

Feet Washing (John 13:1-17) as a Paradigm for Christian Leadership in Nigeria

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doi: <https://doi.org/10.37745/gjahss.2013/vol11n4131>

Published: April 16, 2023

Citation: Jatau P.D. (2023) Feet Washing (John 13:1-17) as a Paradigm for Christian Leadership in Nigeria, *Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences*, Vol.11, No.4, pp.1-31

ABSTRACT: *The washing of the feet is unique to the Gospel of John. In John 13:1-17, Jesus washed the feet of his disciples. Scholars have offered numerous interpretations of this pericope in their efforts to provide a better understanding of the pericope. However, putting together the grammatical, literary, philosophical, and theological analysis of some interpretations can be difficult because they do not fully capture the Johannine presentation of Jesus washing his disciples' feet at the Last Supper. This piqued our interest, and we decided to contribute to the ongoing debate about whether Christians should wash their feet today. This article contends that the Johannine hupodeigma (see v. 15) implies more than an example for imitation, but rather a concrete and fundamental sign of Jesus' perfect form of love by which Jesus victoriously conquers the world, completes the mission, and offers a part in his life for 'his own', thus challenging them to foster servant leadership. The Historical-Critical method is used in this article, with diachronic and synchronic approaches. It addresses literary issues in the text such as delimitation, textual analysis, and an examination of the text's remote and immediate contexts. The importance of this work lies in the fact that it will add to the existing literature on John 13:1-17 and open up new avenues for future research on the subject.*

KEYWORDS: feet washing, Christians, leadership, Nigeria, paradigm

INTRODUCTION

John's Gospel, which was written at a time when there were competing claims for religious leadership, challenges such worldly understanding of leadership and portrays Jesus as a unique and exemplary leader, who, by an act of foot-washing, demonstrated that the true leadership authority lies in enduring love for others, in humility and service. By offering himself to die on the cross for human salvation, Jesus has become the source of life and the cleansing agent for those who yield themselves to him so that they might be aptly equipped to fulfil their mission in the world productively and with servant attitude. Since he has set himself as an example of love, humility, simplicity and service, and enables his followers to reflect these leadership qualities in

the world, Jesus, whom John portrays, is the distinct example of leadership in our contemporary Nigeria.

One of the important issues faced in our society today at the socio-political and ecclesiastical levels is, 'lack of proper leadership'. Many who hold leadership positions are often accused either of misusing their power or of being unable to exercise their power. Traditionally, leadership has been viewed in terms of exercising authority and power over individuals so that they might be fearful and be submissive. This traditional way of exercising leadership has caused the people under authority to be restrained from functioning creatively and constructively. It also runs into the danger of encroaching upon human freedom and choice and thereby of violating human rights. However, one may ask the question: with what attitude and for what purpose is the leader exercising that leadership authority?

The leadership is not directly related to the authority that our leaders hold, but to the attitude with which and purpose for which they exercise their authority. In the time of Jesus too there was a leadership crisis. Those who ruled over the Gentiles were 'lording it over them', that is, they were exercising authority in such a way that the citizens' freedom and creativity were subdued (cf. Mark 10:42). In other words, the rulers had a wrong approach and attitude in their dealings with the people. In the same vein, there has been a false understanding among Christians in Nigeria that leadership is an opportunity to enjoy power and subdue people. With this understanding, many have become ambitious to take up leadership positions. Such selfish ambition has always led into contention, conflicts, in-fights, insecurity and, in brief, to a deep leadership crisis.

Jesus' leadership quality is nowhere described with greater clarity than it is in Jesus' washing of his disciples' feet (John 13:1-17), which is the subject of our study. Since a good leader sets himself/herself always as a model for others to follow,¹ the interpretation of feet-washing as *hupodeigma* (an example) for his disciples to imitate (vv. 14-15) calls for a closer study of the passage not only for understanding the what and how of Jesus' leadership, but also for addressing the leadership issues involved in Christian mission today.

The Historical-Critical method is used in this article, with diachronic and synchronic approaches. It addresses literary issues in the text such as delimitation, textual analysis, and an examination of the text's remote and immediate contexts. The importance of this work lies in the fact that it will

¹ A. Fernando, *Leadership Lifestyle: A Study of 1Timothy* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1985), 94-97.

add to the existing literature on John 13:1-17 and open up new avenues for future research on the subject.²

John 13:1-17 and its Synoptic Parallel (Matt 27:17; Mark 14:19-25; Luke 22:7-38)

John's narrative of the Last Supper has some parallels with the synoptic materials, with some significant variations. In John's account, he does not highlight the preparations for the meal. This meal also is not a Passover meal. This is because Jesus dies on the preparation for the Passover (19:31, 42); he is the lamb of sacrifice (1:29; 19:36). In the synoptic, details of preparations for the meal are given and it is the Passover meal. In the synoptic account the washing of the feet takes the place of the institution of the Eucharist, while in John, since the Eucharist is presumed, the washing of feet is an explanation of the significance of the Eucharist.

“The practice of the Eucharist by the Johannine community is assumed (6:55-58), so the foot-washing becomes an interpretation of the Eucharist significance.” Also unique in John's account is the presence of the “disciple whom Jesus loved”. Here he acts as an intermediary between Jesus and Peter. At the supper, he leans at the chest of Jesus to find out the identity of the traitor. According to Matthew's account, money is the reason for Judas betrayal, while in John it is at the instigation of Satan.

Both John and the Synoptics record the Last supper which Jesus had with his disciples. There are certain peculiarities in the different accounts; this is because a chronology of the account was not intended. The point of each of the accounts is not the historicity, rather the meaning and significance of the event is the point of emphasis for each author and its audience. This is because the action and admonition of Jesus to his disciples on the need for selfless service remain an essential element for every disciple of Christ.

John 13:1-17 and its Translation (NRSV 1988 Edition)

¹ Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. ²The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper ³Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had

² David R. Law, *The Historical Critical Method: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2012), 1–24.

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come from God and was going to God, ⁴got up from the table, and took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. ⁵Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. ⁶He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" ⁷Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." ⁸Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." ⁹Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" ¹⁰Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you." ¹¹For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean." ¹²After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? ¹³You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. ¹⁴So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. ¹⁶Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. ¹⁷If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

Delimitation of Text

For proper exegesis delimitation of the text is necessary. The text of John 13:1-17 belongs to the larger unit in the second part of John's Gospel called the book of Glory. This section begins from 13:1-17:26, with the narrator's solemn words in 13:1, "Now before the festival of the Passover". With the Passover, Jesus' departure from the world to His Father draws near, Jesus is with his disciples whom he loved, to the end. The use of 'Now' at the beginning of this section indicates a shift in the narrative, moving from the book of signs to the book of Glory. This section is carefully set out with seams, "an artistic and strategic whole with a highly unified and coherent literary structure and development, unified and coherent strategic concerns and aims, and a distinctive rhetorical situation."³

The larger coherent unit can be further subdivided into smaller units of 13:1-38,14:1-31,15:1-11,15:12-17,15:18-16:3,16:4-33,17:1-26. The smaller unit of 13:1-38 has several indicators to show that the text was designed to be read as a coherent narrative. Within this pericope is found a fourfold use of the double "amen" (vv. 16, 20, 21, 38). With the strategic positioning of this "amen" saying, the section can be further divided into three subsections: 13:1-17, 18-20, 21-38.

³ F. F. Segovia, "John 13: 1-20, The Footwashing in the Johannine Tradition." *ZNW* 73 (1982) 31-51.

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The narrator opens with the account of the foot washing and the dialogue that surround it, largely dealing with Jesus' instruction of the disciples, the ignorance of Peter, and the failure of Judas (vv. 1-17). This section closes with the double amen in vv. 16-17. In Vv. 18-20, which concludes with double 'amen' in v.20, Jesus addresses the disciples. No other person speaks. Narrative and the pattern of dialogue between Jesus and his disciples return in vv. 21-38, which both open (v. 21) and close (v.38) with the double 'amen'.⁴

In this section, added to the use of double 'amen', there is the theme of 'knowing' and 'doing'. Jesus' knowledge of his hour and love for his disciples flowed into an action of love, Verse 1-3. In the same way, the disciple's knowledge and love is to flow into action as that accounts for true blessedness verses 12-17, this thus forms an *inclusio* for the pericope of John 13:1-17. Therefore, the text of John 13:1-17, can be studied as an independent unit within the larger context of John 13:1-17:26 and the subdivided unit of John 13:1-38.

