operative here in that, although one cannot identify the moment of washing with a soteriological event, the soteriological stakes of participating in Jesus' concrete action are high (13:8).[88] Indeed, the means by which the foot washing is efficacious cannot be separated from the wider relational context of the event. The relationship that Jesus has already built up with the disciples is also the precondition for the foot washing and not just its effect.[89] Jesus clearly does not go around doing this to anyone; relational

---

[88] The necessity of actually undergoing this deed of Jesus is best illustrated by considering the following thought experiment. What would have happened if Peter had said to Jesus "Ok, I get the theological point you are making – I understand it, so there is no need to actually go ahead with physically washing my feet"?

[89] The intimacy of the occasion is communicated through eating from the same bowls (13:18, 26) reclining to the point of touching one another (13:23) and talking in a deeply personal and emotional way (13:21). Whilst it is not clear exactly how the relationship between Jesus and the beloved disciple was unique, the general setting makes it natural to read their interaction as a heightened instance of what was the case for all of the disciples and not a radical departure from an otherwise formal set of relationships.

transformation is a process and not a singular and easily replicable act.[90] Indeed, one's undergoing this action does not automatically entail a change in relational status, as is clear from the participation of Judas.[91] As such, the foot washing is a necessary, if not sufficient, stage in the journey of the disciples from the world to the household of God.

The enactment of the foot washing in scholarly context

I am now able to articulate how exactly this reading differs from the majority perspectives. There are certainly those, such as Beasley-Murray and Michl, who insist on the inherent value in the act.[92] They do not explain this value within the narrative and metanarrative context as Thyen does.[93] But for most, the episode is conceived primarily in illustrative terms, pointing to Jesus' crucifixion. This can be either as a 'picture', as Richter and Hofius would have it, or something like Zumstein's 'métaphore de la croix'.[94] For Mathew, it 'prefigures his sign of love on the cross for the benefit of his disciples'.[95]

All of the examples just mentioned follow Bultmann's basic position that 'in der Fußwaschung … die Reinigung symbolisch dargestellt wird', attributing this interpretation with an anti-sacramental force that dispels the efficacy of baptism and thus plays no directly salvific role.[96] This is despite the fact that

---

[90] When one takes the relational context seriously in this way, it goes a long way towards explaining why attempts to replicate foot washing as an ecclesial rite can easily end up with an air of arbitrariness.

[91] Even the subplot of Judas' betrayal accentuates the sense of closeness in communal interaction, since it is this very closeness that brings the betrayal into relief and evokes the line from Psalm 49 in 13:18.

[92] Beasley-Murray comments that 'it is not to be overlooked that the footwashing is more than a simple parable of the greater act of cleansing achieved by Jesus through his death; it is itself an act of love to the limit, as the Evangelist recognized (13:1)' (*John*, 239). Michl goes so far as to state that this deed represents all of Jesus' deeds of love by itself being such a deed and not merely a parable or symbol thereof (Michl, "Fusswaschung", 702).

[93] For Thyen, the extent to which the value of all the episodes included in the Gospel are truly 'intrinsic' is already qualified by their being collectively geared towards the purpose stated in 20:30–31 (*Johannesevangelium*, 592).

[94] Jean Zumstein, "Le Lavement des Pieds (Jean 13,1–20): Un Exemple de la Conception Johannique du Pouvoir", *Revue de Théologie et de Philosophie*, 132/4 (2000), 358.

[95] Mathew, *Footwashing*, 388, cf. 418, which similarly states that the foot washing 'symbolically prefigures his death on the cross'. The extent to which the cross is a 'sign' is by no means obvious and will be addressed in chap. 5.

[96] Bultmann, *Johannesevangelium*, 358–359.

he, like many others, sees 13:1 as referring to everything up to the end of chap. 19, implying that the foot washing must be included with the cross as a genuine, and thus efficacious, act of love.[97] Indeed, my position is merely the logical corollary of the more commonplace observation that begins from the crucifixion and affirms that it 'stands in continuity with his being, work and love up to this point', implying that this includes washing feet.[98]

By rejecting an initial equation of the foot washing with the cross, I am not *weakening* the connection between the two but, on the contrary, *strengthening* it. I am doing so by showing how the foot washing is an enactment of love integral to the divine narrative, and the salvific process in particular, both in its relationally transformative dynamics and in its incurring the reaction from the world that would culminate at Golgotha. However, this does not mean that its function in symbolising and revealing is excluded.

The symbolic dimension of the pericope can only be properly grasped when it is clear how the cross stands in continuity with the foot washing as an *enactment* of Jesus' love. In terms of revelation, we have seen with Jesus' relationships in his public ministry (above, 2c) that this is an aspect of the enactment of his love. This is worth bearing in mind when we begin to look at the significance of the act beyond what would actually have been experienced at the time (and may even have been inaccessible save through pneumatic assistance). For even in this case, the Gospel is still working within an understanding of Jesus' love for his own in which the mundane and divine are inextricably bound together. Having argued this, we can move on to the second element of this episode, which is to look at how the foot washing is a *revelatory foreshadowing* of Jesus' love.

---

[97] Thyen builds on Bultmann's idea that 13:1 refers to chap. 13–20 as a whole but does not consider the gravity of the suggestion that ἠγάπησεν may refer to the foot washing and not simply make it a symbol (*Johannesevangelium,* 584–585).

[98] 'Jesus Weg zum Kreuz in der Kontinuität seines bisherigen Seins und Wirkens, in der Kontinuität der Liebe steht' (Schnelle, "Abchiedsreden", 600). See also C.K. Barrett's remark that 'John takes seriously the sacrificial love of Christ which, though it was clearly demonstrated in the cross, informed the whole earthly mission of the Son of God' (*The Gospel According to St John* (London: SPCK, 1958), 78), cf. Käsemann, *Testament*, 17–18.

3. The foot washing as revelatory foreshadowing of love

Revelation is not just a theological word. For it is part of the socially conventional nature of Jesus' love within all of his various relationships to make himself known. Whilst this happens simply through being who he is in relation to others (which includes all that Jesus does in the Gospel), it also entails more specific revelation. This is not just a matter of authorial allusion in our pericope; rather, it is narrated as an intrinsic part of what Jesus himself is doing. In general terms, Jesus was aware of the connection between the foot washing and the climactic events of 'the hour' (13:1–3). But it also emerges that he intends to communicate such awareness to the disciples through what he does. This is signalled by Jesus' words to the (uncomprehending) Peter:[99]

> ὃ ἐγὼ ποιῶ σὺ οὐκ οἶδας ἄρτι, γνώσῃ δὲ μετὰ ταῦτα (13:7).
>
> That which I myself am doing you do not now know; but you will know after these things

When and how will the disciples understand? Jesus will shortly provide an explanation of his actions (13:12–17), but there is also another referent of these words.[100] For the phrase μετὰ ταῦτα connotes a common Johannine trope of post-resurrection knowledge (John 2:22; John 12:16).[101] It is then that Jesus' actions will finally make sense. However, the reader is given more clues than Peter to help him or her grasp this via the multivalent resonance between the foot washing and the Passion. This is achieved by three different types of connections: literary and sociological (which I set out in 3a) and theological (3b). I show how this revelatory aspect is connected to enactment in the last sub-section (3c).

---

[99] It is not self-contradictory to say that Peter lacked understanding and that he was morally culpable for his resistance to Jesus. Frequently in John ignorance and wilfulness are connected (e.g. 9:39–41).

[100] Thomas identifies this as another example of Johannine double reference (*Footwashing*, 92).

[101] Although grammatically speaking the plural μετὰ ταῦτα implies a number of events rather than just one, it is fairly common practice in John to use this kind of formulation to move the narrative forward or refer to the future in general (Michaels, *John*, 727, n. 29). Moreover, later in the same passage Jesus refers to the one thing he has just taught with plural pronouns (13:17). Grammar itself is insufficient to demand a wider referent than the immediate one.

3a. Literary and sociological resonances

From the outset, the Passover context sets the scene within Jesus' impending sacrificial death (13:1). Even the setting of the feast (13:2) recalls the incident at Bethany shortly before, the anointing of feet that is connected to Jesus' death and the hostility of Judas (12:1–8).[102] Jesus' actions are described with even more specifically allusive language through what he does first, namely laying aside his garments. For the phrase τίθησιν τὰ ἱμάτια (13:4) not only echoes the self-giving of the Good Shepherd (10:11, 15, 17) but also foreshadows the removal of his clothes and their division among the Roman soldiers (19:23).[103]

Some, including Frey, have also suggested that 'laying down' should also be linked to the παρέδωκεν with which Jesus succumbs to death (19:30).[104] However, this is secondary at most, for despite the terminological variation that characterises John, verbal allusions should be taken as the primary ones. Indeed, the verb παρέδωκεν used at 19:30 is connected to our episode, but to Judas' actions rather than Jesus' (13:2, 11, 21). The repeated reference to Judas' giving up Jesus' life out of evil forms a proleptic contrast with Jesus' giving up of his life out of goodness. It also relativises the former in the face of Jesus' sovereignty in the latter (cf. 10:18), making it clear that evil, embodied in Judas, is not ultimately defeating God's salvific mission.

It is not only through the author's language that he inscribes elements of foreshadowing the Passion into his narrative.[105] This is also achieved through the sociological character of Jesus' action itself. For his washing feet is not

---

[102] Mathew emphasises the importance of the connection not only between the foot washing pericope and John 12:1–8, but also between the latter and various Synoptic parallels, arguing that a connection between washing feet and Jesus' death may lie further back in the tradition than John (*Footwashing*, 167–201).

[103] Cf. Craig Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community,* 2nd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2003), 132.

[104] Frey, "Love-Relations", 186.

[105] However, we will see in our discussion of the exemplary aspect of the foot washing that it is not only set in continuity with the cross, but also in contradistinction from it (see section 4, below).

simply an act of general humility.[106] As we have seen, it constitutes the voluntary adoption of a posture associated with subservience and femininity, relinquishing the privileges of status in an act of devotion that connotes the ultimate self-giving.[107] Moreover, it prepares the way for his execution by a method that was considered inappropriate even for freedmen, yet alone an independent, financially well supported and respected teacher.[108] In fact, part of the foreshadowing aspect of the foot washing is to also depict the shamefulness and impropriety of such a death. Its impact is conveyed through the (albeit ill-informed) reaction of Peter as well as Judas. Likewise the reader is not only supposed to dispassionately note the interesting literary allusions to the cross but feel some of its distastefulness, both from the perspective of Jewish messianic and Greco-Roman social expectations.[109]

Yet just as the use of the word παρέδωκεν draws attention to a relationship of contrast between the foot washing and Jesus' death, so is the case with the social setting itself. For as we saw, it is not primarily the enmity of the world working through the disciples that characterises the scene, but rather the intimacy that is there. The gathering of close friends around a meal could not be in any starker contrast to the crucifixion scene. There he is bereft not only of the companions that had shared table fellowship with him (18:15–27), but is bereft even of the appropriate loyalty of his nation as a whole (19:15–16).

3b. Theological resonances

The way in which the foot washing incorporates subversive elements that point

---

[106] It is this humble service that earliest commentators draw out, mainly as an example but also as a foreshadowing of the ultimate service of giving life for others (Elowsky, *John 11–21*, 81–90).

[107] So Koester, *Symbolism*, 132.

[108] Whilst there is no indication of Jesus' socio-economic status in John, the ease of his interactions with those in the upper echelons of society indicate that they did not view him as being completely out of place there. That he had ultimate control over the finances of the group is indicated in 13:27–29, though as Ling suggests, this may have indicated leadership of a 'virtuoso' group whose economic dealings went beyond conventional piety (*Judaean Poor*, 173–177).

[109] This disjunction reaches its apotheosis in the spectacle of a people handing over their king to a criminal's execution (19:15–16).

to the cross also draws attention to two specifically theological interconnections. For part of what Peter was refusing was the necessary passive moment in discipleship. This is central to the cross itself, which is something that Jesus alone will do for his friends, as both lamb and shepherd; it cannot be reciprocated (15:13–14), even if there are ways in which the disciples are called to approximate it (21:15–21). There is a broader principle at work here where divine action always comes first, as is the case with the antecedent of believing. Whatever ethical implications Jesus' words and actions may have, they cannot be exemplary until they have been undergone, a premise crystallised in the love command (13:34). Only in this relational context can any elements of mimesis and reciprocation in Johannine ethics be rightly understood.

A second theological connection between our episode and the cross comes via the idea of cleansing. It is true that evidence for an expiatory aspect to the Gospel's soteriology overall is not straightforward. One cannot easily discern from the Passion narrative that Jesus' death was 'washing the believer'.[110] It also appears tendentious to combine the foot washing with the explicit words about cleansing in 15:3.[111] Yet we have already seen how this combination of revelation (including through words) and relational transformation is characteristic of the way Jesus loves his own. Moreover, whatever one makes of the Gospel's sacramental perspective, the prominence of baptism as an activity in keeping with Jesus' mission is informative (see especially 3:21 – 4:3). It suggests the endorsement of an ablutionary element of salvation that can reasonably be read into some of the more cryptic statements in John, especially when combined with pneumatological features (e.g. 3:5; 19:35). Thus it is perfectly plausible that Jesus' washing his disciples' feet is part of the means by which the cross is attributed cleansing power. The only proviso is that this cleansing must be seen not as an end in itself but as a stage towards the

---

[110] Contra Culpepper, "Hypodeigma", 140. In terms of explicit statements, it is not Jesus' death but his word, his revealing himself to others, that is credited with the capacity for cleansing in John (15:3).

[111] Koester does this, saying that 'people are cleansed from sin through the revelation of divine love that restores people to a right relationship with God by evoking faith, for faith is the opposite of sin' (*Symbolism*, 133).

ultimate telos of the divine mission, namely to establish people's filial status.[112]

3c. The foot washing as enactment and revelatory foreshadowing of love

Jesus washing his disciples' feet is, therefore, the climax of his loving his own as part of the divine mission of relational transformation from being part of a hostile world to part of the divine household. This divine process works through, not apart from, mundane interaction. As an enactment of love, it is already revelatory insofar as loving involves making oneself known. But the foot washing also has a more specific function in revelatory foreshadowing. It is shaped – not only by its narration but, according to 13:7, by Jesus' own intention – so as to point to the cross as the ultimate extension of the same love. The literary, sociological and theological connections frame it as the same kind of self-giving action as that which led to his death. Furthermore, they also frame it as contrasting in the same way to the status quo, as it incurs the same kind of negative reaction. We must bear these complex dynamics in mind as we consider the significance of the ethical example that Jesus sets.

4. The foot washing as example

The focus on Christological symbolism that characterises the narration of the foot washing (13:1–11) sits awkwardly with Jesus' explanation of his foot washing in terms of moral example (13:12–17), for which he uses the term ὑπόδειγμα (13:15). Indeed, this is why so much ink has been spilt on redactional theories in relation to this pericope.[113] More recently, scholars have been inclined to do as early interpreters did and come up with readings based

---

[112] See, for example, Thompson, *John* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 282. Hofius opines that 1 John 1:7 (τὸ αἷμα Ἰησοῦ… καθαρίζει ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ πάσης ἁμαρτίας) is perfectly encapsulated in the foot washing story, strengthening the impression that the thought represented there was already present in the Gospel on some level ("Fußwaschung", 173–174).

[113] Beasley-Murray rightly points out that despite the disjunction between these two kinds of account suggested by the application of such terms as 'theological' or 'sacramental' and 'moralistic' to its parts, the combination of these things is typical of the Gospel of John (*John*, 230–231).

on the text in the form it is given. Yet when this is attempted, the challenge of how the divine and mundane narratives interrelate in the pericope is brought into even starker relief. With this challenge in mind, the final main section of this chapter reconsiders the meaning of the term ὑπόδειγμα, which Jesus chooses to explain the foot washing in 13:14–15 (4a) and sets this discussion alongside the main interpretative suggestions by modern scholars (4b). Having shown the inadequacy of simply choosing one of the options they suggest, I finally show how Jesus' enactment of love (as I developed the notion in section 2) provides the means by which to offer an alternative reading of Jesus' example (4c). This alternative will be able to integrate both the Christological and exemplary emphases of the pericope, showing at the same time how the divine and mundane dimensions are intertwined in Jesus' action.

4a. Jesus' ὑπόδειγμα (13:15): lexical and cultural considerations

Schlier and the limits of lexicography

Turning to the word ὑπόδειγμα itself, Heinrich Schlier is unequivocal that it has quite a general and non-exclusive meaning.[114] In Greek sources it can denote 'document', 'proof' or 'model', but the sense of 'example' is the chief one, a term not assuming exact replication but not completely discounting it either. Both this usage and the interchangeability with παράδειγμα are found in the Septuagint, with the additional usage of 'copy' or an 'image', such as an illustration or vision of something real (e.g. Ezekiel 8:10; Exodus 25:8).[115] Whilst the latter explains what we find in Hebrews 8–9, the idea of 'example' generally applies to the other New Testament occurrences.[116] However, Schlier singles out John 13:15 as indicating 'more than example' and, in fact, 'a definite prototype' in which the disciples 'experience the love of Jesus and are to cause

[114] Heinrich Schlier, "ὑπόδειγμα", *TDNT*, 2: 32–33. He notes that the word παράδειγμα is also commonly used to convey the same thing.

[115] It is thus unsurprising that Friedrich Rehkopf glosses both words with the term '*Beispiel*' (example) in his *Septuaginta-Vokabular* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989), 218, 296.

[116] It denotes a negative example of sinfulness in Hebrews 4:11 and 2 Peter 2:6; only in James 5:10 does the term denote a positive personal example to follow.

others to have the same experience'.[117]

With such a cursory explanation, it remains unclear whether Schlier thinks that exact replication is necessary for Jesus' act to have its intended effect. But what is notable about Schlier's short article is how the generality of the term ὑπόδειγμα leads him to interpret its use in 13:15. He reads the latter in terms of (his perception of) the Johannine context as a whole, rather than seeing it as a technical term. Others want to import a more specific sense from the Septuagint, noting its conjunction with honourable death and taking this as semantically significant.[118] Certainly, such associations could have been culturally present even if attributing this semantic value to the lexeme itself would come into the category of James Barr's illegitimate totality transfer. In any case, the claim would still have to be judged on the basis of the Gospel's thought more broadly, which is what I am attempting to do here.

Related Greek thought: paradigm and mimesis

The word ὑπόδειγμα is not likely to be a technical term. Nevetheless, discussions around concepts with which it was associated shed some light on the kinds of interpretative options open to us here. This is particularly so in two cases: that of paradigm and mimesis. We turn now to a brief engagement with each of these.

The close connection of the Johannine term with παράδειγμα suggests the relevance of the philosophical sense of 'paradigm' developed by Aristotle.[119] For our purposes, the notable aspect of the idea is that its connection to a more fundamental reality does not render the concrete instance less significant, as if it were a husk to be discarded once the universal had been grasped. In fact,

---

[117] Schlier, "ὑπόδειγμα", 33.

[118] See 2 Maccabees 6:28, 31; 4 Maccabees 17:23. Thyen, following Culpepper, holds that the word connects the foot washing with the death of Jesus and opines that the disciples are hereby placed under the demand to be ready to die for one another (Thyen, *Johannesevangelium*, 592; Culpepper, "Hypodeigma", 142–144).

[119] 'An example [παραδειγμα] represents the relation, not of part to whole or of whole to part, but of one part to another, where both are subordinate to the same general term, and one of them is known' (*Prior Analytics*, trans. H. P. Cooke and H. Tredennick (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1938), 517 [book 2, chap. 24]).

Giorgio Agamben has shown how this Aristotelian notion leaves a certain amount of ambivalence on this score.[120] For it could be that the paradigm is just one potentially interchangeable instance of that fundamental reality; but it could also be that the latter is *only* able to be expressed in that particular paradigm. In terms of the foot washing, that would give us two options; either it is an optional practice expressing something that could equally well be expressed by something else; or it is a concrete instance of Jesus' love that must be maintained.

The latter option may suggest the possibility of a sacramental interpretation if it were not for the fact that a paradigm is, by definition, generative of other action and never, by definition, something that is *sui generis*. Thus we are still left with the question of what kind of rules may apply to determine which actions can genuinely be said to be generated by the paradigm. Agamben's answer to this is not to establish diagnostic categories but, instead, to frame such discernment in terms of an aesthetic judgment.[121] From this perspective, one should be able to judge what kind of actions are faithful to Jesus' ὑπόδειγμα of washing feet by an intuitive judgment. But of course, this only leads to the problem of how such a faculty of judgment can be cultivated, with the most obvious solution being to look at other instances of the paradigm. That the Gospel provides us with exactly that will be my argument in chap. 5. For now, suffice to note that the concept of paradigm helpfully frames the issue of discerning Jesus' ethical example by attention to the relationship between a concrete action and a broader range of actions.

A second Greek concept that could be connoted by the word ὑπόδειγμα is that of mimesis. Admittedly, there is no specific connection between this actual term and mimetic theory.[122] But because the context makes it clear that Jesus is

---

[120] See "What is a Paradigm?" in *The Signature of All Things: On Method* (New York, NY: Zone, 2009). Agamben sets out to define 'paradigm' particularly in relation to the work of Michel Foucault and Thomas Kuhn (pp. 9–18), both of whom he sees working out a distinction that is already there in Roman (p. 18) and Aristotelian (pp. 18–19) thought.

[121] Such a judgment seeks correspondence to "Paradigm", 20–21.

[122] Neither Culpepper ("Hypodeigma") nor Schlier ("ὑπόδειγμα") discuss the concept, and even Keener, with all the Greco-Roman parallels he draws on, makes no connection between this word and the concept (*John*, 911). Van der Watt, in a footnote about the word ὑπόδειγμα, talks

giving an example to be imitated, it is not unreasonable to consider how notions of mimesis lie in the background of 13:14–15. Bennema, who focuses on the idea of mimesis in his monograph on Johannine ethics, makes much of these verses, even if he is ambivalent about the lexical issue.[123] He focuses his discussion on the question of whether Jesus is calling for 'literal duplication' or 'a directive to humble service' (p. 92). Concluding that the former is incompatible with the notion of mimesis connoted by Jesus' injunction, he sees the latter as more plausible. However, he qualifies that by emphasising the fact that the creative articulation of the foot washing can only remain faithful when Jesus' original action is kept in mind, if not physically performed (pp. 104–105).

Accordingly, looking at the word ὑπόδειγμα in terms of mimesis evinces a similar understanding and raises a similar question as does the idea of paradigm. Limiting Jesus' example to exact replication is untenable according to either concept, but the necessity of retaining the specific practice remains an open question. Indeed, Bennema points out that focusing too much on this matter takes attention away from the necessarily *relational* context of all such mimetic action.[124] This observation allows us to forge a link between the Hellenistic idea of mimesis and a more explicitly Jewish practice via our previous discussion about the Rabbi-disciple relationship. Robert Kirschner shows how this relationship not only involved the constantly vigilant presence of the disciples with their Rabbi but the expectation of 'their behavior to bear paradigmatic significance'.[125] In the legal context of *halakah*, the paradigm would have had a wider application than the precise incident that gave rise to

---

about two completely different Aristotelian terms (παραβολή and εἰκών) (*Grammar*, 244, n. 128). He later settles for its translation as 'example' (p. 308), with Jesus' statement in 13:14 rather than the word itself that he connects to 'the common practice of ancient mimesis' (p. 309). The word ὑπόδειγμα is not mentioned in Stephen Halliwell's study of the topic (*The Aesthetics of Mimesis – Ancient Texts and Modern Problems* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002).

[123] Bennema claims that ὑπόδειγμα is an instance of 'significant mimetic language' that has 'inherent potential to express mimesis' but gives no lexical evidence to back this up (*Mimesis*, 93). He later (n. 54, p. 98) points to the same claim made by D. G. van der Merwe ("Imitatio Christi in the Fourth Gospel", *Verbum et Ecclesia* 22/1 (2011), 131–148), but there is no lexical discussion there either. Later again, he flatly contradicts his initial claim and says that mimesis is 'not inherent in ὑπόδειγμα', referring to Schlier's article as he does so.

[124] Bennema only mentions, but does not fully explain, the necessarily relational context for imitation of Jesus' actions (*Mimesis*, 95).

[125] Robert Kirschner, "Imitatio Rabbini", *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 27/1 (1986), 73.

it. But what this meant, of course, was a matter of constant debate.

4b. Critiquing the three main options for the meaning of Jesus' example

Having examined what can be gleaned from the word ὑπόδειγμα itself, we are in a better position to formulate an understanding of Jesus' words in 13:14–15. There are, in fact, three main options and a brief assessment of each will lead to my own reading. As I said before in relation to the pericope as a whole, these are neither mutually exclusive nor are they always held as independent positions by scholars. Nevertheless, they are ideas of exemplarity that we need to look at before deciding how to exclude or integrate them within a comprehensive account.

Martyrdom or laying down life

If one begins from the premise that the foot washing symbolises the cross, or the word ὑπόδειγμα already connotes noble death (as do Thyen and Culpepper), it is only consistent to take its exemplary force as a call to lay down one's life for others.[126] Certainly, this interpretation would forge a link between 13:14–15 and 13:34 that would, in turn, establish continuity between Jesus' self-giving as the acme of love (15:13) and his references to the love command that surround it (15:12, 17).[127] However, we have already seen that the initial premise cannot be accepted in any straightforward way, since the foot washing is not only an illustration but is inherently valuable as an action. Furthermore, Jesus' actions are actually *more* radical than what Peter wanted to do, not to mention the fact that the latter's bravado turned out to be unrealistic.

---

[126] Frey contends that the foot washing is an ethical pointer towards self-giving death for others so that it is 'specifically [Jesus'] willing acceptance of death' that is to be imitated ("Love Relations", 195, cf. Nissen, "Community", 206).

[127] Callahan is more influenced by a 1 John 3:16–17 than our pericope itself when he gives a rendering of love as 'putting one's life at the disposal of those one loves' (*Love Supreme*, 1). However, the fact that the Johannine literature elsewhere uses the idea of laying down life to refer to mundane mutual concern at least raises an interpretative possibility worth exploring.

Indeed, the Gospel as a whole portrays Jesus' sacrifice as *sui generis*.[128] The reiterations of the love command at 15:12 and 15:17 still use the aorist ἠγάπησα to refer to the recently performed foot washing. Conversely, his proverbial statement regarding the acme of love in giving life for one's friends (which would also have had resonance with a militaristic Greco-Roman ethos) points primarily to his own action. This can be affirmed because the command is never followed by a call to imitation but a retrenchment of the disciples' position as the passive party. They are the friends for whom Jesus' life is to be laid down (15:14), the sheep who rely on the sacrificial care of the shepherd (10:11, 15, 17), never vice versa. The unilateral nature of the idea thus stands in stark contrast to the bilateral form of the command in 15:12 and 15:17.

An additional problem with an ethical focus on laying down one's life, even as a lesser sacrificial act, is that it is by definition something that can only be done once. Thus it hardly gives an indication of what quality of life or relationships Jesus is calling for in what he implies will be continual reciprocity.[129] To be fair to those who suggest this possibility, they do not generally restrict Jesus' injunction to entail martyrdom only.[130] Yet this caveat still necessitates an explanation of what it is that connects washing feet to laying down life in a way that makes it generative of other ethical action. Such an explanation is required whether one sees Jesus as encouraging or discouraging laying down one's life; for, either way, the connection between the foot washing and the cross is undeniable. What binds the two? This brings us to our second option.

Humble service

Many scholars, perhaps the majority, understand Jesus' words in 13:14–15 as a call to a radically humble, self-giving service. Whilst not simply a 'plain text reading' as Brown claims, this is certainly a reasonable interpretation of these

[128] The disciples are never actually commanded to lay down their lives or, as Weder puts it on more general terms, to do the 'masterful deeds of Jesus' ("Das neue Gebot", 193).

[129] This is implied my reciprocation itself and possibly, depending on one's view of verbal aspect, the present infinitive of νιπτειν in 13:14.

[130] E.g., Culpepper states that 'the close association of love with the footwashing and Jesus' death conveys the implication that Jesus was charging his disciples to love one another even if such love requires that they lay down their lives for the community' ("Hypodeigma", 146).

words, using 13:16–17 to link the social humility required in washing feet and the willingness to accept crucifixion.[131] It also fits with Jesus' shifting of the focus away from the dramatic act proposed by Peter to something more unassuming in line with the actual example he gives. As such, it is also more practicable and sustainable as a community ethic. However, such an interpretation ends up being unsatisfactorily vague. What range of humble service does Jesus' foot washing exemplify? And how could such an ethic take account of its connection with laying down life (which still needs to be part of the equation somehow)? Such vagueness is especially problematic when one considers the apparent specificity of Jesus' rationale for giving his example: ἵνα καθὼς ἐγὼ ἐποίησα ὑμῖν καὶ ὑμεῖς ποιῆτε (13:15). The desire to respect this need for a more specific referent is the most telling factor in favour of the third option, namely the sacramental interpretation.

Sacrament

Whether washing feet is a cypher for something else (either baptism or Eucharist) or a sacrament in its own right, this pericope has frequently been seen to endorse or even inaugurate an ecclesial rite (see above, 1b). On the one hand, my argument thus far tends against such a position. For, again, Jesus' action has inherent value and cannot be read as a symbol in the sense of simply illustrating something else such as baptism or Eucharist. And even if the foot washing were taken as a sacrament in its own right, this would seem to countermand the force of the term ὑπόδειγμα, which implies something that goes beyond exact replication of a singular act.[132] Yet, on the other hand, the notion of 'sacrament' as a self-enclosed ceremony is a caricatured view that

---

[131] Brown claims this along with the contention that 'verses 14–17 state explicitly that what Jesus did in washing the feet of the disciples was an example of self-sacrificing humility to be imitated by them' (*John*, 558).

[132] Thomas argues that the context of Jesus' establishing his example dictates that it must be taken as a specific action to follow and not 'a general call to humble service' (*Footwashing*, 110). Whilst his contention that the word ὑπόδειγμα helps communicate this is unsustainable as we have seen, the specificity implied by the sequence in καθὼς… καὶ in 13:15 is stronger grounds. Yet not even this need imply that Jesus is instituting a stand-alone rite rather than a paradigmatic case. Indeed, even the sources Thomas quotes from Origen, Augustine and Chrysostom see foot washing in continuity with other forms of humble service (pp. 142–145). Bauckham also produces a sharp critique of Thomas's evidential basis ("Did Jesus?", 412–417).

does not necessarily fit with Early Christian practice.[133] Just as Eucharist was both a rite and a means to inculcate 'Eucharistic' living, so washing feet in this way could have wider significance.[134] It could have been practised ceremonially and simultaneously be made to serve as the means to inculcate a broader ethic at a more mundane level.[135] Yet the same problem arises here as before: how may one delineate the kind of 'broader ethic' that washing feet implies?

4c. Incorporating the lessons of enactment into Jesus' example

Enactment: relational transformation and subversion

I have shown that Jesus' ethical example cannot be reduced to an injunction to martyrdom, an exhortation to a life of humble service, or an institution of a sacrament. This suggests the necessity of an explanation which integrates the foot washing more fully within the complex contours of Johannine thought.[136] Specifically, this requires that we take fuller account of what has been underplayed in scholarship, namely Jesus' *enactment* of love in the foot washing. This is relevant here in two main ways.

Firstly, Jesus' love is enacted by transformative relationships. The way he relates as a Rabbi with disciples is the foremost instantiation of his relating to 'his own' who constitute the divine household. Not only does his washing the disciples' feet *imply* the same relational pattern between them, it *specifies* it

---

[133] Thus Bauckham's argument that the quotidian character of the foot washing makes it unsuitable for sacramental practice is unsustainable ("Did Jesus?", 417).

[134] The way in which the Eucharist sets a wider pattern for Christian life will be broached in chap. 6. It is a prominent theme in contemporary ethics, as per William Cavanaugh's *Theopolitical Imagination: Discovering the Liturgy as Political Act in an Age of Global Consumerism* (London: T & T Clark, 2002), especially pp. 112–122.

[135] Somewhat unusually among those who reject a sacramental interpretation, Michaels insists that actual performance of foot washing is essential as a way of preserving a 'sign of a broader commitment to imitate him in every area of life' (*John*, 736).

[136] Some challenges attendant on doing this are apparent in Mathew's attempt to break out of rigid adherence to any of the more traditional interpretative options. She concludes that Jesus' example 'transcends the literal imitation of washing the feet to include any action that reveals the Father and the Son and makes possible the gift of life to its recipient' (*Footwashing*, 412). This inevitably begs the question of what this means in practice, but the closest we get to this is where Mathew later refers to 'a new and faithful expression of the essence of that ὑπόδειγμα in manifold ways' in mission work (p. 428). Only with an explanation of exactly what it is about the practice of foot washing as a specific action that communicates the 'gift of life' could the kind of actions it implies be elucidated more clearly.

through insisting on continual mutuality. Moreover, the context of an intimate communal meal is neither accidental nor disposable as a mere setting for a lesson. With the words καὶ ὑμεῖς ὀφείλετε ἀλλήλων νίπτειν τοὺς πόδας (13:14, and you ought to wash the feet of one another), Jesus is shaping a community ethic that is intimate and, as we have seen, radically unworldly. Whereas giving one's life for others could be heroic, doing so whilst embracing a lower status was, by definition, dishonourable. This leads us to our second point, which is the connection between the foot washing and Jesus' death. We have seen how scholarly debate has not yielded clarity on this issue, with the ethical ambiguity naturally resulting.[137] What Jesus enacts by washing feet is not merely a quirky private act of relational reconfiguring among a few friends. For it is part of a whole ministry that is authoritative both in mundane sociological terms (as a Rabbi) and in divine soteriological terms of the kingdom (as Messianic Son of God, even Son of Man).[138] From this perspective, the open invitation to all is also a universal challenge. Accordingly, he is establishing a community of transformed relationships that is politically subversive and, as such, leads to death.[139]

Jesus' example

On the basis of the foregoing, we are in a position to delineate the nature of the ethical example that Jesus is giving in 13:14–15. In washing his disciples' feet, Jesus enacts his relationally transformative love in a way that establishes them with him in the divine household. For Jesus himself, this was part of his divine mission that would involve his salvific death for others.[140] For his disciples, washing feet involved something different, but it had its place within the same relational telos. As such, it is a paradigm of ongoing commitment to

---

[137] Mathew does not distinguish between the exemplary quality that Jesus confers on the foot washing and the portrayal of the cross; her applying the term ὑπόδειγμα to the cross without qualification is thus problematic (*Footwashing*, 289).

[138] Recall Chilton's argument showing the combination of these two in "Rabbi Jesus".

[139] Thus Bauckham comments that 'those who follow Jesus in acting like a slave for others may also, like Jesus, incur a slave's death for others' ("Did Jesus?", 417).

[140] Thus Nissen's comment that 'Jesus' whole life is a laying down of his life for others' ("Community", 201).

one another's good by intimately attending to mundane needs in a way that forms a divine household.

Because this divine household includes the element of friendship, it involves laying aside one's individual claim to honour, which is always honour *over others* and thus competitively hierarchical. This is especially the case when such action is demanded in relation to enemies in one's midst.[141] As such, this community ethos is unworldly and, in its outward-facing posture to encompass everyone, dangerously subversive. As Miranda puts it, we are being confronted with 'the terrifying revolutionary thesis that this world of contempt and oppression can be changed into a world of complete selflessness and unrestricted mutual assistance'.[142]

This reading of John 13:14–15 as ethical paradigm does, it is true, leave the question of practical specificity unanswered. It does not even ascertain whether the concrete act of washing feet was meant to be replicated. On this, for the episode to be generative of other behaviour in the paradigmatic way that I am suggesting, it would have to be revisited in its concrete specificity.[143] Such is inscribed in the very nature of the episode as scriptural text, which necessitates imaginative engagement with or without physical performance.

But one may still ask how it is that foot washing can function as a paradigm for other actions of love that tend towards the same relational transformation that Jesus inaugurates here. Bennema is helpful here, drawing attention to the combined importance of cognition (13:12) and pneumatic guidance that are essential to the Gospel's view of discipleship.[144] For one to discern what is

---

[141] Mathew devotes a whole chapter to the role of Judas in the episode (*Footwashing*, 277–328). Whilst she is right to emphasise the fact that Jesus keeps extending his love to Judas, she underestimates the significance of the exclusively negative way in which he is referred to in John. We see this in the first reference to him as traitor (6:71), then thief (12:6), then the traitor who goes into 'the night', a Johannine way of expressing godless darkness (13:26–30). Mathew's conclusion that John wishes the reader to think that Judas 'is not excluded from the salvific effect of Jesus' work' (p. 322) fails to consider that Judas may have excluded himself.

[142] Miranda, *Being and the Messiah*, 108.

[143] Beasley-Murray's conclusion is apt: 'It is precisely because it is a concrete embodiment of the love that gave itself to people and for people that we must not limit the "example" to acts of literally washing people's feet' (*John*, 240).

[144] This is congruent with Bennema's idea of 'Dynamic, Creative, Spirit-Led Community Ethics' (section title) in his *Mimesis*, 201.

faithful to Jesus' example entails a depth of understanding of his nature and actions that is, as Agamben points out, aesthetic and even relational, not simply 'objective'.[145] Further examining the Johannine portrayal of love in Jesus' nature and actions will thus be the burden of the remainder of this thesis, occupying the next two chapters respectively.

5. Conclusion: a threefold reading of the foot washing and the love command

Enactment, revelation and example

The foot washing is first of all a story of Jesus loving his own prior to him revealing or teaching through it. Jesus thus *enacts* his love in continuity with the way that he has already done in the period of his 'public' ministry. In this case, however, it involves going beyond what has come before, intimately attending to the basic needs of his disciples in a way that accords them an abundance of honour. In this, the physical act is necessary, though not in itself sufficient, in establishing a relational configuration within the divine household that is novel and subversive. As such, the mundane and divine dimensions are thoroughly intertwined without being collapsed into one another. As is the case with any relational reality, the disciples cannot be without their own part to play in this.[146] Therefore, before they understand the wider significance of what is happening, they are called to participate, albeit passively, by having their feet washed.

Jesus' action already entails revelation insofar as it is part of his making himself known to them. And there is also incorporated within the episode a deliberate revelatory foreshadowing. In the literary framing of the episode, as

---

[145] This is not to say that such understanding excludes those without explicit faith commitment. For the imaginative construal of Jesus as a literary character can be related to even if one reserves judgment on whether one is talking about a fictional or factual portrayal.

[146] The ethical response to his actions is not an optional addition to receiving Jesus but is inherent in it, even as it retains its derivative character as response (*Rethinking*, 22). 'Jesus' friendship is the model of friendship for the disciples, and it makes any subsequent acts of friendship by them possible because the disciples themselves are already the recipients of Jesus' acts of friendship' (O'Day, "Jesus as Friend", 152).

well as its sociological nature and theological significance, it is closely connected to Jesus' death. Yet this does not collapse the distinction between the two. Hence the example (ὑπόδειγμα) that Jesus gives refers primarily to action itself (rather than what it purportedly symbolises). This is so not in its physical nature alone but in its function in establishing relationship within the divine household. This is not just social but also theological, with the Christologically patterned action witnessing to Jesus and ultimately continuing the invitation to relationship with him (cf. 17:21). But the disciples must first have had their own feet washed before they are to do the same, and certainly before they could enact it as a welcome into this household.[147] As such, the Johannine ethic derived from the foot washing is more fundamentally one of *participation* than mimesis.[148] Indeed, the passive moment remains even when they are to take active part insofar as they must both perform and undergo the action. But because this involves loving as Jesus did, and doing so as part of the community life, we may think of this as the basis for an ethics of mimetic participation.[149]

The foot washing and the love command

Connecting John 13:34 to the foot washing as I have done does not restrict the range of the former but connects it to Jesus' love in the Gospel as a whole. For this particular action only makes sense within the larger perspective of divine love, which aims for relational transformation and works in the mundane sphere, even up to sacrificial death. To have more of a practical sense, not least in socio-economic terms, of what it means to participate mimetically in the ethics of love established by the foot washing, one must increase one's basis for judging how it is paradigmatic or symbolic.[150] This requires development in two

---

[147] For Coloe, this also explains the very authorship of the Gospel insofar as 'only one who has experienced such union would be bold enough to propose such divine-human intimacy' (*Dwelling*, 165).

[148] Coloe sums it up well using the same terminology: 'in the footwashing, disciples participate in a ritual act of welcome into the household of Jesus and his Father' (*Dwelling*, 145).

[149] Hence Callahan writes that 'love is impossible outside the embrace of the community, for love *is* that embrace' (*Love Supreme*, 36, emphasis added).

[150] Although the theological aspect is necessary, it is insufficient without ascertaining what this

main areas: firstly, in the Gospel's theological understanding of participation and, secondly, in an interpretation of Johannine symbolism that can maintain the Christological significance of Jesus' signs without negating their purpose on the mundane (and specifically socio-economic) plane. These two areas will be addressed in chapters 4 and 5 respectively.

response is meant to involve in practical terms. This is where Bultmann is consistently lacking, but so also more recent interpreters, e.g. Frey, "Love Relations", 195, and Keener *John*, 902.

Chapter 4 – From Intradivine Life to Cruciform Ethics: John 17 and Participation in the Divine Household

Johannine ethics is most fundamentally about participation in the establishment of divine household. This entails both a 'vertical' and a 'horizontal' dimension; accepting Jesus as the life-giver and loving one another. Jesus gives a paradigm for this love in the foot washing, which believers must receive before enacting it within the mutuality of the community, the divine household. We now need to develop our understanding of the theological roots of this love ethic in two respects: the basis of the divine household in the life of God and the means by which people participate in it.

The initial task will be to develop the necessary conceptual tools for our discussion (section one). To show what is needed in this regard, I will first set out my approach to the two main questions this chapter addresses.

Firstly, we need to examine the intradivine relationship that is at the heart of the divine household (section two). I do this through a study of the Father-Son relationship in John 17, which provides the most intimate theological portrayal in the whole of John.[1] I will argue here that the Father-Son relationship is characterised at the most fundamental level by love. This has theological and ontological implications for human participation in the divine household, which comprises the second of the two main tasks in this chapter. In treating the issue of human participation in intradivine love (section three), I begin with a further exploration of Jesus' prayer, noting how it establishes the ontological and relational conditions for openness to 'the other'. I then branch out to the Gospel more widely as I address the main challenge to participation in the divine household, namely the challenge of death.

I have used the words 'participation' and 'ontological' in full knowledge of the

[1] Whilst this does not involve engaging with pneumatology (the Spirit is not directly mentioned in John 17), pneumatological implications will emerge at several points during this chapter.

conceptual work needed to clarify them and to justify their use in relation to the Johannine text. This will be the chief task of section one. For now, very basic definitions can be given. 'Participation' is not being used here in a Thomist sense. Rather I use the word with an everyday meaning that takes its sense from its connection to Johannine concepts. 'Ontology' is meant in the general sense of that which concerns the nature of being, and in particular 'divine' or 'human' nature and the relationship between them.

My overall argument here will be that intradivine relational dynamics provide both a basis and a paradigm for human participation in the divine household.[2] This participation is based first of all in relationship to Jesus and patterned after the cruciform shape of his own life in its holistic engagement within the mundane sphere. Providing this broad theological framework for Johannine ethics allows the foot washing to be seen in continuity with Jesus' mundane engagement in his public ministry, which in turn allows us to delineate more clearly the practical dimension of ethics (in chap. 5).

