

Washing One Another's Feet as Jesus Did: Revelatory Activities and the Progressive Sanctification of Believers

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Abstract

While John 13:1–11 soteriologically interprets the foot-washing as symbolising participation and purification in Jesus, the subsequent John 13:12–20 ethically interprets the act as a humble self-sacrificing service emanating from love. Scholarly attempts at relating these two tiers of interpretations have sometimes tended to view them as conflicting. The first tier, taken to be christological, is said to be diametrically opposite to the second discipleship-oriented tier. This article draws on recent conceptualisations of Johannine symbolism to argue against this trend. Instead, it proposes that through the foot-washing, Jesus was instructing his disciples to participate in revelatory activities centred on his death. Humble participation in such revelatory activities maintains the cohesion of the fellowship while also triggering their purification in Jesus. This interpretation is supported by 1 John 1:7–10, a passage thought to be a commentary on the foot-washing.

¹ The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

Introduction

1.1. The Problem

The account of Jesus' washing of his disciples' feet in John 13 has generated several questions of historical, textual, literary, and theological significance (e.g. Haring 1951:355–380; Thomas 2004). Research into its discipleship elements has, however, mostly focused on elucidating what exactly Jesus wanted his disciples to do when he instructed them to wash one another's feet as he had done (13:14–15). There is no doubt that the chapter portrays discipleship as an imitative christology. The debated question is how far this imitation of Jesus by his disciples should go. In other words, to what extent can the disciples wash one another's feet the way Jesus did it?

It is well known that there appears to be a two-tier interpretation of the foot-washing in John 13, namely, (a) there is a soteriological tier in John 13:6–11 which interprets the act along the lines of participation and purification in Jesus, followed by (b) a moral/ethical interpretation in John 13:12–20 which construes it as an example of humble self-sacrificing service of love. The challenge is to explain how these two tiers are related to each other, and so, work out the degree to which the disciples could emulate Jesus. The second interpretation is of course more straightforward for the disciple to emulate (cf. Luke 22:26–27). But what can be said of the first tier of interpretation? To put the problem more sharply, if disciples, in Jesus words, 'should do as I have done to you' (John 13:15b), then, in what ways can they fulfil the purification and participation tier of the interpretation of the foot-washing?

1.2. A review of proposed solutions to the problem

Several proposals have been put forward aimed at addressing this problem, with varying degrees of success. A few of these will now be reviewed as a way of providing a context to the present investigation. These proposals are, namely, (a) redaction of two different sources, (b) purely moral/ethical approach, (c) purely sacramental and quasi-sacramental approaches, and (d) polysemous approaches.

1.2.1. *Johannine redaction of two different sources*

Starting with Bultmann (1971:466–472), a few scholars have argued that the problem emanates from the Johannine redactors' unsuccessful conflation of two different sources, one with polemical intentions against Jewish purificatory rites, and the other derived from the Johannine community's sacramental practices (Brown 1966–70:560–562; Segovia 1991). Thus, this approach views the problem as a literary-historical one, regards the two tiers of interpretation as fulfilling different functions, and so, does not attempt to address directly the difficulties the tiers pose.

It is perhaps right that this theory has fallen on hard times in current Johannine scholarship. The lack of solid evidence to back the proposal, and the contrary evidence elsewhere in the gospel that purification is not viewed in a completely negatively manner as the theory supposes (Attridge 2006:52–55), have together seriously undermined the viability of the approach. Besides, postulating different sources to solve an exegetical quandary hardly provides adequate guidance as to how the passage must be interpreted and applied. Barrett (1978:437) is surely correct therefore when he cautions that appealing to different sources as solution merely postpones the problem, and in any case 'does not exhaust the expositor's task'.

1.2.2. *Purely moral/ethical interpretation*

Approaches that diminish one of the two tiers of interpretations in favour of the other are also inevitably inadequate. For example, several reasons may be advanced for rejecting the purely moral/ethical interpretation as adopted by Michl (1959:697–708), Belsterling (2006:77–92), and Köstenberger (1999:148). Firstly, the introduction to the chapter in 13:1–3 places the act of foot-washing in the context of the approaching death of Jesus. This introductory emphasis at least implies that a soteriological slant must be applied to the interpretation of the foot-washing.

Secondly, the dramatic tone of the account parallels it with other similarly parabolic prophetic acts performed by Jesus in the gospel, acts whose interpretations are often related to the death of Jesus (Barrett 1978:436; Koester 2003:11; Schneider 1981:81). Accordingly, it is reasonable to assume a religious understanding of the foot-washing which goes beyond the moral/ethical interpretation.

Thirdly, Jesus gravely warns Peter that he would forfeit his 'share with me' (John 13:8) if he refused to be washed. This portentous warning gives the act of foot-washing a more profound experiential meaning that goes beyond that which the ethical interpretation of humble self-sacrificing service of love would seem to highlight. Fourthly, Jesus' rhetorically forceful command that the disciples 'ὁμῖν καὶ ὑμεῖς ποιῆτε', meaning, they 'should do as I have done' (John 13:15), the doubly affirming ἀμὴν ἀμὴν (Amen, Amen) emphasis in John 13:16a, and his solemn injunction with a conditional beatitude that 'εἰ ταῦτα οἴδατε, μακάριοί ἐστε ἐὰν ποιῆτε αὐτά', meaning, 'If you *know* these things, you are blessed if you *do* them' (13:17; emphases added), rhetorically places the emulation of the meaning of the foot-washing by disciples above moral/ethical categories.

Finally, the canonical placement of the foot-washing account at the beginning of the passion narratives, together with its literary relationship with the anointing of Jesus' feet by Mary (John 12:1–8), and the absence of the Lord's Supper in the fourth gospel, all establish a firm link between the foot-washing and Jesus' death (cf. Keener 2003:901–902). In that case, the purely moral/ethical interpretation would seem not to exhaust the interpretation of the foot-washing.

1.2.3. Purely sacramental or quasi-sacramental approaches

The sacramental approach, be it baptismal (e.g. Craig 1939:36–37; Lightfoot 1960:261–263; Schnackenburg 1968–82: 3:21–22; Moloney 1998:378), Eucharistic (e.g. MacGregor 1963:112–114; Suggit 1985:64–70) or as an extra sacrament (e.g. Bacon 1931–32; Correll 1958:72; Neyrey 1995:198–213) continues to appeal to a sub-section of interpreters. These interpretations, in varying ways, argue that the participation and purification alluded to in 13:6–11 regard the foot-washing as a symbolic ritual to be performed by disciples on each other.

