The account of Jesus’ story in the Fourth Gospel slows down dramatically across 11:55-20:29. After the Prologue (1:1-18), the ministry has taken place between a first celebration of Passover, mentioned in 2:13, the occurrence of a second Passover in 6:4, and a final Passover mentioned in 11:55. Once the Book of Signs has come to an end (1:19-12:50), and the Book of Glory begins (13:1-20:31), this third Passover, introduced in 11:55, is given as the chronological setting of the remainder of the narrative in 12:1, 13:1, 18:28, 39 and 19:14. This is part of the “overlap” that John creates in the narrative, with 11:1-12:50 acting as a “hinge” between the ministry of Jesus (1:19-12:50) and the Book of Glory (13:1-20:31). A major feature of this “slowing down” is the careful and lengthy reporting of events and discourses that Jesus shares with his disciples on their final evening together (13:1-17:26). Inaccurately known as the Last Discourse, these chapters contain the narrative of Jesus’ washing the disciples’ feet and sharing the morsel with them (13:1-38), a series of discourses (14:1-16:33) and a final prayer (17:1-26).¹ As “the hour has come” (12:23; 13:1; 17:1) the theme of

¹ There is widespread recognition that John continues and develops the well-used practice of the farewell discourse and prayer, evidenced in many places, but especially in The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs. For further details and bibliography, see Francis J. Moloney.
love is drawn into the theme of Jesus’ bringing to perfection the task given to him by the Father (4:34). For the purposes of this study I wish to focus upon 13:1-38 where Jesus’ self-gift in love is proleptically acted out.2

The Literary and Theological Structure of 13:1-38

Prior to providing a reading strategy for 13:1-38, a further critical issue needs to be resolved. Although most argue that the narrative surrounding the footwashing and the morsel closes at 13:30, and the first discourse begins in 13:31, there are sound reasons for questioning this division. In the first place, vv. 31-38 does not constitute “discourse.” In a way that matches vv. 6-9, Jesus’ discussion with Peter and his prophecy of future denials in vv. 36-38 are part of a longer narrative that began in 13:1. This is further supported by noticing that the theme of love opens the narrative (v. 1) and closes it (vv. 34-35). Similarly, the theme of Judas’ betrayal, first mentioned as the narrative opens in v. 2, is matched by the theme of Peter’s denials, foretold by Jesus as the narrative come to an end. The first part of the discourse proper, dealing with Jesus’ departure and its consequences, begins in 14:1-31.3

In 13:1-38, against the backdrop of Jesus’ washing the feet of his dis-

ciples, and his gift of the morsel, even to Judas, a message of the unconditional love that Jesus has for “his own” even in their failure (v. 1: ἐὰς τέλος), is shared with the reader/listener. But Jesus’ making love visible in his actions, and his request that his disciples do the same (vv. 15, 34-35), is not limited to a focus upon the person of Jesus. He shows and tells them of his consummate love (v. 1: ἐὰς τέλος) so that they might see in him the revelation of God: that they “may believe that I am he” (v. 19). But that is to anticipate conclusions to this reflection that depend upon further considerations of the literary and theological structure of the passage.

A feature of the Gospel of John is Jesus’ use of the introductory expression: “Amen, amen, I say to you.” Elsewhere, especially in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus introduces some of his statements with: “Amen, I say to you.” Only in the Fourth Gospel is the double “amen” (ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν) found. It can thus be classed as a stylistic feature of the Johannine story of Jesus.4 The expression is found four times in 13:1-38 (vv. 16, 20, 21, 38) and plays an important role in establishing the internal structure and argument of the passage.5 It unfolds in three major stages:

1. Verses 1-17: The footwashing and Jesus’ subsequent instructions to his disciples, ending with the use of the double “amen” in vv. 16-17.

2. Verses 18-20: At the centre of the episode, Jesus explains why he is telling his fragile disciples these things, ending with the use of the double “amen” in v. 20.

3. Verses 21-38: The gift of the morsel and Jesus’ subsequent instructions to his fragile disciples, beginning (v. 21) and ending (v. 38) with the use of the double “amen.”

Each of these stages, which I will entitle respectively “The footwashing and its aftermath” (vv. 1-17), “the central statement” (vv. 18-20), and “the

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4 It appears 24 times in the Gospel of John. The single “amen” appears more than 30 times in Matthew, 13 times in Mark, and 7 times in Luke.

gift of the morsel and its aftermath” (vv. 21-38), call for further literary analysis, but I will associate that process with my exegetical and theological reading of the respective passages. As we will see, each of these major sections is further articulated in three identifiable moments.