1. The ontological challenge of participation in divine life

In this first section I begin by introducing our passage and drawing attention to the question of human participation in divine life that arises from it, and especially from 17:21 (1a). I then show how the contemporary debate on Johannine ethics illustrates the importance of the question but does not clearly articulate an answer (1b). Moving on to more theologically inclined work on John, I more precisely identify the particular lacunae to address (1c) before identifying the most suitable scholarly resources for doing so (1d), and making an interpretative proposal on that basis (1e).

1a. Jesus' 'farewell prayer'

John 17 comes at the end of the Farewell Discourse that begins with the foot

[2] To participate in the 'life of God' and 'intradivine relationships' means nothing different from participating in the 'divine household'. However, unlike the former two, I use the latter expression to refer to that which already includes the human community.

washing. Despite its unique content, it is part of the body of material in which Jesus deals with how the disciples are to maintain relationship with him even in his absence.[3] Therefore, rather than seeing Jesus' prayer as a soliloquy, it is being verbalised for the benefit of those listening (cf. 11:42).[4] Although there are good reasons why the moniker 'high priestly' has been used, this appellation somewhat unhelpfully sunders the passage from its relational context.[5] For what Jesus is doing here is giving a parting revelation that coheres with his role as a Rabbi, whilst simultaneously establishing the divine household. Indeed, what he offers here is a unique insight whereby 'the disciple and the reader are party to a heavenly family conversation'.[6] Thus I have termed it Jesus' 'farewell prayer'.

Yet we must also bear in mind the wider narrative context in the Gospel as a whole. For 13:1 frames the whole discourse as an enactment of Jesus' love that reaches its end (εἰς τέλος) in the Passion, an effect heightened by the *inclusio* of 13:1 and 17:1.[7] The thematic interweaving between Jesus' prayer and the foot washing episode further intensifies the movement towards the cross.[8] Indeed, this chapter must be seen as a key stage in the progression towards the cross

---

[3] Brown notes how the extraordinary theological content of the prayer has led to varied speculation on its original placement and *Sitz im Leben* (*John*, 744–749).

[4] Most commentators assume that the prayer was heard and even had a 'didactic aim', as was suggested as early as Augustine (*Homilies on the Gospel of John*, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994, 675). Michaels argues that the silence regarding the disciples' presence indicates that they do not hear the prayer (Michaels, *John*, 858). However, as was argued in the previous chapter, the Johannine conception of discipleship means that the logic works the other way around; it is a 'dwelling-with' that assumes their witness to what Jesus says and does. Moreover, Jesus says he speaks for their joy (17:13) and the statement 'having said these things' in 18:1 refers to what comes before it in a way that implies the prayer to have been part of what was said in the disciples' presence rather than in privacy. For Moloney, 17:20 puts the whole preceding prayer within the frame of this didactic purpose (*Love*, 129–130).

[5] Keener is particularly balanced on this issue, framing the passage by putting the traditional appellation 'High-Priestly Prayer' in a broader historical context of motifs (such as the unity of God's people, God's glory, and obeying God's agent) that constituted the 'common Judaism' of the day. At the same time, he points out how the pastoral needs of the author's audience shaped the chapter's content, particularly in terms of the need for reassurance that their 'second hand' knowledge of Jesus did not make their connection to him any less direct (*John*, 1050–1052).

[6] Brown, *John*, 747.

[7] Brown notes the *inclusio* of chaps. 13 and 17 in general and more specifically the parallel between 13:1 and 17:1 (see *John*, 745 and 740 respectively for these observations).

[8] Moloney observes the key thematic links with John 13; not only does Jesus' prayer trace the converse progression from glory to love, but John 17 deals in parallel with 'the themes of making God known to fragile disciples and, through them, to "the world"' (*Love*, 123).

as a dramatic interlude that leads to his fateful engagement with the authorities. In fact, because the real source of earthly events is, in John, Jesus' interaction with the Father (1:1–3, 14; 6:11; 11:41; 13:1), John 17 can be seen as a hinge that already sets in motion the events that lead to his death.[9]

The challenge of Jesus' prayer for Johannine ethics

The structure of the prayer itself is generally recognised as threefold, with some variation in the precise divisions.[10] Without wanting to commit to a particular literary interpretation, this structural division does nicely illustrate the content.[11] In 17:1–5 Jesus prays for himself, specifically his glorification (17:1) which corresponds to his authority to work in the world (17:2), bringing life (knowledge of God, 17:3), a work he has completed (17:4) as he returns to glory (17:5). In the second section, 17:6–19, Jesus prays for 'his own' in the world who have received his name, word and Jesus himself (17:6–8) to be protected as they were during his ministry (17:9–12). They share in his joy but also his rejection by the world in which they must remain (17:13–16) whilst being kept secure by the word during their own missional work (17:17–19).

Finally, in 17:20–26 Jesus extends his prayer from his own who are present to include all believers in the future. He prays for their unity and resulting witness to him (17:20–23), so as to be together in glory and share in the relationship between Father and Son (17:24–26). It is here in this last section that one of the most striking visions of divine-human relationship in the whole

---

[9] It is 'the decisive turning point between ministry and passion' (so Keener, quoting Paul Minear, *John*, 1050).

[10] Beasley-Murray notes that this structural division 'proposed by Westcott, has been widely adopted', though noting that the first section can be taken to extend to 17:8 since it does not contain petition for disciples and (I would add) reads as an expansion of vv. 2–4 (*John*, 295). Michaels divides 17:6–19 (6–8, 9–19) and 17:20–26 (20–23, 24, 25–26) (*John*, 857) whilst Keener sees the whole prayer as a prayer for the disciples, with the main body (17:6–24) divided into present and future disciples (*John*, 1055) and 17:25–26 supplying a conclusion about making God known (p. 1064). Brown argues for a threefold structure starting at verses 1, 9 and 20, using a similar basis to my own choice, stating that 'the key to the organization of xvii is found in Jesus' three indications of whom he is praying for' (*John*, 749).

[11] It is mistaken to divide too absolutely between the three sections since Jesus' purported prayer for himself in 17:1–5 includes concern for his own and 17:22 reverts to a focus on the disciples who are actually present, a point rarely noted. Thus, though 17:20 compels us to include future believers in what follows by implication, the same can equally be said of the previous verses in the prayer.

New Testament is set out as Jesus prays

> ἵνα πάντες ἓν ὦσιν, καθὼς σύ, πάτερ, ἐν ἐμοὶ κἀγὼ ἐν σοί, ἵνα καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐν ἡμῖν ὦσιν, ἵνα ὁ κόσμος πιστεύῃ ὅτι σύ με ἀπέστειλας (17:21).
>
> In order that all may be one, just as you, Father, are in me and I also in you, in order that they also may be in us, in order that the world may believe that you sent me

Not only can human oneness be *like* Father-Son oneness but it can somehow *participate* in it.[12] This already suggests that Johannine ethics can be understood within the frame of participation in the Father-Son relationship, but how it could be formulated in terms of mundane living is far from obvious. This is at the heart of the challenge that is being taken up in this chapter. But instead of beginning with the question of how human community can be so conducted as to enable people to participate in the Father-Son relationship, I want to begin from the opposite side: what is it about the intradivine relationship that can be described as 'love' (for this will provide the basis for human oneness) and what is it about this relationship that is open to human community?

Answering such questions clearly brings us into contact with theological considerations. Indeed, this passage's doctrinal significance has long been recognised in Christian history.[13] It was famously addressed by Käsemann as a lens through which to view the whole Gospel (adopting an overall perspective that is diametrically opposed to my argument in this thesis).[14] However, recent interpretation, whilst giving helpful insight into aspects of literary

---

[12] The syntax of 17:21 leaves open the possibility that the καθὼς compares the Father's mutual indwelling with Jesus with the believers' indwelling with Father and Son, excluding a comparison between Father-Son oneness and that of believers. However, the next verse is unambiguous in stating that ἵνα ὦσιν ἓν καθὼς ἡμεῖς ἕν, meaning that we still must grapple with this reality, whether from 17:21 or 17:22.

[13] Grant Macaskill notes that it is a 'part of Scripture that has been particularly significant in the development of Trinitarian theology and of participatory theologies', *Union with Christ in the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 265). We will have occasion to return to Macaskill's work (below, 1d).

[14] Käsemann took Jesus' prayer as his 'last testament', as per the original German title of *Testament* 'Jesu letzer Wille nach Johannes 17'. However, Käsemann's dismissal of 3:16 as pre-Johannine (*Testament*, pp. 59–60) and claim that John 17 is incompatible with any cruciform theology (pp. 5–10) have been rightly rejected by, e.g., Frey ("Love-Relations", 173). The argument of this chapter will, contra Käsemann, show how central divine universal love and Jesus' death on the cross are to the theological and indeed ethical significance of John 17.

background,[15] has been theologically thin.[16] In my analysis of this chapter, therefore, Brown's commentary will provide a useful touchpoint but Augustine and Aquinas will also appear as suitable dialogue partners alongside the essay of Watson's that is the most immediately relevant to my topic (see below, 1d). This theological focus derives not from an ideological commitment to certain modes of scriptural interpretation but rather from the exigencies of my particular thesis question. For the consideration of the ontological questions that characterises more theologically inclined work is vital for a proper estimation of the socio-economic dimension of ethics, as I will now explain.

1b. The real ontological gap in the debate on Johannine ethics

My aim here is to develop conceptual resources needed to deal with the question of how intradivine relationship relates to human community according to John 17. I began my thesis with the general observation that positing a holistically concerned 'family' ethic on the basis of a reconstructed historical risks short-circuiting necessary theological work (chap. 1, 2e–f).[17] But we now need to identify more closely what this necessary theological work is. To do this, we return to the previously discussed essay by Frey, which, albeit through omission, indicates part of the answer:

> 'Die Liebe, von der in den johanneischen Schriften geredet wird... ist kein bloßes Gefühl, sie ist ethisch konkret praktizierte Solidarität der *familia Dei* in materiellen und geistigen Dimensionen... Auch die Einheitsbitte im Abschiedsgebet Jesu (Joh 17,20f.) fügt sich bestens in diesen Horizont'.[18]

---

[15] E.g. Kari Syreeni, *Becoming John: The Making of a Passion Gospel* (London: T&T Clark, 2019), 185; for arguments in favour of various Old Testament precedents to Jesus' prayer, see the essays in Benjamin Reynolds and Gabriele Boccaccini (eds.), *Reading the Gospel of John's Christology as Jewish Messianism* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), which connect it to Isaiah (pp. 92–93), Chronicles (p. 211), Exodus (p. 249, n.3) and Daniel (p. 423).

[16] Even Dale Bruner, writing in a homiletical vein from an explicitly confessional perspective that engages with pre-modern interpreters, is light on the theological aspects of the passage (*The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmands, 2012), 960–1020).

[17] This is a persistent claim of my thesis that goes beyond a critique of the sociological modelling informing 'Johannine Community' hypotheses. This methodological stance has been most famously attacked in Bauckham (ed.), *The Gospels for All Christians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998). Bauckham goes as far as stating that 'the enterprise of reconstructing such a community [as the Johannine one and others] is hermeneutically irrelevant' ("Introduction", 4).

[18] "Glauben und Lieben", 37.

In terms of ethical conclusions, my thesis is in full accordance with the basic sentiment expressed here. However, for this position to be sustainable, we must be able to see how the kind of mundane community he talks about relates to the telos of the divine household (to which he refers as the *familia Dei*). More specifically, what role could mutual material concern play in bringing people into the intradivine unity referred to in John 17:21?

Frey, as far as I am aware, nowhere deals with the concept of participation from the ontological perspective that would seem necessary to provide a rationale for his claim. But this lacuna is not on a feature of his work alone; it emerges in the recent monographs on Johannine ethics. Trozzo is typical in making a strong claim for the necessity of participation in Johannine ethics but not explaining, beyond a brief mention of the incarnation, how this necessitates holistic engagement.[19] This idea is taken up more fully by Miranda, for whom the coming of Jesus establishes the conditions for 'authentic relationships' in the economic and political realm. But his anti-metaphysical stance interprets this as *the* instantiation of divine presence, so that there is no prior intradivine unity in which people participate.[20] For Gorman, the movement between divine and mundane goes in the opposite direction to Miranda, so that participation in God is connected to theosis.[21] However, whilst denying that this involves ontological confusion, he does not actually address the question of ontology in relation to human community, even in relation to John 17.[22]

Of course, one does not have to explicitly discuss 'ontology' to interpret John in an ontologically significant way, as we see in van der Watt's reading of 17:23–26. He posits a close connection between the love of God and that among

---

[19] Trozzo talks about 'the incorporation of believers into the unity shared between the Father and the Son' (*Exploring*, 32), with the Gospel 'inviting them to participate in this identity-forming relationship' (p. 81) through 'imitation of Jesus' love' (p. 125). That this involves engaged 'social ethics' is suggested by 'John's presentation of a real material incarnation, a physical life, and a visible human death' (p. 125).

[20] Thus the bold statement that 'only in a world of justice will God be' (*Being and the Messiah*, 45).

[21] This is 'in part a matter of family communion, in part a matter of family resemblance by receiving (metaphorically speaking) the divine DNA' (*Abide and Go*, 21).

[22] *Abide and Go*, 24. On John 17 he says only that the disciples 'share in the missional love and life of God' (p. 111). Likewise Byers; his account of deification asserts that 'believers derive their new ontology from the Spirit' but does not specifically address how their mundane life can participate in God (*Ecclesiology*, 233).

believers, with the latter being of the 'same nature' as the former (p. 296) so that 'love generates love' (p. 328). Yet he generally emphasises the sociological basis for Johannine ethics, which is 'developed in terms of what was commonly accepted and expected within ancient families' (pp. 151–152).[23] Thus there is no theological account of how the social and material aspects that he attributes to the Johannine 'ethos' relate to the reality of God (pp. 437–456). Indeed, he states only a negative perspective on this in relation to John 17: 'being one with the Father and Son does not mean to "ontologically become them", but to be like them' (p. 219).

Bennema directly challenges van der Watt on this point, countering that 'an ontological dimension in terms of a mystical union cannot be ruled out'.[24] He focuses on imitation, whereby 'the Son-Father mimesis is often paradigmatic for the believer-Jesus mimesis' (p. 65) but does so in a relational context whereby 'believers are drawn in and participate in this divine relationship' (p. 66), which he labels as a 'family' (p. 80). This is further explored in reference to John 17, which Bennema sets out to analyse in terms of its concentration of what he calls 'existential mimesis' (p. 125).[25] The apparent confusion in this section is informative regarding the challenge I am raising in the debate on ethics.[26] What Bennema means by 'mystical union' is left ambiguous, as is his idea of 'the ontological dimension'. Particularly notable for my purposes is how

---

[23] Rabens agrees with van der Watt on the importance of 'the Gospel's family and friendship ethos' ("Johannine Perspectives on Ethical Enabling in the Context of Stoic and Philonic Ethics" in *Rethinking*, 125). But he also adds emphasis to the relational importance of 'ethical empowering and personal transformation' (p. 126) through 'emotional comfort and care' (p. 127). Thus 'John has a holistic concept of love which includes emotions and which finds its expression in intimate relationships' (p. 130).

[24] *Mimesis*, 126. As his note on this page (n. 147) indicates, his critique of van der Watt on this point refers to his earlier work *Families of the King* (2000). In *Grammar*, van der Watt seems to have reacted to such criticisms by making the necessity of relationship with God explicit, but this sits uneasily with elements that imply the opposite.

[25] 'Existential' is differentiated from 'performative' mimesis by referring to a state of being rather than to actions.

[26] Bennema says that 'John's indwelling language cannot be literal' (pp. 126–127) as if 'the Father, Son and believer are identical or physically inside one another'. Thus he denies the possibility of a 'literal' indwelling that is spiritual, though he qualifies this later, saying that God's indwelling by the Spirit 'probably has a literal sense of an intimate relationship without demanding the same literalness as possessing a physical object'. Yet he then cuts back on this nod towards ontology and posits the equivalence of saying 'I have the Spirit' with 'I have colleagues' (p. 127).

an inadequate grappling with such questions of ontology correlates with minimising the mundane dimensions of Johannine ethics.[27]

1c. Filling the gap with more theologically inclined work on John?

The contemporary debate on Johannine ethics illustrates the importance of a gap in its consideration of ontology, doing no more than gesturing towards theological resources for filling it. We are left with a sense that participation is important, but not how this concept bridges the gap between divine life and mundane community. John 17 arises repeatedly as potentially fertile ground for this question, but it has not yet been engaged with in detail with ethical concerns in mind. It might be expected, therefore, that such questions are answered by more theologically inclined material.

Popkes's monograph, the most comprehensive recent treatment of love in John, directly states its ethical purpose (albeit restricted to whether the scope of Jesus' love is conventicular or universal).[28] Popkes' work is helpful in providing a thoroughgoing treatment of the Gospel as a narrative of love premised on a reading of John 17.[29] He provides the strongest framework we have yet seen for the ecclesiological implications of this, emphasising the nature of the community as the continuation of God's presence by seeing 17:26 as 'eine *relecture* des Motivs der reziproken Immanenz' in 15:9–11 (pp. 188-189). But the avoidance of ontological questions, even where they naturally arise, is stark.[30] Thus his conclusion on the love of God (pp. 355–361) has nothing on the material necessity of its practice, despite his having identified the foot

---

[27] On one hand, he is clear that 'communion (fellowship, oneness, unity, indwelling) appears to be the most significant identity marker of the divine family' and that this entails 'life, light, love, truth and honour', which transforms behaviour (*Mimesis*, 130). He also mentions that 'the Johannine literature only provides two concrete examples of love in action', namely the foot washing and the 'economic assistance' mentioned in 1 John 3:17. Yet he never discusses what these might mean and when he summarises the essential features of mimesis in John (p. 201), such material engagement is not even mentioned.

[28] Enno Popkes, *Die Theologie der Liebe Gottes in den johanneischen Schriften* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005). He sets out this contrast on p. 3.

[29] He refers to it as the Gospel's 'dramaturgische Christologie der Liebe Gottes' (p. 169).

[30] His discussion of the prologue lacks any mention of incarnation (pp. 183–187) and his brief treatment of spirit/flesh dualism has no ontological reference (pp. 203–204).

washing and Leviticus 19:17 as background for the love command.[31]

The dual tendency to avoid ontological and practical concerns turns out to be characteristic of much work in this area. It is also apparent in studies on Johannine love by Moloney and, more surprisingly considering his later work, Segovia.[32] It even applies to treatments of Johannine theology that set out to contextualise the Christology that dominates the surface of the text by a stronger focus on God.[33] Hence Thompson notes in relation to 17:26 that 'those with faith … participate in the relationship of mutuality and love of the Father and the Son' with no discussion of how intradivine relationship relates to the mundane aspects of human participation.[34]

1d. Setting the ontological frame of participation in John 17

In all the work on Johannine theology and ethics above, there has been a mismatch between the avowed significance of participation in intradivine relationship and a discussion of participation that delineates its ontological implications. However, Macaskill notes that 'the Johannine literature contains some of the richest participatory language found in the New Testament' (p.

---

[31] Earlier, in explaining how Jesus' love is the 'Existenzgrundlage der Gemeinde' (*Theologie der Liebe*, 249), he says that the foot washing is key to the love command (pp. 250–262), and also brings in the background of Leviticus 19:17 (p. 263), but there is nothing about the need for material concern. Thus he also explains 1 John 3:17 entirely on the basis of historical contingency rather than having internal theological rationale (pp. 148–150).

[32] Moloney, despite devoting a section to John 17 and framing his overall thesis as bringing the connection of love to Jesus' hour into the sphere of practice, does not theologically address how this bridge can be crossed (*Love*, 121–133 (the section on John 17), 212–214 (on the necessarily practical nature of Johannine love). Segovia ignores John 17 for his own redactional-critical reasons and what he refers to in reference to chap. 15 as 'the love which commences the hierarchy itself' is not developed practically because 'the author does not describe or expand upon the nature of that love' (*Love Relationships in the Johannine Tradition* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982), 189–190).

[33] Frey observes that the focus on Christology has involved a neglect of other theological topics in Johannine scholarship but that the text need (and indeed *should*) not be read this way ("God in the Gospel of John", in *Glory of the Crucified One*, 313–317).

[34] *God of the Gospel*, 100). Thompson has only the briefest reflection on the theme centred around the quotation above, where she also affirms the fact that the life that this implies is 'embodied, quite literally, in Jesus and his followers' (pp. 99–100). Bauckham discusses love in relation to the cross in a way that is consonant with my argument thus far (*Gospel of Glory*, 69), but he does not explicate intradivine love in any detail.

251).[35] Moreover, he shows how the key ideas he identifies coalesce in John 17 (pp. 265–266) with its 'intimacy' of union whereby 'the community of faith … is described as participating in the divine fellowship' (p. 266). Crucially, Macaskill notes that such participation is premised on the 'ontology of the incarnation' without which people could not be united to God as a community of mutual love (p. 270).[36]

A similar framework to that of Macaskill's is, in fact, worked out with specific relation to John 17 by Watson in a brief but theologically dense essay.[37] Participation is mentioned some 30 times in the course of this piece; rather than being defined, its meaning unfolds over the course of the argument. He reads John 17 not only as an account of 'the intradivine oneness of Jesus and the Father' but also of how it is 'opened up, so that humans may participate in it' (p. 171). In line with my argument regarding the establishment of the divine household, he observes how Jesus' prayer expresses love by building up the specific community of the eleven present throughout the Farewell Discourse (pp. 171–173). However, he also stresses that this does not entail a limitation of the community, arguing that it is of ethical significance that women are included (pp. 173–175).[38] Particularly notable for my purposes is that the rationale for this view of participation is ultimately ontological, rooted in the embodied humanity of Jesus (pp. 176–181).[39]

Both Watson's and Macaskill's work suggest how Jesus' prayer can provide

---

[35] Macaskill traces these through the Prologue and the Paraclete (pp. 253–257), "I Am" sayings (pp. 257–263) and Farewell Discourse (p. 264).

[36] The relevance of the ontology of the incarnation is how 'the real divinity and real humanity of Christ are depicted in relation to the human union with God' (p. 8). John Behr addresses in greater detail the ontological questions around the incarnation in his *John the Theologian and his Paschal Gospel: A Prologue to Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019) but, though I will refer to his work on occasion in what follows, it does not deal with ethics at all.

[37] "Trinity and Community: A Reading of John 17", *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 1 (no. 2) (1999), 168–184.

[38] This is because 'the community for which Jesus prays does not consist only of male apostles, and because this community of men and women is comprehended within the ungendered intradivine community of Father and Son' ("Trinity and Community", 175). This is also connected to a critique of insularity as a more general tendency in Johannine interpretation (p. 182)

[39] Three arguments are made on this score. Firstly, Jesus' physical death is the site of glorification (pp. 176–177; see also below, 3e); secondly, his humanity is (in some sense) part of his pre-existent nature (pp. 178–179; see below, 3b) and, thirdly, language itself functions materially, so that verbal communication is embodied by definition (pp. 179–181).

theological substance to my thesis thus far, and my exegesis of the foot washing episode in particular. They show, first of all, how the concept of mimesis is ethically secondary to that of participation.[40] Moreover, they argue that John 17 must be read in a way that takes seriously the embodied nature of human participation in divine life.[41] However, it is also here that a slight gap remains. For the ontological purview assumed by 'embodiment', grounded as it is in the concept of incarnation, is limited to the question of human and divine nature. Because it does not include non-human creation, the ontological basis for ethics that Watson proposes cannot account for the significance of materiality *per se*. A similar limitation attends Macaskill's reading of John, which might explain why his connection of Johannine thought to practical ethics is somewhat ambiguous.[42] It is important for my thesis to consider John 17 from an ontological purview that takes in not only theology and anthropology but also cosmology. For socio-economic concerns have to do with the way humans are valued specifically in the way in which they relate to (non-human) resources and not just other humans. It is their materiality rather than just their humanity or embodiedness that is not taken sufficiently seriously in accounts of Johannine ethics.

To fill the narrow gap still remaining we must expand our disciplinary boundaries even further beyond biblical studies. We do this by turning to Klaus Hemmerle's theses on trinitarian ontology, which is currently receiving renewed attention.[43] For Hemmerle, it is love itself that is most ontologically

---

[40] For Watson 'the unity of those who believe is not only *like* the unity of the Father and the Son, it *participates* in that unity' ("Trinity and Community", 170). For Macaskill, the incarnation is *sui generis* and only also serves as an example for 'the necessity of self-sacrifice' when understood as 'participation in his own redemptive work' (*Union with Christ*, 191).

[41] Watson expresses this most clearly in polemic against Käsemann's docetic reading of John, which he sets up in order to dismantle the idea that 'bodiliness will be incidental and irrelevant to their participation in the eternal life of a disembodied divinity' ("Trinity and Community", 175).

[42] Macaskill does not directly connect incarnation to the socio-economic implications of Jesus' example mentioned in 1 John 3:17, even if he leaves room for such a connection to be made by the general observation that community membership also 'necessitates the social outworking of love' (*Union with Christ*, 270). Elsewhere he mentions the cosmological side of participation explored by Orthodox theology (e.g. pp. 45–49) but does not connect this to John.

[43] Klaus Hemmerle, *Thesen zu einer trinitarischen Ontologie* (Würzburg: Echter, 2020). This new edition of the 1976 original includes an English translation by Thomas Norris, to which I will refer in what follows. This short text has been brought to attention by the Cambridge-

fundamental, being that which is central to the 'Trinitarian Mystery of God' (p. 119, 'dreifaltigen Geheimnis Gottes', 54). It is from recognising this that 'every being, every thinking, every happening is unlocked in its structure' (*Thesen*, 119), every 'phenomenon' ('Phänomenen', p. 54) in fact. Rather than an abstract or mystical proposition, he attributes the ontological priority of love with the 'power to shape community and to impact on society' (*Thesen*, 131). What makes this especially relevant here is how Hemmerle explicates his idea within a thoroughly Johannine frame (*Thesen*, 131–132).[44] He sees it as the logic controlling the connection of the command in John 13:34 and the intradivine oneness of John 17:21ff (he presumably means up to 17:26). Thus the divine life of love is the reality within which the mundane life of believers is carried out.

1e. An alternative ontological basis for participation in divine life

The possibility that I want to explore is that love is what is most ontologically fundamental in John and that this can be seen from Jesus' prayer in chap. 17. This requires us to think from a *tabula rasa* as it were, starting not from a particular binary formulation of spiritual/material or even divine/human. Doing so would allow us to conceptualise participation in the divine household primarily as participation in love rather than in a divinity that is defined in its distinction from humanity. Such an approach need not (and, to be true to Johannine thought, *must* not) abolish the creature/creator distinction. But, on the positive side, it has potential to conceptualise ethics on the basis of the Father-Son relationship of John 17 that would avoid any denigration of the mundane sphere as a whole and provide a powerful basis for holistic (including socio-economic) engagement. None of what I have said thus far constitutes an argument for an account of participation based on an ontology of love. However, the lacunae in specialist Johannine scholarship do make it likely that the interpretative options for John 17 need to be expanded with a broader

---

based "New Trinitarian Ontologies" (NTO) project, which aims to establish a broad metaphysical frame for the purpose of a theology that engages with social and political issues (https://www.facebook.com/newtrinitarianontologies/?ref=page_internal, accessed 04/05/2021).

[44] Hemmerle's understanding of 'self-giving love' is also generally Johannine, as exemplified by his use of John 13:1 and 15:12 as well as 1 John 4:16 in defining the notion (pp. 131–132).

ontological frame. Thus I offer my reading as a textually faithful way to fill the gap for the sake of greater ethical understanding.

2. Intradivine relationship in John 17

The foregoing discussion has been heavily weighted towards more theoretical questions. This has been necessary in order open up conceptual possibilities around the idea of participation that have not generally been explored in Johannine scholarship. In this section, however, the focus is more squarely on the text itself. To reiterate the question that I am addressing here:

> What is it about the intradivine relationship that can be described as 'love' (for this will provide the basis for human oneness) and what is it about this relationship that is open to human community?

My argument proceeds as follows. Firstly, I show how the interaction of Father and Son portrayed in John 17 should be understood under the more general category of love (2a). Secondly, I expand this understanding of love beyond an action or even a state of being to a description of the Father-Son relationship itself (2b). Thirdly, I draw from the preceding discussion the proposition that God is love, expounding both its theological and ontological implications (2c) before drawing the section briefly together (2d).

2a. Intradivine love in action and being

Jesus' prayer only explicitly raises the theme of love in its closing verses, where the verb ἀγαπάω appears 4 times (17:23 twice, 17:24, 17:26). These are all in the 2nd person aorist indicative form ἠγάπησας and all in reference to God's love for Jesus (except one, which denotes God's love for his own and those who believe in him through them, 17:23). The noun ἀγάπη appears only once at the end of the passage, apparently as an expanded description of the Father loving Jesus (17:26).

An initial glance at these references yields little more than a reiteration of the affirmation that the Father loves the Son (cf. 5:20); nowhere among them do we find statements with the same programmatic force as those in 3:16, 13:34 or

15:13. However, the situation appears differently when we look at the narrative sequence portrayed in 17:24–26. What we have there is a progression from the intradivine love of Father and Son before creation (πρὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου, 17:24c) to the Father's sending the Son (17:25b). This sending enacts the the revelation by which those given to him (ὃ δέδωκάς μοι, 17:24a) could share in intradivine love (17:26) and ultimately be with Jesus in intradivine glory (17:24a). Therefore, these verses bear something of the quality of a metanarrative by which the entire span of history (which is the Gospel's purview) can be read as a story of love.[45] Looking at John 17 in terms of what it says about love thus makes good literary and theological sense.[46]

Love as giving in John 17

Because what is included in the remainder of Jesus' prayer are elements of the divine narrative, we have an initial reason to read John 17 primarily as an account of intradivine (and divine-human) love. However, there is more specific evidence in this direction. For 17:24 indicates that it is the Father's love for the Son that underlies his giving of glory to him, suggesting that the gift language earlier in the passage (e.g. 17:2, 6) can be explained on the same basis as an activity of love. Indeed, the glory given by the Father to Jesus (τὴν δόξαν… ἣν δέδωκάς μοι (17:24) is not a one-off act but, as we see from the beginning of the prayer (17:1, 4–5), partakes of a pattern of continued mutual glorification.[47]

---

[45] Popkes observes that this passage is something of a compendium of Johannine love theology 'in welchem unterschiedliche Motive und Argumentationslinien vorhergehender Texte zusammengeführt, komprimiert und ausdifferenziert werden' (*Theologie*, 171, cf. Frey, "Love-Relations", 175). Bauckham makes the same point by stating the converse. The (human) story of 'Jesus's love for his friends' is told 'as the central story within the great narrative that runs from the eternity before creation', the beginning of which is indicated in 17:24 (*God of Glory*, 69).

[46] Cf. Keener, *John*, 1050. Whilst Frey, as we have seen, emphasises the importance of love in the Gospel's narrative, and sees John 17 as key in his argument for "Johannine Theology as the Climax of New Testament Theology" (*Glory of the Crucified One*, 367), his essay on this verse in that volume ("Glory of the Crucified One", 237–259) focuses more on the theme of glory than love. Only with his (forthcoming) commentary will his detailed reading of John 17 as a whole become apparent.

[47] The parallel between 17:24 and 17:1, 4–5 suggest that 'giving glory' and the verb 'to glorify' (δοξάζω) are here synonymous (cf. the phrase δὸς δόξαν τῷ θεῷ in 9:24 and the discussion below, 3c). Jesper Nielsen shows how this equivalence works across John as a whole ("The Narrative Structures of Glory and Glorification in the Fourth Gospel", *NTS* 56 (2010), especially p. 361)

How exactly 'glory' is to be understood is an issue to which we shall return presently (see below, 3d). Whatever the exact nature of the phenomenon, it is something that is desirable in divine life, and at least part of what it means for the Father to love the Son and vice versa is to glorify one another.[48]

'Giving glory' refers to the specific act denoted by the verb δοξάζειν (see above, n. 47). However, the use of the verb δίδωμι in this context also makes 'giving glory' an example of a wider type of action, that of giving. In fact, this verb occurs sixteen times in this prayer, describing various exchanges between Father, Son and people.[49] These three parties are set in a chain at 17:2, where the Father gives (authority) to the Son, who gives (eternal life) to those people given him (cf. 17:6, 9). In terms of other intradivine interaction, the Father gives the Son work to do (17:4), words (17:8), and his name (17:11–12).

How this prevalence of gift language in Jesus' prayer is related to the concept of love that I am expounding comes only through a reading of the Gospel as a whole. Indeed, elsewhere we can perceive love as fundamental, not just in a vague sense but specifically as that which encompasses the activity of giving. This is apparent especially in key programmatic statements, not least 3:16, where the Father gives the Son. This is, in turn, enacted as the epitome of love wherein Jesus lays down his life (e.g. 10:18; 15:13; 19:30). Although the verb δίδωμι itself does not appear in these three verses (the compound is found in 19:30), 'laying down life' means a giving of self. Indeed, because of the connection of this to the 'hour', this act of giving lies behind Jesus' initial request for glorification (17:1, see also section 3e, below).

Love as 'being with'

It could be inferred from this centrality of giving glory that love is equated with action; but in 17:26, the noun ἀγάπη is the object of the verb ἀγαπάω, making it

---

and tere is no reason to think of 'giving glory' as a euphemism for something different like giving the Spirit for instance, as Bruner suggests (*John*, 1008–1009).

[48] Only once is Jesus explicitly said to love the Father (14:31), where the context is also about Jesus' carrying out his mission from God on the earth (cf. 17:1–4).

[49] Keener notes that this represents 'the Gospel's greatest concentration of δίδωμι' (*John*, 1053).

clear that love is more than an action. Therefore, the analysis thus far allows us to conceptualise Father-Son love as *manifest in* such activity but also as something that is *more than* glorifying or mutual giving. But what is this 'more than'? Can love exist in abstraction from the activity of glorifying and giving? Whilst our text implies that the dynamic of giving and receiving should be understood as a continuous enactment of love, there are three aspects of the picture that open up a less action-oriented angle. What these suggests is that love is also a matter of 'being with' one another.

Firstly, there is the very fact that giving requires receiving; the love of the Father is one that is received by the Son and vice versa. Passivity as well as action characterises intradivine love. Secondly, the relationship between the Father and Son is described as being 'one' (17:21–22). This oneness is not only a function of common purpose but describes a relationship of oneness that, as Watson puts it, must be taken with 'ontological seriousness'.[50] An ontological oneness should not connote something static or inert since this oneness of love involves mutual indwelling (17:21) and intimate knowledge (17:25), making it inherently dynamic.[51] Thirdly, and relatedly, Jesus' desire is for believers to be *with him* and the Father (17:24). In fact, prior to that, his desire is for him to be there himself, pledging to come 'towards' (πρός, 17:11, 13) the Father.

Jesus' references to being 'towards' the Father echo the statement of original relation in ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν (1:1), which raises a quandary. For if love is only an action or even a voluntaristic state of being, it would appear to be a contingent reality. But there is a permanence of relation implied by the opening words of the Gospel. The Word did not just happen to be towards God; the implication is that there is a permanency of relationship here. This suggestion necessitates a further development of the way in which we understand love, focusing more on the relational dynamics inherent in it.

---

[50] "Trinity and Community", 169.

[51] Thompson sees 'intimacy' as an unsuitable notion to associate with the Father-Son relationship in John. She thinks such language 'owes more to Romanticism than to biblical concepts of paternity' (*God in the Gospel*, 72) and subjectivises the Gospel's more 'external' focus. Yet there is no need to psychologise the narrative portrayal of the Father-Son relationships to see how they bespeak intimacy; their closeness is brought deliberately into view from the phrase εἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ πατρὸς (in the bosom of the Father, 1:18).

2b. Intradivine love as Father-Son relationship

My analysis of intradivine love in John 17 thus far has probed the elements of action (as both the active and passive party) and intimate co-presence. It has yielded the notion of love as a dynamic state of being towards one another that must be manifest in actions but is not reducible to actions. Yet this 'one another' is not simply an abstraction of two subjects; it is Father and Son in permanent relation. As such, love cannot be understood simply from the perspective of the individual but from the relationship. The way the Father loves the Son is determined specifically by 'Fatherhood', which is a matter of the *relationship* of Father to Son (the same being true vice versa).[52] Just as we saw with Jesus' 'I Am' statements (chap. 2, 2d), his identity is, paradoxical as it sounds, intrinsically relational. Indeed, what it means for the Father to be 'Father' is only comprehensible in relation to the Son, and vice versa, making both divine identity and nature intrinsically relational categories.

On these grounds, love can be thought of not ultimately as what one or the other party has or does but as the nature of each party's relational identity. There is no way to separate how the Father is towards the Son from what it is 'to love'. Conversely, for the Father to love the Son is inherent in what it means for the Father to *be* the Father (again, *mutatis mutandis* for the Son).[53] If love is a function of relational identity, there is no reason why one cannot say that love *is* this relationship. That this is more than a tendentious line of argument and in fact a plausible reading of John 17 is supported by its shedding light on two elements of what it says about intradivine glory (how this concept relates to human participation will be broached below, 3c).

---

[52] There is dispute over the extent to which cultural understanding of Father-child dynamics is helpful for understanding the Gospel on this point, but it does not affect the present argument and I discuss the dynamics here without treating this issue. Van der Watt is helpfully nuanced in the way he deals with this (*Grammar*, 295–298).

[53] Thompson recognises that asserting God to be 'Father' is 'not some "ontological" predication in and of itself that can be separated from speaking of the Father's relationship to the Son' (*God of the Gospel*, 98), as if a relational understanding trumps an ontological one. But she does not consider that perhaps this *relationship* is ontologically fundamental (see below, 2e).

Intradivine glory and the asymmetry of love

Firstly, there is an apparent anomaly in the fact that glory can be given from one to the other and at the same time be talked about in terms of permanency. Referring to the gift of glory with the perfect tense δέδωκας (17:24) and the imperfect εἶχον (17:5) suggests a paradox. The Father's giving of glory to the Son is an event. Yet there is apparently no time at which there was any lack of glory in the Son (reflecting the statement πάντα ὅσα ἔχει ὁ πατὴρ ἐμά ἐστιν, all which the Father has is mine, 16:15). Rather, mutual glorification is a permanent aspect of the relationship. Indeed, nowhere in John 17 is glory described as the property of an individual party.[54] In a similar logic of divine interaction that I am arguing for in relation to love, glory exists only (but perpetually) in the relationship between Father and Son. Thus it fits with the previous point that mutual glorification is at the heart of the love characterising the Father-Son relationship. 'Mutual glorification' suggests that intradivine love in John 17 entails reciprocation. However, what it involves for the Father to glorify the Son is very different from the other way around, which brings us to our second point.

Seeing love as a function of relational identity explains the asymmetry in the interactions portrayed by Jesus' prayer.[55] The notion of asymmetry in enactment by no means countermands the fundamental singularity of love as the defining factor of the relationship. Even if its modes of enactment are not the same for each party, love itself is reciprocal in a general sense.[56] However, it is notable that in the case of giving glory, the Son does this through completing the work he has been given (17:4), which is different to the other

---

[54] On this basis, one could call it a 'relational reality', existing by being shared and given in the context of relationships. This notion is expounded in relation to the Isaianic background in Joshua Coutts, *The Divine Name in the Gospel of John* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 50–53.

[55] Hence Michaels comments that God does not love the world 'in the same way that he loves Jesus and the disciples – that is, as a father loves a child' (*John*, 880).

[56] Thus I would qualify my general agreement with Frey's assessment. In saying that the 'binitarian' intradivine relation is 'irreversible', he says that 'the Father loves, authorizes and sends the Son, shows him his works, and glorifies him … the Son does what he sees and hears the Father do and say, fulfills his work, and thus glorifies the Father' ("Climax", 360). The implication here is that love is just another mode of interaction, and not necessarily one that fully characterises the Son's relational treatment of the Father.

way around. Where the Father glorifies, it is not always specified how this takes place, but it does involve directly giving glory (as opposed to involving a third party) in a way that the Son is nowhere said to do in return (17:22, 24). In fact, apart from mutual glorification, it is always the Father who gives to the Son and not vice versa. The Son's response to the Father's giving is not to reciprocate or directly imitate it but rather to enact giving towards other people (17:2, 8), to whom the Father does not give directly.

2c. God is love

Thus we can affirm that love is what the Father is to the Son (and vice versa), even if it is differently enacted by each. The logical corollary of this is that there is nothing in the Father-Son relationship that is *not* love and, therefore, the relationship itself can be understood as love.[57] Accordingly, love, as it is portrayed in Jesus' prayer, is a bewildering concept. It refers to action, a state of being with, and even the Father-Son relationship itself, a description too cryptic to constitute an explanation. That something so close to the heart of Johannine thought should be shrouded in mystery is neither unexpected nor problematic. For Jesus' stated aim here is not ultimately for his own to *understand* but to *receive* love; he wants divine love to be *in people* (17:26). Once again, the purpose is participation in the relationship of the divine household; cognitive knowledge is only beneficial if it serves this more basic goal (cf. chap. 2, 2e).

<u>As statement of Johannine theology</u>

However, this does not mark the end of the line for our investigation. For if my analysis thus far is plausible, it has implications for Johannine theology not only in terms of the *identity* but also the *nature* of God as love. What I mean by this can best be clarified negatively in relation to the tendency to focus on the

[57] This is not to say that Johannine love is *only* this relationship; indeed, the fact that a single concept, 'love', can describe both the Father towards the Son and the Son to the Father means that there is a logical possibility that it could also describe other relationships of the same quality of perpetual self-giving to the other (cf. below, 3a).

identity rather than the nature of God. I give two brief examples in order to make my point.

Thompson's monograph on Johannine theology works on the premise that a theological frame has been lacking in Christologically focused work on John.[58] Her response is, however, to consistently addresses the question of *who* God is and how God relates, leaving the question of *what* God is unanswered.[59] This is well illustrated by an apparent subtlety: she says that Jesus in John 'moves towards a reshaping of the content of the word "God"' so that 'to know God is to know God as the Father of the Son'.[60] But why could the theological reshaping to which she refers not go further? Why could one not say that 'God' is now 'Father-Son'? It turns out that she tacitly imports certain notions of personhood and unity through the term 'identity' which then function as a *de facto* ontology of God without explicit discussion. As a result she is not open to certain possibilities of exegesis:[61] Could God, for John, be equally difference as oneness? Equally relationship as singularity? Could love be at the heart of divine nature and identity?[62] Such questions are left unaddressed – and love's potentially ontological import simultaneously minimised.[63]

A second example of this tendency pushes me more forcefully towards my

---

[58] See Thompson's discussion of this scholarly trajectory (*God of the Gospel*, 1–15).

[59] Thompson compares her own approach here to Bauckham's foregrounding of 'divine identity' (*God of the Gospel*, 45–47).

[60] *God of the Gospel*, 51.

[61] Despite Thompson's affinity with his construal of 'divine identity', Bauckham himself is more self-conscious about these sorts of questions. Hence he shows how Social Trinity thinking is appropriate to the Gospel insofar as it does not prioritise one over three, does not reduce persons to modes, and sees divine identity in relationship rather than prior to it (*Gospel of Glory*, 35–39).