In all fairness, there are good reasons not to reject these interpretations out of hand. Certainly, in the historical Mediterranean culture of the time, literal foot-washing by believers could well have been seen as 'reinforcing [the] social commitment' which Jesus enjoined on the disciples (Keener 2003:902). At least, there is evidence that a number of patristic authors interpreted the foot-washing along these sacramental lines (cf. Lincoln 2005:372; Thomas 2004:42–44).

However, despite its attractions, the sacramental approach, especially if taken in isolation on its own, is ultimately problematic. To start with, a convincing explanation of the mechanism(s) by which a foot-washing sacrament, even if judged to be efficacious, may invoke participation and purification in Jesus, as well as serving as an act of humble service of love is still awaited (Macchia 1997:239–249).

Besides, mimicking Jesus' physical act of washing feet would seem, on its own, to underrate the central point of the idea of emulating his example. Surely, it is the meaning of the foot-washing which is reflected from Jesus on the disciples and not the physical act of washing. As Witherington III rightly points out, John consistently encourages his readers 'to read the story at the level beyond the material one and to look for the spiritual significance behind or within them' (1995:237). It must certainly not be forgotten that though Judas' feet were presumably washed, he was shortly declared as 'not clean' (John 13:10–11). So, the best that can be said about the sacramental approaches is that they do not exhaust all the possible applications of the meaning of the foot-washing.

Similar arguments may be made against the quasi-sacramental approaches. The 'cleansing from post-baptismal sin' theory as proposed by Dunn (1970:247–252), for example, has a lot in its merit, especially if, as will later be argued, there are links between the foot-washing in John 13 and the exhortation of 1 John 1:7–10. The problem, however, is that Dunn's specific proposal does not exactly fit in with the actual historical situation portrayed by the narrative.

Likewise, the 'divine hospitality' interpretation that construes the foot-washing as symbolising welcome reception into God's household (e.g. Coloe 2004:400–415) or as an act of 'eschatological hospitality' (e.g. Hultgren 1982:541) suffers from their failure to underscore the purification idea from the first tier of interpretation. Equally, the suggestion that the foot-washing stood for 'preparation for martyrdom' in the Johannine community, as advanced by Weiss (1979:298–325), suffers from similar weaknesses. It is plausible that later post-biblical Christians adopted the rite in the context of approaching martyrdom, and in declaration of their readiness to die for one another (cf. John

13:14–17). Even so, the passage itself does not indicate that by washing his disciples' feet, Jesus was preparing them for their martyrdoms.

1.2.4. Polysemous approaches to the foot-washing

Recently, a number of mediating approaches have attempted to bridge the gap between the two tiers with some interesting results. Very promising among these is the approach which regards the foot-washing in John 13 as a polysemous act by Jesus (Carson 1991:458; Keener 2003:899; Koester 2003:133; Lincoln 2005:369; Malina and Rohrbaugh 1998:219–220; Schneider 1981:81). In this approach, it is argued that the two tiers represent a typical Johannine literary-theological style in which metaphors, images, and symbolic acts are made to span two levels. There is usually a christological level which, in our case, is the soteriological interpretation, and a discipleship level, which is the moral/ethical interpretation. The first tier is taken as applying only to the historical disciples whose physical feet were washed by Jesus, while the second tier is taken to apply to other Christians.

As will shortly be shown, this two-level christology-discipleship dimension of Johannine imagery is indeed common in the gospel, and this makes the polysemous approach quite attractive as a solution to the problem. This is especially so, since the polysemous approach enables a broader understanding and application of the lessons of the foot-washing. Indeed, the present proposal may be broadly categorised as polysemous.

Before laying out that proposal, however, a number of deficiencies with the current state of scholarship on the polysemous approaches to the foot-washing need addressing. To begin with, I summarise these deficiencies, before examining them more fully. Firstly, in those references in the gospel where the two-level presentation of Johannine imagery occurs, John does not create as sharp a dichotomy between the

christological and the discipleship applications of the imageries as is proposed by current polysemous interpretations of the foot-washing. Secondly, John 13 specifically underlines Johannine discipleship as an imitative Johannine christology, thus undermining the current dichotomous approaches to the polysemous interpretation. Thirdly, the current polysemous approaches wrongly disconnect the revelatory motifs which are predominant in John 13 from the purificatory symbolism of the foot-washing. I shall now provide further elaborations on these deficiencies.

1.2.4.1. Johannine discipleship as an imitative christology

The evidence from the gospel is that, contrary to the current polysemous approaches, where images span both the christological and discipleship tiers, the interpretations are not as sharply dichotomised. Typically, the image that is reflected from Jesus on to the disciples maintains some common features between the two tiers. Even images that are related to Jesus' divine origins, such as sonship (e.g. 1:12–14), holiness (e.g. 17:19), and light (e.g. 12:36) are transferred to the disciples in such a manner as to underline Johannine discipleship as an imitative Johannine christology (Zimmermann 2006:40–41). In fact, in John 7:37–39, there is an ambiguous fusion of christology with discipleship, so that both Jesus and the disciple are said to be the source from whom 'shall flow rivers of living water'. This fusion of christology with discipleship is not at all out of place, given John's theology of the union of the disciple with Jesus (e.g. John 15).

The manner in which the theology of revelation is applied in the gospel's christology and discipleship may be helpful for illustrating this point, that images transferred from Jesus to his disciples maintain

several common imitative features. So, just as John's christology² is largely expressed in revelatory terms, significant aspects of Johannine discipleship are also expressed with revelatory motifs. Just as Jesus 'sees' from his Father and testifies to humanity of what he has seen (John 3:31–32); the disciples are likewise witnesses of Jesus, and specifically, eyewitnesses of Jesus' ministry, passion and resurrection (e.g. John 15:27; 20:1–29).

Indeed, if it is correct, as some Johannine scholars suggest, that the Beloved Disciple is portrayed as an 'ideal disciple',³ then being a witness of Jesus, which is the main function of this particular disciple (John 19:25–26, 35; 20:8; 21:24–25), is equally the epitome of Johannine discipleship. The Johannine disciples are called to 'see' the Son of Man (e.g. John 1:35–51), behold his glory as the Father's only Son (1:14), testify (e.g. John 4:29; 6:14), and culminate their journey of faith in beholding the glory of Jesus (John 17:24).