Literary Contexts of John 13:1-17

John 13:1-17 falls within the second part of the Gospel of John called the book of Glory. Chapters 11-12 serve as the narrative bridge as there is a transition from Jesus' public ministry to the story of the cross; the 'hour' of Jesus is ushered by this chapter.

The Remote Context of John 13:1-17

The remote context of John 13:1-17 is the book of Glory. The Gospel of John is basically divided into two; the book of signs, chapters 1-12 and the book of Glory, chapters 13-21. The book of Signs sets in motion in literary anticipation of the book of Glory in which the 'hour' of Jesus is revealed. This 'hour' is manifested in 13:1; it is tied to his death wherein his glory is to be revealed.

The 'hour' of Jesus has been held in abeyance from early in the story (2:5) until now (7:6, 8:20). With the advent of the Greeks and their request to see Jesus (12:20-22), however, Jesus is able to announce that "the hour" has come...the arrival of the hour of Jesus serves as a clear indication to the reader that the story is turning toward an account of the lifting up of Jesus on the cross (3:14, 8:28), his moment of glorification, and the revelation of the Glory of God (11:4).⁵

⁴ J. Moloney, "The Gospel of John as Scripture" in the *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 6/3 (2012): 371.

⁵ Moloney, 458.

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The hour of Jesus is that ultimate, unique and decisive moment when the mission Jesus is fully revealed. This is expressed in John 19:30 in the word of Jesus *tetelestai* (it is finished). The verb is in perfect indicative passive form, referring to an act that is complete; an established reality whose effect is always felt. It is the nearness of this hour that forms the remote context of this pericope.

The nearness of Jesus' 'hour' is related to the nearness of the Passover. Within this context, Jesus goes up to Jerusalem to cleanse the Temple, John 2:13. In the Temple he challenges his opponents to destroy the Temple and he will rebuild it in three days, 2:19. Consequently there is an order to arrest Jesus, 11:55. In John 12:1:7 Mary then anoints the feet of Jesus. These events culminate in the manifestation of Jesus' authority as a leader of his people. His authority is bound up with his life giving service to others.

The Immediate Context of John 13:1-17

The immediate context of John 13:1-17 is the Supper; the context within which Jesus washes the feet of his disciples. At this supper, Jesus reversed the traditional order whereby slaves washed the feet of their masters and their guest. Here as their lord and master, He washed their feet instead. This is suggestive of the fact that, the issues affecting discipleship and authority may have been prominent in John's community especially as His return to the Father was eminent. This view is corroborated by Camillus Umoh as he asserts thus:

Also the peculiar way the evangelist quotes Ps 41:10 in 13:18 probably demonstrate a peculiar attitude in the community, where arrogance and contempt may have eroded into its communal lifestyle. Thus the significance of Jesus' symbolic action of washing the feet of his disciples must be seen in part as an attempt also to address such issues in the context of Johannine social-political apologetic.⁶

(b) Literary Genre

John Gospel employs many literary devices in conveying its message. In the text of John 13:1-17 the literary device used by the author is basically that of narrative genre. Within this narrative which is episodic in nature there is also a combination of action, reaction and response tending to dialogue. The pericope can be identified as using rhetorical analysis, "an act of composing discourse aimed at persuasion."⁷ This consists of judicial, deliberative and demonstrative elements.

⁶ Camillus Umoh, *The Plot to kill Jesus: A Contextual Study of John 11:47-53* (New York: Peterlang, 2000), 248.

⁷ Fitzmyer 53.

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In this text, the demonstrative element is employed to persuade the reader to action as captured in verse 17, “if you know these things, you are blessed if you do them”. “In other settings (that is, when the encounters are not of the law court type) the evangelist employs persuasive rhetorical devices such as the deliberative and demonstrative types used mainly for teaching (e.g., 3:3-21; 4:31-38, 39-42; chaps 13-17) and the philosophical type characterized by appeal and persuasion (e.g., 4:7-26).”⁸

Literary Structure of the Text

A modified structure similar to that of Francis Molony will be followed. In this study, the structure will be referred to as a chiasmic structure. The following is the structure of the text:

- A- Introduction and the Washing of the feet (Verse 1-5)
 - I. Jesus knows
 - II. Jesus acts
- B- Jesus’ Dialogue with Simon Peter (Verse 6-11)
 - I. Peter objects to the washing of the feet
 - II. Jesus insist on the need of washing
- C- Jesus washing of the feet as a model for the Disciples (12-17)
 - I. The significance of washing of feet
 - II. The charge to follow the model of Jesus
 - a. If you know
 - } These things you are blessed
 - b. If you do

The structure of the text opens and closes with ‘knowing’ and ‘acting’. In the opening, Jesus ‘knows’ that his hour is at hand and ‘acts’ in love which he had for his disciples to the end. In the end the lifestyle of Jesus (vv. 1-5), is demanded of the disciples. The intermediary verses are carefully woven to lead to this persuasive invitation. The one who is able to live in consonance with the demand of Christ attains true blessedness (vv. 16-17).

Literary Exegetical Analysis

This section would be done based on the above structure.

A.Introduction and washing of the feet (Verse 1-5)

Since John has closed the epilogue of 12: 37-50, it is quite logical that he begins the next unit with an introductory statement. Verse 1 functions in this manner and contains several themes that are

⁸ Okure, 1515.

prominent in the passion narrative: the Passover, Jesus' hour, his return to the Father, Jesus' love for his own, and his foreknowledge. The first phrase, *pro de tēs heortēs tou pascha*, both places the event in time (before the Passover Feast) and advances the Johannine interest in the Passover Feast (cf. 2: 13,23; 6: 4; 11: 55; 12: 1; 18: 28,39; 19: 14,31). In light of the Passover countdown (11: 55; 12: 1) and the description of his death on the day of preparation for the Passover (19: 31), the mention of the Passover brings Jesus' death into focus and ties what follows to it. This idea is closely related to the recognition that Jesus' hour has come.

Theological content is packed into the *ōra* (hour), one of the most important temporal indicators. Nothing is thrust upon Jesus in the Fourth Gospel without the Father's approval, and the *ōra* "... are God's appointed hour, before which no one can take decisive action against Jesus. It is fundamentally the hour of divine salvation history."⁹ It is the appointed time, which Jesus fulfills by going to his death on the cross. As with other episodes in John, Jesus is not caught off guard on this occasion, but anticipates what is to come (cf. 2: 24,25; 4: 16-18; 6: 5,6,70,71; 10: 17-18; 11: 1-5,23; 12: 30; 13: 19-30,38; 14: 29; 16: 4; 18: 4; 19: 28-30; 21: 18,19).

Throughout John's Gospel, *hē ōra* (the hour) is used to describe the mission of Jesus in terms of incompleteness or completeness (cf. 2: 4; 8: 20; 12: 23; 17: 1).¹⁰

While the first part of the Gospel tends toward "the hour" (cf. 2, 4; 7,30; 8,20), the second part explains its theological meaning and its soteriological and chronological context (cf. 13,1; 17,1; 19,27).¹¹

The arrival of the hour, in particular, denotes Jesus' departure from this world and return to the Father. This concept, which was mentioned briefly before chapter 13, reappears frequently after 13:1 (cf. 13: 33-14: 4, 28-31; 16: 5-11, 16, 28; 17: 11-13; 20: 17). The *hina* clause recalls Jesus' birth and mission. Furthermore, the arrival of the hour emphasizes Jesus' love for his own. The term *agapaō* (I love) is used (in John) to describe Jesus' love for the disciples (13: 1,34; 14: 21; 15: 9,12; cf. 11: 5), the disciples' love for one another (13: 34; 15: 12,17), and especially Jesus' love for the Father (14: 31). The abundance of *agapaō* terminology in the closing materials serves to define the intimate dynamics of these chapters.

This deep-seated love is primarily referred to in 13:1 by Jesus' supreme act on the cross, which is foreshadowed by the feet washing. This love is directed toward himself, and it is *eis telos*; it is a preposition that can be governed by different cases, and here it is governed by an accusative. Used

⁹ John C. Thomas, "Footwashing in John 13 and the Johannine Community" <https://theses.whiterose.ac.uk/3505/1/338204.pdf> accessed 20/11/2021, pp 99.

¹⁰ John C. Thomas, "Footwashing in John 13 and the Johannine Community", 100.