[62] Thompson does not address this question directly, though she comes close to it. She states that 'while the primary characteristic of the Father-Son relationship is the life that constitutes their relationship, that relationship is further characterized in John in terms of love' (p. 98), but her concept of 'life' is ultimately a property of the Father conferred on the Son rather than something that is inherently a shared reality (pp. 77–80). She does not explore love at the same level of theological depth as life.

[63] This is so even when Thompson considers the 'unity of God' in relation to Jesus and the Spirit. In relation to Jesus, Thompson sees his unity as being '*with* God' rather than Son-Father redefining the very concept of unity (*God of the Gospel*, 53). Likewise, with the Spirit: 'the relationship of Father and Son, construed in terms of the Father's conferring upon the Son the power … to send the Spirit' is 'essential to the identity of God' (p. 188). The suggestion here that 'God' still denotes a oneness more fundamental than multiplicity is clear from the slightly earlier statement that 'Spirit refers to the mode of God's presence, power, and action' (p. 187).

positive argument. In his treatment of love in John, Moloney states the following:

> 'The God of the Johannine Jesus cannot be known in his essence. That program will bother the Christian church at a later time. For the Gospel of John, God can be known only through his *relationships'*.[64]

Like Thompson, Moloney's desire is to work strictly from the perspective of the text without dogmatic imposition. Far from disagreeing with him here, I would say that he does not go far enough. For one must ask in response to his statement what evidence there is of any 'essence' at all that purportedly remains on the dark side of the Johannine moon. In saying that 'God can only be known through his *relationships*', Moloney has unwittingly pointed the way towards that which he seeks to avoid. There is, in fact, nothing more fundamental in the Gospel's vision of God than the Father-Son relational interactions narrated in John 17, which brings us around to my contention here.

There is no reason to posit an extraneous notion of 'essence'; according to John, God *is* the Father-Son relationship – it is, in Käsemann's formulation, the Gospel's 'one single dogma'.[65] Expressions such as 'binitarian monotheism' capture the formal dimensions of this relational vision without bringing out its quality.[66] Because we have seen that this relationship is love, the deepest theological vision of the author is that God is loving relationship; expressed in a simple formulation, we may say that God is love.

<u>As statement of ontology</u>

We must take one more step in this direction following Hemmerle's proposal.

---

[64] Moloney, "Love", 69.

[65] Käsemann, *Testament*, 25. Although Käsemann uses the term 'unity' rather than 'relationship', Brown notes that he is effectively making 'relationship' the focus of the message of John (Brown, *John*, 774).

[66] It is often said that the Gospel as a whole, and chapter 17 in particular, sets out what has been called a 'binitarian monotheism' (e.g. Frey, "God in the Gospel of John", 338). One can affirm this to an extent, but not in a way that excludes trinitarian possibilities. Byers, for example, holds that although some parts of the Gospel set out 'dyadic theology' or 'binitarianism', 'the evangelist's "narrative pneumatology" will eventually require an understanding of Johannine theology as "triadic"' (*Ecclesiology*, 30–31; this argument is expounded on pp. 224–235).

For to say that 'God is love' is not merely a *theo*logical statement; it is an *onto*logical statement. Indeed, it has all the more ethical force as a result.[67] To say 'God is love' entails that there is nothing about God that is *not* love.[68] But what does it imply about that which is *not* God? Do we presuppose a more basic transcendental field of existence within which God-as-love exists, or does everything exist somehow *within* this reality? If all God is (as revealed in John) is love, this means that all Father and Son are, not only in relation to each other, but in relation to anything and anyone else, is love.[69] There is, therefore, a strong continuity between God's relations *ad intra* and *ad extra*.[70]

Such an ontological purview must take in cosmology and not just anthropology; that the former is the context for the latter is one of the few things we can confidently state from the Gospel's truncated account of creation: πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο (1:3). Prior to this there is only intradivine love, hence Jesus' words in 17:5 and later in 17:24, which point back to the original state of

---

[67] A dichotomy between ontological and ethical significance, such as van der Watt posits when discussing the Johannine concept of light, is unwarranted (*Grammar*, 341). For light can only have the kind of existential role for moral guidance that van der Watt argues for on the basis of a more fundamental ontological reality, as John 1:9 already suggests.

[68] This does not deny that love is a multivalent concept that can be enacted in a variety of ways, as we have seen.

[69] Frey does not discuss John 17 specifically in this regard, but concludes his essay on the statement 'God is love' with a similar sentiment, saying that 'the notion of God's love forms a constitutive element of the Biblical teaching of God, yet it is held to be the essence and the ultimate reason of every relationship between God and humankind' ("God is Love", 643).

[70] Although the argument here is developed through engagement with the Johannine text itself, it resonates with the 20th century development of 'actualistic ontology'. This term denotes the way in which Karl Barth in particular (though himself not using the term) construes of God's relationship to humanity as such an inherent expression of God's being as to make it inextricable from that being. Thus 'God's being *is* God being for us in Jesus Christ' (Shao Kai Tseng, "Barth on Actualistic Ontology" in George Hunsinger and Keith L. Johnson (eds.), *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Karl Barth* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2020), 1006). Some of the controversy around interpreting Barth thinking on this point concerns the possibility that it compromises God's aseity, which is not particularly relevant here (since I make no claims to the Gospel's thinking on the necessity of God's relationship to people). However, of more relevance is the concern that positing strong continuity between God's *ad intra* and God's *ad extra* relationships breaks down the creature/creator distinction along the lines of the Hegelian 'absolute', whose historical becoming *is* its being (Tseng, "Actualistic Ontology", 1020). Although adopting Hemmerle's all-embracing ontological idea of love to interpret John might leave my interpretation open to this same concern, I avoid Hegelian implications. I do so by under-determining the way in which divine love is manifest in cosmology in the argument I develop below. As such, there is *continuity* but not *identity* between God's *ad intra* love and his *ad extra* relationships, including that in which non-human creation partakes. Susan Eastman shows how these questions arise in interpreting Paul, coming to similar theological conclusions as I do here ("Divine Love and the Constitution of the Self", *JSNT* 40/4 (2018), 524–537).

oneness shared by Father and Son.[71] Quite generally, as well as pointing forward, Jesus' prayer functions as a retrospective, encompassing the whole narrative of the Gospel from the perspective of its climactic event. Picking up on motifs from throughout the book, it, like the prologue, has elements of its summary narrative: Jesus prays for himself (17:1–5), and particularly his glorification (17:1, cf. 1:14), referring to his initial commission towards the world (17:2, cf. 1:3) and its completion in his ministry (17:4, cf. 1:5).

Therefore, what is crystallised in John 17 can be read back into the prologue as a principle of creation.[72] Not only is love prior to all of created reality (i.e. all that is apart from God) but this reality comes into being through this relationship of love.[73] The ethical significance of this is that it gives ontological force to love that is logically prior to the incarnation. Because this includes non-human creation every bit as much as human society, materiality per se is no barrier to participation in divine love.[74]

Since the Gospel does not outline the implications of the fact that everything has come into being through the relationship of Father and Son, there is no indication whether (and if so, how) created reality is patterned according to love. However, one can ask a less ambitious question that opens up a path in the same direction: is created reality such that it can house divine life? Or, put

---

[71] Keener remarks that Jesus' 'precreation glory harks back to the very opening of the Gospel' (p. 1055). Thus, even if the prayer is presented as based on eyewitness testimony, the author deliberately connects it to the prologue. This is significant in that it complements the idea of a retrospective pneumatological hermeneutic inscribed into the Gospel (cf. Frey, "Climax", 373–375) and expands the scope of what is brought to the remembrance of the disciples to the protological material in the Prologue.

[72] Cf. Popkes, *Theologie der Liebe*, 183.

[73] As Oliver Davies remarks, 'the Christian doctrine that God is creator is as much a claim about the nature of the world in which we live as it is about the world's origins or the shape and destiny of the self' (*The Creativity of God: World, Eucharist, Reason* (Cambridge: CUP, 2004), 1). Davies begins this book with a quotation of John 1:3. Though he neither uses the term 'trinitarian ontology' (he prefers 'theological cosmology', p. 6) nor foregrounds love, this basic thesis seems consonant with the concerns I am pursuing here.

[74] Again, Johannine scholarship tends to avoid this broader ontological implication. Talking about John 17, Bauckham states that from the 'theological or Christological reality' of the unity of the Father and Son 'derives the Gospel's soteriology and from that the Gospel's ecclesiology and finally the church's mission to the world' (*Gospel of Glory*, 40). Yet it must equally, if more implicitly, shape the Gospel's view of the whole of creation (*cosmology*) and thus its *ontology*. In contrast, Jürgen Moltmann's idea of perichoresis in relation to John is that 'the Trinity is an open and inviting and uniting environment for the whole creation redeemed and renewed in God' ("God in the World, the World in God" in *The Gospel and Theology*, 376).

more in line with the particular concerns of this thesis, is the world (the physical, social and political entity denoted by the term κόσμος), despite its *de facto* hostility, such that the God who is love can live within and through its structures? A positive answer is surely the only one consonant with Johannine thought.[75]

Only a compatibility between divine life and mundane reality could account for the intertwining of the mundane and divine dimensions of Jesus' own life. There is in John, to use Thompson's words, 'no sharp demarcation between the so-called "natural" and "supernatural" realms'.[76] If we are already to think of the Father-Son relationship as 'household', then we could say that the household has an open door.

2d. Intradivine love and the divine household

As we move on to look at the question of human participation, it is worth taking stock of the argument thus far. Based on a reading of John 17, we have seen that 'love' in John is more than a feeling, action or even a mode of being; as that which characterises the Father-Son relationship itself, it is at the heart of God's very nature and at the heart of reality *in toto*. Johannine ethics thus has a comprehensive basis lacking in Christological or theological bases that are not explicitly framed in broader ontological terms. Moreover, our examination also evinces a clearer place for the divine-human entity of the 'divine household' within the narrative of love. The latter begins in God, works through creation, and reaches its telos (from the point of view of John 17:20–26) in divine-human community.

---

[75] Frey's lack of theological connection between divine and mundane reality is even apparent when he discusses the phrase 'God is love' from 1 John 4. He refers to it as the 'true essence of God' as part of his addressing the question of material assistance, but does not say how the connection between the two should be made ("God is Love" in Benjamin Schliesser (ed.), *Von Jesus zur neutestamentlichen Theologie* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 619). He argues thereafter that the repetition of this phrase in the Epistle must be understood within the historical situation of the secessionists, who were probably wealthy and now removed their material support. Love and hate are otherwise undefined; 'only in the implied social context is the reification tangible', which surfaces in 1 John 3:17 as well as references in 2–3 John to hospitality (p. 623).

[76] *God of the Gospel*, 140.

3. Human participation in the divine household

The question now, therefore, is how human participation in the divine household works. A temptation would be to simply extrapolate social lessons from the Father-Son relationship. Indeed, too hasty a move in this direction has been criticised by theologians in response to 'Social Trinity' models, a critique that Bauckham has shown applies to reading John 17.[77] Therefore, in this section I take four careful steps.

Firstly, I show how the understanding of intradivine love in John 17 is logically open to 'the other' (3a) and in fact, secondly, how it already entails human participation in the person of Jesus (3b). Thirdly, I elucidate Jesus' relationship to those people who are his own (3c) as a foundation for, fourthly, setting out what is involved in human participation within this relationship (3d) in light of, fifthly, the reality of Jesus' death (3e).

3a. Openness to the 'other' in the Father-Son relationship

The notion that God is love does not only lead one to an ontology of mystery; some of the features of this love can be identified in such a way that their potential significance for human participation emerges. In particular, the intradivine life portrayed in John 17 is encapsulated by the two elements of abundant giving and mutual indwelling. Moreover, these can both be seen within the notion of self-giving, in that the glory which is given is given *from* self and the intimacy of interaction entails giving *of* self. Putting it in such abstract terms does not mean that we are dealing with a universal philosophical principle that is automatically applicable outside of the Father-Son relationship. However, there are indications within Jesus' prayer of how

---

[77] For a theological critique, see Karen Kilby, "Perichoresis and Projection: Problems with Social Doctrines of the Trinity", *New Blackfriars*, 81/956 (October 2000), 432–445. Bauckham notes that 'correspondence between divine community and human community … can be deployed in a misleading fashion when the thought is simply that the Trinity provides a model to which human community should correspond … even though a superficial reading of Jesus's prayer … might suggest it' (*Gospel of Glory*, 38).

openness to others is actually constitutive of this oft-called 'binitarian monotheism'.

Though intradivine love may be expressed abstractly in terms of two 'subjects', we have seen that love is not identically enacted in both persons. The way the Father loves the Son is not the same as the converse; the Father and the Son, though in a relationship of perpetual mutuality, love differently to one another. Because there is already differentiation within a union of love and the same love can be expressed in different ways, the door is logically opened to further difference. Intradivine life is such that there is an implicit potential for a person or persons who are not Father or Son to participate in this love on the basis of whatever relational identity they may have.

There are actually indications in John 17 itself not only of the *potential* for the Father-Son relationship to include another but that it already does so. This is so because logically speaking, even the idea of 'relationship' itself constitutes a 'third term' that is neither the Father nor the Son. For there is, posited here, not only Father and Son but also Father-Son. Indeed, this complements the fact that in 17:26, Jesus talks about love as an abstract noun (ἡ ἀγάπη), something conceptually separate from either Father or Son. Such would provide a rationale for the idea that the Spirit is in fact this bond of love, hence the Augustinian pneumatology that Aquinas deploys in his commentary on this chapter.[78]

My point here is not to argue for this particular interpretation, which would involve answering the charge that it reduces the Spirit's personhood.[79] My point is not even to endorse a pneumatological understanding of Jesus' prayer, though the prominence of the Spirit in the Farewell Discourse would make this exegetically, and not just dogmatically, justifiable.[80] Instead, I want to make

---

[78] Speaking of 17:3 in particular, he says that 'the Holy Spirit, who is the bond of the Father and Son (qui est nexus amborum) is implied'; later, in reference to 17:11, he explicitly states that this is what defines their love (Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, trans. James Weisheipl and Fabian Larcher (Albany, NY: Magi Books, 1980), 361, 372).

[79] Speaking in relation to John 17:21, Moltmann rejects such a reading and claims that Augustine's formulation 'reduced the Trinity to a Binity' (*God in the World*, 374).

[80] For this reason one can say that Bauckham draws too stark a contrast in his comments on this issue. He says that 'although it has been suggested that the Spirit is present anonymously

two separate points without conflating them.

Firstly, the idea of a 'third-term' in the Father-Son relationship means that even what John 17 describes strictly in terms of intradivine life (without mentioning creation) is not bintitarian in an exclusive sense. Secondly, however, the combination of this inherent openness to 'the other', the Farewell Discourse context, and the idea of 'divine household' do point clearly in the direction of pneumatology. The idea of a 'household' means that one is not forced to be precise about the 'divine nature' of the Spirit. For participation, ontologically speaking, is a matter of participating in *love* rather than some other purported '*essence*'. Moreover, unlike with a 'family' based model, the non-kinship terms in which the Spirit is described is unproblematic. Therefore, we can take seriously the simple implication from the Farewell Discourse (especially 14:1–3, 16–19; 16:7) that the Paraclete is already a member of the divine household. This can be affirmed regardless of the presence or absence of pneumatological allusions in Jesus' prayer itself as an implication of its more abstractly expressed openness to the other, a 'third term'.

3b. Humanity within the Father-Son relationship

As a crucial aspect of understanding how ethics works within the broader frame of John 17, we must see how human participation is already included in the Father-Son relationship. Indeed, 'the eternal life of the Father and the Son, into which the community is taken up, is not only a divine life but also a human life'.[81] That humanity is actually *part of* God's life can be gleaned from what is expressed so famously in 1:14:

> Καὶ ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο καὶ ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν, καὶ ἐθεασάμεθα τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ, δόξαν ὡς μονογενοῦς παρὰ πατρός, πλήρης χάριτος καὶ ἀληθείας
>
> And the word became flesh and took up residence among us; and we have

in chapter 17, there is certainly no explicit reference to the Spirit in that Passage.' Its language is 'binitarian rather than trinitarian' so that 'as exegetes, we must be clear that this was an extension' (*Gospel of Glory*, 36). Surely the task of exegetes is not merely to restate what is explicit but to draw out what is implicit from various contextual factors, not least the immediately preceding material in the same discourse and particularly the close identity that Jesus posits between himself, the Father and the Spirit (14:16–19).

[81] Watson, "Trinity and Community", 176.

seen his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth

There are two main ways in which this can be understood. Either the Son undergoes a change in 'essence', adding humanity to divinity, in which case the word σάρξ indicates an ontological change and thus the basis of a new relationship between God and people.[82] Or the becoming flesh is the manifestation of a prior humanity in the Son.[83] Whichever of the two one chooses, the operative factor for my purposes has often been downplayed; the relational proximity of the term ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν implies that the Son is fully embedded in human society. As such, his divine glory is revealed through his involvement in the various aspects of the mundane dimension, whether it be physical, socio-economic or political (see further below, chap. 5, 3b). This is nothing other than his life of love referred to in 13:1, which establishes the divine household among men and women (see above, chap. 3, section 2a–c).

What John 17 enables us to do is to see not only how Jesus' life of love is lived within human society but how it can equally be framed as the means by which the Son loves the Father. This is encapsulated by Jesus' declaration of his glorification of the Father on the earth through (mundane) works:

ἐγώ σε ἐδόξασα ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς τὸ ἔργον τελειώσας ὃ δέδωκάς μοι ἵνα ποιήσω (17:4).

I myself glorified you on the earth, having finished the work which you gave me in order that I would do it

This work comprises loving people and establishing the relationships of the divine household, making the events of his earthly career acts of intradivine love. This is supremely the case with his impending death for his friends. But in all of the work by which he enacts the divine relational mandate, he glorifies

---

[82] As Watson puts it, through the Son becoming flesh, 'the intradivine oneness of Jesus and the Father is opened up, so that humans may participate in it' and to do so specifically on the basis of 'the *relation* to the divine of a fellow-human', i.e. the incarnated Jesus ("Trinity and Community", 170, my emphasis, cf. Macaskill, *Union with Christ*, 270).

[83] Despite the implication of his quotation above, Watson later explains the grounds for the incarnation in the fact that 'there is in the Johannine concept of "pre-existence" an orientation towards the becoming-human of the eternal Son in the figure of Jesus' ("Trinity and Community", 179). For Behr, who follows McCabe at this point, the notion of 'pre-existence' itself is problematic since it assumes that God operates within human temporality. Thus he makes the more radical claim, also made by Rahner and Barth, that God is always already somehow 'human' (*Paschal Gospel*, 3–5, 326–331).

God.

What is happening here can be described as a kind of mediation whereby Jesus' interactions with the Father are not only direct (i.e. simply between two subjects) but involve others. Likewise Jesus is glorified by God through his disciples (17:10). Indeed, the prayer itself is an example of this interweaving of divine and mundane dimensions and the mediation of the Father-Son relationship through people. For it is 'said aloud before the disciples precisely so that they may share this union'.[84]

3c. Jesus' relationship to 'his own' and their relationship to God

The question now is how exactly it is the case that *other* people participate in divine life. Jesus' desire that divine love be in his own (17:26) is the most explicit reference to how others share in this love. But references to how other people participate in divine life are so ubiquitous in Jesus' prayer that only four out of twenty six verses talk about Father and Son without mentioning others (17:1, 4, 5, 7). Moreover, the chapter is full of parallels between Jesus' identity and role on the one hand and that of 'his own' on the other, usually by deploying the term καθώς (17:11, 14, 16, 18, 21, 22, 23). Does this mean that the way in which other people are to participate in intradivine love is simply to be and do exactly as Jesus is and does, imitating his life?

A negative answer has emerged from the argument of this thesis so far: Jesus' love for his own (whether in the foot washing, 13:14–15 or the love command, 13:34) can only be taken as an example on the prior basis of people's relationship to him. They must receive him as Rabbi and Lord, head of the divine household, and act from within this relationship (hence the term 'mimetic participation' that I am adopting). Likewise, in John 17, what is said about people's relationships to one another is not only *imitative of* Jesus' relationships but is *based* in Jesus' relationship to his own, a statement of belonging which is non-reversible. Thus we need to understand these relational

[84] Brown, *John*, 748.

dynamics in order to allow us to draw explicitly ethical conclusions.

Jesus' own relate to God through him

A key starting point is the fact that Jesus' relationship to his own involves the Father. This is not only the logical correlate of the Son's intradivine life being lived within mundane interactions. For the involvement of the Father with Jesus' own is directly stated in 17:2 and connected to the intradivine relationship itself in 17:23.[85] Thus when we are talking about Jesus' relationship to his own, we are not talking about Jesus in isolation from the Father; likewise, when we are talking about how Jesus' own relate to him, we are also talking about their relationship to God.[86] Augustine recognises the significance of 17:12 in which Jesus' protection of his own, like all he does, is in conjunction with Father and Spirit, even if they have different roles ('personas eum distinguere, non separare naturas').[87] Yet he denies that the oneness mentioned just before that statement (17:11, repeated in 17:21) really includes people, based on their difference of substance, so that Jesus is only united to God in his divinity.[88] This dogmatic concern obscures the fact that neither in John 17 nor anywhere else in the Gospel are the divine and mundane elements of Jesus' interactions with God and people separable from one another. What *is* separable, however, is the relationships themselves; who Jesus is in relation to the Father is not who he is in relation to people.

Being Jesus' own in relationship to God

Thus the first point about Jesus' relationship to his own is that, through it,

---

[85] Concerns for orthodoxy have led to claims that this does not imply equality of love as in Aquinas, *John*, 383, following Augustine on this point. However, since they maintain this based on their estimation of the significance of the substantial difference between divine and human, which is not an emphasis in John as I argue immediately below, the force of their argument is weakened.

[86] Brown thus emphasises the inseparability of the 'horizontal and vertical dimension' (*John*, 779).

[87] E.g., *Homilies*, 691.

[88] In reference to 17:11 and 17:21, he says that 'the Father and Son can be one because they are of one substance' ('quia unus substantiae sunt') but 'while we may indeed be in them, we cannot be one with them; for they and we are not of one substance' (*Homilies*, 700).'

people are in relationship to God in a way that any purported difference of 'essence' (a dubiously Johannine concept in any case) does not preclude. At the same time, the relationship between Jesus and his own is not undifferentiated. Throughout the Gospel, the hierarchical position of Jesus is maintained, as symbolised by titles such as ῥαββί, κύριος, or even Χριστός. What is interesting about John 17, however, is that none of these terms are used; Jesus' relationship to others is expressed simply in terms of their belonging, whether to him or to the world.[89]

Belonging to Jesus in John 17 is both a matter of universal creation authority (17:2, cf. 1:3) and also the gathering of a specific people for eternal life.[90] This is in fact the work that he has been given (which includes revelation, 17:6) and that he has now completed (17:4). Though the literary connection with 19:30 is no doubt deliberate and theologically significant (see below, 3e), it is untenable to restrict this to being a proleptic reference to his salvific death. For the aorist ἐδόξασα in 17:4 followed by the καὶ νῦν δόξασον in 17:5 expresses a sequence of events whereby the cross remains in the future. Besides, Jesus has just said that eternal life is a matter of knowing the Father and Son (17:3). As such, his work entails the incorporation into the divine household that we have seen preoccupying his ministry.[91] Just as we have seen the rest of the Gospel narrative, this incorporation involves both an invitation open to all and the need for a relational response (believing) in order to participate in it, hence the ultimate openness of 'his own' to the members of 'the world' in 17:20–21. The foot washing marked a crucial stage in securing this new relational reality, termed as having a 'part with' Jesus (μέρος μετ' ἐμοῦ, 13:8). Likewise, this

---

[89] The use of the title 'Christ' in 17:3 is not titular but is used as part of the proper name of Jesus (it is the only place in the Gospel where this happens).

[90] It is not necessary from the text to read the second group as a subset of the first. Indeed, the logical implication of 17:2a is that 17:2b would include 'all flesh'. Yet it is clear from elsewhere in the chapter (especially 17:9) that there is a distinction between the world in general and those whom Jesus has been given. This points to an apparent tension in John whereby there is universality in Jesus' salvific role (1:29, 35) and God's love for the world (3:16) but also limited selection (e.g. 6:44).

[91] This is not just about giving individuals revelation; the community-forming aspect of Jesus' work is often neglected, as in Moloney's commentary on these verses that Jesus has 'made God known' to the disciples whose '*knowledge* and *belief* reflect Jesus' accomplishment of the task that this Father gave him' (*Love*, 126–127). Without their mutual love, however, these noetic elements would not be sufficient.

prayer reaffirms the establishment of this relationship, which binds Jesus' own to each other as well as to him in oneness (17:11).

We cannot expound the relational configuration of Jesus to his own without drawing attention to the negative side of the equation. Indeed, this is also apparent in Jesus' prayer via the contrast between this community of oneness and the world (17:9, 11) characterised by hate (17:14–16, cf. 3:20; 7:7; 15:18–19, 23–25) and exemplified in their midst by the figure of Judas (17:12). Accordingly, the eternal life to which 17:3 refers cannot be understood in implicit contrast to 'normal' life but, instead, to death (cf. 17:12). And yet the accent in Jesus' prayer is not on the quantitative transfer of his own from death to life but the qualitative aspects of the latter. All this is defined in relational terms as knowing God and Jesus himself (17:2–3, 25–26), oneness (17:11, 21–23) and protection (17:12, 15). But, in addition, this involves joy (17:13), sanctification (17:17, 19), glory (17:22) and intimate co-presence with Jesus (17:24, 26). These set the crucial foundations for the responsibility of Jesus' own within the relationship, through which we may become more explicit about the question of ethics.

3d. Mimetic participation and the relational imperative for Jesus' 'own'

To see what kind of relational response is demanded of believers as 'Jesus' own', we must look at the actions encompassed by the term 'love' in Jesus' prayer. For here, as elsewhere in John, love encompasses actions not denoted by that specific term. Keeping the words of Jesus (cf. 14:21) is the way in which disciples love him and, by implication, the Father (17:6, 8, 14).[92] Jesus' own are involved in giving him glory (17:10) and share an intimate relationship with him and the Father that bears Christological witness to the world (17:21). This suggests that their intimacy, which Jesus has defined by the paradigm of the

[92] These latter verses make clear that the active response that Jesus requires is specifically identified as keeping his word. Just as the word is the medium of revelation in Jesus' (always interpreted) actions, so is it the medium of participation. My insistence at several points in this thesis that cognition should not replace holistic commitment of the whole person works both ways; linguistic communication is at the heart of relationship to Jesus for those who have that capacity (which is not everybody) .

foot washing, is not only a secondary consequence of obedience to their Lord (13:14–15). Rather, it *constitutes* their love for God; for how else but in love for each other are they to mutually indwell Father and Son (cf., again, 14:21)? One may go as far as to say that, just as Jesus' love for the Father is enacted through relationship to people, so is people's love for Jesus (and God) enacted through relationship to one another.[93]

Once we grasp the priority of the intradivine relationship being the *basis* of social relationships, we can see how it is also *paradigmatic* for them. For there is a repeated pattern in John 17 whereby what is true for the intradivine relationship is paralleled in Jesus' own by the term καθώς (17:11, 14, 16, 18, 21, 22, 23). These verses indicate that, like Father and Son, the disciples are to be one (v. 11, 21–22), subject to the world's hatred as outsiders (vv. 14, 16), sent into the world (v. 18) and loved by the Father (v. 23).[94] Even where the καθώς formulation is absent, Jesus' own parallel what we see in his own life in their intimately knowing the Father along with him (17:3, 6, 14, 24–26), glorifying and receiving glory (17:10, 22), having joy (17:13), being sanctified (17:17, 19) and bearing verbal testimony (17:20).[95] Therefore, Johannine ethics begins by participation, and this participation is also mimetic. Two elements of this are particularly significant for social ethics: intimate oneness (through mutual glorification) and missional invitingness. We now look at each of these in turn.

Intimate oneness through mutual glorification

Jesus' most frequently reiterated prayer in this chapter is for the disciples'

---

[93] This should not be taken to mean that people have no value 'in themselves' and can be instrumentalised for a purportedly higher purpose (see, for example, how Clark-Soles deals with this issue in relation to Jesus' words about the blind man in 9:3, "Love Embodied", 102–103). For the Gospel author, there is no such thing as value 'in oneself' anyway; people's value is defined in relation to God. That already means that glorifying him through mistreating others is a gross contradiction.

[94] Whilst the term καθώς in these verses is often used where John is indicating the basis for something as well as comparison (cf. chap. 3, section 4b), this latter sense is eliminated here by Augustine on a theological basis. In reference to 17:23, he denies that there is equality between the love of Father for the Son and for people, saying instead that 'He loveth us, inasmuch as we are the members of Him whom He loveth' (*Homilies*, 704).

[95] That verbal testimony is the medium for knowing Jesus is everywhere assumed here but it is equally assumed that it is part of a more comprehensive relational knowing from which words cannot be simply abstracted.

oneness (17:11, 21, 22, 23). What 'oneness' means structurally is not explicitly spelled out here, but the Gospel narrative as a whole allows us to see it as the foundation of the 'divine household' which shapes the ethics of the community. The fact that all are loved first by Jesus creates a radical egalitarianism between people whilst also allowing for, and even implying, difference. This is so to the extent that human relationship reflects the Father and Son's own oneness, which is marked by mutuality and intimacy without their relational identities ever becoming undifferentiated. Moreover, whether or not we see the bond of love in 17:26 as having pneumatological resonance, the same bond is what gives human community its coherence. Again, dogmatic concerns have led to a dilution of this continuity.[96] But Brown (who gives exegetical credence to the pneumatological reading at this point) observes that in terms of Jesus' and people's relationship to God, 'no sharp differentiation is apparent in the verses we are considering'.[97] Again, the quality of loving relationship is the same, even if the roles within it are differentiated.[98]

It has already been argued that mutual glorification is a key quality of love in the intradivine relationship of oneness (above, 2c). From this it may be inferred that the same applies to Jesus' own. Yet this is neither directly stated nor is the meaning of mutual glorification clear in reference to people; thus this inference must be tested. In order to argue that Jesus' own mimetically participate in mutual glorification, we need a clearer sense of what 'glory' means here. We have deferred establishing this because the relevant challenge is to understand the social significance of this theological notion. Thus we now must take up this challenge directly.

In terms of general Johannine usage, the theological sense of the noun δόξα is 'visible splendor' or 'divine appearance', with the verb thus meaning to enable

---

[96] For Aquinas (following Augustine here), the oneness talked about in relation to Father and Son is of substance on the one hand and of love (spiritual unity – 'unitas spiritus') on the other (*John*, 371). Yet the fact that people love 'by the Holy Spirit' means that there is some manner of participation in the trinitarian relationship for people who are 'one by participating in a higher love' ('per amorem participatum ex aliquo superiori') (p. 372).

[97] So Brown, *John*, 779–781.

[98] Brown notes in the same discussion that the distinction is upheld elsewhere by the fact that 'Christians are called 'children of God' and only Jesus 'Son of God'' (*John*, 779).

one to so appear.[99] But this often overlaps with the idea of 'honour' as status within social hierarchy, with the two senses impossible to completely disentangle from one another.[100]

It is well to keep this double meaning in mind as we approach the opening petition of Jesus' prayer (17:1b), which is for Jesus to be glorified:

> Πάτερ, ἐλήλυθεν ἡ ὥρα· δόξασόν σου τὸν υἱόν, ἵνα ὁ υἱὸς δοξάσῃ σέ
> Father, the hour has come; glorify the Son so that the Son may glorify you

The connection of glorification to the motif of 'the hour' indicated in this line connects it to the similar idea of exaltation or lifting up used to express Jesus' death (12:27–33), which is confirmed by the narrative progression whereby the prayer is followed by his arrest (18:1–2). That, for the Gospel, Jesus' crucifixion is glorification is indisputable, though this is not without complications that we must address below (3e). However, the passage does not allow us to surmise that this is the sole referent of the Johannine notion of glory.

In 17:4, Jesus talks about glorifying the Father in his relationship to his own. Then throughout his prayer from 17:6–19, he talks only about his relational interactions within his own without separate mentions of intradivine mutual glorification. This places all of his earthly work within the ambit of glory, and not only the cross.[101] Moreover, the glory for which he now prays is not only the climax of what has already come in his earthly ministry but is an instantiation of what was already the case in the pre-mundane situation (17:5). This is reiterated in 17:24, where the disciples' capacity to experience this glory (already mentioned in 17:22) is the operative concern. The question for us now, therefore, is to ask what it means for the disciples to be *actively* involved in

---

[99] Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory*, 44. His interpretation of the verbal form is slightly different to this (see below, n. 128). Nielsen notes the continuity both between the verb and noun and the theological and sociological senses, giving his definition in terms of the latter: 'to give or receive δόξα means to enhance or recognize a hierarchical position' and 'the verb δοξάζειν takes up the meaning of the expression "to give δόξα"', albeit in a sophisticated way ("Glory and Glorification", 361).

[100] Nielsen points out the sociological use in a clearly theological context as the word μονογενής in the key statement of 1:14 expresses the fact that 'according to the ancient household sons participate in the collective honour of the father' ("Glory and Glorification", 356).

[101] Bultmann notes what light the Passion throws on what came before: 'Von dieser Vollendung aus gesehen ist das ganze Wirken des Menschen Jesus Offenbarung der δόξα' (*Theologie*, 395).

this glorification.

Glorification of Jesus entails that one sees in him 'the status and appearance that God's son shares with his father'.[102] But what does Jesus mean by saying that he has been glorified by the disciples (17:10)? The answer is in the previous verses: they have kept his word (17:6) and accepted his identity in relation to the Father (17:7–8). Just as Jesus glorifies God by rightly acting on what he has given (17:4), so do the disciples rightly act on what they have been given by believing (17:8). Believing in John must entail public commitment rather than private assent unlike what we see with those whose who maintained secrecy which is tellingly referred to as loving the glory of people (τὴν δόξαν τῶν ἀνθρώπων, 12:42–43, cf. chap. 2, 2c). Conversely, therefore, despite their imperfections, by following Jesus to the end, the disciples have publicly honoured him by declaring him to be who he is claiming to be, and thus endowing him with 'visible splendor'.[103]

Glory and honour thus belong together in how disciples are to relate to Jesus. Yet in 17:21 it is not the believers' relationship to Jesus himself that reveals his identity to the world; it is their relationship to one another. Moreover, in 17:22 we see that Jesus has given the disciples his glory precisely for the purpose of the same oneness that characterises intradivine life.[104] It is perfectly consonant with Johannine thought as we have seen it that the disciples share in mutual glorification on the basis of having first received glory and that this involves them following Jesus not only as individuals but as a community. But what does it mean for them to *receive* glory?

Since we have already established that giving glory and glorifying are synonymous (2c), it cannot be that Jesus is simply giving them something that

---

[102] Nielsen, "Glory and Glorification", 357.

[103] Bauckham's suggestion that this meaning of δοξάζω is an alternative to the more regular meaning of 'praise' (*Gospel of Glory*, 44) obscures the fact that the praise is only a good translation of δοξάζω because it involves showing the object of praise to be worthy of praise (cf. Augustine, *Homilies*, 678, for a similar point). This might account for the fact that he gives no explanation for Jesus' words in 17:10, saying only that they are 'puzzling' (p. 61).

[104] Bauckham states in relation to 17:22 that 'here understanding the glory as the radiance of God's character makes good sense. Just as God's love, by which Jesus and the Father are one, has been reflected in the life and death of Jesus, so it is to be reflected in the disciples when they love one another' (p. 61).

is detached from himself. And now that we have developed an understanding of glorification, the implication is that it must have to do with making the disciples appear in divine light, lifting them up to be seen as glorious. This, of course, is exactly what the formation of the divine household accomplishes; Jesus' love entails a relational transformation of people from the world to being children of God, friends of their Rabbi and Lord. That this is enacted supremely in the foot washing helps make a crucial connection between the theological and sociological sense of δόξα.[105] Jesus' own are glorified by being given supreme honour; the Lord of the universe is washing their dirty feet with his bare hands. The divine and mundane dimensions are once again intertwined in a theologically crucial way that is obscured by minimising either.[106] Because the disciples have received this from Jesus, they may enact it in relation to each other, not exclusively or in private but within society. Whilst this incurs hostility because of the radically subversive nature of mutual glorification (it being part of the intimacy of love), its object is not to shut out the world. This brings us to our final point about mutual glorification, which is its missional invitingness.

Missional invitingness

How Jesus' own relate to each other has a direct bearing on their witness (17:21) within the world into which they are sent (17:18).[107] As such, one must be careful with Jesus' statement that his own, just as (καθώς) was the case for himself, are 'not of this world' (17:14); far from insinuating some kind of

---

[105] Nielsen recognises the import of 17:22 whereby 'in being included into the relation between father and son the believers become parts of the divine household' ("Glory and Glorification" 359). However, he elsewhere contends that this does not happen before they recognise him by his post-resurrection stigmata, which 'immediately incorporates them into the divine community and results in eternal life' (p. 354). This again demonstrates the problem of trying to isolate a specific moment in time when the salvific work happens (cf. chap. 2, section 3).

[106] Although Bauckham notes the overlapping of the two senses of honour in the Gospel's Isaianic portrayal of Jesus (*God of Glory*, 54–55) he does not acknowledge that it is operative here (p. 61).

[107] Augustine denies that this is the case, understanding instead 'the world' in 17:20 to be the elect world that God loves (3:16) as opposed to the 'world' that is predestined to damnation and is not prayed for by Jesus in 17:9 (*Homilies*, 700–701). Aquinas softens this somewhat by pointing out the parallel in 13:35 which makes explicit that there is nobody who is *a priori* excluded from the missionary impact of Christian love (*John*, 380).

sectarian or insular mindset, it is the precise opposite. It is only on the basis of intimate relationship with God and unambiguous commitment to each other for God's sake that they are able to engage with the world publicly and invitingly in the way that Jesus did (17:11, 21), hence they are to remain there (17:15). John 17 does not elaborate on what being 'sent' entailed in practice, though it is clear that Jesus' own will testify verbally about him (17:20) with a word that is imbued with the same revelatory power as in-person knowledge of Jesus.[108] Lest this suggest some kind of disembodied transfer of data, it must be remembered that Jesus' own manner of testifying is never separated from holistic engagement in mundane life.

Expressed in this way, the shape of Johannine ethics is extremely positive, putting an individual on a continual upward trajectory towards glory within a corporate life whose unity could eventually encompass the whole world. Yet the world is portrayed not only as being outside of relationship to God (17:9, 16) but as being hostile (17:12, 14) and imbued with evil intent from which Jesus' own need protection (17:15). Indeed, for Jesus to glorify the Father as a human in this context involved death (17:1). Moreover, he wants to be 'with' the Father in glory in a different way from the situation he is in when he prays (17:5, 11, 13, 17:24), suggesting that the divine life of love may not be able to be lived to its full extent within the mundane sphere.[109] This fits with the numerous indications in the Farewell Discourse that the divine household is not only a mundane reality but a *supramundane* one (e.g. 14:3; 16:33). How can we interpret these indications that the telos of human participation in divine love is for an existence outside the world? And how do these indications sit with what we have seen in the Gospel thus far, namely that the divine love

---

[108] The fact that Jesus' prayer for a oneness that entails mutual indwelling with him and the Father (17:21) also applies to those later believers who were *not* eyewitnesses (17:20) means that the word itself, rather than the singular event of Jesus speaking it, is effective in mediating his presence. This neither diminishes the reality of his presence through the Spirit nor does it negate the mundane necessity of physically communicated language. Brown remarks that the content of John 17 has – whatever one thinks about its historicity – been passed within tradition, 'through the disciples and not in a purely spiritual way' (*John*, 774).

[109] Watson's contention that the glorification to which Jesus points in 17:24 should be equated with Golgotha ("Trinity and Community") sits uneasily with the prior promise that his disciples would *not* witness the crucifixion (16:32) but *would* be with him in the Father's house (14:1–4). Even those who argue for the paucity of future eschatology in John usually see glorification as a future reality here (again Brown, *John*, 772–774).

characterising Johannine ethics operates in and through the mundane sphere?

3e. The telos of mutual glorification through death

In order to grasp the telos of mimetic participation in the divine household as it is set out in John 17, we now need to proceed in three distinct stages. First, we must elucidate what it means for Jesus' crucifixion to be his glorification and the climactic enactment of his love. Secondly, we must clarify what it means for Jesus to 'die'. Thirdly, we need to bring this understanding of Jesus' work to bear on the ethical framework that has been developed in the thesis thus far.

The cross as glorification and climax of love

It has emerged in this chapter that glory and love are closely related in Johannine thought, though not synonymous. Love is ontologically fundamental as divine nature itself. However, whilst more than action, it is necessarily manifest in the Father's giving to the Son and vice versa. Whilst this self-giving is not always explicitly connected to glorifying, insofar as glorifying always has the goal of enhancing the life of the other and honouring them, it is at the heart of loving. For Jesus to glorify the Father entails obedience by giving himself to the world for relationship to his own (17:4, cf. above, 3c). It is clear in the Shepherd Discourse in particular that the laying down of life that will happen at the crucifixion is an act of obedience to the Father (10:17–18). As such, it is an act of love (14:31) but, as is clear in 17:4, it is also an act of glorification; it both honours the Father in the conventional social sense and shows him to be glorious as the one in whom such works originate (5:19, 14:10).

At the same time, Jesus is laying down his life for others, glorifying them not only in bringing them from death to life but by bringing them from being outsiders to friends (15:13) and children of God (1:12, 11:51–52). Establishing the divine household is a work of glorification by changing the (public) status of its members, albeit in a way that is not recognisable to outsiders as such. Indeed, once we grasp that Jesus glorifies others this way, it brings the logic of his own glorification into relief. For in his death on the cross, Jesus is being

lifted up and shown in public to be the Son who perfectly loves his Father and lays down his life for his own. This is the very epitome of conventional heroism. Its subversive quality comes not from being in absolute opposition to cultural values but from enacting them in a way that only became apparent through the pneumatologically opened eyes.

Although Jesus' love works along with certain mundane social categories, it also functions in direct opposition to these on a more fundamental level. Jesus' self-giving powerfully resists a world that is geared against genuine self-giving love. Moreover, Jesus' self-giving *overcomes* this world (16:33). This indicates a tension in the understanding of Jesus' death: it is not to be the end of the story. The Son wants to be glorified in order to once again glorify the Father (17:1). How can death be the climax of love and glory whilst also being subsumed in a larger narrative of the eternal divine life of mutual glorification?

Jesus' death in relational context

Jesus' crucifixion has always caused problems for those who want to maintain his divine status along with a basic conception of theism inimical to death.[110] Frey articulates the quandary well in historical-critical terms:

> 'If the Johannine δόξα-statements are concerned with the relationship between the mythological-ontological view of Jesus as the eternal Son of God and the narrated story of Jesus of Nazareth, his way to the cross, then this gives rise to the question of the starting point from which one should appropriately illuminate this relation of tension'.[111]

Whilst docetic solutions to this are incompatible with the Gospel (and perhaps deliberately rejected therein, e.g. 19:34–35; 20:26–27), it does seem problematic to both affirm that the cross is an intradivine event and imply that divine being

[110] Although Augustine identifies the resurrection as the main locus of glory, he also emphasises the perpetual presence of Christ with and in God as 'the chief good' ('magnum bonum') to which he points here (*Homilies*, 709–710). Aquinas understands glory in the twofold sense of being perpetually held by the Son but also glorified in the passion and resurrection. However, it is the signs accompanying the passion (mentioned in the Synoptics rather than John) that he sees as glorious rather than the death itself (*John*, 359).