In John, Jesus is *the* Light of the world (John 8:12; 9:5); but John the Baptist is also a 'burning and shining lamp' (John 5:35), and the

² With regard to Johannine christology, the dominant images through which the prologue depicts Jesus, namely, the Logos, Wisdom, and Torah, are all revelatory in nature. In the rest of the gospel, Jesus' incarnation, earthly ministry, and passion are also portrayed as God's revelation to humankind (Ashton 1991:62–66; Bultmann 1971:46–83; Käsemann 1968:12–24; O'Day 1986:657–668). In particular, the death and resurrection of Jesus, which John underscores as a single continuous event, is emphasised as the revelation of the glory of God (Beasley-Murray 1987:219; Wong 2005).

³ Scholars continue to debate the exact role that the Beloved Disciple plays in that gospel. Martin Hengel (1989:78), along with many others, such as Quast (1989) and Lincoln (2002:11) believe he is portrayed as an ideal disciple in Johannine sense. Richard Bauckham (1993:21–44) disagrees and suggests rather that he is portrayed as an 'ideal author'. The word 'ideal' is itself subject to some ambiguity: while some scholars use it to describe a non-historical construct; others understand it as a historical person who exemplified the best depictions of discipleship to Jesus.

disciples are 'children of light' (John 12:36).⁴ Just as Jesus' death is expressed in revelatory terms, as the glorification of the Father and of the Son of Man whom he sent (John 12), so also are specific activities performed by the disciples, especially when they are focused on the death of Jesus, deemed as revelatory.

The term 'revelatory activities' in this article, therefore, refers to specific activities, including speeches, which John underlines as having the revelation of God in Christ at their core, and which is often focused on Jesus' death and/or God's glory.⁵ Examples of Johannine revelatory activities include witnessing (e.g. John 4:39), giving testimonies (e.g. John 1:29–36), interpreting Jesus' words, symbols and signs (e.g. John 16:13), loving and serving one another (e.g. John 13:35; 15:15–17), performing miraculous works (e.g. John 9:3; 14:12; 15:24), and martyrdom (e.g. John 11:16; 21:19).

Revelatory activities performed both by Jesus and the disciples glorify God. But, as we shall shortly suggest, in John 13, they also purify and maintain the cohesion of the fellowship of disciples. Given this consistent transfer of the revelatory images from Jesus to his disciples, it is a mistake to completely dichotomise the interpretation of foot-washing imageries applied to Jesus and his disciples in the manner that current polysemous approaches do.

1.2.4.2. Johannine discipleship as imitative christology in John 13

With reference to John 13, the same phenomenon of discipleship as an imitative christology occurs. The beginning of the chapter depicts Jesus

⁴ It was common for agents of God in Second Temple Judaism to be regarded as 'lights' or 'lamps' (e.g. Moses in 2 Bar 18:1–2; *Memar Marqah* 1:2, 5:3–4, 6:2; Aaron in Sir 45:17; Samuel in *Biblical Ant.* 51:6; Ezra in 4 Ezra 12:42; and Priests and Sages in *Biblical Ant.* 23:7, Sir 24:32; 1QSb IV 27; 1QH IV 27).

⁵ For an in-depth anthropological discussion of revelatory activities performed by agents of deities see Buss (1981:9–30).

as knowing, loving, and acting (13:1–5), and the rest of the chapter amplifies this triple theme. Jesus, it is emphasised, knows the arrival of ‘the hour’ (13:1), knows his inheritance, as well as his destiny (13:3), knows his betrayer (13:11), and those he had chosen (13:18), and knows the exact timing of the Son of Man’s glorification (13:31–32). Jesus expresses his love in action, not only in his self-giving sacrificial act of washing the disciples’ feet, but also in the friendly act of offering the dipped morsel to Judas, his would-be betrayer. So the chapter underlines Jesus as knowing, loving, and acting.

In a similarly imitative manner, the disciples in John 13 are enjoined by Jesus to know (13:12, 17), to love (13:34), and to act (13:15–17). In John 13:34–35, ‘loving’ and ‘knowing’ are put together and reflected from Jesus’ loving and revelation on to the disciples. ‘I give you a new commandment’, Jesus says, ‘that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another’.

Since several aspects of the christology of the chapter are reflected in its discipleship, it is reasonable to assume that certain dimensions of the participatory and purificatory elements of the foot-washing interpretation are also reflected from Jesus on to the disciples. Certainly, given that Jesus insisted that the meaning of the foot-washing should be done by the disciple ‘as I have done to you’ (13:15), the current polysemous approaches, which sharply separate the participation and purification tier of the interpretation from the moral/ethical interpretation, appear inadequate.

1.2.4.3. Interactions between the foot-washing and revelatory motifs in John 13

The third deficiency of the current polysemous approaches is their failure to connect the purificatory element of the foot-washing with the

extensive revelatory motif of the chapter. Several interpreters (e.g. Barrett 1978:442; Culpepper 1991:133–152; Lincoln 2005:370–371) have identified that the whole chapter⁶ is dominated by revelatory vocabulary. This revelatory motif is evident in the repeated stress on Jesus' knowledge (13:1, 3, 11, 18, 21, 26, 36), Jesus' double emphases on being 'your' teacher (13:13–14), the foot washing itself being a prophetic revelatory act, the pivotal statement on the glorification of the Son of Man (13:31), together with the promise of future understanding of the disciples (13:7), the giving of the dipped morsel to Judas (13:26), and the vacation of Judas from his post into (or with) the 'darkness' (13:30). It appears, therefore, that the relationship between the foot-washing and the dominant revelatory motifs of the chapter may provide the cue for resolving some of the interpretive difficulties.

While scholars have explored the function of the revelatory motifs that dominate John 13, they have generally hesitated to link it with the purificatory imagery of the foot-washing. Barrett, for example, refrains from closely linking the two, and instead, draws attention to the fact that in the rest of the gospel, 'the true cleansing agent is the Word that Jesus speaks' (1978:442). Lincoln similarly urges in the direction of purification by Jesus' word, and not in the symbolism of the foot-washing. He argues, 'the main point of the foot washing is not cleansing, whether of sins in general or post-baptismal sins, but lies in the juxtaposition of the identity and status of the one who performs the act and the slave-like nature of the act' (2005:371; cf. Culpepper 1991:147).