Reading John 13:1-38
The Footwashing and its Aftermath (vv. 1-17)

As already suggested, this first section unfolds in three parts, identified by the events and the major players in those events:

1. **Verses 1-5**: The narrator announces that Jesus “knows” that the hour of his departure to the Father has come. What is about to be told will indicate the consummate perfection of Jesus’ love for his own (v. 1: eivj te,loj hvga,phsen auvtouj), even though these words are immediately followed by a reference to Judas’ betrayal of Jesus (v. 2). “Knowing” these things does not deter Jesus from moving into action. He prepares himself and washes the disciples’ feet (vv. 3-5). Love and knowledge flow into action.

2. **Verses 6-11**: Peter objects to Jesus’ washing his feet, and Jesus dialogues with him (vv. 6-10b). This leads to Jesus’ first statement on Judas’ future betrayal (vv. 10c-11).

3. **Verses 12-17**: Jesus instructs the disciples on the significance of what he has done for them, and asks that they do the same, following his example (vv. 12-15). The double “amen” closes the section, asking that disciples be servants of their master, blessed in their knowledge and deeds (vv. 16-17). As the section opened, Jesus’ love and knowledge flowed into action in vv. 1-5. It closes with his words to disciples: “If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them” (v. 17).

Forward looking themes from the ministry of Jesus return in v. 1. The mission that was yet to be accomplished (4:34) and the hour that had not yet come (2:4; 7:6-7, 30; 8:40) are indicated as present. Jesus knows that “the hour had come to depart out of the world to the Father.” The death, resurrection and return of Jesus to the Father are at hand. In this hour, Jesus loves his own “to the end” (eiς τέλος). At the beginning of his ministry, in a brief pause in his encounter with the Samaritan woman, Jesus explained to his shocked disciples that food was to do the will of the one who sent
him, to bring to perfection the task that he had been given (4:34). In 4:34 the Greek verb used to speak of accomplish/bring to perfection is τελειοφ. A noun from the same root as this verb returns in 13:1 to announce that “now” the hour has come. He has loved his own “to the end” (εις τελος).

But the Greek expression εις τελος, used in 13:1, as well as indicating to the reader/listener that Jesus has now come to the completion of his mission in a temporal sense (in the moment of his departing out of this world to his Father, via his cross, resurrection and ascension), also tells of the quality of Jesus’ act of love for his disciples. To say that Jesus loves his own εις τελος is to say that he loves in a way that is unimaginable. He loves in a way that crosses all boundaries of loving: he loves his disciples consummately. The use of the same word (τελος) to speak of “the end” (chronology) and “consummately” (quality) is an indication that Jesus’ revelation of love will take place on the Cross. The footwashing and the gift of the morsel are symbols and images of Jesus’ boundless love manifested on the Cross (see 19:30: τετελεσται). The introduction of v. 1 is “the most significant transition in the Gospel, introducing not only the scene of the footwashing, but the entire second half of the Gospel.”

Thus motivated, Jesus moves into action, aware that the hour has come and also aware that “the devil had already made up his mind that Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, would betray him” (v. 2). In this ambiguity, knowing

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6 For a full-scale treatment of the Johannine presentation of Jesus’ crucifixion as the revelation of God’s love for the world, and the means by which Jesus returns to the glory which was his before the foundation of the world, see Francis J. Moloney, Love in the Gospel of John. An Exegetical, Theological and Literary Study (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013).


8 The Greek expression behind this translation can mean that the devil had put it into Judas’ mind, or that the devil had made up his mind. The former is the majority position (see, as well as the commentaries, RSV, NRSV, JB). Nevertheless, the translation chosen above is supported by a number of narrative considerations. In the first place, as yet Judas has not been taken over by Satan. Secondly, if Satan already controls Judas in v. 2, what is the point of Satan’s “entering” Judas in v. 27? See the supportive note of the expert in Hellenistic grammar, Édouard Delebecque, Évangile de Jean. Text Traduit et Annoté (Cahiers de la Revue Biblique 23; Paris: Gabalda, 1987), 183: “The Greek phrase demands
that he is from God and is returning to God (v. 3), Jesus prepares himself to wash the disciples’ feet (v. 4). Once prepared, he begins to do so (v. 5).