[111] Frey, "The Glory of the Crucified One" in *Glory of the Crucified One*, 240–241.

is the antithesis of death (1:4; 5:26).[112] One textually attentive answer to this could be to note that Jesus' death is only ever expressed programmatically in terms of his self-giving rather than actual dying (10:18; 15:13, cf. 3:16). Accordingly, it could be that it is the sublimity of his love rather than his death per se that is glorious, with the latter being a contingent factor resulting from the encounter between a perfect divine life and a corrupted world.[113]

Doubtless John takes seriously the role of hostile socio-political forces in Jesus' death, which is never straightforwardly attributed to the direct causation of either Father or Son (from 18:1 onwards, Jesus is not the active subject in any verbs apart from speaking). Besides, without the resurrection and ascension, Jesus' death would not be glorious.[114] On the other hand, the force of the maxim in 15:13 is that there is something glorious in vicarious death itself. Moreover, the logic of Jesus' depiction in cultic sacrificial terms is that this depiction must incorporate death to retain its glory. Surely in dealing with the death that shrouded humanity, he is glorified at Passover as the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (ὁ ἀμνὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ὁ αἴρων τὴν ἁμαρτίαν τοῦ κόσμου, 1:29b).[115] Thus we need a better explanation for the role of death within a relationship of perpetual mutual glorification.

It is worth reiterating that there is no reason to assume that the element of mystery can be expunged from Johannine Christology, not least in its soteriological aspects. But crucial insight is gained when we deconstruct what may seem to be the most stable concept at play, namely death. For our commonplace conception today would see death in terms of (potentially permanent) cessation of an individual's being with the emphasis being on

---

[112] Whilst there are debates about the dating of docetic tendencies and their connection to so-called 'gnosticism', such positions certainly arose. These find their most prevalent contemporary form in Islam via the explicitly docetic explanation for Jesus' death in the Qur'an (4.157–158).

[113] Herbert McCabe illustrates this with the analogy of a film that is distorted by having no silver screen on which to view it: 'the story of Jesus is nothing other than the triune life of God projected onto our history … projected onto the rubbish dump that we have made of the world' (*God Matters* (London: Mowbray, 1987), 49). Whilst McCabe's point is more about the issue of temporality than death per se, it equally applies here.

[114] So Augustine: 'Had the Son, however, only died, and not risen again, He would without doubt have neither been glorified by the Father, nor have glorified the Father' (*Homilies*, 677).

[115] Brown demonstrates how the logic of 17:17–19 within the prayer and the Jewish background points decisively to the notion of consecration for sacrifice (*John*, 765–767).

biological processes. But the Jewish understanding with which the Gospel is working is quite different; it is a relational concept whereby one is separated from the (land of the) living and even from God.[116] Whilst there is separation from one's physical body, this implies no cessation of being.

Looking at Jesus' death in terms of relational separation makes good sense out of the narrative of John. For even if there is a point of rupture indicated by the words παρέδωκεν τὸ πνεῦμα in 19:30, Jesus' prayer is clear about his ongoing relationship with the Father in eternal oneness (17:1, 5, 24–26). Self-giving is not giving *away* but giving *into* the divine household that also includes people.[117] Thus, the whole premise of the Farewell Discourse is that Jesus' relationship with his own continues after his absence, albeit in a different form. What *does* end, however, is Jesus' relationship to the world (17:11). This can be seen already in his post-resurrection appearances, where he is no longer part of society more broadly, appearing only to 'his own'.[118] It is thus no coincidence that Jesus' death and burial are described in specific relation to Roman practice and Jewish custom (19:31–41). From this mundane perspective, there is no qualification in the assertion that Jesus died.

Death, eschatology and ethics

So Jesus' crucifixion is the glorious climax of his love, dying to the world whilst living eternally to God and, thanks to the sacrificial efficacy of his work, to his own. Now, in order to see how Jesus' death shapes the telos of mimetic participation, it must be put in a broader eschatological framework. It is clear

---

[116] Whatever else may be said about Jewish conceptions of afterlife, the fact that death is a relational change rather than absolute cessation of being is clear from such descriptions as we have in the Deuteronomic history (e.g. 1 Kings 2:10). The converse is also instructive of the Johannine conception; whilst 'eternal life' may popularly connote perpetual duration of individual being, the definition in 17:3 is decidedly relational.

[117] This must qualify Watson's assertion that Jesus 'offers his Father the worship that consists in a self-surrender without reserve' ("Trinity and Community", 177). If 'without reserve' implies 'without the expectation of resurrection and a response of love', this would imply the end of the relationship. Milbank argues this philosophically in "The Ethics of Self-Sacrifice", *First Things* (March 1999), 33–38.

[118] Relatedly, Brown explains why the world is not prayed for directly in John 17; 'its only hope is to stop being the world – it must pass away, as the author of the Epistle put it in 1 John 2:17' (*John*, 764).

in John that although eternal life is experienced now in relationship to God (17:3), this life entails that people must die.[119] What this means for ethics is not straightforwardly martyrdom. For, as we have seen (chap. 3, section 4), Jesus' death is *sui generis* and the paradigm of foot washing implies an ongoing life of mutual service. Yet we also saw that such concern for others is subversive of the status quo and, in Peter's case, leads to his death (21:15–19). Now we are able to flesh this out theologically with the idea that the death to which Jesus calls the members of the divine household is a dying in relation to the world. Far from being an ethic of death, it is the opposite; an absolute commitment to the life of God through mutual glorification in the mundane sphere, lifting others up in freedom from hierarchical structures that bend such activity around to one's own benefit.[120] In short, this means to love in a world that hates.[121] Whilst this may include dying for others' benefit, it is not likely to look heroic but every bit as shameful as Jesus' naked, bleeding body exposed as a criminal.[122]

Seen in this light, mundane engagement is essential for Johannine ethics for several key reasons. The world is not merely the contingent arena for faithful discipleship, but in its created nature it is ontologically geared towards the life of love that Jesus enacts within it. However, the character of the life that this implies is distorted if the eschatological significance of Jesus' death is not taken into account. Within this context, self-giving is simultaneously unto life (in the divine household) and death (to the world). Judith Wolfe puts it

---

[119] There is some ambiguity over the rationale for this; Jesus' use of the seed metaphor in relation to his death (12:24) suggests a natural process that characterises creation as a whole. However, the moribund nature of the world is elsewhere connected to its sin (3:14–18).

[120] Cf. Popkes's account of how the community's intimacy is part of its outward-facing (and thus hate-incurring) nature (*Theologie*, 349–353)

[121] Most of the focus around the topic of hatred in the Gospel has been on the language used in reference to Jews. However, the only hatred that is apparent from the Johannine perspective is that which the world directs to Jesus and his disciples (see John 3:20; 7:7; 17:14 and especially 15:18–25). The only other use of the verb is in reference to the attitude that Jesus encourages people to take towards their earthly life (12:25).

[122] With this qualification we can agree with Trozzo's observation that the words of 12:24–26 put the 'suffering of Jesus's followers in the same sphere of Jesus's "noble death", which would benefit others and would have lasting value over and above the cost' (*Johannine Ethics*, 126).

succinctly:[123]

> 'Human temporality and mortality cannot simply be outpaced towards participation in plenitude, whether in knowledge or being. Participatory ontology is too often over-realized eschatology.'
>
> 'We can live our being-towards-death as a being towards self-surrender, a surrender that's not merely incidental to our entry into plenitude, but part of it'.

These lines encapsulate both the promise and the warning of John 17 for ethics.

4. Conclusion: cruciform participation in divine love

To sum up the argument of this chapter, we return once more to the question raised by John 17:21:

> ἵνα πάντες ἓν ὦσιν, καθὼς σύ, πάτερ, ἐν ἐμοὶ κἀγὼ ἐν σοί, ἵνα καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐν ἡμῖν ὦσιν, ἵνα ὁ κόσμος πιστεύῃ ὅτι σύ με ἀπέστειλας.

How can human oneness be *like* Father-Son and even *participate* in it? The answer given here is that the Father-Son relationship is so characterised by love as to enable us to state that 'God is love'. This establishes the ontological context for human participation in all the materiality of humanity that it shares with the rest of creation. The openness to the 'other' of the Father-Son relationship also establishes the relational conditions for participation, with the humanity of Jesus being what most immediately enables it. Ethically speaking, 'participation' entails mimetic participation in the divine household through Jesus, which is necessarily cruciform.

From our reading of chapter 17 we have a firmer basis for Johannine ethics than was established by the foot washing alone. Contextualising Jesus' enactment of love that we saw there within a theological and even ontological

---

[123] Judith Wolfe, "Eschatological Being", originally a paper at the NTO conference and published on her site (https://research-repository.st-andrews.ac.uk/bitstream/handle/10023/19526/Eschatological_Being.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y, accessed 10/12/2020), quotations from pp. 4–5. Wolfe bases her thinking on a combination of 20th century phenomenologists and Pauline theology rather than John, but its appositeness to the argument I offer here is clear.

context has provided a more forceful rationale for the ethics of the divine household. We have also sharpened our idea of what mundane engagement actually involves. It has an eschatological telos that makes mutual love simultaneously life-giving and moribund. This dual character defines believers' relational interactions with the social, economic and political dimensions of the world. As such, this chapter has developed a conception of Johannine ethics as cruciform mimetic participation in the divine household through cruciform love in the mundane sphere. What this looks like in practice will be explored in the following two chapters.

Chapter 5 – From Acts of Power to Signs of Love: Holistic Engagement in Jesus' Public Ministry

Having analysed Jesus' foot washing, the challenge that arose was how to unlock the ethically generative potential of this paradigm. The solution provided by the theological (and ontological) context of John 17 is, I will argue, that we see the foot washing as a 'sign of love'. This concept can in turn be applied to Jesus' public ministry more widely, yielding a view of a holistically engaged Johannine ethics of love.

My argument begins with a deconstruction of the division between the foot washing and the signs (section one) before giving initial grounds to commend a fresh approach to the signs such as I am taking (section two). I then set out my understanding of 'signs of love' in relation to the foot washing (section three) and then the more traditionally designated σημεῖα (section four), before being drawn into a conclusion (section five). In my next chapter, this proposal will be tested against, and developed through, the most strongly resistant text, namely John 6.

1. Signs and foot washing: a division deconstructed

My aim in this section is to revise the way in which the signs are understood in relation to the foot washing. This will involve giving a brief overview of modern scholarship on both of these areas (1a), covering ground other than that which was covered in my exegesis of 13:1–17. From there, I set out the prominent perspectives on what (1b), how (1c) and why (1d) the signs signify, showing how interpretative tendencies to minimise their mundane dimension also emerge in relation to the foot washing (1e). Certain corrective strides are drawn from Dorothy Lee's recent essay (1f), but I suggest that we need to go further, and the key to that is a closer connection between the signs and the foot washing (1g).

1a. Modern perspectives on the signs and the foot washing

Signs

Modern scholarship on John has considered the signs as pivotal for a variety of reasons. The most fundamental of these is the simple textual fact that the σημεῖα (generally translated as 'signs') are given such a key role in the purpose of the Gospel to lead readers to belief in Jesus (John 20:30–31).[1] This statement can either be read in relation to the whole Gospel or as a displaced summary of a no-longer extant 'Signs Source' (*Semeia-Quelle*), as Bultmann conjectured and Robert Fortna developed.[2] Partly due to the associations of signs with miracles that their hypothesis strengthens, the signs have been identified with Jesus' miraculous deeds in John 1–12. These chapters have thus been known collectively as the 'Book of Signs', a moniker that has endured even when confidence in the historical-critical basis for it has waned.[3] Signs are also given a prominent role in Johannine understanding by those who approach the text synchronically. They are discussed not only in terms of their role in its literary method of symbolism but, moreover, as examples of its symbolic mode of articulating spiritual reality.[4] Hence they can be seen to lie at the heart of the

---

[1] This is well demonstrated by Van Belle's article, which sets out to exegete 20:30–31 but ends up discussing general theories of the signs with the understanding that the signs mentioned there are 'the hermeneutical key to the Fourth Gospel' ("ΣHMEIA", 300). See also chap. 2, 2a for a more general account of recent scholarship on this passage.

[2] Walter Schmithals summarises Bultmann's position on this in his "Introduction" to Bultmann, *John*, 6–7. Fortna's seminal expression of his ideas is *The Gospel of Signs* (Cambridge: CUP, 1970), in which his indebtedness to Bultmann is clear (pp. 22–25). For Fortna, the source comprises an unknown number of miracle accounts from which the author of John has made a selection (pp. 101–102).

[3] This division has been common since Dodd's use of it in his *Interpretation*. Ironically, he neither followed Bultmann's hypothesis nor had such a narrow conception of signs that this division implies. He observed that with the miracle stories, 'contiguous discourses are so related to the narratives as to indicate that these are to be understood symbolically' but that this applies to all of John as a symbolic composition. This includes the non-miraculous events that can thus be termed 'σημεῖα' (*Interpretation*, 134).

[4] Craig Koester does this in his *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2003). He attempts to read the whole Gospel in terms of 'the fundamental structure of Johannine symbolism' whilst recognising a diversity in how its symbols work (p. 13) and avoiding reductionism or relativism (p. xiii). Although he does not deploy a taxonomy, something like the categories of metaphor, symbol and narrative images characterise the different levels of symbolism he identifies. These

theological thought of John.

Foot washing

Frey's perspective is typical on the matter: for him, the foot washing is not a 'sign' because it is not a miracle, though it 'provides a preliminary interpretation of Jesus' death and, therefore, stands in a certain analogy to the literary design of the Johannine "signs"'.[5] Even where the signs have not been restricted to Jesus' miracles in John 1–12 (which they usually have been), the foot washing has not generally been included among them.[6] Where grounds for such inclusion are suggested, this is often done in a vague way rather than as a strong claim that the foot washing should indeed be considered as one of the signs.[7]

More cogent arguments in this direction come from those who study the Gospel from the broader perspective of symbolism.[8] It is not surprising that Coloe, whose work has helped shape my conception of 'divine household', writes that

> 'the footwashing in its entirety (vv. 3-38) may be described as a Johannine

---

three categories are from Zimmermann, "Imagery in John: Opening up Paths into the Tangled Thicket of John's Figurative World" in Frey et al. (eds.), *Imagery in the Gospel of John* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 15–27).

[5] "Family Ethos", 194.

[6] We can go as far back as Origen to note this. Though considering the 'Temple purging' a sign (and thus not adopting a necessarily supernatural definition), he does not explicitly identify the foot washing as such (*Commentaire sur Saint Jean*: Tome II – Livres vi et x, ed. C. Blanc, (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1970), Book X.30, XXXII.8). Bultmann's problematisation of the category of signs in such a way as to broaden it beyond the *Semeia-Quelle* logically could, but in fact does not, lead to him considering whether or not the foot washing could be included (*Johannes*, especially 540–542 but see also 77–79).

[7] Brown uses the terminology 'prophetic action' both for what he identifies as signs and for the foot washing (*John*, 530, 562) but does not follow up on the implication that this redefines what should count as 'signs', excluding 13:1-20 on the grounds that there is nothing approximating to the 'physical health, sight, and life' that come with Jesus' signs in 1–12 and point to the eschatological situation that eternal life heralds (Brown, *John*, 562). Thompson ignores the foot washing in her article on signs but in her commentary on the passage notes that love entails both acts of service and voluntary death (*John*, 286). This provides a possible way to unite the two that Thyen (*Johannesevangelium*, 586) and Moloney (*John*, 375) both seem to take up, though not with an explanation that connects the foot washing to the signs.

[8] Dodd, whilst acknowledging that the word σημεῖα is directly applied only to miracles in the Gospel, concludes that 'we can hardly doubt that the evangelist considered such acts as the cleansing of the Temple and the washing of the disciples' feet as sēmeia' (*Interpretation*, 142).

sēmeion, which the rest of the farewell discourse will interpret'.[9]

Yet even with those who adopt a symbolic focus there is sometimes inconsistency. Koester, whose category 'symbolic actions' ostensibly breaks down the distinction between the conventionally designated signs and the foot washing, somewhat contradictorily associates signs with miracles elsewhere.[10] The reasons for this inadvertent drift towards a scholarly default are not incidental. Rather, there are genuine theological and theoretical barriers to seeing the foot washing among the signs. In analysing the scholarship that I have just summarised, I want to form a clearer picture of these barriers by focusing on three issues pertaining to the signs: *what* they signify, *how* they signify, and *why* they do so, i.e. what their purpose is in signifying what they do.

1b. What the signs signify

A cursory reading of the Gospel text suggests that what the signs signify is obvious: they signify Jesus' identity as ὁ χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ (20:31). Whilst there is consensus on this, there is division on what exactly it entails. Some, in line with (if not deliberately adhering to) Bultmann's famous 'daß', argue that the signs fulfil an authorising or confirmatory role, signifying only *that* Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God without revealing anything about divine character.[11] Others contend that, on the contrary, such revelation is precisely what the signs offer.[12] Yet the purported contrast between these two positions obscures

---

[9] *Dwelling*, 140.

[10] The layout of Koester's monograph puts the foot washing and the cross among the symbolic actions (*Symbolism*, viii) yet, at the start of his chapter on symbolic actions, he says that 'the term *signs* (*sēmeia*) is appropriate for these miracles, since a sign is not an end in itself but a visible indication of something else' (p. 79).

[11] For the general point about the Gospel, see for example Bultmann, *John* 106–107. Fortna follows Bultmann in his notion of Jesus' σημεῖα as 'legitimating signs of his messianic status' (*Signs,* 228). Förster's lexicographical work is influenced by this view (below, 2b).

[12] Schnelle is emphatic that it is 'not the case that faith has only the "that" of the revelatory event as its content; rather, the miracles describe, with a clarity and reality that can hardly be surpassed, the work of the Revealer in history' ("The Signs in the Gospel of John", *JJH3*, 238). A particularly cogent counter-balance to the notion of signs as tokens of Jesus' identity through their power is Marianne Meye Thompson's article "Signs and Faith in the Fourth Gospel", *BBR* 1 (1991). Lamenting the theologically thin work done on the topic, she argues that Jesus' signs

their mutual compatibility and a common lacuna in the debate.[13] For whether one thinks that the signs signify something *about* God or merely signify *that* Jesus is Christ, the same underlying question is the operative one: what exactly is it about the signs that give them their revelatory force? Whatever answer one gave would, logically speaking, relate to a divine characteristic manifest in Jesus' action.

This specific question of what it is about a sign that reveals Jesus' divine identity is rarely examined. Observing that the signs are a revelation of glory is no solution but only begs the question: what exactly is it about any of Jesus' actions that is 'glorious'? An obvious candidate would be the supernatural aspect of his actions, due to strong association of the signs with Jesus' miracles in John 1–12. This would imply that it is their power over nature that would make the signs revelatory of God.[14] But this would mean that God is identified primarily with power.[15] This perspective could hardly be accepted as Johannine without justification.[16] Koester actually states this disjunction unambiguously in saying that 'the signs revealed God's glory by displaying the scope of divine power; the cross would reveal God's glory by displaying the scope of divine love'.[17]

Some scholars have noticed this problem and sought to qualify the notion by

---

'do indeed point to the fact that he himself is life, but they do so because they themselves are also gifts of life' and even claims that they 'effect what they promise' (pp. 97–98).

[13] That there is a false dichotomy here is indicated by Thompson's statement that the signs 'are not legitimations of Jesus' divinity, but rather manifestations of the character of the God who stands behind them' ("Signs and Faith", 94). Yet surely this manifestation is what legitimates Jesus' claims to divinity.

[14] Some would see this as a modern notion, a product of rationalism that artificially divides reality into 'natural and supernatural' and that certain modern thinkers are trying to countermand (Josh Mobley, "Symbolism after Dialectics: De Lubac, Rahner and Symbolic Theology", *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 20/4 (October 2018), 542). However, the notion is there in early interpretations of John, hence Theodore of Mopsuestia's comment on John 20:30 that 'even those things that were written hardly reveal the extent of his power' (*Commentary on the Gospel of John,* trans. Marco Conti, ed. Joel Elowsky (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), 166).

[15] Schnelle is unambiguous in his description of signs wherein Jesus' 'creative, life-giving power is manifest in the greatness of the miracles,' the 'powerful deeds' validating Jesus' identity ("Signs", 242).

[16] This is especially so with Frey's emphasis on 'the glory of the crucified one' whereby exaltation on the cross is at the very heart of glory in John ("Glory of the Crucified", 249).

[17] Koester, *Symbolism*, 237.

depicting them as deeds of *life-giving* in which power is not necessarily predominant. Thompson has addressed this through emphasising the *giving* aspect of the signs.[18] This is a helpful qualification, and one in line with the life-giving at the heart of Christology (chap. 2, 2d). Nevertheless, if the miraculous element of the signs is understood to be indispensable to their character, the 'giving' element of 'life-giving' will always be secondary.[19] There is no theological rationale undergirding the strength of this perception that restricts signs to the miracles of John 1–12. This raises the possibility that the division owes more to the enduring legacy of composition-historical hypotheses than to a careful examination of the Gospel's thought.[20]

1c. How the signs signify

Another complex matter concerns the means by which Jesus' signs reveal his identity. There is plenty of discussion around the historical background of Johannine symbolism.[21] Likewise, with literary questions, such as whether Jesus' signs are properly termed metaphorical or parabolic or what the sources of thought are for the vision of eschatological life that they purportedly display.[22] However, such considerations neglect a key aspect of the problem,

---

[18] Thompson says of them that that 'one discerns in them the manifestation of the character of God as life-giving and responds to Jesus as mediating that life' ("Signs", 96).

[19] Thompson denies that signs operate through 'sheer manifestations of power' ("Signs", 105) and yet maintains the emphasis on power in including only miracles as signs, doing so without a coherent theological basis (n. 15, p. 93). The underlying tendency is made explicit in her commentary, where she talks about Jesus' signs as 'alternative expressions of his life-giving power' (*John*, 67) and also talks of God's life-giving primarily as a matter of power in her *God of the Gospel* (e.g. p. 188).

[20] Brown recognises the need to make a distinction on more substantial grounds. He reasons that the role of the σημεῖα in the narrative of 1–12 is different to any symbolic actions that come in 13:1 onwards. Whereas the former points to the 'spiritual reality' of eschatological life to be instituted after 'the hour', the statement in 13:1 *inaugurates* that hour so that everything after that points to Jesus' death (*John*, 530). My argument below (section 4) will contend that this is a false dichotomy.

[21] Scholars are increasingly happy to posit a mixed picture for the background of symbolic thought (see Koester, *Symbolism*, 301–309; cf. Hirsch-Luipold, in *Imagery in John*, 63).

[22] Zimmermann notes that 'since the 'linguistic turn' in research on the Gospel of John, increasing attention has been drawn to the imagery of the Fourth Gospel', ("Imagery in John", p. 1). But this has been the tendency for some time. Dodd discusses symbolism in such terms (*Interpretation*, 133–143) and, in specific relation to this passage, Beasley-Murray contends that the foot washing is 'a parable' (*John*, 231, 234).

namely the way in which Jesus' mundane deeds signify divine reality.[23] Do the former simply point to the latter, as if it were a transparent window? Or is there something inherent *within* the mundane act itself that, when experienced, makes it significant beyond mere illustrative value? If so, what is its connection to divine reality?

The way these issues are gestured towards, but not directly addressed, in 20th century scholarship is instructive. Bultmann recognises that a Johannine sign is 'more complex than that of the naïve miracle story' because it is 'not a mere demonstration' but an occurrence of what is signified.[24] Yet he does not end up giving the mundane aspects of Jesus' deeds any ethical import. Barrett and Brown seem to address this by locating the signs within the prophetic tradition. They are, in Barrett's words, 'no mere illustration, but a symbolical anticipation… of a greater reality of which the σημεῖον is nevertheless itself a part'.[25] In none of the above examples is there consideration of the ontological implications of making a sign in the mundane sphere 'a part' of the eternal life to which they point.

Failure to deal with the issue is borne out by the fact that the aforementioned commentators elsewhere ascribe to Jesus' addressing of human need a purely illustrative import.[26] Such questions about the relationship that subsists between the sign and the signified is left unclear and often assumed to be

---

[23] Hofius places great weight on his identification of the foot washing pericope as a 'symbolic story' (*symbolische Erzählung*) (Erzählung", n. 5, p. 157). He does this because 'die Auslegung der Verse Joh 13,1–11 hängt wesentlich davon ab, wie man den literarischen Charakter dieses Textes beurteilt' (p. 157). Yet this gives us no indication of the relationship between washing feet and the death of Christ as real-life events.

[24] Bultmann, *John*, 114. One may extrapolate from this that the truth of the sign is actually the presence of God in Jesus; indeed, Bultmann confirms this in his *Theology*, adding that this is what makes the signs offensive (p. 46).

[25] Barrett, *John*, 63; Brown, *John*, 529.

[26] Barrett states that 'the signs are connected to human need' but only insofar as they *reflect* 'the suffering and sin of the world' to be dealt with by the death and resurrection of Jesus. Shortly later, he adds that 'the miracles in particular show *figuratively* what salvation is'; 'salvation… means the healing of the ills of mankind… in other words, Jesus deals with sin' (Barrett, *John*, 65, 67, emphasis added). It is not that Barrett's assertions are wrong, but that they are reductionistic.

negligible,[27] with only a few exceptions.[28] Lurking in the background is the same reticence to deal with questions of ontology that we have seen before (chap. 4, section 1) and the same resulting denigration of the significance of the mundane realm and the attendant ethical practicalities.

1d. Why the signs signify

Raising the issue of ethics leads us nicely on to consider the purpose of Jesus' signs. They are, it is universally acknowledged, geared towards believing in him, but do they have any ethical role in Johannine thought? Emphasis on their nature as divinely revelatory miracles stacks the odds against a positive answer in two respects. Firstly, such deeds, according to the Gospel's understanding, appear not to be repeatable by people other than Jesus.[29] Secondly, the focus on describing signs as Jesus' own actions rather than relational *inter*actions naturally leads to an assumption that people are passive recipients with no active role to play in receiving the signs.

Because the specific question of the ethical contribution of the signs is generally not even raised, such assumptions are not the subject of critical engagement. How deep-set they are is apparent from the fact that even studies on Johannine ethics do not devote space to serious discussion of the signs, with their ethical value generally dismissed or not even mentioned.[30] Frey's

---

[27] Koester holds that the foot washing of John 13 is a 'symbolic enactment' (*Symbolism*, 131). His only theoretical engagement is to describe symbolism as drawing readers 'beyond the realm of the senses to divine realities, without permitting truth to be equated with sense perception or to be so divorced from sense perception that communication is no longer possible' (*Symbolism*, 31–32).

[28] Hirsch-Luipold sees John 1:14 as key in regards to this question: 'die spannungsvolle Rede von der Fleischwerdung des göttlichen Logos im Prolog fungiert als hermeneutische Leseanleitung' ("Klartext", 65). However, I want to explore what he only refers to, namely 'die Verbindung der ontologischen mit der personalen Relation' (p. 73).

[29] There is nothing in John like the commissioning of the disciples we find in Matthew 10 and Luke 9–10. Only Jesus' words about the disciples doing greater works than him in 14:12 suggest anything approximating this. I will give my interpretation of the verse below (4c).

[30] This is especially surprising in van der Watt's case, whose massive volume deals with so much of the Gospel in one way or another. The two exceptions are the essay by Christos Karakolis (see below, 3c) and Rushton's *Cry*. The latter's comprehensive view of all Jesus' activity as the 'works of God' becomes ethically exemplary insofar as people are called into 'the ongoing re-creation of finishing the works of God' (p. xxviii). This rationale permeates her whole book but is never explicated in detail.

perspective on the signs is, once again, representative here. The Gospel's intention is, he says 'to demonstrate the "glory of God" (cf. John 11:4 or 9:3) or Jesus' own divine power. Therefore, the "normal" expectation of "loving" behaviour is deliberately disappointed'.[31] Surely the mere fact that the Johannine understanding of love entails living ethically after the pattern that Jesus has laid down (13:34), not to mention the theological incongruence of suggesting that Jesus can be other than loving, should be cause enough for more critical engagement with the matter of the signs' ethical import.

1e. Interpretative tendencies evident with the foot washing episode

The foot washing is not usually included in discussions about the signs. However, the same problematic features to which I have drawn attention in scholarship on signs also emerge in that which deals with the symbolism of the foot washing. In particular, there is a similar lack of clarity in identifying the primary *symbolic* referent of Jesus' act.[32] Despite what is explicitly denoted in the introduction to the pericope as the episode's context (13:1), debate around the various cultural connotations (and even its pointing to Jesus' death on the cross) do not contextualise these aspects of the story theologically in relation to the central notion of love. Even when this seems to be recognised, it is not allowed to shape the account of symbolism in a way that the Christological and ethical elements cohere.[33]

This leads onto our second point, which is that the *way* in which the foot

---

[31] "Family Ethos", 193. This statement is particularly ironic considering his essay "God is Love", which states that 'the notion of God's love… is held to be the essence and the ultimate reason of every relationship between God and humankind' (p. 643).

[32] Hofius is unusual in that he attempts to narrow the signification of the foot washing down to a single referent, namely that of the cross (Hofius, "Erzählung", 161). For him, it is the work of the cross to which the foot washing points and, correspondingly, the cross itself that provides the exemplary content of the action as spelled out in 13:12–17. Thus only one referent of the symbolic action is postulated, and its function as a symbol is a merely illustrative one (p. 175).

[33] Bincy Mathew states that 'the footwashing is a symbolic prefiguration of the death of Jesus', combining this with the contention that its symbolism functions 'as a model of servanthood for the disciples to follow' (Mathew, *Footwashing*, 312, 162) and a similar combination is found in Bauckham ("Did Jesus?", 414–416). Thomas says that the interpretation of Jesus' action in 13:6–11 makes the event a Christological symbol 'as every other symbol in the Gospel of John' whereas something quite different is happening with the example given in 13:12–17 (*Footwashing*, 117).

washing symbolises is assumed rather than examined. Key notions such as sign and symbol are often left without definition.[34] Where this is addressed, the ontological dimension of the issue is, once again, conspicuous by its absence.[35] As a result, the general verdict, which can be traced to some of the Fathers, is that 'symbol' in this case means that the physical act of Jesus only *illustrates* rather than in any material way *contributes to* the reality (usually identified with his death) that gives the disciples a part with him.[36] Indeed, this is even true for those who adopt a sacramental interpretation.[37] This lack of ontologically integrative thought more broadly makes it unsurprising that, the ethical dimension is generally not integrated into a coherent understanding of the symbolism operative in it.[38]

1f. Tendencies addressed but also perpetuated: Dorothy Lee on signs

To bring all of these disparate observations into interaction with one another

---

[34] Mathew's monograph contains the word 'sign' in the title but neither discusses the operation of symbolism in the foot washing nor has any references to any treatments of this issue. All of the interpretative options that Thomas considers are designated as somehow symbolic and must thus function so in their own varied ways, but he never discusses this aspect of them (Thomas, *Footwashing*, 11–18). Arland Hultgren's article is another example, including the word 'symbol' in the title without describing what it means ("The Johannine Footwashing (13.1-11) as Symbol of Eschatological Hospitality", *NTS* 28 (1982), 539–546).

[35] Michaels talks of the foot washing as 'a sign of a broader commitment to imitate [Jesus] in every area of life' (*John*, 736). Later, he seems to define the 'sign', whereby the foot washing is 'a kind of acted parable of what the Christian gospel… is all about' (p. 724), obscuring the question of ontology behind this literary category.

[36] Origen says that by it, Jesus is saying that 'the washing of your feet by me is a symbol (σύμβολον) of the shame of your souls being cleansed in order that they may become worthy' (σύμβολόν ἐστιν τὸ νίψασθαι ὑμῶν τοὺς πόδας ὑπ' ἐμοῦ τοῦ καθαρθῆναι τὰς βάσεις τῶν ψυχῶν ὑμῶν, ἵνα γένωνται ὡραῖοι). See Origenes, *Commentarii In Evangelium Joannis, Origenes Werke Vol 4* (Erwin Preuschen, 1903), 32.8.87 (p. 77). This is typical of early interpreters in that the symbolism is understood in relation to the salvific significance of the Passion as it is bound up with the impending Passover in 13:1 (Elowsky, *John 11–21*, 81–89).

[37] Thomas, despite his sacramental interpretation, is typical in not answering how exactly this symbolism works and how the 'spiritual' purpose relates to its mundane aspects. He concludes that the episode is to be read as a 'sign of preparation for mission which denotes fellowship with Jesus, made possible by continual cleansing' (Thomas, *Footwashing*, 115–116).

[38] For example, Thyen binds together the exemplary element with its nature as symbol, but gives no account of how its character as ὑπόδειγμα (which he relates to Jesus' death) plays a role in the symbolism of the episode. 'So verbindet auch das Lexem ὑπόδειγμα die Fußwaschung mit dem Tod Jesu' (*Johannesevangelium*, 593).

and help us plot a way forward, we turn to a recent article by Dorothy Lee.[39] Lee's piece represents much of what I have discussed. She sets up her account of symbolism on the premise that she is not addressing some peripheral matter but rather the 'Johannine symbolic worldview' (p. 260). Just as symbols in general 'communicate theological meaning' (p. 260), so do the signs specifically 'disclose… the identity of Jesus' through publicly visible miracles and, at least ideally, 'lead to faith' (p. 267). She identifies the signs as those incidents in chaps. 1–12 (p. 266) that exclude the foot washing by definition because of its non-miraculous nature.[40]

Lee both assumes that the signs are defined by being miraculous and leaves to the imagination what it is about them that is responsible for 'unfolding divine glory' (p. 267), meaning that supernatural power is the most likely to come to mind.[41] In terms of how symbolism works in John, Lee lays down more of a theoretical and even ontological platform than most interpreters.[42] She even acknowledges the metaphysical complexity of the claim that signs reveal God but is inconsistent on the question of the relationship of the mundane to the divine realm.[43] Confusion on this results in ambivalence over how (material) signs can be the vehicle to apprehending (spiritual) reality, which she says is 'their true meaning' (p. 266).[44] Finally, her claim that the signs communicate

---

[39] Dorothy Lee, "Symbolism and 'Signs' in the Fourth Gospel" in *Johannine Studies*, 259–273. In this short piece, Lee encapsulates the fruits of three decades' reflection on the signs, respect for which is demonstrated by her inclusion in this eminent publication.

[40] Whilst conceding that 'the numbering is difficult to define', it is only other miracles in the text that she would consider adding (p. 268).

[41] She ostensibly avoids the implication that their gloriousness is tied to raw power, claiming that 'the point of the hyperbole apparent in the miracles is not so much to stress the power of action but rather to disclose more fulsomely the identity of Jesus' (pp. 266–267). Yet if the hyperbolic narrative *does* emphasise power (which is in any case disputable), and it is this element that reveals Jesus' identity, we cannot avoid the inference that power is the main facet of divinity being revealed.

[42] Lee points to Sandra Schneiders in the section on signs (p. 265) but earlier mentions Tillich (p. 259) and Rahner (p. 260).

[43] She points out that the materiality of the world is given revelatory moment by the incarnation of Jesus (p. 269) but earlier countermands this idea by positing an ontological dualism between material and spiritual (p. 264).

[44] Where, in reference to the man born blind, she talks about 'the bodily restoration symbolically conveying an inner and spiritual wholeness which the man finally achieves in his second encounter with Jesus' (p. 268), it is clear that the word 'conveying' means simply 'pointing to' (a phrase she uses later on the same page), with any causal link between the two unclear. Likewise, she sees the foot washing as 'pointing metaphorically to cleansing and union' (p. 261), assuming a merely illustrative function.

'the meaning of discipleship' (p. 265) does not yield the ethical implications that the term implies. For she sets in opposition believing ('the one 'work' which human beings are called to perform') with the signs (the 'ethical work which *Jesus* is called to do') (p. 266). Overall, therefore, Lee recognises problematic tendencies of signs interpretation (particularly the lack of engagement with ontology) but there remains ambivalence even in her work suggesting that a more thoroughgoing alternative is needed.

1g. Signs and foot washing: an integrated approach

My examination of scholarship, especially the representative example of Lee's article, demonstrates three broad issues that are worthy of reconsideration as they pertain not only to the specific question that I am dealing with here but ultimately to socio-economic ethics in John. Firstly, there has been insufficient examination of what exactly the signs reveal about divine nature. This requires fresh consideration of the purported role that the 'miraculous' has in understanding the nature of the signs. Secondly, there has been inadequate interrogation of the ontological aspect of the symbolic functioning operative in the signs. Specifically, there is cause to look more closely at the relationship between the mundane action and the divine reality that it signifies. Thirdly, the potential ethical significance of the signs has been widely ignored, in large part due to the way the first two issues have been construed.

My argument is that these problematic areas of interpreting the signs are most fruitfully reconsidered via analysing the foot washing as one of the signs. Outlining how it is a sign sheds light on how the other more conventionally recognised signs should be understood. I approach this analysis by combining the exegetical results of chap. 3 and the theological conclusions of chap. 4 to elucidate the foot washing as a sign. Moreover, I do this in a way that provides a plausible framework within which to understand the other signs as signs of love, even Jesus' feeding of the 5,000 in John 6 (which provides the sternest test to my argument). Consequences for the socio-economic aspect of ethics will be drawn out in relation to the latter passage in the next chapter.

2. Three preliminaries: textual, lexicographical and scholarly

Three preliminaries will help set up my main argument about the foot washing and the signs. The first is the basic textual data relating to σημεῖα in John (2a) and the second is the lexicographical data associated with it (2b). The third preliminary matter to mention is the relationship of my work to that of Harold Attridge's, who is developing a comparable thesis on signs (2c). Neither this nor the previous two matters are in any way definitive for what I am arguing, but they provide a valuable initial support for what amounts to a fairly comprehensive revision of the way in which the foot washing and the signs are understood.

2a. The σημεῖα and the text of John

A consideration of the use of the word for 'signs' in John already makes the standard perspective (i.e. limiting signs to miracles) that I am critiquing appear somewhat tendentious. For it is never defined as a miracle, is not a word that Jesus generally uses for miracles, and is never attached to an exclusive scheme of numeration.

The main Greek word denoting what I have been referring to as Jesus' 'signs' is σημεῖα (σημεῖον being its lexical form). It appears most prominently in the purpose statement (20:30–31), which gives the σημεῖα an important role in portraying the identity of Jesus for the reader. Apart from the purpose statement, the word σημεῖον only appears in the first twelve chapters of John.[45] None out of its 16 appearances comprises a definition of the term, meaning that the author intends a meaning that is sufficiently congruent with common parlance to make what he says intelligible. We may thus use the basic gloss 'sign' without prejudice to the Gospel's more developed conception to which we now turn.[46]

The word σημεῖον is used by three different parties. The narrator identifies

---

[45] See 2:11, 18, 23; 3:2; 4:48, 54; 6:2, 14, 26, 30; 7:31; 9:16; 10:41; 11:47; 12:18, 37.

[46] Henry Liddell et al., *The Online Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek-English Lexicon* (Irvine, CA: University of California, 2011), 1593.

certain actions of Jesus as signs, whether in specific reference to the immediately preceding narrative (2:11; 4:54; 6:14; 12:18) or, more vaguely, in reference to things he had previously performed (2:23; 6:2). Summary statements in 12:37 and 20:30–31 apparently encompass Jesus' whole ministry.[47] Only twice does Jesus himself use the word: once as part of the stock phrase σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα to refer to the Samaritans' general expectation of 'signs and wonders' (4:48) and then, later, to refer to his action of feeding the five thousand (6:26). The third party to use the term, Jesus' interlocutors, on the other hand, use it far more frequently to refer to actions, either that he has done (3:2; 7:31; 9:16; 11:47) or that they are challenging him to do (2:18; 6:30).[48]

Although the word is common, it is not systematically used to identify Jesus' actions, even by the narrator. Twice the narrator enumerates the σημεῖα (2:11, 'beginning' or 'first' and 4:54, the second), suggesting that there are a definite number of incidents to be identified as such. However, these verses share another feature found nowhere else, namely that they specify the place in which σημεῖα took place (Cana of Galilee), raising the possibility that the numeration applies only to that geographical location. Another indication that the number of signs performed is not of great consequence to the author comes in 2:13–22. The only episode recounted from Jesus' visit to Jerusalem is apparently not thought of as a σημεῖον by the Jews (2:18), but the narrator shortly afterwards refers to the σημεῖα that he has done there (2:23).

Furthermore, Jesus consistently – with the exception of 6:26 – uses a different term (ἔργον) to refer to actions that his interlocutors and the narrator denote as σημεῖα.[49] This suggests a degree of contestation around the understanding of the word σημεῖα upon which greater semantic precision could shed some light. Thus, we now turn to consider whether philological evidence points to a narrower definition with which the author may be working, which could

---

[47] The parallel at the very end of John (21:25) uses the vague phrase ἄλλα πολλὰ instead of σημεῖα to describe other things that could potentially have been included within the book.

[48] In 10:41, Those who come to Jesus observe that John did not do any signs, implying a contrast between him and Jesus.

[49] See John 5:20, 36; 7:21; 9:3; 10:25, 37–38; 14:10–12; 15:24. The importance of this particular word will emerge in our discussion below.

potentially help us make a tighter delineation of our subject matter.

2b. A lexicographical consideration of σημεῖον

Hans Förster's 2016 study is the most recent lexicographical investigation of σημεῖον in Johannine usage.[50] Förster builds on the *TWNT* article by Karl Heinrich Rengstorf, which draws out the continuity between the way the word σημεῖα is used in John and the Old Testament description of prophetic signs, particularly the Septuagint version of Exodus.[51] Förster sees less continuity here than Rengstorf did, emphasising the extent to which the Gospel forges its own understanding in accordance with its identification of Jesus as the Christ. He bolsters this argument by moving forwards in time (rather than backwards to other ancient sources), tracing a trajectory to Origen and Augustine via Greek papyri that brings the confirmatory rather than revelatory function to the fore.[52] Yet the way in which Förster develops this idea comes as much from a Bultmannian engagement with Johannine thought as it does with lexicography per se.[53]

The specifically Hellenistic background is treated in more detail by Rengstorf than Förster, though he attributes it limited relevance to the New Testament. This is because the Greek usage trades on the general notion of 'something that makes possible certain insight' (or, later, 'correct recognition') that is not always 'religious' in nature.[54] Attridge (who refers to Rengstorf but does not seem aware of Förster's article) reconsiders a more philosophical background, which he sees as key to John's Hellenistic Jewish milieu (as exemplified by Philo). What he concludes is that the σημεῖα should not be read in Aristotelian, Platonic or any other school's terms but that the Gospel does evince a similar

---

[50] Hans Förster, "Der Begriff σημεῖον im Johannesevangelium", *NovT* 58 (2016), 47–70.

[51] Heinrich Rengstorf, "σημεῖον" in Gerhard Kittel (ed.) and Geoffrey Bromiley (trans.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 216–221.