⁶ The actual limits of the pericope are debated; some commentators opting for 13:1–20 (e.g. Lincoln 2005), most for 13:1–30 (e.g. Barrett 1978; Brown 1970; Howard-Brook 2003; Keener 2003), and yet others for 13:1–38 (e.g. Coloe 2004:403; Moloney 1998:371). The argument for 13:1–38 appears to be the most persuasive.

Koester (2003:133) comes closest to linking the two, but only to move the stress from revelation as a cleansing agent on to the love shown through the act: ‘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. Jesus expressed love in a provisional way through the washing of His disciples’ feet and in a complete way by laying down His life in crucifixion’. Koester further underlines his point that purification is not enjoined on the disciples by stating, ‘the washing they were to perform was a reciprocal action; love and self-sacrifice were reciprocal actions’ (2003:134). Thus, he is disinclined to underline the purificatory element of the disciples’ emulation of Jesus’ revelatory act.

This reluctance is understandable within the context of the wish to avoid the problems associated with the purely sacramental interpretation of the foot-washing. However, the repeated use of terminologies of purification in emphatic manner throughout the chapter⁷ undermines any interpretation which does not include that element. The prominence of that theme surely demands a closer examination of the chapter as to the manner in which purification is related to the revelatory motifs.

Moreover, and as will shortly be shown, there is enough evidence to show that contrary to these hesitations, there is a consistent interaction between purification and revelatory symbolism throughout the gospel. In that context, it is possible to demonstrate that in John 13, the

⁷ The purification related words include *νιπῆρα* (John 13:5, ‘wash bowl’), *νίπτειν* (John 13:5b, ‘to wash’), *ἐκμάσσειν* (John 13:5c, ‘wiped clean’), *νίψης* (John 13:8a, ‘wash’), *νίψω* (John 13:8c, ‘wash’), *λελουμένος* (John 13:10a, ‘bathed’), *νίψασθαι* (John 13:10b, ‘washed’), *καθαρός* (John 13:10c, ‘clean and made pure’), *καθαροί* (John 13:10d, ‘clean and made pure’), *αθαροί* (John 13:11, ‘clean and made pure’), *ἔνιψεν* (John 13:12, ‘washed’), *ἔνιψα* (John 13:14a, ‘washed’) and *νίπτειν* (John 13:14b, ‘wash’).

symbolism of purification by water evoked by the foot-washing interacts with the symbolism of revelation in a non-dichotomous manner. The polysemous approaches to the foot-washing hence require further modifications.

1.3. The present proposal

I propose that the foot-washing must be seen primarily as a revelatory act by Jesus centred on his death, and it is in its form as a revelatory act that Jesus enjoins his disciples to imitate. In this act of foot-washing, the three central Johannine symbols of water, light, and the cross are superimposed on each other, so that purification from sin, which is a recurring concern in the first part of the gospel, is subsumed under a revelatory purification triggered by the cross. In instructing his disciples to wash one another's feet, Jesus was enjoining them to mutually share in revelatory activities centred on the cross, and in that way trigger their progressive purification and cohesion in him.

The thesis will be developed in the following four steps. After a brief summary of some of the relevant recent conceptualisations of Johannine symbolism, the interactions between the purificatory and revelatory images in John 1–12 will be demonstrated. It will then be shown that John 13 focuses on the purificatory effects of revelatory activities centred on the cross. The foot-washing thus belongs to a cluster of purifying revelatory acts in John 13 which Jesus commands his disciples to emulate in the same manner in which he does. Further support for this interpretation will then be sought from 1 John 1:7–10, a passage that is thought to contain a subsequent Johannine commentary on the foot-washing. I shall conclude by enumerating some advantages of the proposal.

2. Survey of Recent Conceptualisations of Johannine Symbolism

Scholarship on Johannine symbolism since the second century has had a chequered history, especially in the West. According to Zimmermann (2006:2–3), until recently the tendency among scholars in the West was towards a consistently negative aversion, disregard and even ‘contempt’ for Johannine symbolic language, an attitude that he summarily calls, ‘pejorative’. Perhaps, therefore, one of the positive benefits bequeathed by postmodernism to biblical scholarship has been the re-appreciation of the pivotal role of metaphorical and symbolic language in the Bible as a whole. This, no doubt, has been reflected in an improved attitude to Johannine symbolism by scholars (cf. Coloe 2009:368–381; Hutchinson 2011:63–80; Ng 2001; Reinhartz 1999:1–10; van der Watt 2000; Vanhoozer 1995:366–387; Zimmerman 2004).

The beginning of this revival, at least in the English language literature, may be traced to the advances made by Koester’s *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel* (2003; 1st ed. 1995). Just over a decade earlier, Alan Culpepper’s influential *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel* (1983) had made some very useful inroads into the subject by delineating the literary-theological contours of the gospel, including some of its complex metaphorical language. Koester’s contribution may, however, be taken as the beginning of the laying of the solid foundation for the recent conceptualisations of Johannine symbolism.

Koester classified Johannine symbols into three categories, namely, representative figures, symbolic actions, and the three central symbols of water, light, and the cross. He traces the pervasiveness of these central symbols throughout the gospel and demonstrates that as the narrative progresses, there appears to be a confluent development of themes built around these symbols. He also observes that most of these

Johannine symbols occur in motifs in which a cluster of related supporting imageries interact with each other though focused on a core symbol (2003:9). These clusters tend to be more marked in the narratives as compared to the discourses, thus, requiring a careful delineation of how they relate to each other (2003:10–11).

Koester proposes that this complex characteristic of Johannine symbolism invariably makes them polysemous, multi-layered, and multifaceted. The symbols certainly allow for multiple meanings, even though there are a limited number of valid interpretations of a single symbol in each context. He further notes that among the plausible meanings of a symbol, there is a 'bright focused centre of meaning together with a penumbra of vagueness that is intrinsically ineradicable' from the centre (2003:26 cf. Wheelwright 1968:220). This 'penumbra of vagueness' commonly derives from the symbol's networked associations with other symbols, making splitting of interpretations of Johannine symbols into discrete entities fraught with significant problems.

Regarding the foot-washing, Koester (2003:11) stresses that it 'anticipates [Jesus'] final act of self-giving in death by crucifixion'. This was at the same time a revelation of Jesus' love and self-sacrifice (2003:133). Further, Koester argues for the two tier interpretation of the foot-washing, the soteriological interpretation applying to the christological element, whereas the moral/ethical interpretation applies to the discipleship element (2003:14). Thus, Koester stops short of underlining how the purificatory element of the foot washing applies to the disciples.