¹¹ John C. Thomas, "Footwashing in John 13 and the Johannine Community", 100.

with the preposition *eis* it means “to the end”, “completely”, “totally”, “consistent with the fundamental message of the New Testament, *eis telos* is largely used in an eschatological sense, referring either to the end of the world, to the ‘martyr’s death’ amid apocalyptic tribulation or to the ‘end of the law’ during the end time inaugurated by Christ.”¹² Here two senses are implied, the temporal and qualitative. In this context it is in reference to the qualitative attribute while not neglecting the temporal, “At the hour of his death, Jesus’ last word is: ‘it is finished’ (19:30 *tetelestai*). Does the demonstration of love (*ēgapēsen*) refer to the washing of the Disciples feet that follows immediately, or to Jesus’ death on the cross? It undoubtedly refers primarily to the second, without excluding the first¹³ *Eis telos* expresses the limit beyond which there is nowhere else or nothing else to give or do. It is possible to interpret *eis telos* as “to the end of his life” or as “fully,” “wholly,” or completely.

Verse 3

Verses 2-3 serve to introduce the feet washing pericope in a direct fashion. It is the foreknowledge of Jesus, as mentioned in v. 1, that precipitates the feet washing which follows. Such knowledge is part and parcel of the Fourth Gospel’s view of Jesus. Specifically, in this context, Jesus’ knowledge includes two aspects: (1) that the Father had placed all things into his hands, and (2) that he had come from God and he is about to return to the Father. The idea of the Father placing all things into Jesus’ hands is one with which the reader is familiar owing to its previous occurrences (cf. 3: 35; 6: 39; 10: 28-29). Here the author uses the phrase to emphasize Jesus’ knowledge of his origin and destiny. In particular, it focuses attention upon the Sovereign of the universe as he prepares to perform an act of servitude.¹⁴ Coming as it does at this point in the narrative the phrase hints at Jesus’ charge to fulfil the salvific act of sacrificial death on the cross.¹⁵ John continues to develop the theme of Jesus’ coming from the Father and returning to him. Not only does the introduction of this motif demonstrate the superiority of the one who comes from the Father over God’s adversary,¹⁶ but it is additional reason for the feet washing since Jesus will soon be leaving the disciples. John again relates the feet washing to the passion, this time by mentioning Jesus’ return to God, that is, his crucifixion and resurrection.¹⁷ Therefore, both aspects of Jesus’ foreknowledge prompt the feet washing and tie into the passion.

¹² Baltz, Schneider, 348.

¹³ Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St John*, Vol I. (London: Burns & Oates, 1975), 16.

¹⁴ John C. Thomas, “Footwashing in John 13 and the Johannine Community”, 107.

¹⁵ G. Delling, *hupagō*, *TDNT* VIII 506 n. 13

¹⁶ John C. Thomas, “Footwashing in John 13 and the Johannine Community”, 107.

¹⁷ Raymond Brown, *The Gospel according to John* 2 Vols (Garden City: Doubleday, 1966-70), 564.

Verse 4

At this point the feet washing scene begins in earnest. Jesus' actions are represented as highly deliberate. He interrupts the meal by rising and laying aside his garments. This action leaves Jesus attired as a servant.¹⁸ Leon Morris suggests that Jesus had stripped to a loin cloth.¹⁹ If this suggestion is correct, John describes a scene wherein the agent of creation wears nothing but a loin cloth and a towel with which he will dry the feet of the disciple.²⁰ There is a foreshadowing in the feet washing of the humiliation and cleansing connected with Jesus laying down his life. The stark reality of nakedness also presents a clear reference to the crucifixion. As G. Ahr concludes:

The reference to the crucifixion is ever more clearly present in the statement about Jesus' nakedness: anyone familiar with the story of Jesus' death can grasp the reference to the removal of clothes, and, indeed, it is the very unexpectedness of this statement which points the reader to this reference.²¹

“All of this serves to relate the feet washing to the death of the Lord.”²²

Verse 5

The action begun in the previous verse is continued in v. 5, as indicated by the use of *eida*. John methodically emphasizes the significance of Jesus' actions by mentioning the towel, water, and washbasin. This emphasis foreshadows the servant motif that appears later in v. 16. The pouring of water into the *nīptēra* and the washing of feet, in particular, extend the servanthood motif that begins with the laying aside of the clothes in v. 4. There is no doubt that slaves were responsible for foot washing.

As previously stated, it was the duty of the servants to carry out the entire process: drawing the water, washing the feet, and disposing of the water. It appears that a slave, no matter how old, could not refuse to perform this service. There is such a strong association between servants and foot washing that the foot basin comes to function figuratively as a sign of servitude; as a result, foot washing and slavery could and were understood as synonymous. Clearly, washing another's feet acknowledged that person's subjugation. But to see only servitude here would be to overlook another aspect of John's emphasis. Such service is evident in John 13, both in the emphasis on

¹⁸ John C. Thomas, “Footwashing in John 13 and the Johannine Community”, 108.

¹⁹ Morris, 615 n. 15.

²⁰ Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, 551.

²¹ P. G. Ahr, “He Loved Them to Completion?: The Theology of John 13- A.” *Standing Before God: Studies on Prayer in Scripture and in Tradition* 73-89. Edited by A. Finkel and L. Frizzell (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1981), 77.

²² Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, 551.

servitude and in the prominence given in v. 1 to Jesus' love for his own which is mentioned twice, once with *eis telos*. Nonetheless, Jesus' action is unique in ancient literature, because no other master (superior) would condescend to perform this act for a subordinate.²³

Hudōr (water) is a word that appears 20 times in the gospel, twice in 1 John, and 17 times in the Apocalypse, which appears to come from the Johannine circle. It appears more frequently in these three works than in the rest of the New Testament combined.²⁴ Water is mentioned in the Fourth Gospel in connection with baptism (1: 26, 31, 33; 3: 23) and is transformed into wine (2: 1-11). Water is mentioned alongside Spirit in the discussion about "birth from above" (3: 5) and is identified as the "Living Water" that quenches thirst forever (4: 7-15). It is linked to healing (5: 1-9; 9: 1-34) and was walked on by Jesus (6: 16-21). Water will flow from Jesus' side after his death (19: 34).

Given its unusual associations, the appearance of *hudōr* here creates an expectation on the part of the readers, as they are aware that its presence may indicate that something significant is about to occur. A *nīptēra* was filled with water. Brown interprets *nīptēra*, a New Testament *hapax*, as a pitcher, a common meal utensil. "In the ancient Near East, washing was not normally done in a basin of standing water, but by pouring water over the part of the body," he concludes from 2 Kings 3: 11.²⁵

While Brown's suggestion appears logical, the text under consideration describes someone who poured water on Elijah's hands. Nothing is mentioned about the feet, though they may be washed in the same manner as the hands. Second, most artistic depictions of foot washing show the guest's feet in a large water pot with water poured over them. Finally, many of the archaeology-discovered footbaths are round basins with a support in the center on which the feet could rest. Given this evidence, it appears that *nīptēra* should be interpreted as a 'footbasin or washbasin.'

John emphasizes the washing with *archo*, which "... usually draws attention to a specific element in the story."²⁶ The use of *archo* here suggests the start of an action that will be cut short. Not only does Jesus wash the disciples' feet, but he also carefully wipes them with his makeshift clothing, the towel. One more note emphasizes the servanthood motif in this verse. The disciples would be reclining on couches that circled the Passover table. Their feet would be behind them because they would be facing the table. In this manner, servants could go about their business while causing

²³ John C. Thomas, "Footwashing in John 13 and the Johannine Community", 108.

²⁴ O. Bocher, "Water", *DNTT* III 989

²⁵ Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, 551.

²⁶ G. Delling, *archo* in *TDNT* 1478.

minimal disruption to the meal. In such a case, Jesus would have circled the outside of the circle, emphasizing his servant-like actions. The narrative setting gives way to dialogue in vv. 6-11 at this point.

A- Jesus' Dialogue with Simon Peter (Verse 6-11)

Verse 6

This scene introduces Peter as Jesus' dialogue partner. Peter does not understand the meaning of Jesus' action of washing the feet of his disciples. Here the author uses the double name of Peter, Simon Peter. Peter refuses to allow Jesus wash his feet out of respect. His challenge is not with his feet being washed, but that they are to be washed by Jesus as this contradicts the very custom prevalent in the society, "Peter's difficulty is not with having his feet washed *per se* but having them washed by Jesus. Peter perceives this as a degrading act for Jesus to perform, for it was customary in Peter's society that the slave would bring a bowl of water and a person would wash his/her feet."²⁷

Verse 7

Jesus replies Peter, "You do not know now what I am doing but later you will understand." This response is indicative of the meaning that lies behind the action and becomes clearer with the answer that follows, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me" v.8. The barrier that here constitute an obstacle to understanding this action also serves as a literary means by which, the author continues the narrative, on account of Peter's protest. He is to fully grasp the meaning of this act at a later period (2:22, 12:16).