[52] Förster, "σημεῖον", 55–62.

[53] Thus, in a methodologically questionable way, Förster bridges the gap between his hypothesis that signs indicate God's presence in Jesus as confirmation of authority rather than revelation ("σημεῖον", 51–53) with his conclusion that they express 'dass Jesus berechtigt ist' (p. 63), hence the epithet 'Zeichen der Glaubwürdigkeit' or 'Bestätigungszeichen' (p. 70).

[54] Rengstorf, "σημεῖον", 200–208.

interest in developing a 'technical sense' as 'part of its pervasive epistemological concern'.[55]

What this brief look at lexicography confirms is that the term σημεῖον is a general one, for which the gloss 'sign' only opens up the question of meaning rather than closing it.[56] To say that a σημεῖον is a 'sign' is simply to say that it is something that signifies. As we saw with the terms ἀγάπη and ὑπόδειγμα (chap. 3, sections 2c, 4a respectively), and as applies to so much of the Gospel's deliberately simple terminology, it is how the author develops the concept throughout the narrative rather than a word's specific imported lexical properties to which one must attend. What Frey says about ἀγάπη may thus be applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to σημεῖον: 'by the repetition and variation of the ἀγάπη motif a semantic network of different ἀγάπη expressions and ἀγάπη relations is established, and every single relation or aspect has to be understood within the coherent network recognizable when the text is read in its narrative sequence'.[57] Again, I would make the qualification that it is not just the narrative sequence, but the overall vision of Jesus and God (especially from such perspectives as are afforded by John 17) that must be taken into account.

Although there is a high level of semantic generality around the term σημεῖον, the conceptual background is not thereby rendered irrelevant. As is increasingly recognised in Johannine scholarship, the (albeit Hellenistic) Jewish tradition is more immediately relevant for understanding the Gospel than non-Jewish philosophy. Bearing this in mind in relation to John 20:30–31, the narrated σημεῖα function to reveal the identity of the Messiah, the Son of [the] God [of Israel]. Thus whatever reconfiguration of divinity happens in John, the σημεῖα will stand in some continuity with the Old Testament vision of God in terms of their revelatory content. However, one possible implication of

---

[55] Attridge, "Ambiguous Signs, an Anonymous Character, Unanswerable Riddles: The Role of the Unknown in Johannine Epistemology", *NTS* 65 (2019), 273.

[56] Hence Koester works with a very general understanding of what a sign is as that which 'conveys something of transcendent significance through something accessible to the senses' before tracing how it works in the text (*Symbolism*, 5). Hirsch-Luipold gives a similar definition, albeit in specifically Hellenistic terms in "Klartext", 90–92.

[57] Frey, "Love Relations", 174.

the background in Judaism must be avoided, which is obscured in English translations that use the word 'miracles' (KJV) or 'miraculous signs' (NIV). In spite of the frequently supernatural features of the scriptural narratives in which sense-perceptible σημεῖα give insight into divine reality, there is no necessarily supernatural denotation in the word itself.[58] The non-necessity of the miraculous element is a logical correlate of the semantic generality of the term that none of the lexicographical work to which I have referred countermands.

Thus we may proceed to discuss the σημεῖα based on a very simple initial definition of σημεῖον as a 'sign' (the term to which we now revert), simply something that signifies. According to John 20:30–31, that which *signifies* in the Gospel are actions of Jesus and that which is *signified* is his Christological identity. A Johannine sign could thus be defined as follows:

> A public action of Jesus that reveals his identity through its divine character.[59]

This is thoroughly in line with scholarly consensus, but my departure will come in how exactly we delineate what is included in these actions. The problem is that this can only be formulated on the basis of a clearer picture of what the narrative says. At the same time, we need to understand what the signs actually are to identify them in the narrative. Such circularity need not be vicious, as I hope to show. But our starting point must be to acknowledge that none of the evidence considered thus far excludes *a priori* any of the episodes in which Jesus is the main protagonist.

2c. A new scholarly direction? Attridge and 'signs of love'

Despite what the textual and lexical data suggests, my account of the scholarly

---

[58] That Förster's lexical study is shaped by the presupposed association of signs with miracles is clear in his approving quotations of Hera and Carson, both of which describe them in terms of power ("σημεῖον", notes 35–36, p. 55). Rengstorf does subordinate the signs' miraculous character to the object of their signification ("σημεῖον", 249).

[59] I use the term 'public' in the broad sense of something that Jesus did in front of others. In fact, John 20:30–31 refers to deeds done in the presence of his disciples, which includes those things not performed in front of the public as a whole but still depend for their efficacy on being experienced by others.

debate apparently leaves me with few allies and an intolerably heavy burden of proof on my position. It would be helpful if one of the more prominent and respected contemporary Johannine interpreters could have paved the way for my argument. As it happens, Attridge has done exactly that in a forthcoming article.[60] In previous work, Attridge has already identified the centre of the Johannine 'liberating truth' in the idea that God is love, similarly to what I argued in the previous chapter.[61] Moreover, he has consigned the connection of signs with miraculous deeds to the Gospel's source material rather than Johannine thought.[62] In his latest work he takes John 13 (and especially 13:15) as the locus of the exemplar of love in a way that can serve as a hermeneutic of the other signs:

> 'The significance of the footwashing as a foreshadowing of the Passion is well recognized. What requires further emphasis is the way in which this episode provides a guide to the reading of the theme of "signs and works."'[63]

This is the task that I am taking up. Indeed, I am traversing a similar route to the one that he seems to be advocating. For Attridge is developing a view of the signs' function as revelation that integrates their role in engendering belief with their ethical value.[64] The latter dimension is, indeed, already there in the idea that true belief in John is always a matter of love which, in response to the signs, is expressed in such acts as 'giving food to the hungry' and working against prejudice in a 'world full of hatred'.[65] To see this in John is thus to operate 'with a penetrating vision honed by the cross's image'.[66] My own work

---

[60] Attridge, "Signs Working and Works Signifying". This article is based on based on a paper given at the 73rd General Meeting of the Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas (National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece, 7–10 August, 2018). It was kindly shared with me by the author, who agreed that I could use it here. It will be published in the forthcoming conference proceedings.

[61] Attridge sums up the centre of Johannine thought with the words 'God is love and those who abide in love abide in God and God in them' from 1 John 4:16 ("Ambiguous Signs", 267).

[62] Attridge, "Ambiguous Signs", 272, 278.

[63] Attridge, "Signs Working", 10.

[64] Attridge initially suggests that legitimation and revelation are mutually incompatible; see "How Johannine Signs Signify (or Don't)" in *Anatomies of the Gospels*, Parsons et al (eds) (Leiden/Boston MA: Brill, 2018), 337, but later comes to see that they are not, so that the signs 'serve not simply as warrants for belief; they also define the content of what it is to believe in Jesus' ("Signs Working", 7).

[65] Attridge, "Signs Working", 12.

[66] Attridge, "Signs Working", 11.

in this chapter sets out a comprehensive rationale for this position, elucidating the signs as the means of cruciform participation in divine love that lies at the heart of the Johannine ethic. In short, they are 'signs of love'.[67]

3. The foot washing as a sign of love

None of my foregoing points do more than establish the initial plausibility of an alternative reading such as I am advocating. Certainly, however, it should be clear that the basic textual and linguistic data turns up no reason to exclude the foot washing from the signs referred to in 20:30–31. Thus the aim in this section is to provide a positive argument for its inclusion. This is done through construing it as a sign of love through whose mundane reality believers are invited to participate in the divine household, which is characterised by cruciform mutual love. I structure my exposition of this claim according to the three question of *what* (3a), *how* (3b) and *why* (3c) the foot washing signifies, synthesising my argument at the end (3d).

The three main elements of this argument are already anticipated by the combination of my examination of John 13:1–17 and John 17. *What* the foot washing signifies is the love that is at the heart of divine nature and that is at work in Jesus' establishment of the divine household. It remains, however, to show how we can understand the element of symbolism operative here.

How the foot washing signifies is through a mundane sphere and its relationships (including that of Rabbi-disciples) that are inherently able to facilitate such love. However, due to the world's antipathy towards God (and thus to love), the mundane sphere is moribund. Within it, therefore, one can only enact love in a way that is self-giving *through* death, albeit the final object is life. This shapes participation in the divine household as cruciform love.

---

[67] Attridge himself does not use this term. Christos Karakolis associates the signs with love, with their being an outworking of Jesus' mission of love to the world ("Sēmeia Conveying Ethics in the Gospel according to John" in *Rethinking*, 202–206).

3a. What the foot washing signifies

Although terms such as 'symbol' and 'symbolic' appear at several points during the analysis of the foot washing, I deferred dealing with it until this present chapter. This is because it is only through the reading of John 17 that symbolism can be properly understood. Indeed, there is no doubting that the foot washing is symbolic but we have seen (above, 1a, 1e) that there is a lack of clarity about what its symbolism functions. Yet the affirmation that the foot washing symbolises love is not controversial. What is particularly lacking is an ontologically engaged account of this love in terms of the relationship between the symbol and what is symbolised.

In order to develop the rationale governing the ontological relationship between symbol and symbolised, we need to reintroduce the theological perspective developed in chap. 4 (2c). We saw there that love is not merely a quality of *divine action* or even an attribute of *divine character* but is, more fundamentally, what most defines *divine nature*. To affirm that 'God is love' is, in the first place, to affirm that for the Father to be the Father is to love the Son and vice versa. But it also means that for God to be God in relation to the world (i.e. for God to be creator) is to love (3:16); likewise, for Jesus to be Lord in relation to his own is also to love (13:1), which is not exclusive of love for the world (chap. 3, 2b–c).

Though enacted differently in each case, love has certain stable features that can be summarised as giving of self for the other's glory and dwelling intimately with one another (so much so as to be 'in' one another). Therefore, such actions (and modes of *interaction*) can both said to *be* love and to be premised on something more ontologically fundamental, which is the nature of God *as* love. Insofar as this is the case, actions and interactions of love can be said to *symbolise* love. Accordingly, Jesus' foot washing, as an action of love, is a *symbol* of love in the sense that it *is* this love enacted in the mundane sphere, but also symbolises an ontologically more fundamental reality of love as the nature of God.

By enacting love, Jesus' action symbolically reveals the nature of love as self-giving for the other in intimate glorification of that other. Hence the foot

washing also symbolises the cross, not by pointing to something different, but by enacting the very same love.[68] Put in terms of symbolism, the symbolised is *really present in*, and not only *revealed by*, the symbol. Thus there is no reason why we may not say that the foot washing is a sign of love in which what is signified (the nature of God) is present in the sign.

3b. How the foot washing signifies

Construing the foot washing as a sign of love whereby the signified is actually *in* the sign has important implications for *how* its symbolism operates. For it entails that actions within the mundane sphere are not merely *illustrations of*, or even a *vehicle to*, something else, but are the *means by which* what is signified is present. This must include not only what is done physically, but also deeds in the social, political and (as a result) even the socio-economic dimension. Why this is so is best grasped when we see that the way in which the sign of the foot washing functions is, in fact, an extension of the Johannine logic of incarnation.

Divinity enacted in the various dimensions of the mundane

Taking the same concept of symbolism to a reading of 1:14a (ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο) means not only that God is *pointed to*, *illustrated by* or even *revealed in* but actually *is flesh*.[69] But what does 'being flesh' actually mean? The classic discussion around this question has been focused on issues around (divine/ human) nature and (spiritual/material) substance (cf. chap. 4, 3b).[70] However, if we start by considering the light shed on the question by the epexegetical phrase following 1:14a, a different emphasis emerges. With the words καὶ

---

[68] The continuity of the foot washing and the cross does not negate the latter as the acme of the mundane expression of love and hence its most glorious revelation (Cf. chap 4, 3e).

[69] This does not imply that what is contained in the idea of σὰρξ now exhausts what we mean by θεός (just as λόγος does not exhaust what we mean by θεός, 1:1).

[70] There is, of course, a vast body of scholarship on this passage to which Frey, as usual, is a trustworthy guide ("The Incarnation of the Logos and the Dwelling of God in Jesus Christ" in *Glory of the Crucified One*, 261–284). However, the way in which I am dealing with the passage, geared as it is ultimately towards socio-economic concerns, means that I am pursuing an avenue of interpretation that has not, as far as I know, been explored.

ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν, the incarnation is articulated as a *relational* event.[71] This is standardly seen in terms of Old Testament associations with the Tabernacle.[72] But, without at all denying such allusions, a more basic fact is often overlooked: for the Logos, the Son of God, to become human is to *become a part of human society*.

When humanity is seen in terms of its relationality rather than the qualities of an individual human, the incarnation is not only (or even mainly) about being 'embodied'. Rather, for Jesus to become flesh and dwell among his own is to be a fully-fledged member of a family, local community, nation and the various other socio-political units that constituted 1st century Roman Palestine.[73] The corollary of the oft-noted fact that Jesus only became human through being a particular person in a specific time and place is that he entered into a *particular set of relationships*. Indeed, it was precisely his genuine social embeddedness that made it so difficult to recognise him.[74] The mistake associated with identifying Jesus as 'Joseph's Son' was not that he was only Mary's son and thus only half human; it was that he was fully human (and a full member of Joseph's family) but also *more than* that.[75] This *more than* is, again, a relational category. Jesus is not only Son of Man (as everybody knew) but also, and uniquely, Son of God.

Jesus' relational identity as a human stands in continuity with his relational identity as God. This is not only in his being a son in Joseph's household as well as the divine Son. It is more fundamental. For the very nature of God

---

[71] I am by no means the first to emphasise this point. Käsemann's disagreement with Bultmann on this verse involved the relationship between 14a and 14b. Indeed, the former's reputation as a docetic interpreter must be qualified by the fact that he wanted to emphasise the relational change over the substantial one. In his essay on the Prologue, he says that flesh is neutral in itself and it is '"the presence of God" on earth [that is] the real goal of becoming flesh', rather than substance itself being the significant thing ("Prologue", 159).

[72] Hence Frey sees the '"Shekinah" of the divine Logos as a key to the understanding of the σὰρξ ἐγένετο' ("Incarnation of the Logos", 278).

[73] An individualistic biological conception of what it is to be human is far more characteristic of contemporary Western anthropology than it would have been of the Johannine world.

[74] Again, these are not entirely novel observations. Bultmann draws attention to both the hiddenness of Jesus' divine identity (*John*, 66) and the particularity of his coming in history to be witnessed to by 'believing eye-witnesses' (p. 70), tempering his avowed existentialism. He does not emphasise the relational aspect that I am arguing for here, however.

[75] The crowd's response to Jesus' claim about being the bread come down from heaven was to ask rhetorically whether this was not Joseph's son (6:42).

entails that what most constitutes *divinity* is the relational identity of Father and Son as love. Likewise, Jesus' various social relationships are not only incidental to his incarnation, basically irrelevant to his salvific mission. On the contrary, they are the means by which he is divine love in the world. It is true that little is said directly about Jesus' human characteristics. However, John specifically mentions Jesus' social identity (e.g. 1:46, 4:9) and is the only one of the four Evangelists who mentions him at a family event (a wedding, 2:1–11) or goes into detail about the political intrigue between Jewish and Roman authorities (chapters 18–19 especially). The idea that this Gospel does not emphasise Jesus' engagement with holistic life is simply a careless caricature. Such engagement is at the heart of what it meant (and means) to be human and, in fact, the only way in which it is possible to be love in the world.

This brings us to the crucial point about how the foot washing signifies. Not only his preaching and miracles but *all* Jesus' mundane relational interactions – physical, social, economic and even political – are the means by which he loves the world. Thus the foot washing is a sign of love in its multiple aspects of physical touch, showing hospitality, giving honour, cleansing and preparation for mission, all of which establish the divine household. Far from being reductionistic, being a sign of love entails signification through the whole range of interactions attendant with a relational human identity that is multiplex in its very nature. Jesus is a son, a Rabbi and a subject of imperial Rome and loves through these relationships and the materiality in which they are mediated. But for the divine household to be established, the sign cannot simply be performed; it also has to be *received*.

Signification by (sacramental) participation

The act of foot washing is not just a unilateral act of love. It requires participation from the disciples in order for it to signify what it should (13:7–8). Certainly the sign signifies love through *being* the love it signifies (in, and not despite its various mundane dimensions). But it also signifies love through being *received*, just as divine love is always love *between* Father and Son. Participation is therefore inherent in the meaning of the sign, and not an

optional part of it. When the disciples participate in the sign of the foot washing, they are really participating in divine love. Thus this sign has what could helpfully be termed a 'sacramental' significance in that divine reality is engaged in *through* the mundane.[76] At the same time, the word 'sacrament' must not obscure the fact that participation in Jesus' action is a primarily *ethical* matter.

Before moving on to the question of ethics, however, a clarification regarding the role of the mundane sphere is warranted. It is, I have been arguing, essential that the disciples engage with Jesus' sign in its physical and social character, and not just its function as a revelatory lesson. However, the case of Judas shows us how this level of engagement is, whilst necessary, not sufficient. Judas has his feet washed but does not receive it rightly, which is to receive it as love (and, therefore, to receive Jesus himself). Judas receives both the foot washing and the sign of friendship in the bread (13:27) but does not receive Jesus' love. This is because, we are told, his heart is under the sway of Satan (13:2). However exactly we conceive of Johannine anthropology, participation in Jesus' love must entail the whole person and not only certain elements thereof. This brings us back to our original point about the ethics of believing as a whole-life commitment to God through Jesus.

3c. Why the foot washing signifies

Elucidating *what* the sign of the foot washing signifies and *how* it does so has already taken us most of the way to understanding *why* it does so. As a sign of divine love enacted in the mundane sphere, its purpose is to draw the disciples deeper into the relationship of the divine household. This requires not only passive acceptance but *right participation* with the whole person – external and internal. There is, therefore, already an ethical aspect to the sign in that it must be received, hence the culpability of Peter in his initial refusal of the

[76] This neither confirms nor denies a traditionally 'sacramental' interpretation of our pericope but rather provides a theologically cogent basis for discussing sacramentality in John in relation to its broader mode of symbolism. This is in line with Brown's comparison of Jesus' actions with sacramental modes of God's presence rather than as necessarily instituting or reflecting sacraments in the technical ecclesiological sense (*John*, 530–531).

washing (13:6–9). However, is there anything inherent in the sign itself that also demands *active* participation? Or is the mimetic command that Jesus outlines verbally (13:14–15) an extraneous addendum?

Again, the analysis of John 17 must be borne in mind, whereby we saw that mutuality is inherent in the relational character of love. Moreover, this mutuality is not always identically reciprocated, hence the Son's way of loving the Father is not the same as the converse. The implication of the foot washing being a sign of love is that the disciples are to participate actively, even if this does not logically necessitate returning Jesus' action exactly how he did it. Certainly it does not mean washing *his* feet in this context; but does it mean anything apart from washing *each other's* feet?[77] Seeing it as a sign of love allows it to be a generative paradigm, but to see how this is so it is necessary to look at other acts of Jesus.

3d. The generativity of the foot washing as a sign of love

The foot washing is a sign of love in which Jesus enacts divine being through mundane interaction so that the disciples may participate in the divine household. Because such participation is paradigmatic for the Johannine ethic of love we may say that the foot washing is simultaneously both sign and paradigm, integrating the symbolic and exemplary aspects that have often been seen to be disjunctive. However, without giving any sense of how this paradigm can be generative of other ethical action, my reading of it as a 'sign of love' would be unhelpful. This danger can be avoided because of two factors, namely the cruciform nature of the foot washing and the way in which it connects to Jesus' other signs. The latter will be developed in the next section, but the former needs a brief word of explanation here.

The sign of the foot washing is revelatory beyond its immediate signification of love for it brings into view the specifically *cruciform* contours of divine love as it is enacted the mundane sphere. It is not only intimate mutual glorification in

[77] However, I argue below that the positive estimation of Mary's anointing of Jesus suggests that perhaps the disciples should have taken the initiative to wash Jesus' feet (chap. 7, 1b).

which the disciples are invited to participate but the love that was supremely manifest at Golgotha. The discussion of death in the previous chapter (3e) led to an eschatological conclusion that helps us integrate these apparently very different aspects of love. For intimate mutual glorification is antithetical to the prevailing culture of the world. Thus Jesus loving this way invites participation in a life that can only reach its telos of unity (towards which the divine household moves, 17:20–26) through death to the world.

This salvific movement is not only *invitational* but inherently *confrontational* insofar as it also spells judgment (and thus *eternal* death) for those who refuse to participate (3:18). It condemns the 'power' of the purportedly hegemonic world order. Recognising this is crucial as we move on now to set the foot washing among the σημεῖα; we are not talking about a sign of love *as opposed to* power. On the contrary, the framing context of the foot washing is, as Richter points out, Jesus' ultimate authority (13:1–3).[78] It is an act of supreme power in which the divine life of love salvifically overcomes (16:33) the hatred with which the mundane sphere has become identified (e.g. 15:23–25). It is precisely this unworldly feature of Jesus' power that is offensive.

4. The σημεῖα as signs of love

So the foot washing is a sign of love that invites cruciform participation *through* and not *apart from* its mundane elements. This opens the door to the significance of holistic engagement in the Johannine ethic. Since such engagement is a feature of Jesus' public ministry in John 1–12, it would seem natural to attempt to apply my reading of the foot washing to the signs narrated there. Yet the holistic nature of these signs is hardly ever taken to be ethically relevant.[79] My argument here must therefore proceed with some

---

[78] Richter helpfully draws attention to the act of power involved here, though he posits a false dichotomy in the claim that 'im vierten Evangelium nicht die Herrschaftsgewalt über alle und alles gemeint, sondern… die Macht und der Auftrag, das Heil der Menschen zu wirken' (*Fusswaschung*, 299).

[79] The magnitude of the challenge is illustrated by the fact that even Loader, in a deliberate effort to re-evaluate the socio-economic dimensions of the Johannine literature, downplays the relevance of what the signs achieve in the mundane sphere ("Good News", 479).

caution. The claim being made in this section is that the signs' mundane (physical, social, economic and political) impact can only be grasped when they are seen as signs of love. This requires explication of *what* they signify (as love, 4a), *how* they signify (as being necessarily through mundane interaction, 4b) and *why* they signify (as being for the sake of participation in the divine household, 4c).

My method in what follows is to begin not with exegesis of individual passages but by taking a view of the signs as a whole and looking at matters of detail in order to bolster my points as I make them. Although a revised estimation of what belongs in the category of 'signs' (as set out 20:30–31) will emerge as an outworking of my analysis, I need to begin from a clearly defined body of material. Therefore, I will argue my case here on the basis of those episodes that are generally agreed to comprise the Johannine signs: turning water into wine (2:1–11), healing the centurion's son (4:46–54), healing the invalid (5:1–9), feeding the five thousand and walking on water (6:1–21), healing the man born blind (9:1–7) and raising Lazarus (11:38–44).

My argument here is for the *theological* continuity between the above mentioned signs and the foot washing. But it is worth noting from the outset that there are also *literary* grounds for positing such continuity, though this has been rarely pointed out. Culpepper, however, is quite straightforward in making this equation. About the foot washing, he notes that

> 'the dialogues with Peter, the disciples, the Beloved Disciple, and Judas serve to interpret the meaning of the action, just as the author has previously used dialogues and discourses to unpack the meaning of Jesus' signs'.[80]

With the Farewell Discourse we have an expanded version of the sign-discourse pattern that has characterised the Gospel to that point. Its opening words in 13:1 also indicate the continuity between Jesus' public ministry and the events from the foot washing onwards as his 'loving his own'. Formally speaking, therefore, the stage is set for the argument that I will now make.

---

[80] Culpepper, "Hypodeigma", 137.

4a. What the signs signify

The first question I address is *what* the signs signify. There is of course consensus that the signs reveal Jesus' identity, which is the most obvious information to glean from John 20:30–31. But to say that they reveal Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, there must be something of divine nature that characterises them. Put in terms of symbolism, one must account for the positive relationship between the sign and what it signifies. My argument that the signs signify love is best made from taking a more commonly adopted perspective and building my argument from there. Thus my starting premise is that Jesus' signs are 'expressions of his life-giving power'.[81]

Signs of life-giving power?

One of the most obvious features of the sign narratives is that in them, Jesus brings life through his actions. This is most literally so in the raising of Lazarus, a revivification that serves as the dramatic climax of Jesus' activity. That this is the epitome of his life-giving work rather than a *sui generis* miracle is clear from the deliberate highlighting of the miraculous nature of Jesus' other deeds. This is accomplished by the narrator through giving details that show these deeds' extraordinary scope (e.g. the amount of wine, 2:6, 10 or food, 6:7, 10–11) or their overcoming of apparently intractable situations (e.g. the disabled men, 5:5, 9; 9:1, 7). Indeed, the revelatory force of these signs depends on Jesus having enacted the requisite power for them to deliver their life-giving effects.

Thus there is every reason to characterise these as signs of life-giving power that reveal a divine nature characterised by life-giving power. Moreover, doing so maintains ontological continuity between sign and signified; the sign signifies Jesus' Christological identity as life-giver (chap. 2, 2d), which in turn is rooted in the life that is in God (1:4; 5:26). I do not want to deny the premise

---

[81] Thompson, *John*, 67, cf. Brown's remark that 'John had a 'general insight that the life-giving power of Jesus was effective through the material symbols employed in the deeds and discourses of the public ministry', "The Johannine Sacramentary" in *New Testament Essays* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1965), 52.

that the signs signify life-giving power. However, I want to qualify our understanding of it. I do this in light of the observation that the conflict caused by people's reaction to Jesus' signs is about their *ethical* quality and not their *supernaturally powerful* quality, which is never in doubt.

The most extended exchange on the topic (10:25–38) occurs during Jesus' winter encounter with 'the Jews' at the cloister of Solomon (10:22–23). Here Jesus refers to his works as his testimony from the Father (10:25, cf. 5:36). He stresses that these are *good* works when they threaten to kill him (10:32), trying to shift their perception to their socially beneficial dimension. Indeed, the irony is that the charge of blasphemy that his opponents insist on is clearly contradictory to their admission of the goodness of his works (10:33). Thus Jesus stresses again that they should judge his origin from God by his deeds' ethical quality (10:37), which should reveal his relationship to the Father (10:38). Rather than offering a reasoned response, Jesus' opponents become violent (10:39).

This story clearly indicates that what people disagree with Jesus over is not whether an act of power has taken place but, instead, whether or not its ethical quality reveals its divine origin. In fact, believing as simply a response to manifest power is criticised as deficient.[82] It is within this context that we can understand why Jesus persistently uses the word ἔργον (ἔργα in the plural), not σημεῖον, to refer to his deeds. The first appearance of the word, its threefold use in 3:19–21, establishes this sense clearly (cf. 7:7, whose prophetic sense emerges in 8:39, 41). The crowd understand the ethical import of works (6:28–29) but only once does anyone other than Jesus refer to his signs as works (his brothers in 7:3).

Thus Jesus is drawing attention to the ethical quality of his deeds, locating their revelatory force there.[83] By using the term ἔργον, he is highlighting their

---

[82] Schnelle misses this fact in his analysis, which never once mentions the word love but refers repeatedly to Jesus' power ("Signs", 242). Yet in putting forward his thesis that miracles lead to faith in the Johannine scheme, he fails to note that the examples he gives (2:23, 6:14, 7:31, p. 237) are all judged as deficient examples of believing by the author.

[83] See John 4:34; 5:20, 36; 7:21; 9:3,4; 14:10–12; 15:24; 17:4. Jesus' use of terminology for the signs and the ethical connotations of the word have both been recognised, most notably by

inherent goodness in the face of accusations that his displays of power were politically subversive or even demonic.[84] It is this quality that he argues to demonstrate that he is from God, not their supernatural power.[85] When the author refers to Jesus' works as σημεῖα, therefore, it makes more sense to understand this in line with Jesus' own perception of his works rather than that of others. It will already be clear that this has potential significance for the exemplary purpose of the sign narratives (see below, 4c). However, we still have some ground to cover to establish the ethical quality of Jesus signs themselves.

The signs and Jesus' relational humanity

In order to perceive the ethical quality of Jesus' signs, we need to see them not simply as *actions* but rather as *interactions*. The text actually focuses far more on this relational dimension of Jesus' public ministry, which characteristically eschews self-aggrandising displays. In fact, despite the many times that Jesus is challenged to perform signs, he consistently refuses to authorise himself when challenged (2:18, 6:30, 10:24–25). Instead, it is when people appeal to his compassion rather than his authoritative power that he acts.[86] Contrary to caricatures of a sublimely detached Jesus, he responds to people relationally.

Hermut Löhr ("Ἔργον as an Element of Moral Language in John" in *Rethinking*). Löhr concludes, similarly to what we have found with other key terms in John, that the 'text is a careful construction of a field of overlapping meanings which links the sphere of God's (and his Son's) action to those of human beings' (p. 249). However, what has not been acknowledged is their combined significance; Jesus wants to emphasise the ethical quality of his *signs*.

[84] Conversely, it is notable that Jesus' enemies, who accept his capacity to do deeds of power, do not care about their moral quality or ultimate origin (11:47). By caring only for the political consequences of his signs in their attraction of popular following (itself, according to the author, without full understanding), they are portrayed as being immoral. Jesus' signs and the perception thereof are primarily a matter of ethics.

[85] Jane Heath's exploration of 'goodness' terminology in reference to John 7:12 brings out the congruence between Jesus' revelation of his unity with God and his moral character ("'Some were saying, "He is good"' (John 7.12b): 'Good' Christology in John's Gospel?", *NTS 56* (2010) 532–533).

[86] Examples include his way of dealing with the royal official's request regarding his servant (4:49) and we see it most supremely in relation to Lazarus. Not only is he the only character whom Jesus is explicitly said to have loved up to that point in the Gospel (11:3–5), but the author goes out of his way to express how moved Jesus is (11:35). Jesus' delay in travelling (11:6) qualifies, but does not negate, the determinative role of his love for the Bethany family in his actions.

This can sometimes be obscured by rhetoric that plays down people's fleshly needs (e.g. 5:14). But Jesus' actions show that he does not discount them. In fact, his perceived carelessness over such mundane concerns arises more from an assumed underlying dualism than careful assessment of the Gospel's thought.[87]

The holistic relational concern displayed in Jesus' actions is also brought out by other, frequently neglected, aspects of the author's narratival strategy. He does not focus on the actual moment of transformation that one would have thought to have been the most forceful testimony to divine action.[88] Instead, the reader's attention is drawn to the reaction of the sign's beneficiary, who is a fully involved recipient of divine favour rather than the equivalent of a volunteer in a magician's show.[89] The question is how they will receive the life-giving deed of Jesus. Signs are quite generally portrayed in John so as emphasise elements of interaction and participation (2:7–8; 5:8–9; 6:11; 9:6) rather than unilateral power. Indeed, this shows how the signs are modes of *giving* and *receiving*, thereby demonstrating their consonance with the relational dynamics in John, and Jesus' prayer especially.[90] As we have seen (chap. 4, 2a), these dynamics, expressed in gift language, are fundamentally a matter of divine love.[91]

---

[87] For example, Loader reveals the ideological basis for his judgment that John downplays physical need when he distinguishes between 'real life' and 'inner or heavenly reality' ("Good News", 473–4, 476). He has created a dualism that would have been totally foreign to the author of John.

[88] There is no record of how the water became wine, the sick people were healed, the food was multiplied and Lazarus was revivified, only that these things happened. Even with the man born blind, whose healing seems attached to his washing in the pool, it is unclear whether his sight had already returned before he washed the mud off his eyes and opened them. The incident with Lazarus is an exception that will be addressed below.

[89] Thus, as Thompson points out, signs effect faith not through 'sheer manifestation of power' but in bringing the life God gives; likewise, 'the response sought is not simply awe or amazement, but trust and obedience' ("Signs and Faith", 105).

[90] Hirsch-Luipold recognises that signs are relational rather than displays of power in that 'Gott zeigt also in den σημεῖα Jesu nicht nur seine macht- und heilvolle Wirksamkeit in der Welt, den Anbruch seiner Gottesherrschaft (vgl. Mk 1:15), sondern er offenbart sein Sein im Verhältnis zum Wesen der Welt' ("Klartext", 95).

[91] Thompson goes some way in this direction with the idea of signs as 'gifts of life' ("Signs and Faith", 98) and 'the active and visible manifestation of God's gracious character at work for the salvation of the world' (p. 95). But her avoidance of seeing them in terms of 'love' is especially inexplicable here, considering how close she gets to paraphrasing John 3:16. Thompson does

Having shifted the focus of the signs' revelation from their *power* to *ethical quality* and finally to *love*, further specifications must be made about what this means.[92] In particular, Jesus is not concerned merely with maintaining an individual's biological life. His actions address not only physical but also personal and structural relationships (which introduces the socio-economic dimension into the equation).[93] Moreover, they do so with an intimacy and abundance that is far more than functional. In turning water to wine, healing the sick, raising Lazarus and contravening Sabbath regulation, he is addressing problems of damaged honour, social alienation, loss of financial independence and abuse of religio-political power.[94] To this one can add the basic material benefit in provision of wine or bread, healing the sick or blind, and raising a dead friend.[95] All of this contributes to the same purpose that I have shown to inform Jesus' relational interactions, namely the establishment of divine-human community in the divine household.

That all of the examples that I have mentioned would have been accepted self-evidently as acts of love is further affirmed when considering the Johannine continuity with Jewish thought about God.[96] This God's loving action

---

talk about love in "Signs and Faith" and sees it as connected to faith. However, she restricts it to one more thing that people are to do (p. 95) rather than the more fundamental ethic that I have argued it to be here.

[92] Heath's examination of "Good Christology" raises the possibility that goodness is central, but this concept (which only arises in 1:46, 5:29 and 7:12) is not such a fundamentally theological category as love. For it takes up the conventional Jewish mentality rather than that of John (though note that Heath is not attempting to set up a comparison between goodness and love).

[93] Motyer, on the basis of the social focus he brings to the Gospel, sees John 13:14–15 as instituting a typical example and draws attention to the connection between this and the signs ("Jesus and the Marginalised", 80).

[94] Just because it is not easy to define the exact effects of Jesus' actions does not mean that such elements were not there as crucial aspects of the narrative. Running out of wine was an embarrassment (2:3); being blind branded one a sinner, an outcast (9:2); unmarried women without male siblings were generally more economically vulnerable (11:20–21) and the political power that Jewish leaders are allowed by Rome is being used in an oppressive, authoritarian manner from which Jesus' actions on the Sabbath in particular (5:1–9) set people free.

[95] Loader notes that Luke 7:22 (cf. Matthew 11:5) 'juxtaposes good news to the poor with acts of healing – sickness and disability were major drivers of poverty, so to heal was to bring good news already' ("Good News" 471).

[96] Whatever the exact Old Testament antecedents to the Gospel's idea of love may be, the context of its narrative operates within the purview of the God of Israel. Following Barrett and Dodd, as well as Attridge, Thompson points out the continuity of the signs with God's work in the Old Testament, whereby physical blessing both pointed to and constituted salvation ("Signs and Faith", 100–105).

(represented by the term חֶסֶד) undergirded the holistic and multifaceted provision in the covenant relationship and is thus fully compatible with the statement that God is love.[97] I raise this not in order to bring in a completely different basis of support to the inner-textual method I have been employing. Rather, it needs to be mentioned here only because it would be an obviously untenable reading of John to assume Jesus to be revealing a divine nature that was not in continuity with the prior revelation given to those to whom he came.[98] If Jesus was not understood (1:5), the problem was not one of divine consistency.

Signs of cruciform love

Jesus' 'signs of love' have to be seen in their relation to the cross to be properly grasped. Indeed, for Richter this cruciform dimension is exactly what unites the signs with the foot washing, though the latter's ethical dimension is all but annulled by his reading.[99] Generally, however, because of the aforementioned division of the Gospel into 2–12 and 13–20, the cruciform shaping of the signs has not always been apparent. Indeed, what are considered signs have been differentiated from Jesus' actions after chap. 12 on the very basis that the former are about life whilst the latter point towards death.[100] Although the connection of the signs to the cross has sometimes been recognised (as will be seen in what follows), the obvious corollary – that this associates the signs

---

[97] As much as Johannine studies has moved towards an emphasis on the Jewish background of John, few scholars acknowledge the significance for the signs that the God whom Jesus reveals is none other than the God of the Old Testament. Thompson's perspicacity on this point is thus especially notable. The signs answer her question 'wherein lay the continuity between the work of God as made known to Israel in the past and the work of Jesus?' ("Signs and Faith", 98).

[98] For Miranda, the messianic kingdom in John meets 'all the conditions… described in the Old Testament; complete justice, knowledge of the true God, life, the resurrection of the dead, the cure of physical ills, love of neighbour' (*Being and the Messiah*, 176).

[99] The fact that Richter cements this connection through *minimising* the ethical import of the foot washing illustrates again how deep-rooted the non-ethical reading of the signs is. He states of the foot washing that 'sie ist für den Evangelisten, auch wenn er es nicht ausdrücklich sagt, ein Zeichen (σημεῖον) und hat wie jedes andere Zeichen im vierten Evangelium eine verborgene christologische und heilsgeschichtliche Bedeutung' (*Fusswaschung*, 288).

[100] Gorman points out that this distinction breaks down when one sees the signs in terms of glory and glory in terms of the cross. Thus 'if the cross is the hermeneutical key to the semantic content of glory, than all of the "forms" of glory in John must be related to the cross' (*Abide and Go*, 127).

closely with love – has been nearly entirely ignored. There are in fact three key ways in which the signs relate not only to Jesus' crucifixion but to cruciform love.

Firstly, and most frequently noted, the signs *allude to* Jesus' death.[101] The most obvious instances of this are in John 6 and the raising of Lazarus from death.[102] Secondly, the signs are connected to the cross through enacting the same quality of love, especially its self-giving aspect.[103] One sees this clearly once again in the case of Lazarus, with Jesus' decision to travel into the danger zone around Jerusalem to save the life of his friend.[104] Thirdly, following on from this point, the signs relate to the cross through playing a key role in the narrative movement towards it. Jesus' crucifixion is not an isolated event but the climax of a death to the world that is enacted every time he acts in an unworldly way. As he does so, he incurs the wrath of the worldly authorities who would eventually kill him.[105] We may also add an additional piece of evidence, which only has weight together with the cumulative effect of the previous three points.[106] This is that signification and death come together in the only three occurrences in John of the verbal form of σημεῖα, the verb σημαίνω.[107]

---

[101] Koester picks up on these allusions in Jesus' signs wherein, for example, the mention of 'the hour' in 2:4 makes his turning water to wine 'a prelude to the gift of his own life' (*Symbolism*, 86).

[102] Hence Schnelle notes that 'the close connection between miracles and the passion, evident both compositionally and materially in John 11… occasions and also clarifies the references to the passion in the other miracle stories' within 'his [John's] *theologia crucis*' ("Signs", 240–241).

[103] Even when the signs do not immediately result in death, they are still acts of giving for the sake of others' honour, in which Jesus sets aside his own prerogative for approval from the societal establishment. He does not attract attention to his actions or seek to be honoured but, on the contrary, accepts the opprobrium that mounts because of them. This constitutes the death to the mundane realm that we discussed above (chap. 4, 3e).

[104] Bauckham brings this out especially clearly in his *Gospel of Glory*, 68–69.

[105] Bauckham notes that Jesus' death is part of his Messianic mandate, 'something he had to do' rather than something that happened 'because he remained faithful to his mission despite the mortal danger into which it led him' (*Gospel of Glory*, 70). However, this is a false dichotomy. He both had to die to fulfil his mandate *and* was killed as a result of his faithfulness to love in the face of hatred.

[106] These three points are neither mutually exclusive nor always easy to disentangle from one another. Hence the ambivalence in Dodd's observation that 'every σημεῖον in the narrative points forward to the great climax', namely Jesus' death and resurrection (*Interpretation*, 142).

[107] This is found where Jesus illustrates his own (12:33, to which 18:32 also appears to refer) or Peter's (21:19) death. Whilst the verb itself may be neutral, the fact that it is used in reference

Wines of love?

The very first sign shows how the claims that I have been making come together (2:1–11). In this story, the author sets the relational scene first, a social event attended by Jesus' mother, himself and disciples (2:2–3). His reaction to his mother's concerns seem terse and dismissive: Τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί, γύναι; οὔπω ἥκει ἡ ὥρα μου (What is that to me you and me, woman? My hour has not yet come, 2:4). However, in narrative context, these words belie a willingness to act according to her wishes. Far from being like a surly teenager who reluctantly changes his mind, Jesus' words test his mother, even playfully so (cf. 6:5–6). Yet his words are also more than rhetoric, pointing to the hour and giving the whole episode a cruciform tint.

Whilst noting the volume of the jars containing water, John neither narrates nor shows any interest in the specific act of power that must have occurred for it to turn to wine.[108] Jesus does not draw the attention to himself in any kind of sensational way; rather, the story is about Jesus' relational interactions that begin with his mother and those who were managing the wedding and climaxes in an incredible reversal of social fortunes for the unnamed groom. The social dimension, not the bare transformation of molecular structures in itself, constitutes the sign. It is this act of selfless, though undoubtedly powerful, love that constituted the glory that the disciples beheld, both fulfilling and stretching their messianic expectations.[109] It is certainly miraculous, but it is not in its raw power that it is glorious.[110]

---

to death may not be without significance. It serves as a reminder that what Jesus reveals about his identity as Messiah *includes* his crucifixion; it is not just something that he undergoes, essentially disjunctive with messianic identity. Self-giving love is at the heart of this identity.

[108] It is simply not the case that the story evinces 'a total concentration on the reality of the miracle and the power of the wonder-worker' (Schnelle, "Signs", 232).

[109] In doing so, Old Testament expectations are clearly alluded to by the event. Heath illustrates the continuity of my focus on love with Jewish eschatological hope on this point. She shows how this incident stands in continuity with the Nathanael encounter in 1:46, which connotes the 'perfect relationship… between Israel and her God' of exclusive 'love and devotion' ("Good Christology", 522). What unfolds in Cana is an intimate scene where 'abundant, miraculous provision of good wine recalls vivid depictions of the eschatological, materialistic experience of God's goodness envisaged in earlier Jewish tradition' (p. 523).

[110] The deep-rootedness of this idea is already apparent in Rengstorf who, despite having just

4b. How the signs signify

What the signs signify has considerable ramifications for *how* they do so. Because the signification of love is also an *enactment* of love, the implication is that the sphere within which this love is enacted (the mundane sphere) includes within it the means by which the signs signify. Like the foot washing, the signs follow the Johannine logic of the incarnation whereby God's enfleshment in Jesus is worked out through his actions in the various relational dimensions of human life.[111] Accordingly, participating in what Jesus does in the mundane sphere in relation to sickness, lack or even death is not only a *pointer*, but actually the *means* by which one relates to him and therefore grasps the signs' meaning. This includes the socio-economic dimension of what Jesus is doing (discussed in more detail in relation to John 6, below, chap. 6).