Koester's eminent work has been endorsed and further advanced by the International Conference on *Imagery in the Gospel of John*.⁸ In his examination of the relationship between Johannine symbols and their referents, Zimmermann describes the phenomenon whereby, within a single pericope, several different symbols are strung together to focus on a single referent (2006:30–36). Here, 'multiple interpretations' is turned on its head, so that a single referent has several different symbols pointing in its direction.

Zimmermann isolates two types of arrangements in this phenomenon. In the first, what he calls 'polyptychon or patchwork technique', several successive images are laid side by side but all focusing on the single referent. So, for example, in the prologue, images of the Logos, light, life, only begotten, and flesh, all referring to Jesus, are laid side by side. Similarly, in John 4, images of water, groom, and prophet, places of worship, Christ, and Saviour are set side by side in such a manner as to exhibit the multidimensional nature of the referent, Jesus.

In the second type of arrangement, the images are not laid side by side; but clustered, superimposed, and, in his words, 'pushed up' against each other so as to make it virtually impossible to separate them from each other. This second arrangement, which Zimmermann labels as 'cluster technique', is most illustrated by John's consistent linkage of the sending motif with the family imagery, so that 'the Father who sent me' formula superimposes two groups of symbols that become inseparable, namely, the family and the emissary metaphors. What happens in this superimposition is that 'it is not only [the] transferral of meaning from the image giver ... to the image receiver, but rather the two sets of images interact with each other leading to a multifaceted Christological interweaving of meanings' (2006:31–32). This networked interaction

⁸ Initially held at Eisenach, Germany in July/August 2005, with papers published in Frey, Van der Watt, Zimmermann, and Kern (2006).

leads to the creation of 'something new—something that is more than the sum of all the individual parts' (2006:37).

Harold Attridge (2006:47–52) has also argued along similar lines of the complex interactions of symbols in John's gospel. He identifies that instead of a simplistic straight-line relationship between symbol and referent, John rather views the same image from different angles in such a manner as to increase the complexity of the referent, and so achieve the penetration of its very 'essence'. He cites as examples of this phenomenon, the shifting nature of the imageries of the Good Shepherd discourse in John 10, the multidimensional nature of the Son of Man title as John employs it, and the variations in the water, light, and the cross symbols throughout the gospel.

Attridge calls this literary phenomenon a 'Cubist principle' and suggests that this was a literary technique that was prevalent in certain religious discourses in the late Hellenistic and early imperial periods. So, in the first part of the gospel, for example, Jesus is simultaneously depicted as replacing the cultic feasts of the Sabbath (John 5:9), Passover (John 6:4), Booths (John 7:2), and Hanukkah (John 10:2). These festivals have water and light as integral constituents of the cultic imageries and continue their presence in the rest of the gospel through the symbolic uses of water, light, and the cross (2006:51).

Johannine symbolism, Attridge concludes, may be regarded as a cluster of 'disorienting complexification deployed in the interest of ultimate focus' on Jesus (2006:51). It is suggested that the foot-washing appears to be a prime example of this 'disorienting complexification' of interactions between the key symbols of water, light, and the cross. I shall now demonstrate how these interactions occur in John 1–12, prior to the foot-washing in John 13.

3. Interactions between the Revelatory and Purificatory Images in John 1–12

Recent political incidents in the British Parliament have given added meaning to the proverb that, ‘sunshine is the best disinfectant’.⁹ The correctness of this saying may well be disputed by microbiologists; but, as I now suggest, there are good reasons to believe that the writer of John’s gospel knew its theological equivalent, that ultimately, revelation triggers purification from sin.

As is well known, the revelatory motif in John is represented by dualistic symbols of light/darkness, day/night, and blind/sight; as well as key expressions for knowledge, misunderstanding, glory/infamy, truth/falsehood, testimony, sign, and witness (cf. Koester 2003:141–171). This revelatory motif is intimately woven into the narrative and discourses of John’s gospel repeatedly, blurring the distinction between the material and the metaphorical elements.

In several passages, for example, what is said to be ‘seen’ is completely metaphorical or spiritual; so that, for example, only those born from above will ‘see’ the kingdom (John 3:3). Believing in Jesus is similarly said to be equivalent to ‘seeing’ him (John 12:44–45). It is also stressed that only those with the necessary faith and humility will ‘see’ beyond the physical (John 5:44; 9:39–41). Revelation, in this regard, divides humanity into those of the light who believe and see, and those of the darkness who refuse to believe and hence, do not see (e.g. John 3:19–21; 5:27; 8:12; 11:9). Just as physical light may result in better vision or

⁹ This pithy saying is commonly attributed to a former U.S. Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis in 1914 to reflect the fact that transparency in public affairs reduces fraudulent practices. The saying was repeatedly cited in the British Press during the scandal involving fraudulent expenses claims by some Members of the British Parliament in 2008/2009. For details of the scandal, see www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstoppers/mps-expenses/5335266/MPs-expenses-the-timeline.html.

blindness depending on how it is viewed, so also may revelation bring salvation or judgment, depending on the human response (John 6:40; 7:17; 8:43; 9:39–41; 12:31–33).

Alongside this revelatory motif are clusters of purification symbolism, largely represented by the symbol of water. In fact, both water and light symbols independently possess purificatory properties. The water symbolism in John has soteriological (e.g. John 3:5; 4:14; 19:34), pneumatological (e.g. John 7:37–38), and eschatological overtones (e.g. John 2:1–11; cf. Ng 2001; Attridge 2006:52–55). In several passages, however, the water symbolism is also used to denote cleansing or purification, as in references to baptism and its associations with purification (John 1:26, 31, 33; 2:22–27) and in the foot-washing in John 13. Similarly, light is also depicted as cleansing or driving out the darkness (e.g. John 1:5–8; 3:19–21; 8:12; 11:9–10; 12:35–36; 12:46).

This idea of the purifying effect of light is not surprising, since, in Johannine parlance, darkness, and blindness are equated to sin and unbelief (cf. Bruce 1983:34). Believing in Jesus purges away the darkness of sin and unbelief (John 12:46). Additionally, the word of Jesus, which in John's gospel is an agent of divine revelation, also performs purification or sanctification of the disciples (John 17:15–19). It is evident, therefore, that the symbols of water and light in John 1–12 have independent purificatory connotations.