The dialogue between Jesus and Peter highlights the inability of Peter to understand the purpose of Jesus’ gesture, not even when it is explained to him (vv. 6-10). Jesus’ stripping for the washing and his telling Peter that he must accept this washing “to have part” with Jesus look to the Cross for their meaning. The laying down of his clothes recalls the “laying down” of life that marked the Good Shepherd (see 10:11, 15, 17, 18), and the demand for a washing so that one can have part with Jesus (ἐξεχείλε μέρος) recalls the baptismal practices by means of which the new Christian is drawn into the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus (v. 8). Peter fails to understand (vv. 9-10b). Jesus closes this scene with a prophecy about the future denials of Judas (vv. 10c-11). Verses 1-5 opened 13:1-38 with the narrator’s description of Jesus’ love and knowledge, including a reference to Judas that led to the action of the footwashing (vv. 1-5). His gesture of self-gift in love and service is now accompanied by Peter’s failure to understand (v. 9), and a further notice of Judas’ future betrayal (vv. 10c-11).

Many interpreters regard vv. 12-17 as a redactional and even a “moralising” addition to the footwashing. This is not called for. Jesus addresses the fragile situation that has emerged across vv. 6-11, asking that his disciples understand this meaning.” See also Barrett, St John, 439, who supports this interpretation of the Greek.

9 See Barrett, St John, 441: “John has penetrated beneath the surface of baptism as an ecclesiastical rite, seen it in its relationship to the Lord’s death, into which converts were baptized (cf. Rom 6:3), and thus integrated it into the act of humble love in which the Lord’s death was set forth before the passion.”

continue his knowledge, love and action. Resuming his position at table, he asks if they “know” what he has done for them (v. 12). The pattern of teacher and lord kneeling in self-gift for his own must continue as one of the marks of the followers of Jesus. He has given them an example they must repeat in their lives of service, no matter what their role might be. The choice of the Greek word for “example” (v. 15: ὑπόδειγμα) continues the theme of self-gift in love, even to death. The Greek expression, found only in John 13:15 in the entire New Testament, appears in some well-known Jewish texts that use it to speak of exemplary death (LXX Macc 6:28; 4 Macc 17:22-23; Sir 44:16). “Jesus’ death ... as it is here interpreted through the footwashing, is the norm of life and conduct for the believing community.”

Jesus’ instruction closes with the double “amen” (v. 16) that leads into a conditioned blessing for his followers (v. 16). He states the Christian tradition that begins from a cultural truism: a servant is not greater than his master (see Matt 10:24). He adds the further Johannine development of that theme: Jesus is not greater than the one who sent him. The discourse turns towards God, as the established cultural order has been reversed: Jesus has served them, as God has lowered himself to make his love known to them in the one whom he has sent (v. 16). Finally, Jesus associates his servants and sent ones, the disciples, with his knowing and doing that led to this example of love and service unto death. The literary unit of vv. 1-17 began with Jesus’ “knowing” and “doing,” aware of what lay ahead of him (vv. 1-5). It closes in the same way, but now the disciples are challenged to “know” and to “do.” They will be blessed if they know and act as he did. The words that close vv. 1-17 are deliberately elegant: “If you know THESE THINGS,

11 Culpepper, “The Johannine hypodeigma,” 144. For the possibility that the Johannine Christians practised a rite of footwashing to recall the teaching of Jesus, see John C. Thomas, Footwashing in John 13 and the Johannine Community (JSNTSS 61; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 126-185; Keener, John, 2:902.

12 See Jean Zumstein, “Die johanneische Auffassung der Macht, gezeigt am Beispiel der Fusswaschung (Joh 13,1-17), in Kreative Erinnerung. Relecture und Auslegung im Johannes-evangelium (2d. ed.; Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments 84; Zürich: Theologische Verlag Zürich, 2004), 161-176. Zumstein shows how disparate elements from the tradition (vv. 4-5; 6-10; 12-17 and finally vv. 1-3) have been “re-read” (relecture) in the post-Easter community to show the Johannine enigma of the all-powerful Christ revealing his greatest power in loving self-gift “to the end.” He concludes: “Eternal life presents itself under the mask of death.” (p. 176).
blessed are you, if you do THESE THINGS” (v. 17). This English translation shows the balance of the original Greek with two conditional phrases framing a blessing: εἰ ταῦτα οἴδατε (conditional) – μακάριοι ἐστε (beatitude) – ἐὰν ποιήσατε αὐτά (conditional).13 As Jesus has demonstrated love in action in the footwashing, they are to demonstrate love in action by following his example (v. 15: ὑπόδειγμα), unto death.