The significance of Jesus' action and his death is not revealed to them until the Holy Spirit has been sent (14:26, 16:22, 25, 29-32). In his reply, Jesus contrasts the present (*arti*) with an 'afterwards' that is left undefined. This cannot possibly refer to the conversation that follows the washing of the disciples' feet (vv. 12-17). It can only be the time after Jesus' death and resurrection, which, according to John 2:22 and 12:16, the disciples would understand by 'remembering'.²⁸

²⁷ Mary Coloe, "Welcome into the Household of God: The Foot Washing in John 13." *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 66/3 (2004): 408.

²⁸ Schnackenburg, 19.

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The use of *arti* (now) and *meta* (after) is particularly remarkable in the Gospel of John. This is an important tool in the development of his hermeneutic perspective, as it leads to an understanding of an event at a later period. To this Mary Coloe asserts:

Now' and 'later' in this Gospel are not simply references to time in a neutral sense, these terms have a rich theological purpose. On several occasions in the narrative thus far, these have been indicators that the full understanding of their experience is not accessible to the participants in the story but will be known only after Jesus' death and resurrection."²⁹

Verse 8

The narrator here uses double negative *ou* and *mē* and breaks the phrase with, *eis ton aiōna*, to show the seriousness of Peter's resistance to the act of Jesus. *ou mē* with the aorist subjunctive or with the future indicative is used classically as an emphatic negative for the future."³⁰ Consequently, Peter's protest against Jesus' act of washing of feet intensifies. The reaction of Peter was rooted on the fact that the washing of feet was considered a menial job that even Hebrew slaves would not undertake except a Gentile slave. The general norm was that, slaves washed the feet of those at table. "The act of feet washing was indeed an act of hospitality (Gen 18:4, 19:2, 24:32, 43:24, Judges 19:21, 1 Samuel 25:41). Women and children could occasionally carry out this task (1Tim 5:10)."³¹ This was also carried out for hygienic purposes (2 Sam 11:8-11, 19:24), it was also carried out in Cultic settings (Exod 30:17-21, 40:30-32, 1 kgs 7:38, 2Chron 4:6). This gesture was also seen as a mark of honor, "washing of feet of your guest was also seen as an act of hospitality. It was done for hygienic purposes, but also was essentially also a symbolic acknowledgment of honor and social position."³²

The response of Jesus to Peter's resistance, *ean mē nipsō se, ouk echeis meros met' emou* (unless I wash you, you have no share with me), is a serious warning against an attempt to exclude oneself from him. The expression means, "To have a share or a place with someone". This is used only here in John's Gospel with an influence from an Old Testament expression, *Hē'leq wūnaHālâ 'immāk*, the meaning originally: (to have a share with a person in something) (Deut 10:9, 14:27,

²⁹ Coloe, 408.

³⁰ Maximilian Zerwick, and Mary Grosvenor, eds. *A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament* (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1981), 149.

³¹ Coloe 54.

³²Jan Watt, "The Meaning of Jesus Washing the Feet of His Disciples (John 13:1-17)." *Journal of the New Testament Society of Southern Africa*, 51/1 (2017): 30.

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29), it is used more or less generally to denote the sharing of a destiny (2Sam 20:1, Isaiah 57:6, Ps 49:18).³³ The deeper meaning of this expression lies in their understanding of Jesus' promise to them after his death, a life which he was to gain; in which they will be beneficiaries. Consequently, Peter could no longer stop the Lord from washing his feet. It is only the one who accepts this act of humble service from Jesus that can share in the glory of Christ as his hour dawns, "Jesus answers that only the man who accepts this service has fellowship with him, remains united with him, that is, as he is on his way to the *doxa*" (glory).³⁴ The intention of the saying exposes the failure of Peter to properly understand Jesus' teaching as portrayed in this act carried out,

the intention of the saying was to point out the foolish misunderstanding of Peter, who supposed that, because Jesus' act in washing his feet represented the humble ministry of his death, he would get better by having his hands and head washed also as if washing with water were in itself a religious benefit. Against this Jesus points out that once one has received the benefit of his love and death (has been baptized into his death) he is 'entirely clean'; further washing is pointless.³⁵

The objection of Peter is guided by the same misapprehension that followed Jesus' cleansing of the Temple (2:13-22), and entry into Jerusalem (12:12-16). In each of these accounts, the fuller meaning comes only after the resurrection. Equally, by accepting this act of humble service, one is encouraged to break from the prevailing mentality of the world that places emphasis on honor, prestige and wealth as marks of true greatness, "thus to accept his service means to believe; it means readiness to accept the disintegration of all standards which the world uses to judge what is great and divine."³⁶

Niptō (*wash*), according to Johannine tradition has a double meaning. On the one hand, it points to the symbolic gesture of washing of feet. This in itself is not necessarily for admission to the life of Christ. On the other hand, it is a reference to a washing, a cleansing necessary for admittance into the Christian fold; namely the sacrament of Baptism, Barrett opines thus:

... the practice of Christian Baptism, the regular gateway into the Church, is at once suggested 3:5. Apparently, John conceived the feet washing as in some sense

³³ Bultmann, 468.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Charles Barrett, *The Gospel of John and Judaism* (London: Biddles, 1980), 368.

³⁶ Bultmann, 471.

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equivalent to Baptism, though the equivalence must not be taken rigidly, as though John argued: all Christians must be baptized; the apostles were Christians therefore the apostles must have been baptized, and if not in the ordinary way then by some equivalent.³⁷

Verse 9

Peter responds immediately to Jesus' stern rebuke, "Lord, not only my feet, but also (my) hands and head." Many interpreters immediately recognize Peter's request as motivated by a desire for total washing.³⁸ Unfortunately, little to no research has been conducted into the specific choice of the hands and head for washing. In other words, no attempt has been made to show how the hands and head came to signify complete washing. Unless these body parts were selected at random, Peter's mention of them is significant. As a result, they require some consideration here. Peter's mention of the hands and head could simply be because, along with the feet, they are the only parts of the body that are normally left exposed, unclothed. But to stop there is to ignore the fact that it is because of their "vulnerability" that both bodily parts are regarded as especially worthy of washing and/or anointing in Judaism.

Because of their susceptibility to uncleanness as a result of contact with a variety of items, the hands are eventually regarded as always being unclean in the second remove, unless they have recently been washed. The ultimate implication of all of this is that the hands can contaminate the entire person (cf. Mishnah, Hagigah 2: 5; Eduyoth 3: 2). When Peter asks for his hands to be washed, he is implying that if any part of the body requires constant washing, it is the hands. Peter's suggestion to wash the head is also significant.

The word *kephalē* (head) came to represent the entire person, life itself, in ancient Greek. As a result, curses are cast upon the head.³⁹ The same basic idea develops in the LXX where, "The head can be used as the equivalent of the person and his/her whole existence."⁴⁰ Therefore, *kephalē* is used to express the whole person and the part (standing for the whole) where blessings (Gen 48: 14,18; 49: 26), curses (2 Sam 1: 10; 3: 29; Ezek 33: 4; Joel 3: 4,7; Obad 15), dust/ashes (Jos 7: 6; Neh 9: 1; Lam 2: 10), and anointing (Exod 29: 8; Lev 8: 12; 1 Sam 10: 1) are placed. Two applications are significant in the New Testament: anointing (Matt 6: 17; 26: 17; Mark 14: 3; Luke 7: 46) and judgment (Acts 18: 6). Peter's request to have his head washed reflects his belief that

³⁷ Barret 367.

³⁸ Brown, *The Gospel according to John* 11, 566.

³⁹ H. Schlier, *kephalē* (head), *TDNT*11, 1675.

⁴⁰ K. Munzer "Head," *DNTT* 11, 158.

the head represents the person.⁴¹ Given this, Peter believes it is reasonable to devote an effective washing to the head. Both the hands and the head, according to Peter, are appropriate for such significant washings.