In a number of passages, the water and light related symbols are superimposed on each other. When this happens, the element of purification assumes a complex multi-dimensional nature related to the mission of Jesus (Culpepper 2006:369–402; Zimmermann and Zimmermann 1998:40–51; cf. Koester 2003:176; Zimmermann 2004). This superimposition is best illustrated by two of the Johannine miraculous signs, namely, the wedding at Cana and the healing of the man born blind.

In the wedding miracle, revelation, and purification combine when the transformation of water in purification jars into wine that is drunk to perfect satisfaction is said to be for the purpose of revealing Jesus' glory. And this revelation, it is stated, leads to the disciples putting their faith in Jesus (John 2:11). Koester's (2003:182) summary of the key points of this first sign is therefore apposite: 'The transformation of the water at Cana suggested that purification would now be accomplished through revelation ... Through that revelation, God "cleanses" by transforming sin into faith, and in so doing fulfils and replaces the system of Jewish ritual purification'.

The healing of the man born blind in John 9 is even more interesting. Its focus on revelation is in no doubt. These revelatory motifs include the actual healing of the congenital blindness of the central figure, Jesus' explanation, that the healing was aimed at revealing God's works (John 9:3), the exhortatory emphasis on working day and night (John 9:4), Jesus' self-identification as the 'Light of the world' (John 9:5), the pervasive witness motif of the whole chapter, the extensive stress on knowledge and ignorance, (i.e. epistemology), in the exchanges between the Pharisees on the one hand, and the blind man and his parents on the other hand in the middle section of the chapter (John 9:14–34), and Jesus' concluding commentary to the narrative pointing to the Pharisees' blindness (John 9:40–41). So, there is abundant indication that the chapter focuses on the theme of revelation (cf. Asiedu-Peprah 2001; Asumang 2010:296–333; Keener 2003:775; Lincoln 2000).

However, what needs to be highlighted is the interaction between the water and the light symbols to point to Jesus' redemptive work on the cross. So, though Jesus frowned on the notion that the man's blindness was due to his parent's sin (John 9:3), he nevertheless made the question of cleansing from sin central to the narrative when he

concludes it by telling the Pharisees, 'If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, "We see", your sin remains' (John 9:41). Sin is here defined as the proud rejection of God's revelation; so that whereas the humble acceptance of that revelation triggers purification from the blindness of sin; proud rejection of the same revelation conversely leaves one condemned in darkness.

Indeed, Jesus superimposes the theme of revelation by light upon purification by water when, as part of the healing, he applies a paste of mud to the blind man's eyes and sends him to wash in the pool of Siloam (John 9:6–7). The man receives his sight only by purification upon Jesus' command. This superimposition of the light and water symbols is extremely important to John as indicated by the threefold repetition of the purificatory manner of the miracle (John 9:6–7, 11, 15).

The role of the pool of Siloam in the narrative is therefore not as peripheral as is sometimes assumed.¹⁰ The passage specifically notes the meaning of Siloam as *Sent* (John 9:7), which ties in very well with the earlier reminder that Jesus was 'sent' to do the Father's works (John 9:4). Yet, it is a mistake to restrict Siloam's role in this passage to just a polemic against Jewish purification. Since it was Jesus who instructed the man to wash in the pool, this is hardly a negative polemic against purification *per se* (Jones 1997:178–198; Keener 2003:781–782). On the contrary, washing in Siloam to receive sight illustrates the superimposition of the water and light symbolisms, so that purification is absorbed but not obliterated into the new dispensation of Jesus.

¹⁰ The multiple symbolism of Siloam includes the rabbinic application of Isaiah 8:6 to the pool as the place of ritual purification par excellence (e.g. *Pesiqta Rabbati* 16:6), as the source of 'living water' especially during the feast of Booths (*m. Sukk* 4:9–10), as 'water of expiation' (*M. Par* 3), as a 'sign' that a prophet was indeed 'sent' by God (e.g. *Tg Hag SSol* 4:15; *Lam Ra* 19) and eschatological Messianic connotations.

Purification in this case is performed by light, specifically, by the 'Light of the World' (John 9:5).

Purification in Siloam was thus the first element of progressive revelation in the blind man's journey of discipleship, a journey that culminated in his worship of Jesus as Lord (John 9:38). As the narrative progresses, the blind man's physical blindness gives way to sight, and gradually, to better light as he confesses Jesus as firstly, 'the man' (John 9:11), then 'a prophet' (John 9:15), followed by as a man 'from God' (John 9:33), and the Son of Man (John 9:35) and finally, as 'Lord' (John 9:38). During the process, the blind man engages in 'revelatory activities', as he testifies about Jesus to his acquaintances and to the Pharisees, with extraordinary boldness.

On the other hand, and in a reversed and equally progressive manner, having rejected the blind man's witness, the Pharisees end up blind and condemned in sin (John 9:41). The blind man is progressively purified as he 'sees' Jesus in better light, while the Pharisees become progressively mired in sin because they refuse to see and believe in Jesus. Thus the narrative clearly illustrates how revelation progressively purifies from the sin of unbelief.

Even though it is not immediately obvious, the symbol of the cross also features in the miracle of the healing of the blind man. The contrast created in juxtaposing the man's physical blindness with spiritual blindness that will only be cleansed in a pool called *Sent* invites the conclusion that only by washing in the pool derived from Jesus, the Sent One, will spiritual blindness be cured. Siloam therefore lays a proleptic anticipatory foundation for the cleansing water that will later flow from the side of Jesus on the cross (John 19:34; cf. Brown 1966:381; Grigsby 1985:234). Hence, in John 9, there is an interactional superimposition of the three central symbols that cannot be

separated from each other. It is this interaction which is also underlined in John 13, and to which attention now turns.

4. Purification through Revelatory Activities in John 13

John 13 acts as a hinge to the whole gospel (cf. Smith 1995:38) in which the symbols of water, light, and the cross in John 1–12 are superimposed on each other in the foot-washing, to set the agenda for the discourses to follow. With regard to the cross element of the symbolism, the introductory statements preceding the foot-washing proper allude to Jesus' impending death. The account of the drama of Jesus' actions, in rising from the table, taking off his robes, girding his waist with the towel, and washing the disciples' feet, has been noted by several commentators as a deliberate dramatization of his descent and ascent (e.g. Barrett 1978:436; Keener 2003:914–916; Lincoln 2005:367; Schneider 1981:76–81). Jesus rises and disrobes because, as John puts it, he knew 'He had come from God and was going to God' (13:3; cf. Phil 2:6–11). Then, also, Jesus' clarification to Peter in 13:8, namely, 'Unless I wash you, you have no share with me', underlines the foot-washing as related to his death by which the disciples would be brought to share in his inheritance.