The term 'participation' needs to be qualified here, since it may seem a strange term to use. Not only do the beneficiaries of Jesus' signs appear passive, but most of those involved in the scenes are apparently no more than spectators. However, we must recall that the signs are designed to be received; without people playing their part, there would have been no signs. The fact that others, most notably the disciples, can grasp them without themselves being engaged bodily in what Jesus is doing does not negate the necessity of the physical participation on the part of those who are immediately involved. For the rationale of the Gospel is that God is known through concrete events in history. This comes not only through touch, taste and smell, but also through sight and

---

referred to Jesus' characterisation of his acts as 'good works', connects the σημεῖα to 'the miraculous demonstration of divine power' in the exodus and insists that they simply reveal the Christ and do not express compassion (Rengstorf, "σημεῖον", 249–252). This is all the more remarkable given Rengstorf's observation that John 2 and 6 'correspond to the expectation that the Messianic age will put an end to hunger and thirst' (p. 246).

[111] I therefore go further than Van Belle, who notes in reference to the signs that 'in their revelatory character, their materiality, and their reality, they also illustrate the incarnation of the Son of God' ("ΣΗΜΕΙΑ", 324). They not only *illustrate* the incarnation but are the means by which it is *enacted*.

hearing, which is how people usually engage with the medium of words.[112]

At the same time, participation must entail the whole person, including one's innermost being.[113] For this, the physical and social aspects are necessary, but not sufficient. Many of those who experience Jesus' signs – both as direct participants and as spectators – carry on in unbelief outside of relationship to God.[114] In receiving the signs, people must also receive Jesus. But the fact that the signs are such that people *can* receive Jesus through them (albeit in conjunction with words) gives them the kind of sacramental quality that we saw in relation to the foot washing (above, 3b).

Imbibing divine love?

Turning once more to Jesus' first sign, I have already portrayed it as a story about Jesus' relational interactions. These are first with (and via) his mother but they climax (via those managing the wedding), in the supernatural production of an abundant gift to the groom. The challenge to my claim that the meaning of the sign is communicated through *actually experiencing* it is that the chief beneficiaries of Jesus' action do not even know what had happened. However, this does not make any less necessary the physical occurrence of the event; indeed, it is only because the wine is produced and drunk that experiencing the event by sight is enough to occasion the belief of the disciples (2:11).

Whether or not the disciples tasted the wine (there is no reason to doubt that they did), they and any other onlookers were participants in the mundane

---

[112] One must also remember that words have to be physically received just as much as anything else that comes from Jesus. However, this does not allow us to go as far as Koester, who states that 'throughout the Gospel, words evoked responses to Jesus that were confirmed by signs, led to proper perception of signs, and could grow into genuine faith even without signs' (*Symbolism*, 140). Even though some of Jesus' words are not immediately attached to signs, insofar as they are all dependent on his incarnated life for their meaning, they are dependent on signs.

[113] I have not discussed Johannine anthropology in this thesis, but however we specify the details, the idea of 'inner being' is part of the Gospel's thought world through the terms ψυχή and καρδία in particular.

[114] There is no indication that all or even most of the beneficiaries of these acts came to believe in Jesus and the statement at 12:37 suggests the very opposite.

reality of the sign by their presence. Thus Jesus' surreptitiousness is not to be explained by his wanting to remain unknown. Rather, it maintains the character of the sign as a gift to be received, geared towards drawing the recipients into relationship with him in the divine household.[115] To what extent this actually happened the reader is left to guess, but the relational purpose of Jesus' actions dictates that the right reaction would have been to drink the wine and seek the provider.

4c. Why the signs signify

The previous two sub-sections have already erected most of the apparatus for answering the question of *why* the signs signify. As signs of love that signify divinity through being love and drawing people into relationship with God through Jesus in the mundane sphere, their purpose is participation. Thus far, I am simply applying the theological conclusions of chap. 2 whereby believing entails a whole-life response to Jesus that is distinct to, but inseparable from, love. But seeing the signs as acts of love also places them under the aegis of that in which the disciples are to participate mimetically according to 13:34. Koester notes that the Gospel's general perspective on discipleship is a function of its symbolism, and of the signs in particular.[116] Yet it has proved more difficult to make the jump from this to identifying actual ethical implications of the signs.[117] A more specific argument to establish what and how the signs

---

[115] The motif of the divine household could be connected to the eschatological messianic banquet on the basis of this event. This idea will be further explored in relation to John 6 below (chap. 6).

[116] Koester brings together the commonplace observation that the Gospel is written for the sake of discipleship with the (far less commonplace) claim that this applies also to the signs. He argues that 'the fundamental structure of Johannine symbolism is twofold. The primary level of meaning concerns Christ; the secondary level concerns discipleship' (*Symbolism*, 13).

[117] Despite Koester's aforementioned emphasis on the role of symbolism vis-à-vis discipleship, this topic turns out to play a very minor role indeed upon going through the monograph. The only one of the seven signs to be accompanied by such an ethical teaching point is the raising of Lazarus, namely that Jesus does not show love by exempting followers from death, but by leading them through death to new life (*Symbolism*, 122). Neither of the other two references to discipleship are much more practically enlightening (pp. 159, 199).

contribute ethically would thus be useful.[118]

Participation in the mundane reality of Jesus' signs – its physical, social and political dimensions – is first of all passive. But in receiving, one must do so rightly. Just as for the disciples to rightly receive the foot washing means (at least) adopting a certain physical and social posture, so it is with the other signs. This is not negated by the fact that the disciples do not seem to participate very actively in the public ministry of Jesus. For their constant witness of what he does serves as the means by which they learn to relate to each other and to others likewise (cf. chap. 3, 2c–f). All that they need is a direct injunction to set this process off, and Jesus gives it to them in the ethical instruction of the Farewell Discourse, to which we briefly return.

The role of the foot washing and the love command is frequently noted in accounts of Johannine ethics. But far less mentioned is the following statement:

> ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, ὁ πιστεύων εἰς ἐμὲ τὰ ἔργα ἃ ἐγὼ ποιῶ κἀκεῖνος ποιήσει, καὶ μείζονα τούτων ποιήσει, ὅτι ἐγὼ πρὸς τὸν πατέρα πορεύομαι (14:12).
>
> Truly, truly I say to you, the one believing in me will also do the works that I do and will do *greater* words than these, because I am going to the Father

What has prevented the straightforward ethical appropriation of this statement is that Jesus is usually taken to be talking about miracles or about mission.[119] But my argument is that 'these things' *constitute* Johannine ethics and are aspects of Jesus' primary work of love. Therefore, this verse indicates that his publicly performed signs can serve as examples, even as ones that can be somehow surpassed through the enablement of the Spirit.[120]

Dependence on the Spirit indicates the necessary priority of relationship with God before it is possible to enact divine love in relation to others. Another way

---

[118] Necessity for this is also demonstrated in Zimmermann, who ends up vaguely concluding that images are ethical in that disciples and believers 'should and can also take over roles and images from Jesus' but goes no further ("Imagery", 39–40).

[119] E.g. Keener specifically distinguishes Jesus' 'ethical deeds' from his 'miraculous works', interpreting 14:12 as a reference to the latter (*John*, 946–947).

[120] Jesus' departure to the Father is connected to the sending of the Paraclete in this chapter (14:25–26, cf. 14:16). Whatever the implication of '*greater*' works is, that doing them depends on the Spirit is clear. The Spirit's leading the disciples into all truth (16:13) includes the ethical significance of Jesus' teaching as much as its theological significance.

to put this is that membership of the divine household is necessary before one can love or invite others. Again, this invitational aspect is carried out *through* the disciples' life of intimate mutual glorification (17:21). At the same time, the outward-facing character of Jesus' signs combined with his commissioning of the disciples (20:21, cf. 17:18) implies an explicitly missional dimension to the signs of love that are to characterise believers' lives. Indeed, without the holistic mundane engagement implied by the signs, the disciples would, in Gorman's words, be presenting '*a gnostic Jesus offering a gnostic salvation to potential gnostic believers who will engage in a gnostic mission*'.[121] Macaskill's comments on John 14 put the matter less polemically:

> 'The shared union between believers and the source of their salvation is constitutive of a community that is now incorporated into the divine fellowship of love, and Jesus's own works, as manifestations of love, have become the pattern for the believer's life'.[122]

It is worth noting once more that this life also comes with a negative side, namely the hatred of a moribund world to which believers are called to die.

A lesson in celebration?

We again turn briefly to John 2:1–11 in order to see how this ethical aspect plays a part in the story. This is the most counter-intuitive step to take in relation to an incident whose interpretation has been dominated by its character as a miracle and a symbolic foreshadowing of the messianic banquet.[123] However, we have already seen that Jesus' interactions, and not simply his capacity to transform one substance into another, reveal his nature. He affirms the cultural context of the wedding, including its social structure, and goes above and beyond what was normally expected in such situations (2:10). In this, he makes clear that social honour is not in itself a bad thing, only that it is *others'* honour that one should pursue. Moreover, Jesus is

---

[121] Gorman, *Abide and Go*, 63, emphasis original.

[122] *Union with Christ*, 264.

[123] 'God's reign would address the situation of poverty and hunger and oppression, Israel would be restored to its right relationship with God, and the land and people would find peace – a situation not infrequently depicted as people coming together in a great feast' (Loader, "Good News", 473).

inculcating a value in forward-looking celebration that suggests we should see the messianic banquet not only as a future reality to which people are to passively look forward but a mode of life that should be pursued in approaching the eschaton. Participation in the divine household is not only a matter of *right* relationships, but an abundance of intimate mutual glorification through mutual gift giving.

5. The foot washing among the σημεῖα as a sign of love

To draw this chapter to a conclusion I briefly summarise my argument and locate it in relation to the more standard reading of the signs that it serves to revise (5a). An adumbration of its implications for an ethical reading of the signs (5b), sets up the more detailed discussion of John 6 in the next chapter.

5a. An alternative reading and the scholarly consensus

My reading of the σημεῖα as 'signs of love' brings together the foot washing and the more standardly designated signs under one conceptual framework. There are certain lacunae in scholarship that indicate the need for a more integrated approach (section 1), for which the initial evidence of the text itself also leaves the door open (section 2). Interpreting the foot washing as a sign of love (section 3) integrates its diverse elements around the theological and ontological centre of divine love without restricting its generative potential as a paradigm. Where this potential may lead can already be see within the Gospel itself in Jesus' signs of love (section 4). These signify divine love by enacting it within the mundane sphere for the purpose of drawing people into cruciform participation in the divine household.

My interpretation may appear to be a total departure from standard readings of the signs, but it remains based in the broad lines of scholarly consensus.[124]

[124] Although what I am proposing here is fully in agreement with Thompson as far as she goes, she does not go far enough to make explicit that the faith which she rightly characterises as a 'commitment to life in the midst of death' must be patterned on Jesus' own walk in the world and thus implies an exemplary element in the signs ("Signs and Faith", 108).

Thus we recall the basic definition of a Johannine sign as a *public action of Jesus that reveals his identity through its divine character*. Where my reading departs is in the identification of Jesus' divine nature (and thus the character of the signs) as primarily one of love. It also sees 'public action' as a function of Jesus' mundane embeddedness rather than seeing the 'public' as a stage for divine revelation. Finally, it sees the purpose of revelation in terms of active participation in a relationship of love rather than focusing on the priority of 'believing' construed more as 'knowledge' or 'confession'.

The benefit of thus centring the interpretation of the signs around the concept of love as I have done is that there is continuity between Jesus' identity, the character of his actions, and what it means to 'believe' in him. This continuity far better suits the tightly integrated nature of Johannine thought than does the disjunctive reading of those who separate Jesus' conduct in John 1–12 from that in 13–21. Indeed, given the theological premise that we can derive from a reading of the Gospel as a whole (namely that God is love), minimising this dimension of the signs would be tantamount to saying that God is not being God, that Christ can reveal the divine nature without enacting it.

It is true that my reading requires that the foot washing retrospectively becomes something of a hermeneutical key for the rest of the signs. However, this is not at all problematic given that it comes in the part of John where what was previously implicit is made explicit to the disciples. Not only does Jesus speak with (perceived) new clarity (16:29) but the death and resurrection itself (20:8) yield new understanding of the preceding narrative. There is no need to assume that the author always makes explicit to the reader how later events in the Gospel are hermeneutically significant for previous ones. Indeed, the pneumatological procedure that this involves is an ongoing one; being led into all truth (16:13) does not happen overnight.

5b. Implications for an ethical reading of the signs

In terms of what my reading means for how we identify the Johannine signs, the most obvious upshot is that we need to expand their number well beyond seven. For if the signs are enactments of Jesus' divine nature of love, there is

no easy way to exclude *anything* that he does from the list. Again, this is not problematic; since the words of 20:30–31 seem to refer to the whole Gospel, it is more natural to include all the stories about Jesus as signs rather than only a few.

Therefore, how exactly we divide one episode from another becomes largely a literary operation rather than a theological one. At the very least one should add to the standard seven those incidents that explicitly reveal Jesus' divine identity. As an initial list, this means considering as signs the temple expulsion (2:13-25),[125] giving prophetic words to the Samaritan woman (4:7–26);[126] accepting an anointing (12:3-8, cf. chap. 7); washing feet (13:1-17); identifying himself powerfully to the mob (18:3-8); giving up his life – the ultimate sign of love (19:28-30); rising from the dead and appearing to disciples (20:1-29); and giving supernaturally successful fishing advice (21:4-8).

What ethical, and specifically socio-economic, import can be derived from these signs is a matter of studying each one individually. Certainly, it is not simply a case of replicating Jesus' actions, as Karakolis argues and as Attridge implies, albeit in his truncated presentation.[127] For it must be remembered that mimetic participation in divine love entails *not* direct replication but rather applying Jesus' paradigm according to the dynamics of the particular relationship within which one is working. This means that believers must first understand their relationship to Jesus. From this, it is clear that their relationship to each other is different to Jesus' relationship to them. Moreover, just as Jesus relates differently to those with whom he is in a relationship of friendship to that of Rabbi-disciple (or defendant, e.g. 19:8–11), so there is a need for an interplay between social convention and the unworldly nature of divine love. All this will inevitably remain on an abstract level unless we look

---

[125] It would take its own argument to draw out the ethical significance of this episode. However, maintaining the (albeit temporary) locus of worship is simply part of what it means to establish the divine household in the mundane sphere. It is not for nothing that Jesus calls the temple τὸν οἶκον τοῦ πατρός μου (2:16).

[126] Insofar as Jesus' interaction with the Samaritan woman came to a revelatory climax in his prophetic words, it is a sign.

[127] Attridge, "Signs Working", 12. Karakolis basically describes Jesus' actions as things that the disciples should do, minus their supernatural dimension ("Sēmeia", 207–212).

in more detail at an example. Thus we turn next to the passage that represents by far the stiffest challenge to my reading of the signs. It will serve as both a test case and an opportunity for developing my interpretation practically.

Chapter 6 – From Heavenly Bread to Mundane Life: The Radical Alternative of the Divine Household

The conception of ethics in John developed thus far is something of a mouthful: *mimetic participation in the divine household through cruciform love in the mundane sphere*. That this has, as yet, yielded nothing by way of practicable action is somewhat ironic. For the whole premise of this thesis is that we must find a way to emerge from the submarine depths of this 'spiritual Gospel' to the dry land of its practical implications. Yet we have also seen how difficult it is to apprehend the divine and mundane composition of these depths, making a rapid process impossible. Therefore, the lengthy navigation of the Gospel's thought has been necessary for us to be able to construe the holistically engaged community it engenders as an organic part of its message rather than an appendage. Having reached our final main chapter, socio-economic ethics will come into view as the tip of the Johannine iceberg, with the full weight of its message behind it.

My argument in this chapter is that the ethics of John is epitomised by a household community at whose centre is a meal whose bounty is accessible to all, regardless of socio-economic status. Mutual love is at the heart of this household's dynamics, a love that gives one's self for others' glory by addressing their mundane need with intimacy and abundance. It is neither exclusive nor hostile to outsiders and yet, because of its distinction from a social order that rejects real relationship with God and others (which is life itself), it is subject to rejection.

The approach in this chapter is to deploy my proposed interpretation of the signs as 'signs of love' to a reading of John 6. This will not only enable me to test my proposal against the Gospel's most ostensibly resistant text but also to develop it in a practical direction. I begin (section one) by setting out the objections to interpreting Jesus' feeding of the five thousand in terms of Johannine love ethics (1a). I then counter these in terms of what (1b), how (1c)

and why (1d) Jesus' sign signifies, with a conclusion that delineates how it is a sign of love (1e). It is a *sign* of love because it is Jesus' *enactment* of divine love, in which he gives himself and makes himself known through the mundane gift of bread in order to invite participation in the divine household.

After having established the general merits of interpreting John 6 as a sign of love, I then offer an alternative reading of the episode that brings out its implications for socio-economic ethics (section two). I do this by focusing on two particular aspects of the feeding sign that I have not yet explored up to this point. These are its connection to the crucifixion (2a) and the nature of the paschal meal that the narrative connotes (2b).

I then integrate these elements into an account of the socio-economic dynamics of the community to which the Gospel gives rise (section three). This will entail showing how the sign of feeding and the foot washing are mutually informative for discerning the paradigm of Johannine love (3a). I then put the signs of love into a broader historical context that brings to the surface their socio-economic import (3b), before briefly concluding the chapter (section four).

1. Facing the challenge of John 6

John 6 is the ideal test case for my interpretation of the signs for several reasons, quite apart from the fact that its direct subject matter is material provision for a hungry crowd. The feeding of the five thousand is in fact unique among the signs as being the only one whose identification as such is both explicit and unanimously identified as a sign by all parties in the narrative. Firstly, the narrator places the people's identification of Jesus' sign in a subsidiary clause (…ἰδόντες ὃ ἐποίησεν σημεῖον…, having seen the sign which he did 6:14), thus endorsing their assessment of it. Later, Jesus upbraids the crowd for not having seen his action as they should have (ζητεῖτέ με οὐχ ὅτι εἴδετε σημεῖα, you seek me not because you saw signs, 6:26), thus endorsing its status as a sign.[1] Moreover, the discourse based on the sign (6:26–71) is one of

[1] The plural in 6:26 appears strange, but it refers back to the introduction to the narrative.

the longest in Jesus' public ministry, and, unusually, maintains its focus on the sign itself throughout.[2] Thus it provides plenty of material with which my reading can engage. Finally, the geographical (6:1) and temporal (6:4) markers around the passage sets the narrative firmly within history.[3] This is important because addressing the socio-economic significance of the sign in any detail requires closer attention to questions of historical context than we have hitherto needed to pay.[4]

1a. Objections to reading John 6 as a 'sign of love'

My reading of the signs as I have developed it thus far would suggest an interpretation of John 6 as follows:

> Jesus' feeding of the five thousand is a sign of love in which he enacts and reveals divine nature through relational engagement in the mundane sphere for the sake of people's participation in the divine household.

This is very different to a more standard reading of John 6, which differs in the three main components of the interpretation of the sign. These are, respectively, *what*, *how* and *why* the sign of the feeding signifies. A more standard interpretation could be construed as follows:

> *What* the sign signifies is Jesus' life-giving encapsulated in the phrase 'I am the bread of life'; *how* it signifies is through the illustration of the multiplied bread and *why* the sign signifies these things is for people to believe and (in

---

Here, the author explains the crowd's presence on the basis that they had seen his previous signs (ἐθεώρουν τὰ σημεῖα ἃ ἐποιει, 6:2). Whether or not the difference between verbs for 'seeing' is significant, the point is that Jesus (in 6:26) is placing his act of feeding amongst his other revelatory deeds.

[2] There is a narrative interlude after the sign where Jesus walks on water (6:16–21) and the crowds try to locate him (6:22–25). These are by no means incidental to the shape of the chapter as a whole but are peripheral to my concerns and will be treated only briefly in what follows.

[3] It is notable in this regard that this is the only one of Jesus' miracles to be recorded by all four canonical Gospels. Ruiz even notes that the Johannine account adds a touch of historical realism absent in the Synoptics with Philip's reference to an exact amount of money in 6:7 ("Temple Commerce", 5–6). None of this is proof for its historicity of course, but it strongly implies that the author *presents* the episode as historical.

[4] Dodd's idea that the narrative's force 'is not essentially different from the relation where the symbol is invented for the purpose' reflects a Platonic view whereby 'the feeding of the multitude with loaves *is* the nurturing of the soul with life eternal' (*Interpretation,* 140). Dodd can only dismiss the importance of history under the apparent assumption that interpreting it requires no process of ethical discernment in relation to the real-life context within which Jesus is portrayed to act.

so doing) receive eternal life (6:68).[5]

In terms of any material dimension of the sign that may have socio-economic significance, the physical aspects of the incident are generally attributed only illustrative value, as Keener's perspective suggests:

> 'The feeding miracle points to a deeper Christological interpretation: Jesus is not merely a new Moses providing a sample of new manna, but he is heaven's supply for the greatest need of humanity'.[6]

Thus it is not surprising that this chapter is rarely considered to have ethical significance, even by those whose focus is Johannine ethics.[7] As in the quotation from Keener, much scholarly discussion surrounds the pericope's contextualisation within messianic hopes of new exodus or early Christian eucharistic practice.[8] Such issues are not irrelevant to my concerns as will be seen by my own interpretation in the next section. In fact, all of the features of the standard reading that I have highlighted have strong textual bases. These features must thus be properly acknowledged here in order to move on to propose a responsible alternative that modifies rather than tries to supplant it.

---

[5] Two prominent examples of those who articulate this basic understanding are Beasley-Murray (*John*, 97–98) and Koester (*Symbolism*, 94–104), who will provide two of the main interlocutors for what follows.

[6] *John*, 663. Cf., later, 'he is not merely, like Moses, the mediator of God's gift; rather he himself is God's gift' (p. 675). 'John's words invite his audience to look to Christ's death itself, not merely those symbols which point to his death' (p. 690). My concern in this chapter is with the word 'merely'. I will show in what follows that Jesus' mediation of God's gifts and the symbolic mode of appropriating his death are ethically important and must be given their proper due.

[7] Trozzo explicitly says that John 6:28 negates any import the passage may have for social ethics (*Exploring*, 94), though later seems to contradict this (p. 174). Andrew Glicksman draws attention to the food and drink imagery in John but connects it only indirectly to ethics via its symbolisation of wisdom ("Beyond Sophia: The Sapiential Portrayal of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel and its Ethical Implications for the Johannine Community" in *Rethinking*, 83–101). Collins mentions the ethical significance of feeding a hungry crowd but does not develop it ("Follow Me", 54–60). Rushton, who interprets every episode according to a similar ethical pattern, comes up with a reading similar to mine (*Cry*, 72–84) and will be referred to below (2b, 3a).

[8] Gerry Wheaton's remark on scholarship shows how these actually belong together since 'the festal background in John 6 is often regarded as contributing to a new exodus theme or the establishment of a new Passover, namely the Eucharist, in the body and blood of Jesus' (*The Role of Jewish Feasts in John's Gospel* (Cambridge: CUP, 2015), 3). Michaels points out that the eucharistic reading of the chapter, especially 6:41–59, 'begins even with the manuscript tradition' (*John*, 395).

What it signifies: Jesus' life-giving power

There initially seems to be no ambivalence in the text about what the sign signifies: Jesus gives the bread in order to signify his Christological identity as the one with the power to give life. Indeed, the progression of Jesus' argument upon encountering the crowd for the first time after the incident is unmistakable. He begins by pointing out that the people have not really understood the sign; if they had, they would have sought out the eternal life offered by Jesus himself instead of his material provisions (6:26–27). This they may receive through believing in him (6:29), the gift of God greater than manna (6:30–34), who is the actual bread of life (6:35).

The rest of the discourse expounds the meaning of this life in terms of resurrection on the last day (first mentioned in 6:39). This future eschatology stands in stark contrast to the popular response with which his actions were initially met, which was to set him in political leadership over them (6:14). His rejection of such a worldly role, retreating once more to the mountains (6:15), was a self-isolation seemingly apposite for one later called ὁ ἅγιος τοῦ θεοῦ (6:69).

Jesus' appearance to the frightened disciples walking on the water (6:16–20) seems to confirm the interpretation of the sign as a show of power over nature whilst making it clear that he will not exercise it according to popular expectations. One might thus conclude from this that what it means for Jesus to be the 'bread of life' is that his life-giving is mainly a matter of *power*. At the same time, this power is essentially apolitical and unworldly, experienced only as a prolepsis of life after death, rather than something that characterises present reality.[9]

[9] Beasley-Murray notes that Jesus disappoints the crowd's expectation for a political messiah, being instead the 'giver of spiritual bread of the kingdom of God' (*John*, 89), 'the life of the age to come' (p. 91). Although Beasley-Murray claims that there is continuity between this life and post-resurrection life, he gives no indication of what the episode says about the former apart from the ritual celebration of 'the feast of the kingdom of God… anticipating the last day' (p. 98). For Koester, John 6 engages the messianic expectation of the Prophet, which would have included kingly and miracle-working functions in bringing manna (*Symbolism*, p. 96, n. 37). In contrast, he says that for Jesus to be the bread of life is to bring 'life in relationship to God' (p. 100), without any necessarily physical component.

How it signifies: a material illustration of a spiritual truth

The food seems to serve simply as an illustration. There is no indication that the bread and fish that people have eaten have achieved anything in themselves. Eating does not even get the people any closer to believing in Jesus, hence his explanation of the sign's meaning meets with widespread rejection (6:66). Thus it seems clear that there is no value in the crowds' having eaten the bread that Jesus has given. Indeed, doing so has apparently made them more likely to *misunderstand* the sign.

So much does Jesus want to emphasise that the point of his action lies elsewhere than the bread itself (6:26) that he identifies himself as the bread of life (6:35) sent from the Father (6:44), directs them to eat this bread (6:51) and apparently interprets this as receiving his words (6:63b).[10] The basis of this last affirmation is a wholesale rejection of the efficacy of flesh to achieve anything:

> τὸ πνεῦμά ἐστιν τὸ ζῳοποιοῦν, ἡ σὰρξ οὐκ ὠφελεῖ οὐδέν· τὰ ῥήματα ἃ ἐγὼ λελάληκα ὑμῖν πνεῦμά ἐστιν καὶ ζωή ἐστιν (6:63).
>
> The spirit is that which gives life; the flesh does not profit anything. The words which I have spoken to you are spirit and life.[11]

There seems to be no room for physical food in this economy of divine action other than as an illustration of spiritual truth.[12]

Why it signifies: to point to eternal life so that people believe

That the purpose of Jesus' sign is to bring people to believe and receive

---

[10] That any kind of physical eating and drinking at all is irrelevant seems confirmed by 6:51, which is generally seen as a reference to belief, unless it is given a eucharistic meaning.

[11] This is a difficult passage in terms of pneumatology. However, whether Jesus is referring to a personal Spirit or a more general 'spiritual' reality, the relevant point for me is that this verse has often been read to be making a separation between two *realms*. Hence Eric Eynikel's claim that 'the Gospel of John witnesses another way of thinking: there are two worlds, the world of the spirit and the world of the flesh' ("The Qumran Background of Johannine Ethics" in *Rethinking*, 102).

[12] Koester states that with the feeding itself, 'the bread the crowd received could sustain them physically, but it pointed to a gift that would sustain them eternally' (*Symbolism*, 99). The sign in this case plays no more than an illustrative role, as it does for Beasley-Murray (*John*, 97–98).

eschatological life is perhaps the clearest aspect of the passage. No less than four times does Jesus refer to resurrection on the last day (ἐν τῇ ἐσχάτῃ ἡμέρᾳ, 6:39, 40, 44, 54) as that which he is offering. That Jesus will do this for those who believe in him is equally clear; he reiterates this four times (6:35–36, 40, 47, 64) after his initial statement to that effect (6:29).

Moreover, the latter statement ostensibly excludes any requirement on the part of his hearers apart from believing. Certainly no other requirement is mentioned; the eucharistic overtones could refer to a *means* of believing, but not an additional requirement. In fact, Peter's declaration at the end of the discourse indicates that the disciples – minus Judas Iscariot (6:71) – have got the message: Jesus' words bring eternal life (ῥήματα ζωῆς αἰωνίου ἔχεις, 6:68). The implication then is that those who receive Jesus' words have believed in his identity (6:69), with nothing further required.[13]

The challenge of a reasonable reading

Combining these three aspects of the interpretation of John 6 gives a fairly straightforward reading of the narrative that corresponds to the standard one outlined above. Through miraculously feeding a large crowd, Jesus reveals himself as the bread of life, the one sent by God to be believed in for the reception of eternal life experienced primarily after they die in this world.

Therefore, I now turn to re-evaluate these three core affirmations with the caveat that my response to these affirmations does not aim to directly refute any of them. Rather, I reframe *what* the sign signifies as Jesus' life-giving identity, only seen within the theological priority of God as love. This allows us to conceive *how* the sign signifies, by the mundane medium of bread whose reception is not merely *illustrative* but a necessary (though not sufficient) component of the life Jesus brings. Finally, *why* the sign signifies is not only to provide something in which people believe and have eternal life but also to be

[13] For Koester, 'people partake of the crucified Jesus through faith. "To eat" is "to believe"' (*Symbolism*, 103). Beasley-Murray accepts a eucharistic reading only with the qualification that the priority of belief guards against the idea of the necessity of eucharistic elements for one's eternal life (*John*, 95).

the means of people's mundane participation in this life within this eschatological horizon. Thus the aim is to encourage a revised perspective on John 6 according to the 'signs of love' that I have proposed in chapter five.

1b. What the sign signifies: life-giving power as a function of love

Jesus' feeding certainly reveals that he is the bread of life. But what exactly is it about him giving this life that the story draws attention to? My argument is that his expression of power, undoubtedly an aspect of the incident, should be subordinated to his enactment of love.

The narration of the sign itself

Jesus' express motivation for doing what he does is the desire to feed a crowd that needed food (6:5–7).[14] His testing Philip by asking him how this could be done need not cast aspersions on his motives, as if it were some kind of charade.[15] Such a suggestion would posit a disjunction between Jesus' divine nature and his mundane relational interactions, as if he had to use pretended material concern as a front for something completely different that motivated him. This would fit far less well with the Johannine understanding of God than the integration of nature and action that is entailed by positing love as the centre of divine ontology.

If the incident were orchestrated to be a show of divine power the story would be told very differently. For even as Jesus distributes the food, the power by which it multiplies is hidden from both those present and the reader.[16] Moreover, Jesus takes a position of service, doing all the painstaking work of distribution himself rather than producing all the food at once and getting his

[14] Even Beasley-Murray comments upon this possibility, though he does not acknowledge its potential importance: 'that the event was an act of compassion on the part of Jesus is not mentioned by John (contrast Mark 8:2–3), but may have been assumed' (p. 88).

[15] Michaels claims exactly this, saying that Jesus 'feigns anxiety about a food shortage in order to elicit a reaction from his disciples' (*John*, 344–345).

[16] Again, Schnelle's beholdenness to the equation of signs with miracles leads him to observe the exact opposite, referring to 'the intensification of the miraculous' in the story ("Signs", 233).

disciples to dole it out themselves. As well as humility, this bespeaks a level of intimate involvement with people that goes well beyond mere functionality (6:10–11).

Although the crowd's reaction is usually highlighted in terms of the deficiency of understanding it displays, there is no indication that they are wrong to receive and eat the food. Jesus' act of thanksgiving (6:11) models an attitude of gratitude that should have been their own response, which has theological import that is generally ignored. For Jesus sees the provision of bread as a gift to be received from the Father (6:11).[17] Moreover, this interaction follows the pattern articulated in John 17 whereby, rather than always involving direct reciprocation, the mutuality of Father-Son love is often enacted through acts of giving to people. That his action is described using this same language of gift (διέδωκεν τοῖς ἀνακειμένοις, 6:11) confirms that his desire to feed people (6:5) was primarily an enactment of love rather than a show of power. Seen within this understanding of the Johannine vision of God, Jesus' revelatory or didactic intentions are not negated but, rather, contextualised within a more fundamental enactment of love.

Certainly, power is at work, but its expression through an offering from a child rather than a sensational creation of food (6:8–9) indicates that the very notion of power being communicated is subverting the conventional one. Yet does not the fact that, soon afterwards, Jesus walks on water directly contradict this point? Its twofold uniqueness in fact suggests otherwise. Firstly, it is the sole occurrence of a sign where supernatural power is exercised without any direct benefit for people's mundane needs. Secondly, it is the only sign in John 1–12 done privately before the disciples.

These factors combine with important theological consequences: it is only when there is no danger of Jesus being misunderstood that he reveals himself this way. The disciples, as his constant companions, will not mistake this revelation as a sign that his divine nature is one characterised primarily by power, as

---

[17] Jan Heilmann points out that, far from having a restrictedly eucharistic usage, the verb εὐχαριστέω 'refers primarily to the common Jewish practice of thanking (blessing) God for bread prior to eating a meal' ("A Meal in the Background of John 6:51–58?", *JBL* 137/2 (2018), 494).

popular conceptions seemed to have it. Moreover, even this action belongs within a more fundamental mode of relating to his disciples in love; his aim is not to overawe the disciples but to make himself known and thus to be received by them. At the end of the incident, this is exactly what happened: ἤθελον οὖν λαβεῖν αὐτὸν εἰς τὸ πλοῖον (6:20–21).[18]

The discourse that follows

When one approaches the discourse beginning in 6:26 from the perspective that Jesus has just performed an act of love, certain aspects of the exchange make more sense.[19] Jesus' identity as the bread of life for the world stands in continuity with the divine nature of love seen through the Father-Son relationship. This continuity – between intradivine and divine-human relationship – is a key aspect of John that is obscured when Jesus' messianic role is understood primarily in terms of power. Nowhere is this continuity seen more clearly than when Jesus, again using the language of gift, talks of self-giving for the world (6:51) on the back of his previously being given (though the verb is 'sent') by the Father (6:44).[20]

This latter verse also makes it clear that the final goal in all this is intimacy of relationship. Accordingly, the life that is given is intended to be not an individualised possession but a relational reality. Resurrection, which leads to life (6:39, 40, 44, 54) is not primarily the biological revivification of an individual body but the bringing of a person out of separation from God into relationship with him and others (cf. above, chap. 4, 3e). There is in all this, therefore, deep consistency between what Jesus does and what Jesus reveals of himself.[21] Jesus enacts self-giving love for the sake of relationship and thus

---

[18] That this is fully compatible with a reading that highlights Jesus' fulfilment of Jewish messianic expectations is aptly illustrated by Beasley-Murray's comment that in the walking on the sea, 'the Evangelist was describing an event in which he saw Jesus as the revelation of God coming to his disciples in distress – *in the second Exodus!*' (*John*, 89, emphasis original).

[19] The very fact that he is able to be found at all means that he wants to be found and wants the crowd to know him. Jesus is only found or apprehended in John when he wants to be.

[20] This theme is brought out with the preponderance of gift language in the discourse (6:26–6:71), with the verb δίδωμι appearing no fewer than eleven times in the passage.

[21] As Michaels notes, in line with the mode of symbolism that I am arguing for, the crowd 'have asked to see a sign, and Jesus has told them that he is the sign' (*John*, 376).

reveals himself as the God of love whose nature is to give intimately and abundantly within a perpetual mutuality. This is the love that Jesus enacts powerfully in relation to the world. The power displayed is a power of love; it is not a love of power.

1c. How the sign signifies: material participation

Through emphasising the identity of God as love, I have posited the identity of the sign and signified (cf. chap. 5, 3a). As such, the idea that the mode of expression is somehow arbitrary or purely transparent is already logically untenable. Indeed, my reading thus far would suggest an interpretation of the bread not only as an *illustrative pointer* but rather as a *gift in its own right*, by which those receiving really do participate in the divine economy.[22] Such is the implication of the theological framework that we have been developing: divine love is enacted through the mundane sphere in a way that is received *through* the physical, social and economic dimensions of Jesus' actions rather than *despite* or *apart from* them.

Thus the food given by Jesus is itself important. However, it is not only the food; it is the mode of relating through which he gives it. Worth recalling at this point is that part of the means of Jesus' love is his interaction *through* socially conventional relationships; his identity is never exclusively divine. In this incident it is particularly clear that Jesus is relating to his disciples and the crowd according to his social identity of a Rabbi.

Jesus' posture throughout is one of teaching (6:3), he is addressed by the crowd as 'Rabbi' (6:25) and the scene of the discourse imperceptibly shifts to the synagogue (6:59). Chilton points out that this rabbinic title, shortly preceding the Christological affirmation 'I am the bread of life' (6:27), is frequently strategic in John. This strategy 'intends a theology of Jesus' pre-existence as the son of man and uses rabbi as an introductory counterpoint'.[23] Moreover,

---

[22] Käsemann illustrates the need to address the nuances of the relationship between these things when he points out that in the Gospel 'bread/life/water/light should be taken to point to the ultimate reality, but too often become substitutes for it' (*Testimony*, 51).

[23] Chilton, "Jesus as Rabbi", 53–54.

Nicodemus' address of Jesus (3:2) shows that the signs are part of this divine-human identity and not the exclusive property of the former of these two elements (cf. chap. 2, 2c–d).

However, we still need to respond more specifically to the aspects of this passage that appear to make my reading untenable. The focal point of the challenge we must face is a verse to which we have already drawn attention:

> τὸ πνεῦμά ἐστιν τὸ ζῳοποιοῦν, ἡ σὰρξ οὐκ ὠφελεῖ οὐδέν· τὰ ῥήματα ἃ ἐγὼ λελάληκα ὑμῖν πνεῦμά ἐστιν καὶ ζωή ἐστιν (6:63).

This is Jesus' apparently programmatic statement in response to the increasing grumbling of his interlocutors. Emphatic in the apparent denigration of the flesh, this pronouncement makes it difficult to see what positive role there may be for physical food save as a foil for the real thing, the spiritual food received verbally. Yet there are strong reasons to reconsider this conclusion.

The exclusionary rhetoric of John 6:63 is not necessarily as absolute as it may appear (as similar rhetorical examples elsewhere suggest).[24] Taking 6:63 this way hints at the importation of alien dualisms into the interpretation of John that has come under increasing critique.[25] Moreover, the temptation to read an absolute spiritual-material opposition into these words flies in the face of the whole Gospel's message of a God who gives life through his enfleshed son.[26] Indeed, there is nothing in John that would allow one to conclude that a human's spiritual life can exist without its physical dimension.[27] By the same rationale, one might suggest that Jesus is not isolating words from their

---

[24] Jesus' injunction shortly before this to 'work not for the bread that perishes but for the bread that remains for eternal life' (6:27) is not a ban on labouring for basic needs. Likewise, his saying that he chose the disciples rather than vice versa does not deny the veracity of the account in John 1:35–51, which portrays the disciples taking certain initiatives.

[25] Koester specifically repudiates the kind of anthropological dualism that some see in John 6:63, arguing that Jesus 'takes people as whole beings in relation to God' (*Symbolism*, 120).

[26] Hence Lee sees the message of John 6 as the following: 'God's means of salvation is not by means of a disembodied Spirit but rather through the Spirit operative in the incarnation: in this narrative, through the flesh and blood of the Johannine Jesus' ("Creation, Ethics and the Gospel of John" in *Johannine Ethics*, 250).

[27] That the same is true vice versa is hinted at by Koester in saying that 'both thirst and uncleanness are ultimately separation from God, with their resolution being reconciliation' (*Symbolism*, 200–206).

material context. Accordingly, a better reading of this verse is to say that life is in 'the flesh that is vivified by the Spirit'.[28] Jesus' messiahship does not bring eternal *instead of* earthly life, but rather *through* and *in addition to* it, *transforming* it in the process.

Jesus' revelation of himself in John 6 therefore depends on the mundane reality of what he does. Robert Song, one of the few to recognise this clearly, puts it thus:

> 'The miracle is not just a sign that shies away from itself, a sermon illustration that can be dispensed with once the point has been grasped. It also embodies that which it signifies: the feeding of the five thousand could not be a sign of the bread that gives eternal life if the five thousand had not been fed'.[29]

Whatever combination of 'word and sacrament' may be implied here, true believing entails a receiving that, though going *beyond*, does not *bypass* physicality. The physical provision of food was necessary, but not sufficient for the communication of life that he brought. The God of Israel known in Jesus does not stop being the one who provides for mundane need in a way that sacralises the physical. Conversely, rightly receiving these gifts entails an active participation that cannot but involve one's whole self. Thus we can explain why it is that eating the bread makes no difference to the crowd's level of comprehension. Just as Judas receives the foot washing but does not receive Jesus, so it is with John 6; receiving the bread should have led to a right receiving that also received Jesus. He wanted the people to eat and be filled as part of their experiencing the life-giving power of his love for the ultimate aim of their participating in the divine household. The message was in the medium, a fact not lessened by people's rejecting the former and accepting the latter.

---

[28] Behr poses this as an alternative to those who are worried about mechanical efficacy, 'as if these physical elements themselves, without the Spirit and faith, suffice' (*John the Theologian*, 154).

[29] Robert Song, "Sharing Communion: Hunger, Food, and Genetically Modified Foods" in *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics* (London: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2004), 390–91). It is perhaps no coincidence that this unconventional observation comes from outside of Johannine scholarship.

1d. Why the sign signifies: eternal life entails relationship

Once again, the logic with which I have been operating in explicating the *what* and the *how* of the feeding in John 6 already implies certain things about the *why*. As a sign that reveals Jesus' identity as the God of love, it is to be received in all its mundane dimensions as part of a fundamental reception of the Son himself. Already in the receiving, there is therefore an ethical moment that characterises the act, both as a general part of what it means to believe and as the passive side of the sharing of food that Jesus hereby implicitly inculcates. However, we need to square this contention with the repeated insistence that the life being given by Jesus is eschatological, and even future (6:39, 40, 44, 54). Indeed, there is nothing in the text itself that explicitly attributes Jesus with advocating a certain lifestyle in the here and now.

It is clear that the ultimate purpose of what Jesus does is eternal life that involves being raised from death. However, the reality of a future existence of glory stands in continuity with mundane life insofar as one is living in relationship to God through Jesus (cf. 17:3, chap. 2, 2h).[30] Just as the inevitability of Jesus' own death and resurrection in no way lessens the significance of his mundane conduct, so it is in this case. The only way to resurrected life is holistic engagement in the world now, pursuing a community of intimacy and abundance in relation to God and others. As the enactment of divine love, it is therefore revelatory (and fundamentally offensive) to the world (chap. 4, 3e). Thus the question of ethics is not *excluded* but rather *framed* by the eschatological ultimate towards which the discourse points.

1e. Jesus' feeding of the five thousand as a sign of love

The feeding of the five thousand is a sign of love. By it, Jesus enacts divine love by giving the gift of bread to people in order that they may participate in the divine household, which is eternal life. This participation is not only a matter

[30] Again, a more developed Johannine pneumatology than I am pursuing in this thesis would bring into relief the role of the Spirit in the capacity to experience this relationship, especially in light of John 14:16–21.

of receiving the life-giving food but also of receiving the life-giver. Therefore, I am not rejecting the standard reading whereby Jesus feeds the crowd in order to signify his nature as the one who gives eternal life so that people may believe. Rather, I am modifying it: Jesus' life-giving is a function of divine love and the signification of this is *through mundane interaction*, including the material gift of food. The purpose of this is, in the first instance, believing, but this is inseparable from a whole-life commitment to participate in the divine household. As such, it has social consequences that Jesus' love command bases on his own paradigm of the foot washing, which in turn is paradigmatic for his signs of love. Within this conceptual framework, Jesus' feeding of the five thousand is a key part of the Gospel's ethical message.