Verse 10

Jesus responded to Peter's seeming surrender thus, "one who has bathed does not need to wash except for the feet", this was a gentle caution against excess. 10a has *leloumenos* (bathed) (to bathe), this participle used for, 'the one who has bathed', refers to total immersion which contrast the verb *nipsasthai* (wash), of verse 10b, 'to wash', which refers to partial washing with water. There is here a transition in Jesus' address from Peter to all the disciples by the shift from the singular *su* (you) to the plural *humeis* which is at variance with the preceding verse. This can however be seen as appropriate, if Peter is presented as the representative of the other disciples. The statement in 10a 'one who has bathed' may be viewed as a parable, followed by its application to the disciples 'and you are clean'. A similar situation can be found in 16:12, followed by verse 22. In this case therefore, it is an attempt to present the washing of the feet as a symbol of Jesus' death; as he humbles himself to offer such selfless service; he would also lay down his life for the salvation of the world. Clearly the community of the disciples would be built on Jesus' death. John employs the use of *ouchi* which is a strong negative to show that, not all of them are clean.

Verse 11

This verse contrasts cleanliness with betrayal, demonstrating that cleanliness entails remaining loyal to and in fellowship with Jesus. Second, the author emphasizes that a disciple can be washed by Jesus and still be unclean, 140 as in the Synoptics, where Judas partakes of the bread and wine without sharing in the reality they represent. Third, the reader is reminded of what is now in Judas' heart by the mention of Jesus' knowledge. Finally, there is "... the gradual and increasingly distinct characterization of the traitor" here.⁴² At this point the dialogue gives way to the explanatory discourse.

B- Jesus washing of the feet as a model for the Disciples (12-17)

Verse 12

After finishing the washing of the disciples' feet, Jesus dresses and returns to his seat position at the table. In response to the ideas expressed in v. 7, Jesus asks the disciples if they comprehend the significance of the event. Such a question implies that the disciples did not learn what they were supposed to learn from the experience. Who could comprehend Jesus, the Saviour of

⁴¹ K. Munzer "Head," *DNTT* 11, 159.

⁴² Schnackenburg III, 22-23.

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Mankind, stooping to wash the disciples' feet? However, deep theological reflection through dialogue and action is an integral part of the Fourth Gospel. The question in v. 12 is provided as commentary, explanation, and obligation for the community.

Verse 13

In this verse, Jesus contrasts the disciples' accurate assessment of his person and status with the action he has just performed. *Humeis*, the second person plural personal pronoun, directs his words to the entire group. Jesus is referred to as Teacher and Lord throughout the Gospel. *Didaskalos* position is highlighted in almost every instance where he appears. It's worth noting that Jesus is never referred to as *Didaskalos* by anyone other than those who already believe in him (11: 28; 20: 16) or will believe in him (1: 38; 3: 2). The impression left by Jesus' use of the term here, as well as its confessional nature in the Fourth Gospel, is one of honor, authority, and even power.

Throughout the Fourth Gospel, Jesus is referred to as *Kurios*. At first glance, it appears to mean nothing more than "sir" (although, cf. the textually uncertain use in 4: 1). However, as the book progresses the term takes on a distinct Christological orientation, and the generic sense almost vanishes (cf. 6: 68; 11: 27; 20: 18, 28). In particular, in w. 6 and 9, Jesus responds to Peter's use of the title. Because they are correct in their usage, the disciples' use of the title reflects insight into his person.⁴³ Jesus does not deny the titles. On the contrary, in this first section of the Book of Glory, he takes them up himself, as part of the self-revelation that characterizes chapters 13-17. John seems further to emphasize this point by placing the titles in the nominative case, a very rare construction.⁴⁴

Verse 14

Using *didaskalos* and *kurios* to contrast his own person and status with that of the disciples, Jesus now gives explicit instructions about the practice of feet washing among the disciples. The order of *kurios* and *didaskalos* may have been reversed for emphasis. *Oun* serves to emphasize the link between Jesus' actions and the following ands. Given his actions, *kai humeis opheilete allēlōn niptein tous podas*. The appearance of *kai*, as well as the emphatic use of the personal pronoun, *humeis*, emphasize the importance of his instruction. The verb *opheilō* emphasizes the act's obligatory nature even more. *Opheilō* conveys the idea of necessity and/or obligation. Its force can be seen throughout the Johannine literature. In an attempt to persuade Pilate that Jesus should be crucified, the Jews say in John 19:7, "We have (the) law, and according to the law, he must

⁴³ Lindars, 452.

⁴⁴ Blass, DeBrunner, Funk, 143.

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(*opheleite*) die.... *opheleite* is used in the epistles to describe the obligatory nature of moral conduct (1 John 2: 6) and Christian service to other brothers and sisters (1 John 3: 16; 4: 11; 3 John 8).

Normally, the nuance in the other New Testament uses of *opheilō* is that of

... an obligation towards men which is deduced and which follows from the experienced or preceding act of God the Saviour. In many instances the sentence construction indicates the connection between human obligation and the experienced act of salvation.⁴⁵

The disciples' call to service is based on the Lord and Master's salvific action,⁴⁶ because "... now that Jesus, their Lord and Teacher, has washed his disciples' feet - an unthinkable act! - there is every reason why they should also wash one another's feet, and no conceivable reason for refusing to do so."⁴⁷ The disciples have been cleansed by Jesus' hands. They are now instructed to keep this practice going (as a sign of cleansing from sin). The emphasis of this verse is on washing each other's feet. Because of the connection between these verses and w. 6-10, there is an implicit and contextual directive that the disciples both receive and render this service/sign. There is nothing in this that suggests that foot washing be extended beyond the disciples. It is, by definition, a uniquely Christian act.

Verse 15

The force of Jesus' command for the disciples to practice foot washing among themselves is strengthened by the use of the term *hupodeigma* for foot washing. But, in this context, what does *hupodeigma* mean? Is it a general call to imitate Jesus' humble service, or is it a specific command for the disciples to wash one another's feet? While a general call to humble service cannot be completely ruled out, there are three reasons to believe that the readers will see *hupodeigma* as a reinforcement of the direct command to wash one another's feet. The context of this verse is the first thing to consider. The disciples are clearly instructed in v. 14 to wash one another's feet. Following so closely upon this explicit command, it is likely *hupodeigma* would be taken in a specific fashion. Second, this is the first (and only) *hupodeigma*, given by Jesus, which the readers encounter in the Fourth Gospel.⁴⁸ Third, the combination of *kathōs* and *kai* emphasizes the intimate connection between Jesus' action (washing the disciples' feet) and the

⁴⁵ F. Hauck, "*opheilō*" TDNT V 563.

⁴⁶ Schnackenburg, 111 24.

⁴⁷ Sanders and Mastin, 309.

⁴⁸ Schultz, 62.

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action of his disciples (washing one another's feet).⁴⁹ They are to act precisely as he acted. The instructions to wash one another's feet are rooted and grounded in the actions of Jesus in vv. 4-10. Therefore, the feet washing is far more than an example.

Following so closely on this explicit command, *hupodeigma* is likely to be taken in a specific manner. Second, this is Jesus' first (and only) *hupodeigma*, which readers encounter in the Fourth Gospel.⁵⁰ Third, the combination of *kathōs* and *kai* emphasizes the close relationship between Jesus' action (washing the disciples' feet) and his disciples' action (washing one another's feet). They must act exactly as he did. The instructions to wash one another's feet are based on Jesus' actions in verses 4-10. As a result, the washing of the feet is far more than an example. "It's a clear prototype." Readers, like the disciples in the story, are likely to interpret *hupodeigma* in relation to feet washing in particular, rather than humble service in general.

Verse 16: Again, the command to wash one another's feet is based on an appeal to the person and status of Jesus. This time it takes the form of a saying, which appears in a Synoptic context as well (Matt 10: 24). The double *amēn* that precedes the rest of the saying indicates the statement's authority. The *amēn amēn* formula refers to a particularly solemn saying that comes from Jesus' own authority. As H. Schlier concludes:

The point of the Amen before Jesus' own sayings is ... to show that as such they are reliable and true, and that they are so as and because Jesus Himself in His Amen acknowledges them to be His own sayings and thus makes them valid.⁵¹

After identifying himself as Teacher and Lord (verses 12-13), Jesus expands on the implications of his Lordship. Because he has washed his disciples' feet as Lord, they have no choice but to do the same because of their own position as slaves in relation to Jesus. Their own status and actions cannot hope to be on a higher level than their superior's. Another adage-like saying emphasizes the point. "No one who is sent is greater than the sender." Again, the emphasis is clearly on the authority of Jesus' actions in comparison to the disciples' similar activity.