The light symbolism of the foot-washing is present through the revelatory nature of the act itself. After the act, Jesus explains to his disciples, 'Do you *know* what I have done to you?' (John 13:12, emphasis added), thus defining the act as a dramatic parable aimed at revealing central truths. John indeed stresses that the act is performed by Jesus from the point of view of *knowing* his origins and destination (John 13:3). Like the cleansing of the temple (John 2:22) and the entry into Jerusalem (John 12:23), Jesus invested the foot-washing with revelatory mystery, interpretation of which was to be unlocked by his death.

The water symbolism is also evident in the purificatory aspects of the act (John 13:5–11). Jesus tells the disciples, ‘you are clean, though not all of you’ (John 13:10), inviting the conclusion that purification was an important component of the act. Accordingly, the three central Johannine symbols of the cross, light, and water are inseparably superimposed on each other in the foot-washing, with the cross playing the primary role.

In line with this, three further narrative-theological arguments may be advanced to show that by enjoining his disciples to emulate the lessons of the foot-washing, Jesus was instructing them to participate in revelatory activities centred on the cross, which will trigger their progressive purification and participation in him. To summarise before proceeding, these arguments are, namely, (a) the foot-washing is underlined as a revelatory act that purifies, so its emulation by disciples must be along similar lines, (b) the foot-washing explicates both the christology and discipleship of John 13, underlining the imitative nature of discipleship, and (c) John 13 contrasts the progressive purification of Peter with the progressive ‘blindness’ of Judas, demonstrating how participation in revelatory activities purifies.

4.1. The foot-washing as a revelatory act in John 13

Leaving aside the foot-washing itself for the time being, all the other activities that Jesus performs in the chapter, and those that he instructs his disciples to also perform in response to his example are underlined as revelatory. For example, Jesus predicts that one of his disciples will betray him (John 13:21). When pressed further to identify the betrayer, Jesus offered a dipped morsel to Judas (John 13:26) as a revelatory act in fulfilment of scripture (John 13:18; cf. Ps 41:9). The instruction that the disciples should love one another is also couched as a revelatory act:

'By this everyone will *know* that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another' (John 13:35).

Furthermore, the fourfold 'Amen, Amen' sayings in the chapter (John 13:16, 20, 21, 38) also emphasise the focus on Jesus' revelatory activities in the chapter. Other revelatory activities by Jesus in the chapter are the prophetic predictions of the glorification of the Son of Man (John 13:31–32), of Jesus' departure in a little while (John 13:33) to a place where they will also follow (John 13:36), and of Peter's impending denial of Jesus (John 13:38). Furthermore, though the disciples are bemused about some of the revelatory acts of Jesus, it is noted that they would eventually understand and transmit the revelation as messengers of Jesus (John 13:16). The disciples are, therefore, agents who propagate the revelation that Jesus brings. As all the other activities performed by Jesus and instructed to be performed by the disciples are underlined as revelatory, it is likely that it is in its form as a revelatory act that Jesus enjoined his disciples to emulate.

4.2. The revelatory christology of John 13 and the foot-washing

The christological titles that are explicitly underlined by the chapter, namely, Lord, Teacher, and Son of Man, are all interpreted by the foot-washing. These are then reflected on to and applied to the disciples. It is reasonable, therefore, to understand the act of foot-washing as a purificatory revelatory act by Jesus that he enjoins his disciples to emulate in the manner in which he also does.

So, although Jesus is Lord, he stoops down as a servant to wash his disciples' feet; thus, revealing his Lordship as that of the Suffering Servant (Keener 2003:899; Nicol 1979:20). This interpretation is then reflected on to the disciples when Jesus subsequently reminds the disciples that they also were *servants* (John 13:16). Similarly, as teacher, Jesus uses the foot-washing to set his disciples a revelatory

υποδειγμα—‘that you also should do as I have done’ (John 13:15; cf. Culpepper 1991:142–143). Likewise, as the Johannine Son of Man, Jesus willingly offers himself unto death as means of glorifying the Father and is, in turn, glorified in his imminent ascent onto the cross (John 13:32). This christology is again reflected on to the disciples as, at the end of the chapter, Peter declares his willingness to be martyred (John 13:37). Thus, the foot-washing served as a revelatory act explicating the christology.

Given that the foot-washing interprets the christology of the passage, and this christology is reflected on to the disciples, the purification and participation element of the foot-washing should not be separated from the moral/ethical interpretation. Just as Jesus’ revelatory activities purify, so also will revelatory activities performed by his disciples, if done in the manner he instructs, namely, centred on the cross, trigger purification and participation in Jesus.

4.3. The purification of Peter and the purging of Judas from the fellowship

The theme of purification through revelation centred on the cross is highlighted by focusing on the juxtaposition of the two main discipleship characters in the chapter, namely, Peter and Judas. Peter’s declaration that he would lay down his life *for* Jesus (John 13:37), even if interpreted to be typically over-enthusiastic and naïve, nevertheless indicates a significant progression in his understanding. By the end of the chapter, and through the several revelatory acts of Jesus, Peter had progressively moved from his ignorance and misunderstanding when he protested purification and participation in Jesus, to the point of understanding the implications of the foot-washing as not just participation and friendship, but also being willing to die *for* Jesus.

Later in the gospel, John will label the martyrdom of Peter as glorifying God (John 21:19; cf. Lincoln 2005:388).

In contrast to Peter, the departure of Judas from the fellowship meal is depicted as the cleansing of the whole group from the gloom of darkness and Satan (John 13:30). Even though Judas' feet were presumably washed, he remained unclean (John 13:11), underlining the fact that purification was efficacious only in a proleptic manner in relation to the cross (cf. Bultmann 1971:473). This becomes obvious when Judas is linked with darkness in John 13:30, indicating that the impurity alluded to in John 13:11 is the darkness of Judas. His darkness represented the stain on the fellowship of disciples, as well as his own. Jesus' revelatory activities in the chapter therefore triggered the purging of the community of disciples from the darkness of sin that Judas represented. Whereas Peter received this revelation and was purified, Judas did not.