The Central Statement (vv. 18-20)

The stunning centrepiece of 13:1-38 is found in vv. 18-20.14 Between vv. 1-17 and vv. 21-38 the rationale for both the footwashing and the gift of the morsel is spelt out. Despite its brevity, the passages is articulated by means of three distinct affirmations:

1. Verse 18: Jesus has chosen fragile disciples, one of whom will betray him.
2. Verse 19: Why he has done this: “that you may believe that I am he.”
3. Verse 20: Solemnly, introducing his words with the double “amen,” Jesus sends out these disciples, that both Jesus and the one who sent him may be received.

In v. 18 and v. 20 Jesus speaks of his relationship with the disciples. He is aware of their fragility, their inability to understand, and the fact that one of them will betray him. He knows whom he has chosen, and he is aware that one of them will strike out against him. He recalls Psalm 41:10, stating that one of them, who shares the table and eats his bread (ὁ τρώγων μου τῶν ἄρτων), has lifted his heel against him (v. 18). The betrayer who has lurked throughout this narrative (see vv. 2, 10c-11), is again mentioned in v. 18. Despite the failures and the betrayals, however, Jesus has chosen these disciples. In v. 20 he points out that he has not only chosen them (v. 18), but he will send them out (v. 20). Closing this central section with a further double “amen,” Jesus assures them that he sends them out so that they can make Jesus known, just as Jesus has made the Father known. Anyone who receives his sent ones, therefore, will also receive the Father. Jesus will send out

13 See Simoens, La gloire d’aimer, 84-85.
14 This passage (vv. 18-20) even forms the “material centre” of 38 verses, with the centre of the centre in v. 19. See Zumstein, Saint Jean, 31-33.
these disciples. Jesus has chosen and sent out ignorant, fragile disciples, even one who will betray him.

The question “why” must be asked. To chose and send out those who fail, betray and deny makes no sense. The response to that question is provided in v. 19, the central statement of 13:1-38: “I tell you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he (ἰνα πιστεύσητε ὅταν γένηται ὅτι ἐγώ εἰμι).” In Jesus’ act of footwashing, symbolising his consummate love-unto-death for disciples who fail to understand and who will betray him, God is made manifest. It will shortly be matched by the gift of the morsel that also tells of self-gift unto death for disciples who do not understand him, who betray him and deny him (vv. 21-38). As yet, the unconditional self-gift of Jesus for his fragile disciples has not taken place, but it is clearly anticipated in the loving gestures of the footwashing and the gift of the morsel. The reader/hearer of the story is well aware that what is anticipated by these gestures will take place on the Cross, but the disciples in the story do not. They continue in their ignorance, their false promises and their misunderstanding.

The post-Easter Johannine community is told that Jesus has knowingly chosen disciples, and sent them out as bearers of his presence, and the presence of the Father who sent him (vv. 18, 20). He is telling his disciples all these things now, before the event of the Cross, so that when that consummate revelation of love takes place, then they might believe that he is the presence of the divine among them (v. 19: ὅτι ἐγώ εἰμι). If the earlier statements about the counter-cultural nature of Jesus’ actions in his example to the disciples are surprising (vv. 12-15), his revelation of why he is giving himself unconditionally in love to disciples, chosen and sent out by him, who not only do not love him in the same way, but who will deny him, betray him and misunderstand him, transcends all possible human explanation. This is what it means to love εἰς τέλος (v. 1), consummately, in a way that the world can never comprehend. The love of Jesus εἰς τέλος for his own is the revelation of the incomprehensible love of God. In these gestures of loving self-gift, anticipating the Cross, Jesus makes known the love of God. They demonstrate Jesus’ love in action to stunned readers and hearers of the story, who are themselves fragile disciples of Jesus.15

15 Zumstein, Saint Jean, 31-33, also makes a strong link with the post-Easter Church,
The Gift of the Morsel and its Aftermath (vv. 21-38)

Paralleling the structure of vv. 1-17, the closing section of 13:1-38 has three parts:

1. Verses 21-25: The narrator indicates Jesus’ profound emotional condition. Opening with a double “amen,” Jesus again forecasts the future betrayal of Judas. The Beloved Disciple, at the request of Simon Peter, asks who this might be.

2. Verses 26-30: Jesus indicates that he will give the morsel to his betrayer. A brief dialogue follows the gift of the morsel to Simon Iscariot. No one at the table understood what was happening as Judas goes out into the darkness of the night.