It is difficult to determine whether John's use of *apostolos* is meant to inspire technical thoughts of the Twelve,⁵² because this possibility must be balanced by John's avoidance of the term as a designation of the Twelve. It is safe to assume that the *oude apostolos meizēn tou pempantos auton* prepares the readers for v. 20, which clearly refers to the mission of the disciples.⁵³ This

⁴⁹ Morris, 621 n. 36.

⁵⁰ H. Schlier, *hupodeigma TDNT* II , 33.

⁵¹ H. Schlier, *amēn TDNT* I 338.

⁵² Brown, *The Gospel According to John* II, 553.

⁵³ Michaels, 228.

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interpretation of the master-slave language, which corresponds perfectly with the context, is far preferable to reading service back into v. 15 and turning it into merely an ethical example. In any case, the injunction to wash one another's feet is given full authority by Jesus.

Verse 17:

A final exhortation is issued so that the disciples do not fail to perform the feet washing among themselves. The command is now in the form of a blessing. It is not enough for the disciples to know what to do; they must also do it if they are to be blessed.⁵⁴ The grammar of this verse demonstrates that the disciples have some understanding of the feet washing now that Jesus has explained it, but they must act on it. The use of a first-class conditional clause, which indicates a future possibility, achieves this contrast.⁵⁵

Makarios is typically used to refer to "... an approving proclamation of fact involving an evaluative judgement."⁵⁶ The use of *makarios* in this context emphasizes the significance of carrying out Jesus' command to wash one another's feet. This emphasis is similar to that of v. 8, in which Peter is warned that *meros* (part) with Jesus is conditional on receiving the feet washing. As a result, not only did Jesus wash the disciples' feet as a sign of their continued fellowship with him, but they are now also instructed to continue this practice. In light of its earlier meaning, it is likely that the disciples' feet washing would convey a similar meaning, continued fellowship with Jesus. The act of washing one another's feet in response to Jesus' command results in a declaration of *makarios*.

To summarize, the narrative contains three directives for the disciples to practice foot washing. It appears unlikely that either the disciples (in the narrative) or the implied readers would interpret such emphatic language as not referring to the actual practice of feet washing."

Some Theological Themes from the Text

From the exegesis of John 13:1-17, the work infers the synthesis of the exegesis and theology of the text.

The Centrality of Love

The theme of love is very central to the Gospel of John and the entire Johannine tradition. It is set forth as a necessary path to God. This for John is carried out in a specific way through selfless service for others especially the least, the peak is in laying down one's life for others. This is

⁵⁴ Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John* 444.

⁵⁵ W. D. Chamberlain, *An Exegetical Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1941), 198.

⁵⁶ Brown, *The Gospel According to John* 11 562.

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exemplified in the life of Jesus whose passion is the perfect expression of that love. The introduction to the Book of Glory usher in this theme with the opening words of verse 1, “Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.”

This love is graphically captured through the washing of the feet; an act which is not merely an invitation to service but a symbol of love which defies discussion or argument. This love consist in a life of total and absolute response to human pain and suffering, with such an effect that it destroys evil in all its forms. This love of Jesus is a love to the end, utmost, completely. According to the Gospel of John there are seven signs; “the changing of water into wine (2:1-12), healing of an official’s son (5:43-5:40), healing of the man at the sheep gate (5:1-18), feeding of the five thousand (6:1-15), walking on the sea (6:16-21), healing of the man born blind (9:1ff), and the raising of Lazarus (11:1-16).”⁵⁷ The last of this sign culminates in John 13:1. To show the centrality of love in the Gospel of John, in the second part of the Gospel, the vocabulary changes,

the use of terms such as life, to live, to give life occurs fifty times in 1-12, but only six times in 13-20, light to light appears twenty four times in 1-12 but not at all in 13-20. On the other hand, the words ‘love’, ‘to love’ are used six times in 1-12 but thirty one times in 13-20. The change in basic terms makes an important point clear to us even from the vocabulary. The shift of life, authentic human existence here and hereafter, and of light, articulate and self-conscious understanding thereof, alike flow to us as modalities of the God who is love.⁵⁸

In the Book of sign Jesus is presented as speaking in terms of life however in the Book of Glory, his emphasis is on love because he is about to undertake a paradigmatic exercise. He is to suffer cruel and unjust death as a mark of his love for his own. At the supper before the Passover festival, he took up his garments and the author using verbs that refer to the laying down and taking up of his life, try to demonstrate the extent of this love which Jesus anticipates should characterize the life of all his disciples. Love thus becomes the mystery the disciples must be rooted in if they are to be his true disciple,

This is why the attitude of love among disciples is so critical, for love is the essential dynamism of any household. At one level, Jesus’ relationship with his disciples remains

⁵⁷ Brown, *The Gospel According to John* 11, 342.

⁵⁸ Crossan 109.

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that of teacher and master, but as the 'hour' approaches, there is a deeper level of loving intimacy that he now reveals, knowing that it will not be understood until later.⁵⁹

Consequently, Peter's objection to the washing feet is an indication of his rejection of Jesus' love; an act which must be seen in the light of the crucifixion, death and resurrection of Jesus as a most succinct demonstration of that love. This is also the view of Taylor as he states thus, "the crucifixion and death of Jesus is not an evil to be rejected, a scandal that proves the unworthiness of the one who dies that way. It is God's fullest act of love, and unless Peter and all believers embrace it and let it embrace them, there will be no sharing in Jesus' inheritance."⁶⁰ The washing of feet becomes paradigmatic in the Jewish context where slaves rather than masters washed the feet of those at table. He reversed the order, an act which could only be motivated by love. This love therefore, is characterized by the willingness to go an extra mile in doing good for the benefit of others. This recognition creates an atmosphere of selfless service; where no one is too good or highly placed not to undertake an act that is needful for the welfare of another. It is also set forth as a command for his disciples especially when set in parallel with vv. 31-35, "the parallelism between the two units (vv. 12-15 and vv. 31-35) brings together the foot washing, interpreted as a model, and the command that disciples love one another as Jesus has loved [them]. Jesus' love is demonstrated by the laying down of his life (15:13), which, I have argued, the foot washing symbolically enacts."⁶¹

Service as a Core Value

In the text of John 13:1-17, we find an important statement about the mode that is to characterize discipleship, namely the mode of service. Jesus in the text of John 13:1-17, undertook the act of washing his disciple's feet and giving the persuasive nature of the Gospel, selfless service is projected as a paradigm for authentic discipleship. In his teaching, he made it clear and distinct that for one to be truly great, he/she must be servant of others (John 13:12-17, Luke 12:24-27). This service entails even laying down one's life for others, following the example of Jesus (John 10:11, 15, 13:21, 15-19). This sort of selfless service which is expected to be for the common good is preferred as a model of discipleship and leadership in the community of Christians. As a result of this standard outlined by Jesus, he criticized the Jewish leaders because of their failure to live up to this standard, their unwillingness to give their lives for others (John 10:12, 13). As a perfect teacher, he sets an example by washing the feet of his disciples and urges them to do same. Since

⁵⁹ Coloe, 415.

⁶⁰ Coloe, 189.

⁶¹ Coloe, 412.

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the members of the community of Christians are brothers and sisters, love is expected to be the basis of their service. As brothers and sisters who have now become friends and have a common patrimony, there is a redefinition of their society. As friends, equality is now the hallmark, consequently, discipleship and leadership is not based on rank or status but the willingness to be at the service of the other. In a spirit of friendship the mode should be that of selfless service,

... the leadership as service demanded within the Christian community is first and foremost a demand for self-giving rather than self-seeking. Such self-giving is only possible within a community where the standards of relationships are restructured. In order to set a new model of leadership contrary to that of the opponents of Jesus, a new societal structure is established, so that people no longer relate to each other in terms of their social status and rank, but as the children of the same God the father and as friends.⁶²

On the basis of friendship, discipleship and service becomes effective and efficient. For Jesus their Lord and teacher while still their lord and teacher, washed their feet, “He does indeed remain their Lord and teacher even though he washes the feet of his disciples in this regard nothing has changed. Jesus expresses his lordship in self-humbling service; in other words, even the Lord is willing to serve to this extent, based on his love for his disciples.”⁶³ In such a situation, we find an atmosphere of familiarity wherein status and position of honor are not relevant but loving service to the point of giving ones comfort, time resources and even life for the good of others without counting the cost. This stands in opposition to the perception of Peter who found it difficult to accept the fact that Jesus should wash his feet. His understanding of discipleship was oriented to self enhancement at the detriment of others. This understanding smacks of domination, tyranny, nepotism and the promotion of personal advantage. As one who would soon be charged to “feed the Lambs” and “tend the sheep” (John 21:15-18), it became pertinent for the model of selfless service by presented to him. Subsequently, a true and blessed disciple is the one who knows this truth and does it just as the ‘Lord’ and ‘Teacher’ did to the extent of giving his life. According to Anderson, “once they accept this teaching and act accordingly, they share in God’s blessings. Jesus’ continual message to his disciples in the entire Gospel is that they should serve others as he did.”⁶⁴

⁶² Umoh, 284.