2. Establishing the divine household: an alternative reading of John 6

What significance does seeing John 6 as a 'sign of love' have for Johannine ethics? I have shown how objections to its being thus read as an ethical text can be satisfied, but now we must move beyond this level of generality. Thus my next task is to offer a plausible alternative reading that bears socio-economic fruit.

A degree of humility is necessary in this endeavour. For in attempting to be more specific about a passage's meaning, the danger is that one feels compelled to offer a proposal that claims exclusive validity. Yet there are so many fruitful ways in which John 6 can be read that this approach is self-defeating. This is why my aim is to provide a *plausible* reading for socio-economic ethics. By this I mean a reading that brings to the text a strong theological rationale derived from the Gospel as a whole and yet respects the details of this passage. Moreover, its plausibility will need to be tested by whether or not its ethical content is practicable, which in turn requires a more detailed historical perspective than that with which I have hitherto worked.

Therefore, my reading of John 6 approaches the text with an understanding of Johannine ethics as mimetic participation in the divine household through

cruciform love enacted in mundane engagement. What specific consequences this has can be brought out by attending to two aspects of the narrative that have not yet featured in the foregoing discussion: its connection to the crucifixion and its narrative shaping by the paschal meal.

2a. The cruciform context

For the σημεῖα to be signs of love is also for them to be cruciform, insofar as they partake of the divine narrative of the Gospel. I have shown not only how this applies in the case of the foot washing, but also how it is a feature of the more conventionally recognised signs. Likewise, the connection to Jesus' crucifixion is an essential element of the ethical significance of John 6. Appearing here are, in fact, all three of the ways in which I have already identified this connection to be made (chap. 5, 4a).

The first and the third of these – literary allusions and partaking in the narrative sequence that led to the cross – are relatively minor but still apparent. There are a number of such allusions to the Passion apart from the oft-noted eucharistic ones in 6:51–58 (which I will address shortly). These are quite subtle, as with the reference to the people's making Jesus king (6:15). This is precisely the charge that led to Jesus' execution; it is mentioned repeatedly during his trial before Pilate (18:33 – 19:16) and finally written above the cross (19:19). Another example is the phrase used about picking up the leftover bread (ἵνα μή τι ἀπόληται, in other that nothing may perish, 6:12), which has linguistic connections to his ensuring the safety of his disciples in the garden (18:9) as well as the overall purpose of his salvific mission (3:16).

In terms of how the feeding also connects to the cross through being part of the narrative sequence that led to his death, this happens in two ways. Firstly, Jesus' action is part of his public activity that generally piques the ire of the authorities. This is either because his popularity leads to his being heralded as king (6:14, cf. 11:47–48; 12:19) or because of the specifically theological offensiveness of his claims about himself (e.g. 6:41, 66). Secondly, however, the events of John 6 cement within his closest group the man who would betray him (6:70–71).

Eating the flesh given by Jesus

A more direct way in which the narrative is given a cruciform shape is in line with the second of the three factors I identified (chap. 5, 4a), namely the way in which Jesus enacts the same love as that ultimately manifest on the cross. Attention is drawn to this factor, perhaps more explicitly than with any other sign, by the following words of Jesus:

> ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ἄρτος ὁ ζῶν ὁ ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καταβάς· ἐάν τις φάγῃ ἐκ τούτου τοῦ ἄρτου ζήσει εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα, καὶ ὁ ἄρτος δὲ ὃν ἐγὼ δώσω ἡ σάρξ μού ἐστιν ὑπὲρ τῆς τοῦ κόσμου ζωῆς (6:51).
>
> I am the living bread which has come down from heaven. If someone eats from this bread, he/she will live forever; and the bread which I will give is my flesh for the life of the world.

This verse, along with the passage that follows it (6:52–58), reframes Jesus' giving of bread in the preceding sign. It can now be clearly seen that, in the feeding, Jesus is giving *of himself*. This is an act of serving, which also entails giving *from himself* from what he has himself been given, both in distributing the bread from the child (6:9) and, simultaneously, himself as a gift from the Father (6:11).[31] It an enactment of the same love as that which sees him lay down his life in order to give the life that had been sent by the Father (6:32–33) through whom he lives (6:57). Likewise, the bread must be received by eating (even 'chewing') and drinking his blood – ὁ τρώγων μου τὴν σάρκα καὶ πίνων μου τὸ αἷμα (6:56).

What this means ethically should be seen first of all in relation to Jesus himself. For the Christological emphasis in this passage is a microcosm of the relentless insistence of the Gospel that life can only be lived through the Son of God. Therefore, whatever else can be said about Johannine ethics from John 6, we must begin with this Christocentric affirmation of the relational imperative to believe. But does this mean that the social dimension is secondary or even arbitrary? Certainly the assumption is that all those who hear Jesus have the responsibility to respond as individuals. However, it is crucial to note the

---

[31] Recall that in John, giving *of* self is not theologically distinguished from giving *from* self (chap. 4, 2a).

significance of Jesus choosing the twelve:

> Οὐκ ἐγὼ ὑμᾶς τοὺς δώδεκα ἐξελεξάμην; (6:70).
>
> Have I myself not elected you, the twelve?

There is a corporate dimension to the believing that Jesus engenders. Indeed, both the verb ἐκλέγομαι and the number connote the election of Israel, which again speaks to the continuity between the Old Testament narrative and Jesus' establishment of the divine household in John.

If the call is for a corporate receiving of Jesus, what social form does it take? The term 'believing' in itself gives no indication of this, though its necessarily mundane context means it always implies such a form within which it is exercised. Taking the eucharistic overtones seriously makes sense here, since these connote a communal mode of receiving Jesus (even without positing a fully developed practice in the background).[32] Moreover, we have seen that the signs of love can be described as sacramental insofar as they entail receiving divine love through mundane engagement (chap. 5, 3b). That Jesus is pointing to a concrete form of action rather than a general principle also fits with what we saw about the paradigm of the foot washing, which maintains its generative potential only by attending to its particulars. But is the feeding of the five thousand also tied to the broader social engagement denoted by the foot washing's paradigm of love? In order to see how this is the case, we need to expand our idea of eucharistic practice not by going forward to early Christian history but backwards, to the connotations in John 6 of the paschal meal.

2b. The (political and eschatological) paschal meal

Jesus' death is associated with that of the paschal sacrifice in John and such resonances are present in this chapter.[33] However, apart from 6:51, it is not the

---

[32] Heilmann marshals the most up-to-date views on historical evidence to argue against a eucharistic background to the passage whilst noting the generative capacity of its language. He concludes that 'the text of the Gospel of John influenced the development of ritual, but ritual did not influence the text of John 6' ("John 6:51–58", 500).

[33] As has been pointed out, its combination with other imagery (particularly from Isaiah 53) is

act of atonement (connoted by the preposition ὑπὲρ) upon which the discourse focuses. What Jesus repeatedly draws attention to is the gift given through this death (namely life) and the way in which people receive it (6:27, 33, 35, 40, 47, 48, 53, 54, 63). As is typical in John, this receiving is through continual believing (hence the present tense verbs – 6:27–29, 40, 47), signifying relationship rather than a one-off exchange. This stands in continuity with the cultural practice of the Passover, whereby the goal of the paschal sacrifice was the communal meal (and thus ongoing life).[34] Theologically, this fits both with the fact that Jesus' sacrificial death is his self-giving into perpetual mutual glorification and the ethical corollary that the mundane life of love must thus also pass through death *en route* to this telos (chap. 4, 3e). In fact, the paschal meal gives shape to this life in a particular way, as emerges from tracing the theme of Passover through the narrative.

The feeding as a Passover narrative

From the beginning of the passage, the author frames the episode in relation to the Passover (6:4).[35] Whilst it appears in the following narrative in often subtle ways whose 'prominence must not be overstated,' there are indications that this feast shapes the whole meaning of the feeding.[36] The way in which Jesus' actions are described is key in this respect:

> ἔλαβεν οὖν τοὺς ἄρτους ὁ Ἰησοῦς καὶ εὐχαριστήσας διέδωκεν τοῖς ἀνακειμένοις ὁμοίως καὶ ἐκ τῶν ὀψαρίων ὅσον ἤθελον (6:11).

---

what imbues the notion of the 'lamb of God' with the notion of substitutionary atonement (Wheaton, *Feasts*, 89–91).

[34] Wheaton observes that although John 'cast Jesus as the paschal victim sacrificed on the cross at the same time as the lambs were being slaughtered in the Temple', scholarship has too often ignored the sacrifice's 'function as provision for the all-important paschal meal'. Thus 'John portrays Jesus as *the paschal lamb who must be eaten by all who would participate in the restoration of the community of the people of God effected by his death*' (p. 83, emphasis original).

[35] Hoskyns observes that 'the progression of John 6 from Moses to Jesus and bread to flesh is 'almost unintelligible unless the reference in v. 4 to the passover picks up 1:29, 36, anticipates 19:36… and governs the whole narrative' (*John*, 281). Behr, who makes even more of the fact, notes that 'the whole of John 6 is shot through with intertextual references to Passover themes', drawing numerous parallels (e.g. John 6:4/Exodus 12; John 6:5/Numbers 11:13; John 6:20/Exodus 3:14, 20:2) (*John the Theologian*, 148).

[36] Wheaton sounds this warning (*Feasts*, 99) despite making a long and rigorously argued case for a reading of John 6 in which the Passover is the chief hermeneutical key (*Feasts*, 93–126).

> Jesus then received the loaves and, having given thanks, distributed [them] to those reclining, likewise from the fish, however much they wanted.

As well as the theological resonances of receiving and giving, the cultural connotations are vital here. Giving thanks for bread this was a key act in the Passover ritual (even if it was also common mealtime practice); moreover Jesus gives it to those who are *reclining*, a very odd word to use unless a formal meal were being connoted.[37]

In addition to domestic practice, wider socio-political dynamics are invoked in Jesus' actions, as is brought into view by the rarely noted social character of the crowd. Whether the people in John 6 could not afford to go to Jerusalem or did not want to, they are disenfranchised by their absence from an event to which all Jews were encouraged to go.[38] Such alienation from the establishment is, in fact, already indicated by their traipsing around the country after a healer of the sick (6:2), not something that respectable members of society would do. Furthermore, the crowd's neediness is apparent from Jesus' reaction to seeing the crowd, which is immediately to think of feeding them (6:5). The fact that they have already eaten before noting the miraculous sign and make the (admittedly extreme) decision to make him king as a result (6:14), as well as Jesus' challenge to them later (6:26), all paint a picture of a crowd for whom food security was not to be taken for granted.

There is even a hint that Jesus' own absence from the feast (the only such recorded in the Gospel) indicates a critical stance towards an establishment that had restricted access to the goods of paschal celebration.[39] Jesus rarely levels such systemic critiques directly of course, but it is notable that he has previously done so in relation to the Temple's economic policy during the

---

[37] Robin Routledge explains these features of the Passover in "Passover and Last Supper," *TynBul* 53 (2002). 'To begin the meal proper, the host blessed the unleavened bread, broke it and shared it with those sitting around the table' (p. 215) and 'one feature of the meal was that the guests ate most of it reclining' (p. 209).

[38] Wheaton points out that 'participation in the festival essentially sealed one's participation in the covenant community' (*Feasts*, 123).

[39] Indeed, as Michaels notes, 'only this once does Jesus stay away from Jerusalem during a Jewish festival'. However, he neither sees any significance in this motif for the chapter as a whole nor acknowledges the socio-economic dynamics of the interaction Jesus goes on to have (Michaels, *John*, 340–343).

previous Passover (2:13–25).[40]

It is very likely, therefore, that Jesus' actions imply an economic dimension to participation in the divine household. However, this possibility needs to be supplemented by a consideration of the political angle of the situation. For the Passover's celebration of national deliverance quite naturally stoked revolutionary fervour.[41] This feast was not only a way in which to appropriate the deliverance of Israel from Egypt and confirm one's membership of the covenant people; it also looked forward to a further, and final, exodus under the new Moses, in which the twelve tribes would finally be gathered.[42] Economic significance was bound up with this political eschatology in that scarcity would be made a thing of the past.[43] At the same time, the gathering of the tribes itself (cf. 6:71) was also eschatological in a more other-worldly way, culminating in the celebration of the Messianic banquet.[44]

The fact that Jesus' actions explicitly addressed such heightened expectation explains the extreme reaction of the people to Jesus' feeding them in seeking to make him king.[45] Thus, despite rejecting the specific political advances of the crowds, Jesus' actions are not at all apolitical. He has miraculously provided a quasi-Passover meal *outside* of the Temple and its environs, enacting divine love in relation to those who, for whatever reason, are not taking part in the

---

[40] Ling notes that one of the effects of the Temple was that it 'bled the rural economy dry' (*Judaean Poor*, 84).

[41] Even if there are no recorded incidents of riots directly associated with it, Wheaton finds in Josephus evidence that the Passover intensified 'hope for liberation from the economic, social and religious oppression experienced under Herod', who was under Rome (*Feasts*, 85).

[42] Wheaton, *Feasts*, 81-7. This, as he later points out (p. 103), is the denotation of 6:12 and 4:34–38 before it, though I would want to add that it works as an additional meaning of Jesus' mundane concern to avoid waste and does not make the former a charade.

[43] Kenneth Hanson and Douglas Oakman show how such feasts provided a window into a new world of divine economy without the scarcity that blighted 'ordinary people' (*Palestine in the Time of Jesus* 2nd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2008), 137–143).

[44] This is indicated elsewhere in John as well such as the wedding in John 2 and the fish in John 21 (cf. Heath, "Good Christology", 522–524).

[45] Hence 'understanding him as one of the political leaders who claim to feed people but only try to stabilise their own power by symbolic acts of charity clearly is a misunderstanding' (Joachim Kügler, "Politics of Feeding: Reading John 6 (and 1 Cor 11) as Documents of Socio-political Conflicts", Masiiwa Ragies Gunda and Kügler (eds), *The Bible and Politics in Africa* (Bamburg: University of Bamburg Press, 2012), 260).

feast in Jerusalem.[46] As happens so often in John, Jesus takes on the authority of the Jewish establishment embodied in the Temple and offers the gifts of God to those outside of the status quo.[47]

We may now put these observations together with what we have already seen and ask this question of the feeding of the five thousand:

> Why does Jesus enact a powerful sign of divine love characterised by physical nourishment, socio-economic inclusivity and religio-political radicality?

The answer that it is simply in order to communicate the necessity of individual acceptance of his identity for eternal life in the future is clearly inadequate. It is equally inadequate to suggest that he is instituting the Eucharist as a new ritual or becoming the host of an alternative Passover at the margins of society. All of these relational, sacramental and ethical elements must be integrated for a satisfactory understanding of this sign of love:[48] Jesus is establishing a divine household at whose centre is a meal in which he himself is ultimately the food and in which participation is not determined by the social status quo.

3. The socio-economic gospel according to John

Having looked in some detail at John 6, we are now able to branch out from there to take in the Gospel as a whole in its historical (and particularly *socio-economic*) context.

---

[46] Thus Wheaton states that 'the feeding of the crowd has been cast as a replacement Passover meal' (p. 108) whereby Jesus fulfils the promise of Isaiah 55:1–3 to feed people eschatologically.

[47] Coloe not only shows how Jesus embodies the temple but also how the idea is transmuted in John into a broader conception of 'God's dwelling place' that also applies to the community (*Dwelling*, 1–3).

[48] Rushton shows how not only these elements can be integrated but how one can add to this the sapiential images of the narrative to which I have not drawn attention. Thus 'by John 6, Jesus is established as Wisdom-Sophia and evokes this female figure who gathers her disciples' by the invitation to eat and drink (Proverbs 9:5) (*Cry*, 75, cf. Glicksman, "Beyond Sophia").

3a. John 6 and the foot washing paradigm

The challenge taken up at the beginning of chap. 5 was to draw out the generative potential of the foot washing paradigm. Seeing it as a sign of love allowed us to see Jesus' other σημεῖα as instances of the same paradigm. This interpretation has been strengthened by close attention to John 6, which appeared to offer the most resistance to being read in such a way. Having argued this reading, I am now able to move in the opposite direction, asking how Jesus' feeding of the five thousand informs our understanding of the foot washing paradigm and, as a result, Johannine ethics more broadly. In fact it does so in three ways.

Firstly, John 6 helps us see the paradigmatic import of a sacramental meal. The context of a meal is more than incidental to the meaning of Jesus' sign; it is a key part of his enactment of love in establishing a divine household.[49] That this applies to the foot washing is not surprising since abstracting it from its mealtime context would result in a culturally disjunctive and even arbitrary action. But what is implied from the eucharistic and paschal elements of John 6 is also *why* the sacramental aspect of the meal is important. For eating is not a merely material or even social act but is that by which one enacts the perpetual feeding on the life of Jesus (6:51).[50] As such, it involves his life-giving presence, which cannot be separated from the life-giving Spirit, who in turn comes with the words of Jesus (6:63).

This observation helps us to frame the sacramental meal within which the foot washing happens in relation to the broader aims of the Farewell Discourse to inculcate the believers' holistic life in which Jesus is present.[51] Within this broader liturgical purpose, it makes sense to see the explicit instructions of 13:14–15 as indicating a paradigm whose concrete adoption maintains the

---

[49] Rushton additionally points out that the pattern of 'meal, rejection and betrayal becomes apparent' in John 6, connecting it to the foot washing (*Cry*, 80).

[50] Michaels notes in reference to 6:56 that 'mutual indwelling expresses an intimate relationship between Jesus and his disciples, mirroring the relationship between God and Jesus' (*John*, 400).

[51] Coloe, who sees the foot washing as a sign (*Dwelling*, 140) sees the 'mutual immanence' addressed in 14:1–15:17 as an outworking of the reality that happens in that episode (p. 146).

Christocentric focus to which its various elements contribute rather than a single, abstract action.

Secondly, however, what I have described as 'sacramental' must not be set in opposition to the 'ethical'. For the foot washing remains an enactment of love that is generative of its enactment in other contexts. It has profound consequences for a cruciform life, which entails believers participating 'through their death in conformity with Christ' but is not restricted to the martyrdom that has been associated with it.[52] Indeed, the feeding sign confirms that attention to mundane need is a key aspect of Jesus' community-forming love, which may not be so clear to us from the example of washing feet alone.[53] Moreover, this broad category of need opens up other examples of how Jesus addresses it, not least in commitment to people's physical and economic capacity (5:1–9; 9:1–7). The objection to seeing such signs as exemplary is because of their expressly Christological and miraculous character. But when seen under the aegis of love, material concern is every bit as essential to the life of the community as is its liturgical practice.[54] In fact, since divine love is enacted through mundane relational interaction, it is already sacramental. Whether or not this happens miraculously is secondary, though there is no Johannine reason to say that it cannot do so.[55]

---

[52] The quote is from Behr (*Paschal Gospel,* 156). Behr's historical observation that what came earlier than words of institution was the association of Eucharist with martyrdom does not change the theological fact that martyrdom must be seen within the context of a wider life of discipleship in which Jesus is equally interested (cf. Michaels, *John*, 397, 402).

[53] Interpreters who work within a dualistic conception of the spiritual and mundane realms tend to miss this. Michaels is an interesting example. On one hand, he recognises that 'Jesus seems to want to incorporate the crowd into the existing group of itinerant disciples, buying food along the way and eating together as a community' (*John*, 344). Yet later he explains that the food is only a metaphor for the eternal food that leads to life and in no way participates in it (pp. 363–365). But by his own logic, the mundane dimensions of interaction between Jesus and the disciples has eschatological and not just temporary import. Indeed, Michaels acknowledges how the mundane aspects of Jesus' own death are vital in John. 'Flesh', he insists, is not 'a metaphor for Jesus' death' (p. 409) but a reference to the physical reality thereof.

[54] Barrett comments on sacraments that John 'is concerned to root their spiritual efficacy in the material, and the material in the real humanity of the Son of God' and even that 'Eucharistic union has an ethical aspect, because it involves love unto death, that of Christ in which believers participate through action' (*John*, 69, 71).

[55] Augustine is helpful here. Bringing together the features of power and goodness that he sees at work in the feeding of the five thousand ('non solum pro bonitate, verum etiam pro potestate'), he sees these within the broader reality of divine administration of the universal

Thirdly, the divine household is about something more radical than common sacramental meals and concern for basic needs: it is about glory, the glory of being children of God. It is notable in John 6 that the way that Jesus shares the bread and fish goes beyond the mere allocation of resources. He is far more intimately involved with the feeding than he would have to be to achieve the same material result. There is an intimate service in Jesus' actions that extends his role as a popular Rabbi to that of a host who draws people into a household relationship. He is the shepherd-king who gives his life for the sheep.[56] That both the feeding of the five thousand and the foot washing are framed by the Passover context is important in this respect. Though neither are conventional paschal meals, they connote the intimacy of that situation through engendering a household dynamic.[57]

Establishing the divine household is already a political action insofar as the statuses by which people would have understood themselves are nullified by the relationship into which Jesus draws them. Neither the marginalised people whom he feeds nor the disciples are treated according to their conventional social categories. Instead, Jesus treats them as children of God and invites them to belong, taking on a new identity. Taking this radical new identity constitutes a death to the world, whose life is ordered by a different force.[58]

3b. Signs of love in historical context

My reading of John 6 has brought us into closer contact with historical reality than has been the case in the rest of the thesis. This has been necessary in order to give a more detailed account of the socio-economic significance of its

---

creation ('universamque creaturam administrat'), which is for him a far greater miracle than simply feeding 5,000 men (Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, trans. John Rettig (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1988), XXIV, 1–3).

[56] As Kügler comments in relation to John 6, he is 'a king who gives his life as the ultimate sign of love' ("Politics", 272).

[57] Routledge points out that even though it was celebrated in the Jerusalem Temple, 'Passover continued to be a family celebration', probably gathered in groups (*Passover*, 207), even if there were too many to actually fit within the precinct themselves.

[58] Cf. Heilmann, who comments that Jesus' exemplary death 'does not mean martyrdom in the usual sense but the *social death* of the disciples who believe in Jesus and will therefore be hated by the world' ("John 6:51–58", 493, emphasis original).

sign of love. In order to flesh out some of the additional conclusions that I have reached by seeing the feeding of the five thousand in conjunction with the foot washing paradigm, a clearer picture of the relevant context will be helpful.

Often the debate about the socio-economic situation of the ancient world gets mired in quantitative issues upon which it is notoriously difficult to reach consensus.[59] Indeed, there is inherent difficulty attached to precision in relation to all such matters of New Testament background (not just with John) due to the paucity of relevant evidence.[60] However, a qualitative description is not only possible but actually more helpful for my purposes.[61] Indeed, the broad outlines of such a description is not particularly controversial.[62] There are three of its features whose relevance for Johannine ethics I want to draw out. These I will look at under the headings of the ubiquity and perpetuity of precarity, the foundational role of households and the priority of honour.

Before doing this, it is worth acknowledging that questions of Johannine historicity represent a quagmire into which one can easily sink with just one false step. However, the three points to which I want to draw attention here can be made from firm ground. For there is no disputing that the Palestine that

---

[59] For an insightful cross-section of the complexities involved in this debate see John Barclay, "Poverty in Pauline Studies: A Response to Steven Friesen," *JSNT* 268 (2004), 363–366. David Downs gives a broader overview of the discussion in *Alms: Charity, Reward, and Atonement in Early Christianity* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), 11–17.

[60] Hence Jack Pastor comments that that 'very little of the Christian literature deals with the daily economic life of later Roman Palestine' ("Trade, Commerce, and Consumption" in Catherine Hezser (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Daily Life in Roman Palestine* (Oxford: OUP, 2010), 301).

[61] Thus Peter Garnsey and Richard Saller comment that 'in class analysis, the search for the precise membership of classes, conceived as specific social entities, is a less fruitful approach than the identification of the processes by which social inequalities arose and were perpetuated' (*The Roman Empire: Economy, Society and Culture*, 2nd ed. (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 232).

[62] In what follows I draw on Roland Boer and Christina Petterson, *Time of Troubles: A New Economic Framework for Early Christianity* (Minneapolis, MI: Fortress, 2017) as well as Garnsey and Saller (*Roman Empire*). Ling's account in his *Judaean Poor* is helpful, and I also draw on relevant essays from *Jewish Daily Life* and the multi-volume *Cambridge History of Judaism* (henceforth *CHJ*) (vol. 1, William Davies and Louis Finkelstein (eds.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); vol. 2, Davies and Finklestein (eds.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); vol. 3, Davies, William Horbury and John Sturdy (eds.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

provides the setting for the Gospel is the Palestine of history.[63] There is also broad consensus that it was *not* written there but rather in an urban centre of the Roman Empire, probably Ephesus. My points here actually relate equally well to both of these contexts, as I will now show.

The ubiquity and perpetuity of precarity

It is particularly clear in John 6 that food security was a live issue and that this was not only due to agricultural factors but also political ones (6:14). In fact, such precarity was extremely common, making the question of mundane need a constant concern for many. Certainly, Palestine (especially Galilee) had potential for variegated and abundant provision due to the quality of natural resources and there is even a little evidence regarding trade, including some international.[64] However, common activities such as fishing never guaranteed success (21:4–6).

The overwhelming majority operated at or near subsistence level; Josephus and the Synoptics make it clear that 'life in rural Galilee was hardly the idyllic peasant utopia we often see represented in Jesus films'.[65] This agrarian dependence created a near constant risk of scarcity (hence the surprising abundance of Jesus' gift of wine, 2:6–8). Only very few would not have considered themselves to be living in a precarious situation.[66] Even in urban centres of the Empire, which would have housed more of the elite, agrarian dynamics were directly determinative of material wellbeing.[67]

---

[63] Even among those scholars who view the historicity of Jesus in John positively, it is still common to refer to 'the Johannine Jesus'. But the indisputability of Palestine in John being the same historical entity as is presented in the Synoptics is indicated by the fact that nobody ever refers to 'the Johannine Palestine' or 'the Johannine Jerusalem' etc (see, e.g., Anderson and Clark-Soles, "Introduction and Overview", *JJH3*, 8–10).

[64] See Zeev Safrai, "Agriculture and Farming", *Jewish Daily Life*, 251–252. Pastor notes the problematic evidential basis for trade in "Trade", 297–299.

[65] Robert Myles and Michael Kok, "On the Implausibility of Identifying the Disciple in John 18:15–16 as a Galilean Fisherman", *NovT* 61 (2019), 367–385; cf. Gildas Hamel, "Poverty and Charity", *Jewish Daily Life*, 308–309.

[66] Yet, as Garnsey and Saller observe, 'subsistence farmers were vulnerable but also resilient' (*Roman Empire*, 231).

[67] 'If cities were the hallmark of Roman imperial culture, the countryside continued to generate the bulk of economic production' (Garnsey and Saller, *Roman Empire*, 107).

Another factor in this socio-economic precarity was control of the land. This was not only because of the broader imperial control but also the model of tenant farming under local elites.[68] Although Roman military occupation in Palestine meant a certain security that guaranteed agricultural independence, it also endangered it through taxes, annexation and extortion (hence the anxiety of the Jewish leaders, 11:48), and freedom decreased under Herod.[69]

Whilst not being precarious in the same way, the situation of urban centres provided no guarantee of material wellbeing. Jerusalem remained under the control of the 'religious' authorities with the Temple at the heart of strategically granted Jewish authority, with certain economic benefits for being attached to them as well (thus the significance of Jesus' acts in 2:13–25).[70] This illustrates the wider point that, with no state welfare system, access to needed resources depended on relational networks. The kind of 'strings attached' were associated with patronage (which was often bound to the Roman military structure) or, within diaspora Judaism, synagogue participation.[71] If one was not in good standing with 'the world', in any of these manifestations, then this increased reliance on domestic structures, which brings us to our second point.

The foundational role of households

Overall wellbeing was thus guaranteed by one's local networks, starting with

---

[68] People would have wanted their own land, but at least they had security as tenants; 'access to land would make it possible to lead a life of food purity, offer sacrifices, pay tithes, be charitable, hire others, make better-suited marriages, and be properly buried' (Hamel, "Poverty", 313).

[69] This pattern had been operative since well before the Romans (Martin Hengel, "The Political and Social History of Palestine from Alexander to Antiochus III (333–187 B.C.E.)", *CHJ* vol. 2, 56–61). However, it was Herod who first actually controlled the land (Emilio Gabba, "The Social, Economic and Political History of Palestine, 63 BCE – CE 70", *CHJ* vol. 3, 107).

[70] Imperial rule was not monolithic. That it entailed different spheres of activity over which the Jews of Palestine would have had relatively more or less control had been the case even from the Persian period (Ephraim Stern, "The Persian Empire and the Political and Social History of Palestine in the Persian Period" in *CHJ* vol. 1, 78–87). Hamel notes that the Temple not only collected a lot in revenue, it also provided employment for many besides the priests who served there and was the centre of charity ("Poverty", 319).

[71] Trozzo's observation that 'Johannine believers saw themselves as threatened by the synagogue leaders and ostracized from their religious community' is 'evident in the Gospel regardless of the precise reconstruction of the historical situation' (*Exploring*, 114–115).

the households.[72] Their economic function was accentuated through including not only what has become known as 'nuclear family', but also extended and multi-generational family as well as workers and sojourners.[73] In the absence of state welfare, kinship and other local networks (around the Synagogue and business) were the most important source of protection for those unable to produce for themselves.[74] Indeed, the clear reliance of the early Church on houses as meeting places connects their patterns of worship to such practical contingencies.

Thus, even if we are not able to reconstruct the precise dimensions of the Johannine context, an interdependent community of networked households with mixed relationship to the Roman establishment will have been the frame within which it was read. Seen within this context, one cannot downplay the significance of the mundane dimension of Jesus' establishing a divine household.[75] That the practice of the community in meals and mutual service – both of which are sacramental without being limited to sacraments – would revolve around households simply makes sense. Indeed, there was no other way to guarantee the provision of basic need other than through strong household relationships. However, the Gospel's ethics of love is not merely about pragmatism, which brings us to our final point.

The priority of honour in an integrated society

A community whose members become 'children of God' gives the impression of sectarian unrealism that is ill suited to the harsh realities of 1st century life as I have portrayed it thus far. What could such a notion mean in this context? To

---

[72] As Alexei Sivertsev observes, there was some diversity in these, including with gender roles, and their social importance was broader than the domestic connotations of the word suggest. For 'only in more affluent Jewish households could there be a clearly articulated distinction between 'public' and 'private' spheres' ("The Household Economy", *Jewish Daily Life*, 236).

[73] Sivertsev, "Household Economy", 229–238.

[74] Likewise, there was no participatory democracy in which ordinary people (whether citizens or not) could hope to influence the structural forces that shaped the control of land. Thus households were largely prey to the vicissitudes of military and commercial interests of the powerful minority.

[75] A similar point could be made about the Johannine notion of κοινωνία (1 John 1:3, 6, 7), which has often been taken to denote a purely 'spiritual' reality.

answer this we must begin from the recognition that it was impossible to isolate the economic dimension from the others (as is already implied by the holistic function of households). Economic life, together with social, religious and political life, formed an integrated whole.[76] Socio-economic status was thus a function not only of an individual's productive capacity but also of the prevailing hierarchical power dynamics.[77] Therefore, being 'poor' was not simply a question of low net worth; it was (and is) an indication of one's inability to access resources mediated through relational networks.[78] Conversely, social status came from one's standing in these relationships and so was bound up with religious and political factors rather than being dictated by one's finances alone.[79] Thus Nicodemus's combination of social status (3:1, 10) and religio-political power (7:45–52) makes his apparent wealth (19:38–42) unsurprising.

As the measure of status, honour was thus more fundamentally valuable than money; by the same 'timocratic principles', being categorised as poor was a mark of dishonour.[80] Consequently, social hierarchies at all levels (domestic, local community, wider political) tended to be rigid and fiercely guarded.[81] Seen in this light, Jesus' willingness to dispense with his conventionally defined

---

[76]As Boer and Petterson put it, 'the ancient Greek and Romans or indeed any other ancient people did not operate within a horizon of thought, practices, and institutions that involved the categories many of us associate with economic analysis.' In fact, 'economic matters' are discussed in 'moral, social, and political terms' in any literature that hails from the time (*Time of Troubles,* p. xiii). Likewise, 'in Judaea, kinship, economics, and politics appear to be embedded in religion' (Ling, *Judaean Poor*, 91).

[77] 'Economic activity is inescapably social' (Boer and Petterson, *Time of Troubles*, 40).

[78] Even in the Old Testament 'the poor' is both about 'Israel in its need and desire for change and individuals within Israel', who were especially needy (Loader, "Good News", 472).

[79] Ling notes how the 'poor' in the LXX was never an exclusively 'economic' category (*Judaean Poor*, 98–100) and could even be a subversive mark of religious honour 'within first-century Jewish pietism' (p. 112).

[80] The phrase is from William Scheidel, "Stratification, Deprivation and Quality of Life" in Margaret Atkins and Robin Osborne (eds.), *Poverty in the Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 48). In the same volume, Osborne says that 'both in Greek city-states and during much of the Roman Republic, political status was of greater significance than levels of wealth. As a result, the poor were not thought of as a distinct group' ("Roman Poverty in Context", 6).

[81] A Marxist interpretation may ideologically posit such pursuit as 'the preserve of the wealthy', applying only to those who no longer had material concerns (Boer and Petterson, *Time of Troubles*, 89). But even evidence of Jesus' interactions in the Gospels (e.g. Mark 10:35–45) countermands this, not to mention Boer and Petterson's own reference to social stratification within the "'slave hierarchy'" on the very same page (p. 89).

status, and the concomitant demand for others to do the same, was radical. It communicates that such social distinctions are irrelevant and even moribund in the life of the divine household.[82] Its positive radicality is that such relational configurations that dictate access to mundane goods no longer apply. As children of the household, all have a right to access the Father's (holistic) goods. And as *potential* children of the household, all have a right to be invited, even if they are recalcitrant and even (like Judas) turn out to be enemies. The eschatological significance of this establishment of the divine household is maintained *through* not *instead of* its holistic mundane engagement.[83]

4. Conclusion

Far from being an obstacle to reading the σημεῖα in the Gospel as 'signs of love', John 6 plays a valuable role in developing this concept. As an enactment of love through the life-giving provision of bread, Jesus' feeding sign invites participation in the divine household and even points towards some of its specific features. These include the sacramental meal and the radical dissolution of social hierarchy entailed by the intimacy with which mutual concern for mundane need is enacted. However, the relentlessly Christocentric message of John 6 demands that the community be first and foremost focused on Jesus himself, and his crucifixion in particular. It is only his presence that gives life to the divine household, no matter how radical an alternative it may purport to be to the prevailing world order.

Thus Jesus' feeding of the five thousand adds both sacramental and ethical specificity to the view of Johannine ethics as *mimetic participation in the divine household through cruciform love in the mundane sphere*.

---

[82] Hoskyns comments that 'the presence of Jesus in the midst of sinners' relativises social distinctions, whereby 'the whole visible world of men and women' is in such a state that "poverty" 'seems a word too slight' to describe them (*Fourth Gospel*, 63).

[83] As Routledge says, 'one day the kingdom of God which, in the person of Jesus, has already broken into the kingdom of this world, will be fully established, and he will sit down at the Messianic banquet which inaugurates the new age' (*Passover*, 220)

Chapter 7 – Conclusion: Socio-Economic Ethics for Better News to the Poor

Far from being irrelevant to socio-economic concerns, there is in John the ethical impetus for a communal life that is truly good news to the poor. The divine love enacted in the mundane sphere by Jesus establishes a household in which participation is eternal life itself.

In this conclusion I press home this thesis (section one), first setting out my argument in full (1a) and showing how it answers the questions raised in chapter one (1b). I then point to avenues down which my work has begun to go but that invite further exploration (section two). These are both within Johannine studies (2a) and further afield (2b). Finally, I conclude by showing what kind of contemporary application this Gospel's socio-economic ethics of might have (section three), in reference to an African and a British context.

1. My argument *in nuce* and the problems it has addressed

1a. From no news to good news via the whole Gospel

This thesis began by setting itself the question of what socio-economics one can find in the Gospel of John (**chapter one**). The word *in* is important here; the aim was not to consider what lay *behind* the text, either in reference to the literary background or an ethos derived from a purported socio-historical context. Equally the aim was not to consider what may life *in front* of the text, the kind of creative readings that could be proposed with some bearing on socio-economic ethics. Rather, the task was to look at the ethical requirements *in* the text, explicating them by taking into account the Gospel as a whole and relying as little as possible on external sources. Acknowledging that specific references to my concerns are limited, this task involved expounding what lies at the

heart of Johannine ethics – namely believing and love – in order to draw out what socio-economic import these have. These latter would emerge like the tip of an iceberg and, if properly construed, come with all the weight of the Johannine message.

The two main ethical requirements in John were identified as believing and loving (**chapter two**). Beginning with the first of these recognises its central role in the Gospel's purpose (20:30–31). It is a relational concept whereby one makes a decision to accept Jesus as the life-giver. This in turn brings one into divine-human community, which has social consequences. These consequences are elucidated not through the notion of believing, but that of mutual love (13:34).

Because the primary exemplar of the command to love is the foot washing, it was necessary to analyse this episode so as to form an understanding of Johannine love (**chapter three**). The complexities of the pericope (13:1–17) demand that one construe this action of Jesus to be first of all an enactment of love in establishing the divine-human community (which was termed the 'divine household'). At the same time, the foot washing is also a revelatory foreshadowing of the Passion and an example to follow. This latter element constitutes a paradigm that can only be enacted within relationship to Jesus, thus engendering an ethics of mimetic participation.

Participation is ethically central but could only be elucidated through detailed attention to the intradivine reality in which one participates (**chapter four**). Doing this through an examination of John 17 revealed a Father-Son relationship in which love is so central as to yield the proposition 'God is love'. The portrayal of intradivine love sets both the ontological and the relational conditions for human participation therein. Not only is mimetic participation characterised by mutual glorification but it is also necessarily cruciform. It is a self-giving love that is fully engaged in the mundane sphere and that leads through death to its telos in the fully united glory of the divine household.

The implications of a focus on God as love then allowed the generative potential of the foot washing paradigm to be realised (**chapter five**). This happens through it being reconceived as a sign of love that can also serve as a moniker

for the more conventionally recognised σημεῖα. With this interpretation, the holistic engagement entailed in Jesus' signs gains a significance beyond mere illustrative value, giving it ethical import.

In the feeding of the five thousand, we met the stiffest test to the notion of 'signs of love' (**chapter six**). However, analysis of this sign yielded an even more detailed understanding of the socio-economic ethics of the Gospel, at whose heart is the formation of the divine household. The latter is characterised by the sacramental practice of shared meal and mutual service that is at once Christocentric and socially radical. There are no more 'poor', only children of God who share access to the divine provision of mundane goods.

Overall argument

My overall argument is, therefore, that Johannine socio-economic ethics, via the requirements to believe and to love, is about the establishment of community, the divine household. It is formed by a Christocentric participation in divine love that has four main characteristics. It is *mimetic* in that it follows the example of Jesus; it is *sacramental* in that it engages with divine reality *through* the mundane and not *apart from* it; it is *cruciform* in that it constitutes death to the world on its passage to glory. These three combine to give the fourth characteristic, which is a socio-economically radical community where the mutual love ensures the provision of mundane needs within the intimacy of a household where all are equally children of God.

Thus the main challenge addressed by the thesis – the problem of identifying Johannine socio-economic ethics – can be given a positive answer in the following formulation:

> *The Gospel message invites sacramental participation in the divine household through cruciform love in the mundane sphere according to Jesus' paradigm. People participate as children of God, not on any other social, economic or political basis, and share access to divine goods accordingly.*

But there are also two subsidiary questions that were raised and need to be briefly addressed. These are the problem of how we interpret Mary's anointing of Jesus in 12:1–8 and the wider methodological challenge posed by Frey's

reliance on historical reconstruction to the detriment of theological analysis.

1b. Solving a problem like Mary and adding meat to Frey

Solving a problem like Mary

The challenge of John 12:1–8 is that, on the surface, it downplays concern for the poor. Devotion to Jesus himself is what is required, not social action.

However, my thesis sheds new light on this pericope: the incident with Mary is part of Jesus establishing the divine household. This happens through Jesus laying down his life for his friends whereby the divine narrative of salvation is concretely instantiated by his entering the 'danger zone' of Bethany to raise Lazarus. Seen as a response of love, Mary's devotion is an excellent example of participation in the divine household as well as a symbolisation of Christological identity. It is an enactment of love before it is an illustration.

That Mary is already one of Jesus' own is clear from the context. In fact, it is this that explains her capacity to love in a way that he commends (unlike those who act on their own initiative). Indeed, she pays Jesus honour (and thus glorifies him) through intimate and abundant love enacted through the mundane means of her possessions (12:3). Moreover, she does this in a cruciform way, giving of herself in a way that risked (and incurred) the ire of the world, represented by the Jewish establishment through Judas in this case (12:5). Mary's action even constitutes a revelatory foreshadowing of Jesus' death, as per the reference to her anointing him for burial (12:7).

Mary demonstrates that she has already received and learned what Jesus later enacts through the foot washing paradigm.[1] Indeed, this becomes apparent later in the foot washing episode itself. For it seems that Jesus tacitly expected one of the disciples to behave with similar devotion as Mary did. His performing the the action when the meal had started rather than before (13:4), indicates that nobody had taken the opportunity to do it at the normal time.[2]

---

[1] North emphasises Mary's love as a response to Jesus' laying down his life (15:13) in a way that is 'prototypical of the love later commanded of the disciples' ("John 12:1–8", 223).

[2] It is unclear if Mary's action happens after the meal has begun, though 12:2 makes it likely.

But what about Jesus' words concerning the poor?

> τοὺς πτωχοὺς γὰρ πάντοτε ἔχετε μεθ' ἑαυτῶν, ἐμὲ δὲ οὐ πάντοτε ἔχετε (12:8).
>
> For the poor you always have with you, but me you do not always have

Is Mary's devotion simply preferable to such mundane concern? From Jesus' conduct in the Gospel as a whole, it is clear that this is a false dichotomy. But even in this passage, an alternative presents itself.

It is true that the only way to care for anyone, poor or otherwise, is through relationship to Jesus. Thus Judas' suggestion is dismissed out of court because, like Peter's otherwise laudable offer to lay down his life for him (13:37), it is not done from a place of having received Jesus' love. However, another dimension of the incident is that Judas is objectifying the poor for his own gain. This is not only because he is stealing their money (12:6) but, more subtly perhaps, because almsgiving could serve as a way of keeping the poor in a socially inferior category. The same cultural impulse to increase one's glory at the expense of another that Jesus constantly (if implicitly) criticises is apparent here, not least in his critique of 'other shepherds' in John 10.[3] What Jesus does is, instead of 'giving to the poor', to make 'the poor' children of God, sat equally at the table with those whom society would call rich. The formation of the divine household in which context Mary's anointing at Bethany should be understood is a far more socio-economically radical project than giving alms.