3. Verses 31-38: As Judas departs, the passion begins. Jesus announces that the moment of the glorification of the Son of Man and the revelation of the glory of God is “now.” He issues a new commandment: that they love one another as he has loved them. Peter continues to misunderstand Jesus and his destiny, and Jesus, closing this section with a final double “amen,” foretells his threefold denial, before cock-crow.

In v. 21 Jesus’ words open with the double “amen.” Jesus raises the question of the betrayer, and begins a dialogue with his own that will lead to the revelation of the identity of the betrayer at the table (v. 26. See v. 18). There is also a parallel between v. 1, where the narrator reported Jesus’ knowledge and love, and v. 21a where another emotional experience is mentioned: Jesus is troubled in spirit. A link with the Cross was established in v. 1 through words which spoke of Jesus’ love for his own εἰς τέλος. The Cross is again close at hand in the words “troubled in spirit,” which echo Psalms 42/43. As well as the double “amen,” the solemn nature of the verb “testified” (μαρτυρέω) indicates a break between vv. 18-20 and leads into what follows. Jesus’ words on the betrayal highlight that one of the but does not fully appreciate the Christological significance of vv. 18-20. He explains how Jesus’ choice of Judas was not a mistake, but part of God’s design, indicated by the fulfilment of Scripture in v. 18. This is true, but is not the major thrust of vv. 18-20, the centre-piece of 13:1-38.

disciples, present at the table (see vv. 12, 18), will betray him (v. 21b). These words set off a reaction among the disciples around the table, who are not moving in the world of Jesus. They are “uncertain (ἀπορούμενοι) of whom he spoke” (v. 22). Ignorance, confusion and misunderstanding continue (see vv. 6, 7, 9, 12-13).

The Beloved Disciple appears for the first time in the story. He is lying at table, “close to the breast of Jesus” (v. 23) a position of affectionate closeness. Despite his position of honour, he is included in the perplexity of v. 22. Peter, subordinated to the Beloved Disciple, asks, “Tell us who it is of whom he speaks” (v. 24). This special disciple, like all the other disciples at the table, is ignorant of the full meaning of Jesus’ words and must ask Jesus. His question shows his ignorance, and triggers the words and actions that follow: “Lord, who is it?” (v. 25).

The one who is to betray him will be part of an intimate human gesture: dipping the morsel at table and sharing it with him (v. 26a). Jesus’ actions fulfil his words: “So when he had dipped the morsel, he took it and gave it to Judas, the Son of Simon Iscariot” (v. 26b). Because most early interpreters of John 13 could not accept the possibility that the morsel given to Judas might be regarded as eucharistic, the textual tradition is very disturbed here. The above translation of v. 26b accepts the Greek words λαμβάνει καὶ (“he took it”) as original. It is only after the reception of the morsel

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19 The Greek expression indicating this closeness to the breast of Jesus (ἐν τῷ κόλπῳ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ) is very close to the expression used in 1:18 to speak of Jesus’ turned in loving union with the Father (Greek: εἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ πατρός) during his ministry. See Moloney, John, 40-41, 46-47.

20 The words “he took it (λαμβάνει καὶ)” are found in all Gospel narratives of Jesus’ gift of bread at a final meal with his disciples. Reasons for accepting this reading will be given below.
that Satan enters into Judas (v. 27a). In v. 2 the reader was told that the devil had decided that Judas was to betray Jesus, but in v. 27a Satan enters into Judas. He is now part of a satanic programme, diametrically opposed to the programme of God revealed in Jesus. Yet, in an exquisite final gesture of love, Jesus shares the dipped morsel with his future betrayer (v. 26). The most evil disciple in the story (see 6:70-71; 12:4-6; 13:2) shares a morsel that points to the Eucharist (13:26)?

The unbelievable continues to happen as Jesus’ unconditional love (see v. 1: εἰς τέλος) is revealed in his actions.

Because Jesus’ consummate love for his failing disciples (v. 1: εἰς τέλος) is not recognised as the hermeneutical key to the interpretation of John 13, almost all scholars, and all preachers, shy clear of this eucharistic interpretation. They are aided in this by the fact that the Greek word used in v. 26 is “morsel” (ψωμίων) and not “bread” (ἄρτος). The former is a small piece of any food, although generally bread, while the latter can only be bread. Those who have seen the passage as eucharistic use 1 Corinthians 11:29 to claim that Satan enters the sinful Judas because he takes the eucharistic morsel without discerning. This interpretation has no place within the Johannine story of Jesus’ unbelievable love for his disciples. John Meier, focuses upon the words of the love command in 13:34-35 and ignores what Jesus did with Judas. He claims that “it is only after Judas leaves the supper room and plunges into the night of evil (v. 30) that Jesus draws the ultimate

21 For the discussion, see Michel-Joseph Lagrange, *Evangile selon Saint Jean*, Etudes Bibliques (Paris: Gabalda, 1927), 362-363. Most modern scholars either regard the use of the morsel as a method of eliminating Judas from the upper room (e.g. Schnackenburg, *St John*, 3:30), or an indication that Judas chooses Satan rather than Jesus (e.g. Brown, *John*, 2:578).


lesson from his sacramental act of washing.”