⁶³ Bauckham, 196

⁶⁴ Bauckham, 108.

The 'Hour' as a definitive moment for Jesus

In John's Gospel, a person's 'hour', is that moment when she/he does the work to which he/she is specifically assigned. The 'hour' of the woman is the moment of her childbirth (16:21), the 'hour' of the unbelieving Jews is the time which God allow them to commit their crimes (16:3-4). The 'hour' for Jesus is the moment in which he is to fulfil the work for which his Father sent him into the world, that is, for the victory over Satan, sin and death (12:23-24, 27, 31-32). This hour provides the basis for Jesus' transition from this world to his father, a movement into Glory, "the hour of Jesus' glorification has arrived, and it will begin with his passing from this world to the father. This passing becomes the new Passover. Death is not presented as a failure because it concludes with the passage to the father, which is truly a passage to glory."⁶⁵

In the first part of John's Gospel, technically called "the Book of Signs", there are several mention and reference to the 'hour' of Jesus (2:4, 7:30, 8:20, 12:23, 27), which is anticipated to bring to completion the purpose of Jesus' life. In the second part known as the Book of Glory, the 'hour' is said to have arrived. The 'hour' is a decisive moment in the life of Jesus. It is tied to the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus that fully reveals his mission and identity, a moment of confrontation with evil and triumph over evil,

The crucifixion is the hour of the great confrontation between the Christ of God and the prince of this world (14:30b); but the last has no claim on or power over Christ (14:31) therefore the confrontation in the cross is the hour of the glorification of the son of man (12:23-24): then it is revealed the Judge-King will triumph over the prince of this world, passing judgment over him by casting him out of his illegal position of power over the world.⁶⁶

The crucifixion thus becomes the omega point in the Gospel of John, "but Jesus' alpha sign recorded in 2:1-11 also reveals his glory, and the resurrection itself is the omega sign given by Jesus himself (cf. 8:28, 20:8,24-29)."⁶⁷ This moment is very central to the whole Gospel as it also reveals the divinity of Jesus and the possibility of believers to share in the fruits of his mission,

⁶⁵ William Anderson, *The Gospel of John: the word Became Flesh* (Missouri: Liguori, 2012), 105.

⁶⁶ Andre Oudtshoorn, "Where Have All the Demons Gone?: The Role and Place of the Devil in the Gospel of John)." *Journal of the New Testament Society of Southern Africa*, 51/1 (2017): 96.

⁶⁷ Okure, 1514.

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The farewell discourses (Chs 13-17) expound in detail the significance of his identity and mission and the place and role of the disciples in relation to this identity and mission. His passion, death, and resurrection, which the gospel views as his glorification (chs. 18-20), constitute the decisive event that proves the truth of his divine identity and makes available to believers the fruit of his life-giving mission...⁶⁸

The cross which fully manifests the glory of Christ is according to the Gospel of John, the setting for the destruction of the devil. It is the place where the devil is expelled from the world, “The cross, however paradoxically, also proves to be the place of judgment and destruction of the devil. In John’s Gospel, Jesus’ death on the cross is portrayed as the exorcism of the devil from the whole world.”⁶⁹ With this destruction, God’s victory over evil and its adversaries is established. All who are released as a result of this victory from the tyranny and power of evil are not to undertake a new battle but to express belief in God who has to destroy the evil one.

Within the general context of the arrival of Jesus’ hour, it becomes the setting in which the disciples are drawn into the life of God. This beautifully fits into the scheme of the prologue of the Gospel of John. According to the prologue, “But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God” John 1:12,

Jesus completes his Passover to the father and, in this moment, draws his disciples into his filiation, fulfilling the promise of the prologue that believers would become children of God (1:12). From the cross, the Nazarene temple builder raises up a new household of God in the New relationships formed between the mother of Jesus and the beloved disciple (19:25-28).⁷⁰

Cleansing as reference to Baptism

At a spiritual level the reference to cleansing in the text of John 13:1-17 can be seen as a pointer to the sacrament of Baptism. The Church teaches that, “Holy Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit, and the door which gives access to the other sacraments” (1213). The insistence on the fact of the disciple being cleansed yet not all are cleansed (v10), is seen as an allusion to the sacrament of Baptism. In the pericope, reference is made to an action which is needed once, as it is with the sacrament of Baptism. The insistence on

⁶⁸ Okure, 1517.

⁶⁹ Oudtshoorn, 80.

⁷⁰ Coloe, 411.

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being washed (vv 8, 10) likely evokes the Baptism, that is, the rite of passage into the community and a sharing in Jesus' death.

The whole scene of washing of the feet which is an expression of love and selfless service is seen by other scholars as integral to the Holy Eucharist. This is also viewed in general as a symbol of Baptism wherein the disciples were cleansed by the Lord and given new life. "Sacramentally, the washing of the feet symbolizes Baptism (as happens during the Easter vigil Liturgy), by which we are cleansed, purified from sin, and given new life in the Spirit (3:3-8)."⁷¹ The objection of Peter to the washing of the feet by Jesus is seen as an opportunity to further explain the washing of feet in the light of purification, which is necessary for sharing in the life of God.

The misunderstanding by Peter serves as an opportunity for Jesus to explain that the washing of the feet has another symbolic meaning in addition to hospitality, namely that it is needed for the sake of purification. For the washing of the body therefore was a symbol of spiritual cleansing, without which no one can draw near to God, at least of all those who were to perform the duties of reconciliation.⁷²

Authentic Discipleship through doing the will of Christ

A disciple is one who learns a skill under a teacher and carefully preserves and transmits such learning. Such a person enjoys a level of intimacy and knowledge of the teacher and is subsequently expected to be a credible representative of such learning and tradition acquired from the teacher.

In calling his disciples, Jesus laid emphasis on self-renunciation and total detachment from possession (Luke 14:26, 33, 18:22, Mark 8:34). At the heart of discipleship is the fact of carrying the cross. This finds a better expression in the act of selfless service for others (Mark 9:35, 10:42-45), according to Mary Nwachukwu:

The attitude of service stands against that of power as the Gentiles do (Mark 10:42) and of love for places of honor and self-seeking, as the Pharisees do (Matthew 23:11)...

⁷¹ Okure, 1561.

⁷² Jan Watt, "The Meaning of Jesus Washing the Feet of His Disciples (John 13:1-17)." *Journal of the New Testament Society of Southern Africa*, 51/1 (2017): 31.

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This image of Jesus as servant (*diakonos*) justifies the cross motif and provides a concrete expression of discipleship in particular contexts.⁷³

Authentic discipleship entails the ability to ‘know’ and ‘do’ the will of the teacher, Jesus. In his teaching the emphasis was always on ‘knowing’ and ‘doing’ the will of the father. “Two things are involved in following Jesus: abiding with him and while at his side, learning to do what he says. When Jesus speaks, he instructs. Hearing his word and obeying him entails being at his side.”⁷⁴

Sacred scripture is replete with accounts that show Jesus’ insistence on doing the will of the father. In Luke 11:27-28, a nameless woman in the crowd expressed gratitude to God for the womb that bore Jesus after he had expelled seven demons. In response to this gratitude, Jesus insisted, “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it” (Luke 11:28). In Luke 8:19-21, Jesus was informed of his mother and brothers who needed to see him, to this also he responded, “My mother and brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it” (Luke 8:19-21). The cumulative force of these accounts goes to strengthen the reality of living according to knowledge acquired as a requirement for blessedness. This blessedness means life, fruitfulness, grace and it flows from doing the will of the Lord.