Thus, revelation purifies those who accept it by faith, but condemns those who reject it. Indeed, this contrast between the judgment of Judas and the purification of Peter and the other disciples parallels the opposing salvation/judgement effects of revelation in the blind man in contrast to the Pharisees of John 9. Like the blind man, Peter and the other disciples are progressively purified by Jesus' revelation. On the other hand, like the Pharisees, Judas is condemned by the revelation, is possessed by Satan, and leaves the fellowship, into the night (John 13:30).

Since the discipleship elements of the foot-washing are emulated from the christology, it should be concluded from the foregoing analysis that revelatory acts that are performed by disciples, so long as they are centred on the cross, trigger purification and participation in Jesus. Put another way, activities by disciples that serve to reveal Jesus' person and mission, done and received in the spirit of humility, as all

revelatory activities require, will trigger the purification of believers from the darkness of sin and unbelief and maintain their cohesion in the community of disciples.

It must be clarified that a revelatory act performed by a disciple does not, on its own and in a direct manner, redeem another disciple. As Lincoln (2005:372) aptly cautions, the disciple's emulation of Jesus 'will always be a non-identical repetition, which cannot have precisely the same significance for them as it had for Him'. The disciple is, after all, an agent through whom Jesus' revelation was to be propagated (John 13:16). Purification through participation in revelatory activities cannot therefore occur independent of Jesus' work in and through the disciple. All the same, in enjoining his disciples to wash one another's feet 'as I have done to you', Jesus is underlying that a revelatory act performed in the manner in which he instructs serves as a trigger for the purification and participation of other disciples in him.

The moral/ethical interpretation of the foot-washing as a 'humble self-sacrificing service of love' is therefore valid; but it is only valid with a caveat. It is valid, so long as such acts of humble service are revelatory activities that are centred on Jesus' death. Certainly, in the Johannine theological idiom, not all humble self-sacrificing service would qualify as emulating Jesus' *υποδειγμα*. Only those acts of self-sacrificing service that are centred on Jesus' death on the cross, and which therefore serve as revelatory activities, would qualify as emulating Jesus' *υποδειγμα*.

5. Revelatory Activities and the Foot-washing in 1 John

Even though many in contemporary Johannine scholarship continue to reject the traditional view of a common authorship between the Johannine epistles and the gospel (cf. Painter 2010:365–366), there are

enough reasons to question the foundations of this scholarly consensus (cf. Yarbrough 2008:5–15). Furthermore, there are good grounds for supporting the view that significant portions of the first Johannine Epistle served as the Evangelist's commentary on the fourth gospel (e.g. Lieu 2008; van der Watt 2007:22; Witherington 2006). At least the considerable number of linguistic, theological, and idiomatic overlaps between 1 John and the second half of the gospel according to John make such a suggestion a likely possibility. If this is so, it is reasonable to investigate whether the Johannine epistles validate the present proposal suggesting that revelatory activities performed by disciples trigger purification.

With regard to the foot-washing in particular, Thomas (2004:155–158) has identified 1 John 1:7–10, 2:1–2 and 5:16–18 as providing further proof in support of his theory that the foot-washing was subsequently interpreted as a sacrament for post-baptismal sin in the Johannine community. Brown (1982:239) has similarly linked 1 John 2:1 to John 13, urging that the author of 1 John found in the symbolism support for his theology of communion with one another as the context for cleansing in the foot-washing.

Even though not all scholars would agree with these theories, the numerous cross-references between the Farewell discourse and 1 John suffice to support an attempt to seek validation of our proposal from 1 John. For our purposes, 1 John 2:1–2 and 5:16–18 may be set aside, since they deal more directly with the post-baptismal sin theory and confound the link with the foot-washing.

In 1 John 1:7–10, however, the cross, revelation, and purification are superimposed on each other to indicate that revelatory activities among disciples trigger and maintain participation and purification in Jesus. 'If we walk in the light as He himself is in the light', 1 John 1:7 goes, 'we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son

cleanses us from all sin'. No doubt, according to this passage, the purifying agent is the blood that flows from the cross. However, it is stated that the trigger for the progressive cleansing of the community of disciples is 'walking in the light'.

If it is true that, as suggested by both Thomas and Brown, the foot-washing forms the background of 1 John 1:7–10, then John here re-labels the foot-washing as a revelatory activity, as 'walking in the light'. In that context also, it is more than a mere coincidence that both 'washing of feet' and 'walking in the light' involve the feet and lead to purification. The only difference is that, in typical Johannine style, the symbol of water in the former has now been replaced by that of light in the latter. In our current conceptualisation, 'walking in the light' means performing revelatory activities which are centred on the cross.

6. Conclusion

It has been argued that in enjoining his disciples to wash one another's feet, Jesus was instructing them to mutually perform revelatory activities centred on the cross and in the manner that he did. Done this way, revelatory activities trigger purification and maintain the participation of disciples in Jesus. This interpretation, if correct, offers a number of advantages.

Firstly, it limits the skewing effects of the textual problems associated with John 13:10. There are two manuscript traditions on John 13:10, the longer readings introduce the phrase, εἰ μὴ τοὺς πόδας ('except the feet') to qualify Jesus' statement, a qualification which is lacking in the shorter readings. Theologically, the longer reading appears to suit the discipleship aspect of the foot-washing, stressing the point that, even after initial bathing, disciples still needed regular foot-washing. On the other hand, there are wholly valid reasons also for preferring the shorter

readings.¹¹ Whichever view is correct, however, if the foot-washing is understood to be a revelatory act centred on the cross that purifies, the problems created by the two traditions are eased. The longer reading in this context, even though preferable, cannot vitiate the shorter reading's point that purification is firmly triggered by revelation from the cross.

Secondly, it may be said that this interpretation is eclectic, and so, functional in its operation. It satisfactorily fits in with both sacramental and non-sacramental approaches alike; as well as the hospitality, martyrdom, post-baptismal sin, and moral/ethical interpretations. In all cases, the present proposal privileges the mechanism of the emulation of the foot-washing as a purifying revelatory activity centred on the cross.

Finally, this interpretation has some pastoral implications. Believers today may, in several different ways, mutually wash one another's feet, and in the way Jesus did it, so long as what they do is a revelatory activity centred on the cross of Jesus.

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¹¹See Beasley-Murray (1987:229) and Thomas (1987:46–52) for discussion on the options.

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