I am suggesting that it is at the moment of Jesus’ sharing with Judas that “Jesus draws the ultimate lesson” of both the washing and the gift of the morsel.

In v. 18, as Jesus addressed his disciples, he told them that the events about to happen will fulfil Psalm 41:10b: “He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.” The LXX translation of the first part of the Psalm (“He who ate my bread”) uses the Greek verb normally used to refer to human eating (ἐσθιῶ), but in John 13:18 the verb “to munch, to grind with the teeth” is used (τρωγω). The verb used in the Greek of the LXX has been replaced by a more vigorous word. The only other use of the verb τρωγω in the Gospel of John is found in the eucharistic passage of 6:51c-58. It appears four times (6:54, 56, 57, 58). Framed between uses of the usual verb (φαγω: see 6:51, 52, 53 and v. 58) the more physical verb appears in the most explicit eucharistic material in the Gospel (6:51-58), in the wider setting of John 6 where φαγω is otherwise universally present (see 6:5, 23, 26, 31, 41, 51, 52, 53). The only other use of this verb (τρωγω) in the Gospel of John is at the gift of the morsel in 13:18. John refashions this Old Testament passage, linking the gift of the morsel to Judas with Christian traditions which surrounded the Last Supper (see also Mark 14:18 and Luke 22:21, where Ps 41:10 also provides background). These eucharistic hints would not be missed by the reader/listener.


27 Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 396 (s.v. ἐσθιῶ), 1019 (s.v. τρωγω). As with heavily used verbs in many languages, the verb “to eat” appears in two forms: ἐσθιῶ and φαγω/φάγω (see 6:5, 23, 26, 31, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53).


29 In agreement with Spicq, I regard the fourfold use of τρωγω in a setting where φαγω is used eight times as deliberate, and not just a “use of verbal variety” (as is argued, among others, by Francis T. Gignac, “The Use of Verbal Variety in the Fourth Gospel,” in *Transcending Boundaries. Contemporary Readings of the New Testament. Essays in Honor of Francis J. Moloney*, eds. Rekha M. Chennattu and Mary L. Coloe [Rome: LAS, 2005], 195). This connection between v. 18 and the eucharistic passage in 6:51-58 is recognised by Zumstein, *Saint Jean*, 31-32, but he does not link it with the event reported in v. 26.
But there is more. Above I included “and he took” in my translation of v. 26, but these words are not found in some early manuscripts. They recall Jesus’ deliberate action of “taking” bread in the bread miracles of all four Gospels (Mark 6:41; 8:6; Matt 14:19; 15:36; Luke 9:16; John 6:11), reflecting the eucharistic thought and practice of the early Church. The same expression is found in the Synoptic and Pauline reports of the Last Supper (Mark 14:22; Matt 26:26; Luke 22:19; 1 Cor 11:23). Given the eucharistic hints involved in the use of the verb used by John in 13:18 and in 6:54, 56, 57, 58, the originality of the words indicating that Jesus took the morsel before giving it to Judas should be maintained. Eucharist is a sub-theme to the meal and the gift of the morsel (vv. 21-38), just as Baptism is a sub-theme to the footwashing (vv. 1-17). Jesus gives the morsel to the most despised character in the Gospel’s narrative. The reader/listener and all subsequent Christian readers of the Gospel have been horrified by this suggestion. But Jesus’ never-failing love for such disciples, a love which reaches out even to the archetype of the evil disciple, reveals the unique God and Father of Jesus Christ who loves the world unconditionally (see 3:16-17; 13:18-20).

A brief “aside” on the reception history of this passage is in place at this stage. For centuries, Christians (reading John 13:1-38 as if it were an exact report of what actually happened on that night) have been horrified by the suggestion that Jesus might have shared the eucharistic morsel with Judas. This horror influences the exegetical decisions of even the most critical interpreters. Given the variety of traditions (at least Mark/Matthew; Luke/Paul; John), and the significance of the “memorial” of this meal, it is impossible to establish what actually took place at the meal. As in the early Church and subsequent centuries, many contemporary Christians continue

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32 As also in Bauer, Johannesevangelium, 174; Schnackenburg, St John, 3:30. It is easier to explain why it was eliminated (to avoid any hint of Judas and the Eucharist) than to explain why a scribe would insert it, if it was not there originally.