Adding meat to Frey

A second subsidiary issue raised in the opening chapter is how to address my own concerns in such a way that would contribute to the contemporary debate on Johannine ethics. Specifically, how could I address the increasing consensus that the ethics implied by the Gospel is holistic, but that this can be asserted only on the grounds of historical evidence garnered from other sources? Frey is,

[3] Cf. Trozzo, who mentions in relation to John 12:1–8 that Judas is condemned for *not* looking after the poor, much like the bad shepherds of chap. 10 (*Exploring*, 170–174). This critique is also clear from the foot washing itself and, for example, Jesus' surreptitious performance of miracles (e.g. 2:1–11) and suspicion of worldly honour (2:24–25; 6:14).

once again, the one who expresses this position most succinctly:

> "'Love" in the Johannine literature is more practical and life-oriented than the surface level of the texts and the steep theological reasoning suggest… If we start by interpreting Johannine ethics from the perspective of family ethos, the 'love' demanded does not lack specification. It is basically linked with matters of communal life, property and material possessions'.[4]

It will be obvious that my thesis chimes with this conclusion. However, where I demur from Frey is in the use of a historically reconstructed 'family ethos' to fill perceived ideological gaps.[5] Indeed, it is my contention that it is precisely the 'steep theological reasoning' that provides the most compelling evidence for the holistic nature of Johannine love. More than that, theology determines ethics beyond the general idea of communal life that he offers. Two fundamental ways of construing the Gospel's thought achieve this.

Firstly, I see Jesus' formation of a community as a core part of his mission. His gathering of disciples is more than just a side effect of his passage towards crucifixion or even a way to guarantee witnesses to himself after his absence (although it is surely that as well). Rather, it is the establishment of a divine household that, in divine-human unity, is the eschatological telos. Johannine ethics is the participation in this relational reality.

Secondly, what undergirds my integrated view of Jesus' mission is that I keep always at the forefront of consideration the ontology of John. This provides a much-needed way of connecting the divine narrative to the mundane one in which ethics is practised. However, it begins upstream of ethics, and even upstream of the incarnation; it begins by considering the nature of God as love. I have only scratched the surface of the cosmological implications of this ontological starting point, but it does explain why any dualistic scheme based on substance is alien to the Gospel. As a result, human materiality is equally as important as spirituality, with all the ethical implications this has. A deeper understanding would necessitate broadening the conceptual canvas beyond

---

[4] Frey, "Family Ethos", 181–182.

[5] This remains an important critique even of those whose proposed historical context is amenable to my interest in socio-economic issues, such as Callahan's imaginative reconstruction of the community as an alternative society to 'the partnership of the Judean temple state and the Roman imperium in Palestine' (*Love Supreme*, 82).

that of biblical studies, taking in the metaphysical tradition engaged by such endeavours as New Trinitarian Ontologies. This leads us onto our next section.

2. Avenues for further exploration

It is inevitable in any thesis that avenues are opened whose exploration is only possible in a very limited way within the scope of the project at hand. Because of my near exclusive focus on a literary-theological reading of the Gospel, there is a lot that has remained unexplored. I now draw attention to those avenues that would seem to promise especially fruitful engagement, within Johannine studies as well as in adjacent (sub-)disciplines.

2a. Developing Johannine themes

Those elements of John that beg further development come into three main categories: exegetical, theological and historical.

Although I have sought to ground all my claims in the text itself, the necessarily broad purview of this thesis means that several potentially important pericopes have not been treated in detail. The relevance for socio-economic ethics of the Temple incident is a key example.[6] Indeed, because of the holistic purview within which I am locating material concerns, most of Jesus' interactions with people are worthy of detailed attention, especially when socio-economic features are alluded to (e.g. 4:46–54; 10:7–10; 21:1–6). In terms of more conceptually significant passages, further work on John 14 would help develop the interplay between love, believing, commands and the work of the Paraclete.

This latter point brings us onto our second area of development, which is related to Johannine theological themes. For although I have developed the theme of love, the ramifications of my ontological understanding have not been

[6] Other examples include John 4:1–42 (cf. Jo-Ann Brandt, "The Geopolitics of Water and John 4:1–42", *JJH3*, 245–258), John 9:1–38 (cf. Clark-Soles, "Love Embodied in Action") and John 21:1–14 (Myles and Kok, "Galilean Fisherman").

drawn out. An example is how it affects the place of believing in the Gospel's schema, since making love as fundamental as I have would seem to locate believing as a mode of love. Another concept that has been subsumed under the idea of love is that of revelation, making oneself known. There is scope for a clearer articulation of the way in which this works within relationships, not least in terms of the role of words vis-à-vis actions. This in turn has a bearing on how the divine household is understood in its missional capacity, and the extent to which its treatment of outsiders combines proclamation and practical concern.

Quite generally, the concept of the 'divine household' requires further elucidation. For my discussion has only taken tiny steps towards incorporating pneumatology. Certainly, it has not dealt with the difference that the Spirit makes in our understanding of relationships (whether intradivine or divine-human). Moreover, I have not situated the divine household alongside other Johannine ecclesiological concepts (or at least images that denote the collective identity of believers). For there is certainly a notable variety of imagery (sheep, 10:1–18 and the vine, 15:1–9) traditionally associated with Israel, which already forms the backdrop for the Gospel (1:31, 49). How these relate to notions of kinship and household would need to be examined.

This latter point brings us onto our third area of development, that of history. The most obvious historical question arising from my thesis is how the ethics of divine household would have worked in practice, not least within a diaspora Judaism context.[7] Such an investigation would need to begin by asking how the Johannine Epistles relate to the Gospel, given the fact that research on their socio-economic import is more advanced.[8] In addition to this, my reading of Jesus' feeding sign implies a strong continuity between the Hebrew Bible and John in terms of socio-economic ethics, which would need to be further investigated in relation to Second Temple Judaism.[9] However, David

---

[7] Frey has begun to explore this connection in "The Diaspora-Jewish background of the Fourth Gospel", *Svensk Exegetisk Årsbok* 77 (2012), 169-196.

[8] See, e.g., Jon-Michael Carman, "Scaling Gaius and Diotrephes: Socio-economic Stratification in 1 and 3 John", *JSNT* 43/1 (2020), 28–43.

[9] Beth Stovell has already done considerable work in this direction in "Love One Another and

Armitage's work on poverty in the New Testament context suggests that my work on John could be deepened by a consideration of the Greco-Roman milieu as well.[10]

2b. Extra-disciplinary trajectories

At the beginning of this thesis I located my discussion in relation to the broader pursuit of New Testament ethics, and Burridge's work especially. Having now argued my case, we can see how Burridge's division of ethical material into rules, principles, paradigms and the symbolic world correspond to the three different levels at which I see the central topic of love operating in the Gospel: the command (13:34) is both rule and principle and the foot washing is a paradigm. Both the theological vision of God (in John 17 especially) and the divine narrative climaxing on the cross constitute the symbolic world of love within which the two other levels operate. As such, the way that I map out the (complex and overlapping) relationship of this material contributes to the wider discussion around New Testament ethics. Indeed, it brings John into closer proximity with the Synoptic Gospels than is often thought to be the case, not only through sharing the *bios* genre but in their mode of ethical reasoning.[11]

Moreover, my thesis suggests how the Gospel could contribute to New Testament work that is concerned with socio-economic issues. John is routinely overlooked in such debates, but it has something crucial to offer in the form of an ontological framework that gives order to constituent ethical elements. For 'economic considerations feature integrally both in understanding the texts of the New Testament and in understanding the essence of Christian self-definition and moral formation'.[12] Indeed, the Gospel may provide a more comprehensive conceptual basis for the kind of socio-economic practice that

---

Love the World: The Love Command and Jewish Ethics in the Johannine Community" in Stanley Porter and Andrew Pitts (eds.), *Christian Origins and the Establishment of the Early Jesus Movement* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 426–458.

[10] David Armitage, *Theories of Poverty in the New Testament* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016).

[11] Cf. Burridge, *Imitating Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 287–292.

[12] Longenecker and Liebengood, "Introduction", *Engaging Economics*, 7–8.

scholars such as John Barclay relate to the theology of early Christianity.[13] More specifically, it seems possible to draw a straight line between John 6 and the social aspects of Eucharist in 1 Corinthians 11 via the foot washing and the call to materially sacrificial love in 1 John 3:16–17. Kügler suggests just this:

> 'The Eucharist should be rediscovered as an actual meal based on solidarity between men and woman, between young and old, between rich and poor'… [This would] serve as a prophetic-critical sign to African politicians as well as to global Christianity'.[14]

This quotation indeed points us further beyond biblical studies to developments in Christian ethics, where the ethical role of the eucharist is increasingly central.[15] But Kügler also directs our attention further again to the real world in which ethics is lived out. It to this horizon that I direct my closing comments.

3. A final word: towards becoming flesh

The purpose of the Bible is ultimately that it should be lived and not only studied. Indeed, the latter is only worthwhile insofar as it informs the former for most who read its pages. This is no less true for John than for any of the other canonical books. But however directly one place responsibility at the Johannine door, the biblical material has not always been socially employed in a way that even Christians could support. With this in mind, how could my thesis yield a mode of action that contributes to human flourishing? I give three examples.

Western missionary work in sub-Saharan Africa is unavoidably shaped by the

---

[13] Material support can have Christological and soteriological import: 'The Christ-gift constitutes the inner dynamic of the cosmos, and believers are not only beneficiaries of that gift, but participate in it' ("Gift and Grace in Philippians, 2 Thessalonians, and Ephesians: A Response", *HBT* 41 (2019), 236). So likewise, with ecclesiology: 'money declares identity and purpose, and how the church decides whom to support is diagnostic of its view of itself and its goals' ("Household Networks and Early Christian Economics: A Fresh Study of 1 Timothy 5.3–16", *NTS* 66 (2020), 287).

[14] "Politics", 273.

[15] Cavanaugh is the name most associated with this development, but see also Luke Bretherton "Sharing Peace: Class, Hierarchy, and Christian Social Order", *Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics* (op. cit.), 329–342).

massive socio-economic differential. However, responding to this has not always been considered as essential by those for whom an evangelistic focus is diluted by material concern. Even where such concern has been exercised, it has served to perpetuate inequality by working on a charity model, giving financial aid without addressing the underlying relational dynamics. A Johannine approach would take the formation of household community seriously as the corollary of Christocentric liturgical practice. The colonial dynamics that imply inferiority would be radically challenged by the kind of kinship that John implies. For Western missionaries to serve, and serve alongside, Africans as fellow children of God would transform the relationships within which socio-economic disparity is currently perpetuated. For those who have pursued such an endeavour, its cruciform nature will be apparent; for it remains unpopular, even within Christian circles, to abolish certain social distinctions by which people implicitly maintain their self-worth.

An example closer to home is the Monday Night Group (MNG) in Durham. Its original aim was to provide a worshipping community for former prisoners upon their release. However, it has expanded to incorporate many who are marginalised, and uncomfortable in traditional (generally middle-class) church settings. The group is characterised by common meals, worship and a participatory ethos whereby the (again, mainly middle-class) 'volunteers' are increasingly undifferentiated from other community members. This again goes beyond charity, but it is not materially indifferent. For MNG is also connected to an initiative called 'Handcrafted', which trains people in the practical skills that boost their employability. All of this aims to establish a divine household of mutual care where socio-economic status no longer determines people's access to the holistic goods of divine provision.

Thirdly, and finally, I want to look beyond the ecclesial walls. For this thesis has been written in a pluralistic context and (not to ignore its material conditions) has been sponsored by UK government research council money. What does the Johannine ethic have to say to society more broadly? There is no avoiding the persistence with which John insists on the exclusivity of Jesus' claims as the one in whom life is found. Put in a broader cosmological framework, it only makes sense to say that living ultimately depends on being

connected to the life-giver. However, there are aspects of the Gospel's socio-economic practice that can be advocated at policy level without insisting on the need for a Christian state. This is particularly so when poverty is seen as a fundamentally *relational* issue rather than an abstractly *financial* one, and households are seen as the key arena in which this is addressed. If policy steps were made towards the greater economic empowerment of households, the context in which material needs were met would achieve far more than welfare support alone.[16]

To close, therefore, Johannine socio-economic ethics goes well beyond charity. Instead, it enacts a divine mandate that was articulated a long time before the Gospel was written:

> He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap,
> to make them sit with princes, with the princes of his people
> (Psalm 113:7–8, ESV)

Put in the language of John, Jesus raises people from death and makes them children of God (1:12).

[16] I have expanded on these ideas at a more popular level in *Money Can't Fix Everything* (Cambridge: Jubilee Centre, 2020), https://www.jubilee-centre.org/money-cant-fix-everything-ebook (Accessed 28/5/21).

Bibliography

Primary Source

Novum Testamentum Graece, 28th ed., edited by K. Aland et al. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012).

All English translations are my own unless indicated otherwise.

Ancient Sources

Aristotle, *Prior Analytics*, trans. H. P. Cooke and H. Tredennick (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1938).

Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, trans. J. Rettig (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1988).

———. *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, ed. P. Schaff (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994).

Eusebius, *The History of the Church* (trans. G. Williamson) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965).

Origen, *Commentarii In Evangelium Joannis, Origenes Werke Vol 4* (Erwin Preuschen, 1903).

———. *Commentaire sur Saint Jean* (*Tome II – Livres vi et x*), ed. C. Blanc, (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1970).

Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Commentary on the Gospel of John,* trans. Marco Conti, ed. Joel Elowsky (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010).

Secondary Sources

Agamben, Giorgio, *The Signature of All Things: On Method* (New York, NY: Zone, 2009).

Anderson, Paul, "Moving the Conversation Forward: Open Questions and New Directions" in P. Anderson and R. A. Culpepper (eds.), *Communities in Dispute: Current Scholarship on the Johannine Epistles* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014), 275–288.

Anderson, Paul, and Clark-Soles, Jaime, "Introduction and Overview" in P. Anderson et al. (eds), *John, Jesus, and History Vol. 3: Glimpses of Jesus Through the Johannine Lens* (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2016), 1–28.

Anderson, Paul, and Culpepper, R. Alan, *Communities in Dispute: Current Scholarship on the Johannine Epistles*, (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014).

Anderson, Paul, Just, Felix, and Thatcher, Tom (eds.), *John, Jesus, and History Vol. 3: Glimpses of Jesus Through the Johannine Lens* (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2016).

Armitage, David, *Theories of Poverty in the New Testament* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016).

Ashton, John, "Introduction: The Problem of John" in J. Ashton (ed.), *The Interpretation of John* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 7–26.

Attridge, Harold, "Genre Bending in the Fourth Gospel", *JBL* 121/1 (2002), 3–21.

———. "Johannine Christianity" in M. Mitchell and F. Young (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Christianity vol. 1* (Cambridge: CUP, 2008), 125–143.

———. "Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility" in J. Ashton (ed.), *Revealed Wisdom: Studies in Apocalyptic in Honour of Christopher Rowland* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 183–199.

———. "How Johannine Signs Signify (or Don't)" in M. Parsons et al. (eds.), *Anatomies of the Gospels* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 335–347.

———. "Ambiguous Signs, an Anonymous Character, Unanswerable Riddles: The Role of the Unknown in Johannine Epistemology", *NTS* 65 (2019), 267–288.

———. "Signs Working and Works Signifying", forthcoming. This article is based on based on a paper given at the 73rd General Meeting of the Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas (National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece, 7-10 August, 2018), used with the author's permission.

Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, trans. J. Weisheipl and F. Larcher (Albany, NY: Magi Books, 1980).

Barclay, John, "Poverty in Pauline Studies: A Response to Steven Friesen," *JSNT* 268 (2004), 363–366.

———. "Gift and Grace in Philippians, 2 Thessalonians, and Ephesians: A Response", *HBT* 41 (2019), 224–237.

———. "Household Networks and Early Christian Economics: A Fresh Study of 1 Timothy 5.3–16", *NTS* 66 (2020), 268–287.

Barr, James, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961.

Barrett, Charles Kingsley, *The Gospel According to St John* (London: SPCK, 1958).

Barton, Stephen, "Johannine Dualism and Contemporary Pluralism" in R. J. Bauckham and C. Mosser (eds.), *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 3–18.

Bauckham, Richard, "Introduction" in R. J. Bauckham (ed.), *The Gospels for All Christians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 1–8.

———. "Did Jesus Wash the Disciples' Feet?" in B. Chilton and C. Evans (eds.), *Authenticating the Activities of Jesus* (Boston: Brill, 1999), 411–429.

———. *Gospel of Glory: Themes in Johannine Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015).

Bauckham, Richard J., and Mosser, Carl (eds.), *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008).

Beasley-Murray, George, *John* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987).

Behr, John, *John the Theologian and his Paschal Gospel: A Prologue to Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

Bennema, Cornelis, *Mimesis in the Johannine Literature: A Study in Johannine Ethics* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017).

———. "Virtue Ethics and the Johannine Writings" in S. Brown and C. Skinner (eds.), *Johannine Ethics: The Moral World of the Gospel and Epistles of John* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2017), 261–282.

Benyik, Gyorgy (ed.), *The Bible and Economics* (Szeged: Jate Press, 2014).

Berkhout, Esmé (et al.), *The Inequality Virus* (Oxfam International, 2021), https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/621149/bp-the-inequality-virus-250121-en.pdf (accessed 2/3/21).

Boer, Roland, and Petterson, Christina, *Time of Troubles: A New Economic Framework for Early Christianity* (Minneapolis, MI: Fortress, 2017).

Brandt, Jo-Ann, "The Geopolitics of Water and John 4:1–42" in P. Anderson et al. (eds), *John, Jesus, and History Vol. 3: Glimpses of Jesus Through the Johannine Lens* (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2016), 245–258.

Bretherton, Luke, "Sharing Peace: Class, Hierarchy, and Christian Social Order" in S. Hauerwas and S. Wells (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics* (London: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2004), 329–342.

Brown, Raymond, *New Testament Essays* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1965).

———. *The Gospel According to John* (New York, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1966).

———. *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1979).

Brown, Sherri, "Believing in the Gospel of John: The Ethical Imperative to Becoming [sic] Children of God" in S. Brown and C. Skinner (eds.), *Johannine Ethics: The Moral World of the Gospel and Epistles of John* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2017), 3–24.

Brown, Sherri, and Skinner, Christopher (eds.), *Johannine Ethics: The Moral World of the Gospel and Epistles of John* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2017).

Bruner, Dale, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmands, 2012).

Bultmann, Rudolf, *Das Evangelium des Johannes* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1950).

———. *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1953).

———. *Theology of the New Testament, Vol. 2*, trans. K. Grobel (London: SCM Press, 1955).

———. *The Gospel of John*, trans. G. Beasley-Murray, with an introduction by Walter Schmithals (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971).

———. *The Johannine Epistles*, trans. P. O'Hara et al. (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1973)

Burridge, Richard, *Imitating Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007).

———. "Is "Biblical Ethics" a "Genre Mistake"? Methodological Reflections on New Testament Ethics in Debate with Gustafson and Hays" in V. Rabens et al. (eds.), *Key Approaches to Biblical Ethics: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 237–268.

Byers, Andrew, *Ecclesiology and Theosis in the Gospel of John* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

Callahan, Allen Dwight, *A Love Supreme: A History of the Johannine Tradition* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2005).

Campbell, W. Gordon, *Reading Revelation: A Literary-Theological Approach* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 2012).

Caragounis, Chrys, ""Abide in Me": The New Mode of Relationship between Jesus and His Followers as a Basis for Christian Ethics (John 15)" in J. van der Watt and R. Zimmermann (eds.), *Rethinking the Ethics of John* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 250–263.

Carman, Jon-Michael, "Scaling Gaius and Diotrephes: Socio-economic Stratification in 1 and 3 John", *JSNT* 43/1 (2020), 28–43.

Carson, Donald, *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester: Apollos, 1991).

———. "Syntactical and Text-Critical Observations on John 20:30–31: One More Round on the Purpose of the Fourth Gospel", *JBL* 124/4 (2005), 693–714.

Carter, Warren, *John and Empire: Initial Explorations* (New York, NY: T&T Clark International, 2008).

Cavanaugh, William, *Theopolitical Imagination: Discovering the Liturgy as Political Act in an Age of Global Consumerism* (London: T & T Clark, 2002).

Cassidy, Richard, *John's Gospel in New Perspective: Christology and the Realities of Roman Power* , 2nd ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015).

Chilton, Bruce, "The Gospel according to John's Rabbi Jesus", *BBR* 25/1 (2015), 39-54.

Clark-Soles, Jaime, "Love Embodied in Action: Ethics and Incarnation in the Gospel of John" in S. Brown and C. Skinner (eds.), *Johannine Ethics: The Moral World of the Gospel and Epistles of John* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2017), 91–115.

Collins, Raymond, "Follow Me: A Life-Giving Ethical Imperative", in S. Brown and C. Skinner (eds.), *Johannine Ethics: The Moral World of the Gospel and Epistles of John* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2017), 43–66.

Coloe, Mary, *Dwelling in the Household of God* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007).

Coutts, Joshua, *The Divine Name in the Gospel of John* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017).

Culpepper, R. Alan, "Hypodeigma", *Semeia* 53 (1991), 133–152.

———. "The Gospel of John as a Document of Faith in a Pluralistic Culture" in F. Segovia (ed.), *What is John? Vol.1* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1996), 107–127.

Davies, Oliver, *The Creativity of God: World, Eucharist, Reason* (Cambridge: CUP, 2004).

Davies, William, and Finklestein, Louis (eds.), *Cambridge History of Judaism vol. 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

———. *Cambridge History of Judaism vol. 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

Davies, William, Horbury, William, and Sturdy, John (eds.), *Cambridge*

History of Judaism vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

Do, Toan, "The Johannine Request to "Come and See" and an Ethic of Love" in S. Brown and C. Skinner (eds.), *Johannine Ethics: The Moral World of the Gospel and Epistles of John* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2017), 177–196.

Dodd, Charles H., *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953).

———. *The Johannine Epistles* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1946).

Dodd, Sarah and Gotsis, George, "Some Economic Implications of Synoptic Gospel Theology: A Short Overview", *History of Economic Ideas* 8/2, 7–34.

Downs, David, *Alms: Charity, Reward, and Atonement in Early Christianity* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016).

Eastman, Susan, "Divine Love and the Constitution of the Self", *JSNT* 40/4 (2018), 524–537.

Elowsky, Joel (ed.), *John 11–21, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007).

Eynikel, Eric, "The Qumran Background of Johannine Ethics" in J. van der Watt and R. Zimmermann (eds.), *Rethinking the Ethics of John* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 102–113.

Fortna, Robert, *The Gospel of Signs* (Cambridge: CUP, 1970).

Förster, Hans, "Der Begriff σημεῖον im Johannesevangelium", *NovT* 58 (2016), 47–70.

Frey, Jörg, "Love-Relations in the Fourth Gospel: Establishing a Semantic Network" in G. van Belle et al. (eds.), *Repetitions and Variations in the Fourth Gospel* (Leuven: Peeters, 2009), 171–198.

———. "The Diaspora-Jewish background of the Fourth Gospel", *Svensk Exegetisk Årsbok* 77 (2012), 169-196.

———. ""Ethical" Traditions, Family Ethos, and Love in the Johannine Literature" in J. W. Van Henten and J. Verheyden (eds.), *Early Christian Ethics in Interaction with Jewish and Greco-Roman Contexts* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 167–203.

———. "God is Love" in B. Schliesser (ed.), *Von Jesus zur neutestamentlichen Theologie* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 619–644.

———. *The Glory of the Crucified One: Christology and Theology in the Gospel of John*, trans. W. Coppins and C. Heilig (Waco, TX: Baylor University

Press, 2018).

———. "Johannine Dualism" in J. Frey, *The Glory of the Crucified One: Christology and Theology in the Gospel of John*, trans. W. Coppins and C. Heilig (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2018), 101–170.

———. "The Glory of the Crucified One" in J. Frey, *The Glory of the Crucified One: Christology and Theology in the Gospel of John*, trans. W. Coppins and C. Heilig (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2018), 237–260.

———. "The Incarnation of the Logos and the Dwelling of God in Jesus Christ" in J. Frey, *The Glory of the Crucified One: Christology and Theology in the Gospel of John*, trans. W. Coppins and C. Heilig (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2018), 261–284.

———. "God in the Gospel of John" in J. Frey, *The Glory of the Crucified One: Christology and Theology in the Gospel of John*, trans. W. Coppins and C. Heilig (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2018), 313–346.

———. "Johannine Theology as the Climax of New Testament Theology" in J. Frey, *The Glory of the Crucified One: Christology and Theology in the Gospel of John*, trans. W. Coppins and C. Heilig (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2018), 347–376.

———. *Theology and History in the Fourth Gospel* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2018).

———. "Glauben und Lieben im Johannesevangelium" in C. Hoegen-Rohls et al. (eds.), *Glaube, Liebe, Gesprach: Neue Perspektiven Johanneischer Ethik* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2018), 1–54.

Gabba, Emilio, "The Social, Economic and Political History of Palestine, 63 BCE-CE 70" in W. Davies and L. Finklestein (eds.), *Cambridge History of Judaism vol. 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 94–167.

Garnsey, Peter, and Saller, Richard, *The Roman Empire: Economy, Society and Culture*, 2nd ed. (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

Gill, Robin (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

Glicksman, Andrew, "Beyond Sophia: The Sapiential Portrayal of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel and its Ethical Implications for the Johannine Community" in J. van der Watt and R. Zimmermann (eds.), *Rethinking the Ethics of John* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 83–101.

Gorman, Michael, "John's Implicit Ethic of Enemy-Love" in S. Brown and C. Skinner (eds.), *Johannine Ethics: The Moral World of the Gospel and Epistles of John* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2017), 135–158.

———. *Abide and Go: Missional Theosis in the Gospel of John* (Eugene, OR:

Cascade, 2018).

Green, Joel (ed.), *The Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011).

Griffiths, Paul, *Intellectual Appetite: A Theological Grammar* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2009).

Halliwell, Stephen, *The Aesthetics of Mimesis – Ancient Texts and Modern Problems* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002).

Hamel, Gildas, "Poverty and Charity" in C. Hezser (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Daily Life in Roman Palestine* (Oxford: OUP, 2010), 308–324.

Hanson, Kenneth, and Oakman, Douglas, *Palestine in the Time of Jesus*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2008).

Heath, Jane, "'Good' Christology in John's Gospel?", *NTS 56* (2010), 513–535.

Heilmann, Jan, "A Meal in the Background of John 6:51–58?", *JBL* 137/2 (2018), 481–500.

Hemmerle, Klaus, *Thesen zu einer trinitarischen Ontologie* (with an English translation by Thomas Norris) (Würzburg: Echter, 2020).

Hengel, Martin, "The Political and Social History of Palestine from Alexander to Antiochus III (333-187 B.C.E.)" in W. Davies and L. Finklestein (eds.), *Cambridge History of Judaism vol. 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 35–78.

Hezser, Catherine (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Daily Life in Roman Palestine* (Oxford: OUP, 2010).

Hirsch-Luipold, Rainer, "Klartext in Bildern" in J. Frey et al. (eds.), *Imagery in the Gospel of John* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 61–102.

Hofius, Otto, "Die Erzählung von der Fußwaschung Jesu Joh 13,1-11 als narratives Christuszeugnis" in *ZTK* 106/2 (2009), 156–176.

Hoskyns, Edwyn, *The Fourth Gospel*, ed. F. Davey (London: Faber and Faber, 1947).

Huie-Jolly, Marie, "Maori 'Jews' and a Resistant Reading of John 5.10–47", in M. Dube and J. Staley (eds.), *John and Postcolonialism: Travel, Space and Power* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 94–110.

Hultgren, Arland, "The Johannine Footwashing (13.1-11) as Symbol of Eschatological Hospitality", *NTS* 28 (1982), 539–546.

Instone-Brewer, David, *Feasts and Sabbaths: Passover and Atonement (Traditions of the Rabbis from the Era of the New Testament vol. 2a)* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011).

Karakolis, Christos, "Sēmeia Conveying Ethics in the Gospel according to John" in J. van der Watt and R. Zimmermann (eds.), *Rethinking the Ethics of John* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 250–263.

Käsemann, Ernst, *The Testament of Jesus*, trans. Gerhard Krodel (London: SCM, 1968).

———. "The Structure and Purpose of the Prologue to John's Gospel", trans. W. Montague in *New Testament Questions of Today* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1969), 138–167.

Keck, Leander, "New Testament Ethics", *JBL* 115/1 (1996), 3–16.

Keener, Craig, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003).

Keith, Chris, "The Competitive Textualisation of the Jesus Tradition in John 20:30–31 and 21:24–25", *CBQ* 78/2 (2016), 321–337.

Kierspel, Lars, *The Jews and the World in the Fourth Gospel* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006).

Kilby, Karen, "Perichoresis and Projection: Problems with Social Doctrines of the Trinity", *New Blackfriars*, 81/956 (October 2000), 432–445.

Kirschner, Robert, "Imitatio Rabbini", *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 27/1 (1986), 70–79.

Koester, Craig, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community,* 2nd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2003).

Konstan, David, "Greek Friendship", *The American Journal of Philology* 117/1 (1996), 71-94.

Korgan, Kathleen (ed.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Sociology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

Köstenburger, Andreas, "Jesus as Rabbi in the Fourth Gospel", *BBR* 8 (1998), 97–128.

Kügler, Joachim, "Politics of Feeding: Reading John 6 (and 1 Cor 11) as Documents of Socio-political Conflicts", in M. R. Gunda and J, Kügler (eds.), *The Bible and Politics in Africa* (Bamburg: University of Bamburg Press, 2012), 251–273.

Labahn, Michael, ""It's Only Love" – Is That All?" in J. van der Watt and R. Zimmermann (eds.), *Rethinking the Ethics of John* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 7–43.

Lee, Dorothy, "Creation, Ethics and the Gospel of John" in S. Brown and C. Skinner (eds.), *Johannine Ethics: The Moral World of the Gospel and Epistles of John* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2017), 241–260.

———. “Symbolism and ‘Signs’ in the Fourth Gospel” in J. Lieu and M. de Boer (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Johannine Studies* (Oxford: OUP, 2018), 259–273.

Liddell, Henry (et al.), *The Online Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek-English Lexicon* (Irvine, CA: University of California, 2011).

Lieu, Judith, and de Boer, Martinus (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Johannine Studies* (Oxford: OUP, 2018).

Lincoln, Andrew, “The Lazarus Story: A Literary Perspective” in R. J. Bauckham and C. Mosser (eds.), *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 211–232.

Ling, Timothy, *The Judaean Poor and the Fourth Gospel*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

———. “John, Jesus and Virtuoso Religion” in P. Anderson et al. (eds), *John, Jesus, and History Vol. 3: Glimpses of Jesus Through the Johannine Lens* (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2016), 271–282.

Loader, William, “The Law and Ethics in John’s Gospel” in J. van der Watt and R. Zimmermann (eds.), *Rethinking the Ethics of John* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 144–158.

———. “The Significance of 2:15–17 for Understanding the Ethics of John” in P. Anderson and R. A. Culpepper (eds.), *Communities in Dispute: Current Scholarship on the Johannine Epistles* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014), 223–236.

———. “What happened to ‘Good News to the Poor’ in the Johannine Tradition?”, in P. Anderson et al. (eds), *John, Jesus, and History Vol. 3: Glimpses of Jesus Through the Johannine Lens* (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2016), 469–480.

Longenecker, Bruce and Liebengood, Kelly, “Introduction” in B. Longenecker and K. Liebengood (eds.), *Engaging Economics: New Testament Scenarios and Early Christian Reception* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 3–8.

Longenecker, Bruce and Liebengood, Kelly (eds.), *Engaging Economics: New Testament Scenarios and Early Christian Reception* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008).

Löhr, Hermut, “”Εργον as an Element of Moral Language in John” J. van der Watt and R. Zimmermann (eds.), *Rethinking the Ethics of John* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 229–249.

Luther, Susanne, “The Authentication of the Past: Narrative Representations of History in the Gospel of John”, *JSNT* 43/1 (2020), 67–84.

Macaskill, Grant, *Union with Christ in the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford

University Press, 2013).

Martyn, J. Louis, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, 3rd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003).

Mathew, Bincy, *The Johannine Footwashing as the Sign of Perfect Love: An Exegetical Study of John 13:1–20* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018).

McCabe, Herbert, *God Matters* (London: Mowbray, 1987).

Meeks, Wayne, *The Prophet-King: Moses Traditions and the Johannine Christology* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967).

———. "The Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism", *JBL* 91 (1972), 44–72.

———. "Understanding Early Christian Ethics", *JBL* 105/1 (1986), 3–11.

———. *The Moral World of the First Christians* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1986)

———. "The Ethics of the Fourth Evangelist" in R. Alan Culpepper and C. Clifton Black (eds.), *Exploring the Gospel of John: In Honor of D. Moody Smith* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 317–325.

Michaels, Ramsey, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010).

Michl, Johann, "Der Sinn der Fusswaschung", *Biblica* 40/3 (1959), 697–708.

Milbank, John, "The Ethics of Self-Sacrifice", *First Things* (1999), 33–38.

Miranda, José Porfirio, *Being and the Messiah*, trans. J. Eagleson (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1973).

Mobley, Josh, "Symbolism after Dialectics: De Lubac, Rahner and Symbolic Theology", *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 20/4 (2018), 537–553.

Moloney, Francis, *Love in the Gospel of John: An Exegetical, Theological and Literary Study* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013).

———. "God, Eschatology, and "This World": Ethics in the Gospel of John", in S. Brown and C. Skinner (eds.), *Johannine Ethics: The Moral World of the Gospel and Epistles of John* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2017), 197–217.

Moltmann, Jürgen, "God in the World, the World in God" in R. J. Bauckham and C. Mosser (eds.), *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 369–381.

Morgan, Teresa, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith: Pistis and Fides in the Early Roman Empire and Early Churches* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

Motyer, Stephen, "Jesus and the Marginalised in the Fourth Gospel" in Anthony Billington et al. (eds.), *Mission and Meaning: Essays Presented to Peter Cotterell* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1995), 70–89.

Myles, Robert, and Kok, Michael, "On the Implausibility of Identifying the Disciple in John 18:15–16 as a Galilean Fisherman", *NovT* 61 (2019), 367–385.

Nielsen, Jesper, "The Narrative Structures of Glory and Glorification in the Fourth Gospel", *NTS* 56 (2010), 343–366.

Nissen, Johannes, "Community and Ethics in the Gospel of John" in J. Nissen and S. Pederson (eds.), *New Readings in John: Literary and Theological Perspectives* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 194–212.

North, Wendy, "The anointing in John 12:1–8: a tale of two hypotheses" in T. Thatcher and C. Williams (eds.), *Engaging with CH Dodd on the Gospel of John* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 216–230.

Oakes, Peter, "Methodological Issues in Using Economic Evidence in Interpretation of Early Christian texts" in B. Longenecker and K. Liebengood (eds.), *Engaging Economics: New Testament Scenarios and Early Christian Reception* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 9–34.

O'Day, Gail, "Jesus as Friend in the Fourth Gospel", *Interpretation* 58/2 (2004), 144–157.

Osborne, Robin, "Roman Poverty in Context" in M. Atkins and R. Osborne (eds.), *Poverty in the Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 1–20.

Paddison, Angus, "Theological Interpretation and the Bible as Public Text" in *Journal of Theological Interpretation*, 8/2 (2014), 175-192.

Pastor, Jack, "Trade, Commerce, and Consumption" in C. Hezser (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Daily Life in Roman Palestine* (Oxford: OUP, 2010), 297–307.

Popkes, Enno, *Die Theologie der Liebe Gottes in den johanneischen Schriften* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005).

Rabens, Volker, "Johannine Perspectives on Ethical Enabling in the Context of Stoic and Philonic Ethics" in J. van der Watt and R. Zimmermann (eds.), *Rethinking the Ethics of John* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 114–142.

Rehkopf, Friedrich, *Septuaginta-Vokabular* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989).

Rengstorf, Heinrich, "σημεῖον" in G. Kittel (ed.) and G. Bromiley (trans.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 216-221.

Rensberger, David, *Johannine Faith and Liberating Community* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1988).

Reynolds, Benjamin, and Boccaccini, Gabriele (eds.), *Reading the Gospel of John's Christology as Jewish Messianism* (Leiden: Brill, 2019)

Richter, Georg, *Die Fusswaschung im Johannesevangelium* (Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 1967).

Routledge, Robin, "Passover and Last Supper," *TynBul* 53 (2002), 203–221.

Ruiz, Gilberto, "Temple Commerce and John 2:13–22" (Emory University; ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2013, #3568968)

Rushton, Kathleen, *The Cry of the Earth and the Cry of the Poor* (London: SCM, 2020).

Safrai, Zeev, "Agriculture and Farming" in C. Hezser (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Daily Life in Roman Palestine* (Oxford: OUP, 2010), 246–263.

Scheidel, William, "Stratification, Deprivation and Quality of Life" in M. Atkins and R. Osborne (eds.), *Poverty in the Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 40–59.

Schlier, Heinrich, "ὑπόδειγμα", in G. Kittel (ed.) and G. Bromiley (trans.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 32–33.

Schnelle, Udo, "Die Johanneischen Abschiedsreden und das Liebesgebot" in G. van Belle et al. (eds.), *Repetitions and Variations in the Fourth Gospel* (Leuven: Peeters, 2009), 589–608.

———. "The Signs in the Gospel of John", P. Anderson et al. (eds), *John, Jesus, and History Vol. 3: Glimpses of Jesus Through the Johannine Lens* (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2016), 231–244.

Schüssler-Fiorenza, Elisabeth, "The Ethics of Biblical Interpretation: Decentering Biblical Scholarship" *JBL*, Vol. 107, No. 1 (1988), 3–17.

Segovia, Fernando, *Love Relationships in the Johannine Tradition* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982).

———. "Criticism in Critical Times: Reflections on Vision and Task" (*JBL* 134/1 (2015), 6–29.

Segovia, Fernando (ed.), *What is John? Vol.1* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1996).

Sivertsev, Alexei, "The Household Economy" in C. Hezser (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Daily Life in Roman Palestine* (Oxford: OUP, 2010), 229–245.

Skinner, Christopher, "Love One Another: The Johannine Love Command in the Farewell Discourse" in S. Brown and C. Skinner (eds.), *Johannine Ethics: The Moral World of the Gospel and Epistles of John* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2017), 25–42.

Smith, D. Moody, "The Contribution of J. Louis Martyn to the Understanding of the Gospel of John" in J. L. Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, 3rd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 1–23.

Song, Robert, "Sharing Communion: Hunger, Food, and Genetically Modified Foods" in S. Hauerwas and S. Wells (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics* (London: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2004), 388–400.

Stare, Mira, "Ethics of Life in the Gospel of John" in J. van der Watt and R. Zimmermann (eds.), *Rethinking the Ethics of John* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 213–228.

Stendahl, Krister, "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West", *The Harvard Theological Review*, 56/3 (1963) 199–215.

Stern, Ephraim, "The Persian Empire and the Political and Social History of Palestine in the Persian Period" in W. Davies and L. Finklestein (eds.), *Cambridge History of Judaism vol. 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 70–87.

Stovell, Beth, "Love One Another and Love the World: The Love Command and Jewish Ethics in the Johannine Community" in S. Porter and A. Pitts (eds.), *Christian Origins and the Establishment of the Early Jesus Movement* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 426–458.

Syreeni, Kari, *Becoming John: The Making of a Passion Gospel* (London: T&T Clark, 2019).

Tanner, Kathryn, *Christianity and the New Spirit of Capitalism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019).

Thomas, John Christopher, *Footwashing in John 13 and the Johannine Community* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991).

Thompson, Marianne Meye, *The Humanity of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1988).

———. "Signs and Faith in the Fourth Gospel", *BBR* 1 (1991), 89–108.

———. *The God of the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001).

———. "The Raising of Lazarus in John 11: A Theological Reading" in R. J. Bauckham and C. Mosser (eds.), *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 233–244.

———. *John* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015).

Thyen, Hartwig, *Das Johannesevangelium* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005).

Trozzo, Lindsey, *Exploring Johannine Ethics* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017).

Tseng, Shao Kai, "Barth on Actualistic Ontology" in George Hunsinger and Keith L. Johnson (eds.), *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Karl Barth* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2020), 1006–1022.

Van Belle, Gilbert, "The Meaning of ΣHMEIA in John 20,30–31", *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses. Louvain Journal of Theology and Canon Law* 74 (1998), 300–325.

Van der Merwe, D. G., "Imitatio Christi in the Fourth Gospel", *Verbum et Ecclesia* 22/1 (2011), 131–148.

Van der Watt, Jan, *Families of the King* (Leiden: Brill, 2000).

———. *A Grammar of the Ethics of John Vol. 1* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019).

Van der Watt, Jan, and Zimmermann, Reuben (eds.), *Rethinking the Ethics of John* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012).

Wallace, Daniel, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996).

Watson, Francis, "Trinity and Community: A Reading of John 17", *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 1/2 (1999), 168–184.

———. *Gospel Writing: A Canonical Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013).

———. "Putting "Theological Interpretation" in Its Place: Three Models and Their Limits", *Journal of Theological Interpretation*, 14/1, 2020, 65–73.

Westcott, Brooke Foss, *The Gospel According to St John* (London: James Clarke & Co., 1958).

Williams, Catrin, "Faith, Eternal Life, and the Spirit in the Gospel of John", in J. Lieu and M. de Boer (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Johannine Studies* (Oxford: OUP, 2018), 347–365.

———. "Jesus the Prophet: Crossing the Boundaries of Prophetic Belief and Expectations in the Gospel of John" in C. Koester (ed.), *Portraits of Jesus in John: A Christological Spectrum* (London: T&T Clark, 2019), 91–107.

Williams, Matthew N., *Money Can't Fix Everything* (Cambridge: Jubilee Centre, 2020).

Weder, Hans, "Das neue Gebot: Eine Überlegung zum Liebesgebot in Johannes 13" in A. Dettwiler and U. Poplutz (eds), *Studien zu Mattäus und Johannes/ Études sur Matthieu et Jean* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2009), 187–205.

Weyer-Menkhoff, Karl, "Ethics in John by Considering Scripture as Work of God" in J. van der Watt and R. Zimmermann (eds.), *Rethinking the Ethics of John* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 159–174.

Wheaton, Gerry, *The Role of Jewish Feasts in John's Gospel* (Cambridge: CUP, 2015).

Wischmeyer, Oda, "Das alte und neue Gebot: ein Beitrag zur Intertextualität der johanneischen Schriften" in A. Dettwiler and U. Poplutz (eds), *Studien zu Mattäus und Johannes/ Études sur Matthieu et Jean* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2009), 207–220.

Wolfe, Judith, "Eschatological Being" (https://research-repository.st-andrews.ac.uk/bitstream/handle/10023/19526/Eschatological_Being.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y, accessed 10/12/2020).

Wolter, Michael, "Ethos und Identität in paulinischen Gemeinden", *NTS* 43 (1997), 430–444.

Zehnder, Markus, and Hagelia, Hallvard (eds.), *The Bible and Money: Economy and Socioeconomic Ethics in the Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2020).

Zimmermann, Reuben, "Imagery in John: Opening up Paths into the Tangled Thicket of John's Figurative World" in J. Frey et al. (eds.), *Imagery in the Gospel of John* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 1–43.

———. "Is There Ethics in the Gospel of John?" in J. van der Watt and R. Zimmermann (eds.), *Rethinking the Ethics of John* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 44–80.

Zumstein, Jean, "Le Lavement des Pieds (Jean 13,1–20): Un Exemple de la Conception Johannique du Pouvoir", *Revue de Théologie et de Philosophie*, 132/4 (2000), 345–360.