The connection between word and life (a pure gift or grace from God) is very consistent in the scripture, starting from Genesis. Humanity and the entire creation came into existence by God’s creative word. Jesus himself is the word (John 1:1-2, 14); he became a human being by means of God’s spoken word spoken to Mary and received in faith. It would follow therefore that to become his relative, give birth to him in one’s life, all that is required is equally to hear and keep; accept and do God’s word as his mother did.⁷⁵

In the scope of the washing of the feet, ‘knowing’ and ‘doing’ the will of God is to be seen in the willingness of the disciple to actually offer selfless service for others. This may even go to the extent of laying down one’s life in order that others may live. The text of John 12:24-25, corroborates this position, “Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and

⁷³ Mary Nwachukwu, “Discipleship as Service.” *Theology and Diakonia: Faith in Action*, vol. 3. Eds. Klaus Kramer and Klaus Vell Guth (Philippines: Clarert, 2014), 9.

⁷⁴ Francis X. D’Sa, “Do Whatever He Tells You; Selfless Action in Bhagavad Gita and Christianity” in *Theology and Diakonia: Faith in Action, One World Theology* Vol. 3, eds. Klaus Kraäma et. al (Philippines: Claresian Publications, 2014), 24.

⁷⁵ Okure, 142.

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dies, it remains just a single grain, but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.” This mandate of selfless service is not restricted to worship in specific seasons such as carried out during the Mass of the last Supper on Holy Thursday. It is an act which must permeate the entire Christian life. For Judette Gallares:

This is not a pattern to be followed for worship primarily or even in performing ones *diaconal* act, but one that is essential to living the commandment of love, the heart of which is the willingness to give from one’s heart and not to count the cost in loving. It is essentially sacrificial and self-giving.⁷⁶

Motive of Service

There can be several motives for service, it is therefore imperative to make a distinction in the different motive. The basic motives include: obligation, philanthropy and friendship. When service is rendered on the basis of obligation, it is not from ones free will but as a duty owed the one served. In such a situation, the one who serves has no alternative. The one who serves undertakes such a duty because he/she may enjoy some benefits from such service. This sort of service is found between slaves and masters and the poor and the rich. The basis of such relationship is inequality in status or rank. Since this service is out of compulsion, it creates a situation of domination and suppression. This is at variance with the service demanded by Christ as stipulated in John 13:1-17.

Another motive is that of philanthropy. This kind is engendered by the desire to render help to one who is in need. The one, who serves, considers him/her self superior to the those served since they possess the ability to help the one who is in need. While it is rooted in free will, it does not rule out the fact of inequality between the helper and the helped. This can be seen in services rendered by the rich to the poor, developed nation to developing nations. This can be a powerful tool of manipulating the weak and oppressed. It is exploitative in nature and contradicts the intention of Jesus in John 13:1-17.

There is also service motivated by friendship. Friendship normally, defies ranks and status. It is usually rooted on equality. As a result, service motivated by friendship is free from constrain, in such service, both parties have a common goal namely: the actualization of the good of the friend. Such services is not self seeking but self-giving.

⁷⁶ Judette Gallores, “The vision of a Diaconal Church” *Theology and Diakonia: Faith in Action*. eds. Klaus Kramer and Klaus Vell Guth, Vol 3. (Philippines: Clarert, 2014), 216.

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It is thus clear that not every service is Christian and liberating. The service that is both Christian and liberating is that which is based on friendship. This was the motive behind the action of Jesus as recounted in John 13:1-17. The basis of his service was friendship in the spirit of love that down plays all claims to divisive structures, rank and status. With this example, he presented a model of what every disciple must do. While he maintained his position amongst them as ‘Lord’ and ‘Teacher’, it became an opportunity for him to serve them; a service to the extent of giving his life, “since he relates with the disciples as a friend, he does not see his position as teacher and lord as an opportunity for exploitation and domination, but rather as a responsibility to serve in love to the point of laying down his life for their good.”⁷⁷

John 13:1-17 and the Nigerian Context

Jesus sets himself up as an example of servant leadership in John 13:1-17. In the late first century AD, there was a leadership crisis in both Jewish and Christian circles, and John presents Jesus not only as the Christ, King, Shepherd, Lord, and Teacher, but also as an exemplary leader who demonstrated his leadership qualities through love, humility, simplicity, and sacrificial service. Jesus sought to train, motivate, and influence those who were devoted to him to become servant leaders. He loved ‘his own’ *eis telos* (until the end) as their Lord and Teacher and expressed his love by doing a slave’s work of washing their feet. This demonstrates that he prioritizes human values and has led them to recognize their worth in life.

The Jesus of John’s Gospel is the ultimate leader, whose authority stemmed from his humility and who firmly charged that all men and women who belong to him must emulate his servant attitude. In other words, by demonstrating servanthood in front of his disciples, Jesus hoped to foster a positive attitude and inter-personal relationship among them. Despite his dignity, position, and honor, Jesus’ action challenges Christians in positions of leadership to be group-centered leaders who work out the group’s goal as witnessing Christ to the world with the gospel of love and service exemplified by his stooping low and washing the feet of his disciples (vv. 4-5). Anthony Umoren lends credence to this thus,

in this regard, Church leaders like Jesus, and in response to the constant pleas of Pope Francis, should live, act and dress simply in a way that shows that their dignity as persons does not depend on their wealth or their opulence. They should also preach against and

⁷⁷ Umoh, 287.

resist attempts to use ungodly means, or manipulate persons and events in order to amass wealth.⁷⁸

The washing of the feet alludes to Jesus' death on the cross and the cleansing effect of his blood, through which one can be united with him. The humble act of Jesus, then, was not only an example for his followers to follow, but also an effective means of communicating the truth that the one who laid down his life becomes the life-giving and enabling source for them to fulfill their mission in the world as servant-leaders. By serving as both a model and an enabler, the Christian servant-leader must establish himself or herself as the supreme leader capable of transforming others in Nigerian society into servant-leaders through his or her attitude toward leadership. In that sense, a servant leader, like Jesus, must have the best interests of his or her followers at heart. Similarly to how Jesus took time in v. 6 to explain his actions to Peter when he was confused and frustrated by Jesus washing his feet, Christian leaders in Nigeria should listen to their followers' complaints and public opinions. This is precisely what Jesus did in the pericope.

From the exegesis of verse 1, Jesus demonstrated true knowledge of himself. He understood who he was - *the Son of God* - and that he came from and would return to God. This implies that a servant leader must be aware of his or her own identity, vision, and life mission. As a servant leader, Jesus was very clear about his origin and purpose on earth, so he worked hard to keep his disciples on track by ensuring they understood the current plans. Christian leaders in Nigeria should have a clear goal and vision, and they should bring their followers along with them. By responding to Peter's question in v. 7, 'what I am doing you do not understand now, but you will understand after this,' Jesus persuaded Peter to accept Jesus' intention to have his feet washed despite Jesus' position and dignity. In dealing with others, Christian leaders should strive to use influence rather than coercion.

It is essential for Christians in Nigeria to be cleansed by Jesus' words and Spirit and to allow him to continue to cleanse them through his blood shed on the cross. Only by fully surrendering to Jesus' dealings can they be united in love and fellowship with him. The servant attitude is, if anything, the common bond and unifying factor between Jesus and his followers. By telling the story of feet-washing, John challenges Nigerian Christians to believe in a suffering messiah whose death and resurrection provide the foundation and source of effective leadership. Any leadership that is not rooted in Jesus' death and resurrection will result in self-glorification, insecurity, and

⁷⁸ Anthony Umoren, *Jesus and Miracle Healing Today* (Uyo: Ambassador, 2000), 126.

authoritarianism. Without collaboration with the servant-leader, Christians in Nigeria can hardly prove themselves to be typical leaders.

The literary exegetical analysis revealed that, just as Jesus cared for the disciples entrusted to him by the heavenly Father, Christian servant leaders must see themselves, pattern their lives and actions as stewards and keepers, and work to improve the attitude, quality of life, and inclusive growth within Christendom to ensure the effective proclamation of the good news of the kingdom.

CONCLUSION

Reading John 13:1-20 as a literary unit reveals that the disciples' participation in Jesus' destiny is not an option, but rather a requirement. By taking on the role of a slave, Jesus inaugurated an outstanding model of leadership while also setting an example for how his followers should treat one another. The attitude of Christian leaders in Nigeria today reveals that their personalities and actions are still far from the paradigm of Jesus' leadership style. It was discovered that Christian leaders in Nigeria compete for positions while also being overly concerned with fame and amassing wealth for themselves and their families. This shows that Christians have a long way to go. Hence, the need for Jesus' leadership model exemplified in John 13:1-17, a kind of leadership whereby a leader has the interest of his followers at heart, becomes an imperative for growth and development in all aspects. To foster the leadership model exemplified by Jesus, Christian leaders must be clothed with humility, selflessness, love and genuine passion for unity, peace and progress in the society.