33 See, for example, Augustine, In Johannis Evangelium Tractatus CXXIV, LXII.1-6 (C.C.S.L. XXXVI, 483-485).
to be shocked by the above proposal, an important part of the Johannine presentation of the love theme. Primacy must be given to the Johannine love-rhetoric, not to a possible reconstruction of what Jesus may or may not have done. Largely unrecognised, however, is the fact that the same possibility is found in the Synoptic account of the Last Supper. Judas has already associated himself with the plot to kill Jesus (Mark 14:10-11; Matt 26:14-16; Luke 22:3-6), but he is present at the last meal (Mark 14:17-21; Matt 26:20-25; Luke 22:14, 21-23). Never is the reader told that he departed. Indeed, Luke has Jesus state: “the hand of him who betrays me is with me on the table” (Luke 22:21), although in Luke’s subtle account, more than Judas’ hand may be inferred by this use of Psalm 41:10.

Jesus knows Judas’ intentions (vv. 2, 10c-11, 18, 21-26). Satan’s designs for Judas now unfold: Satan entered into Judas (v. 27a). Jesus sends Judas on his way, recommending that he do his task as quickly as possible (v. 27b). There are no subtle allegories behind these words of Jesus; they are dramatic words which lead to vv. 28-29, indicating the universal ignorance of the disciples. Not one of the people at the table understood. The “no one” (οὐδείς) includes the Beloved Disciple (v. 28). How it is possible that no one understands, after the clarity of the question and the response to the question in word and deed in vv. 25-26? But ignorance and confusion reign, and the best some of the disciples can do is guess that Jesus is telling Judas, the guardian of the money box, to make some purchases for the feast, or give something to the poor (v. 29). After receiving the morsel, Judas immediately went out, and it was night (v. 30a). Now controlled by Satan, Judas walks away from the light of the world (see 1:4, 7; 8:12; 9:5), into the night and the darkness of those who reject Jesus, and who plan to kill him (see 1:5; 3:2; 8:12; 9:4; 11:10; 12:35, 46). At the beginning of Jesus’ ministry Nicodemus, one of “the Jews,” moved from the night toward Jesus (3:2). That journey is still in progress (see 7:50-51; 19:38-42). Now, as Jesus’ life comes to an end, one of “his own” moves away from the light into the night (13:30a).

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35 On this passage, see Schnelle, Johannes, 220. On its function for the story of Nicodemus in the Fourth Gospel, see Francis J. Moloney, Signs and Shadows: Reading John 5-12 (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1996), 90-93.
Judas’ action leads to a “shout of triumph” from Jesus.36 The author links Jesus’ proclamation in vv. 31-32 with the departure of Judas.37 The reader/listener is already aware that Jesus will be “lifted up” to make God known (see 3:13-14; 8:28), to draw everyone to himself (12:32-33). As this is the case, Judas’ departure into the darkness, to betray Jesus unto death (31a), leads logically to Jesus’ statement of vv. 31b-32. Themes foreshadowed across the Gospel gather. The “hour” has come (see 12:23, 27, 31; 13:1); now is the time for the glorification of the Son of Man, and for God to be glorified (11:4; 12:23, 28). On the Cross Jesus begins his “hour” of his glorification; but his death will reveal “the glory of God.” The term “glory” (δόξα), once used to describe the visible manifestation of God at Sinai, has been consistently applied in the Gospel narrative to refer to the works of Jesus (see 2:11; 5:44; 7:18; 11:4, 40; 12:41, 43). In these works God has been manifest, and the Cross will be the time and place where that manifestation reaches its perfection (τέλος).38 

Because Judas has been taken over by Satan after receiving the morsel, in a radical rejection of the love of God revealed in and through Jesus’ gift of the morsel (v. 31a), Jesus will be “lifted up.” Jesus can thus proclaim that now the Son of Man will be glorified, and the glory of God will be seen in the glorification of Jesus upon the Cross (vv. 31b-32b). The glorification of Jesus and the revelation of the glory of God, so intimately associated with the crucifixion, will take place now (v. 32c).39 Judas’ exit sets in motion the events promised by Jesus in vv. 18-20 as the time and the place when the disciples, chosen and sent by Jesus, might come to believe that Jesus is the revelation of God (v. 19: “that when it does take place you may believe that I AM HE”).

Opening with a term of endearment, “little children” (τεκνία), which

37 This is one of my many problems with the majority position that ends the narrative in John 13 with v. 30, and makes 13:31-14:31 the first discourse. For example, Schnackenburg’s detailed commentary on vv. 31-32 (St John, 3:49-52) does not give one word to v. 31a.
reinforces the presentation of Jesus’ unconditional love for his failing disciples, he looks back to words spoken to “the Jews” in 7:33. That moment, also marked by conflict and danger, is recalled as Jesus tells his disciples that they will seek him, but not find him because, as he told “the Jews”: “Where I am going you cannot come” (v. 33; see 7:34). The reader finds in one verse, a term of endearment, a statement from Jesus that a time is close at hand when he will no longer be with his disciples, and a close association of the disciples with “the Jews.” As “the Jews” would not and could not understand who Jesus was and where he was going in his return to the Father, so it is also with Jesus’ ignorant and failing disciples. Yet, they remain his disciples, his “little children,” lost, yet loved, in their misunderstanding, failure and ignorance (v. 33).

To these “little children,” he gives a new commandment (vv. 34-35). Earlier Jesus gave the disciples an example (v. 15a). Both the example and the new commandment are closely associated with Jesus’ demand that his disciples follow him into loving self-gift unto death, symbolised by the footwashing and the morsel. It was also implied by the command to follow Jesus’ example; that the disciples do to one another, as Jesus had done for them (v. 15b). It becomes more explicit in the new commandment that they love one another, even as Jesus has loved them (v. 34b). The link between the example and the commandment is clear. Disciples of Jesus will be identified as such because they love one another as Jesus has loved them (v. 35). In the time of Jesus’ absence (see v. 33), they are to repeat the love of Jesus, and render present the life-style of Jesus (vv. 34-35).

In v. 7a Jesus told Peter: “What I am doing you do not know now.” In proof of Jesus’ statement, Peter now asks what is meant by the proximate absence of Jesus, caused by his going to a place where they cannot come (v. 36a). Jesus repeats the words he said to all the disciples in v. 33: he is going to a place where Peter cannot follow “now.” Jesus tells Peter that even though he cannot follow him “now” (v. 36b), that he shall follow “afterwards”

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40 See Andreas Dettwiler, Die Gegenwart des Erhöhten: Eine exegetische Studie zu den johanneischen Abschiedsreden (Joh 13:31-16:33) unter besonderer Berücksichtigung ihres Relecture-Characters, Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments 169 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995), 74-79. It is seldom noticed by scholars who separate vv. 31-38 from vv. 1-30. Schnackenburg, St John, 3:12, 52-54, uses it as one element in his claim that vv. 34-35 are an editorial addition.
(v. 36c; see v. 7b). A narrative tension between exists the “now” of the story, as failing and misunderstanding disciples are at the centre of the action (vv. 7a, 36b), and the time of an “afterwards” when this situation will be transformed (vv. 7b, 36c. See 2:22; 12:16; 21:18-19).41

But Peter claims there is no tension. As earlier he attempted to dictate terms to Jesus both about whether he should have his feet washed (vv. 6-8), and about how he should be washed (v. 9), he now asks Jesus a question which indicates that there is no journey he is not prepared to make with Jesus (v. 37). Peter is thinking of human journeys into some dangerous place and time; Jesus is speaking of his return to the Father. Peter and Jesus are working on two different levels. Peter claims he is prepared to lay down his life for Jesus, as the Good Shepherd had earlier said that he would lay down his life for his sheep (see 10:11, 15, 17). This is exactly what Jesus asks of his disciples in the gift of his example (v. 15) and the gift of the new commandment (vv. 34-35), but such love flows from a radical following of Jesus, and never from an imposition of one’s own world-view upon God’s design. Jesus prophesies that Peter will be thwarted by his own ignorance. He will fail, as he will deny Jesus three times before the cock crows (v. 38).

The setting of the meal ends, bathed by the light Jesus’ incredible demonstration of his unconditional love for “his own” (v. 1: εἰς τέλος), made even more brilliant by the darkness of the forthcoming betrayal of Jesus by Judas (see vv. 2, 10-11, 18, 21-30, 31a), the ignorance of Peter and all the disciples (vv. 6-9, 28-29; 36-37) and the future denials of Peter (v. 38).

Conclusion

The first events in the Johannine account of Jesus’ final evening with his disciples (vv. 1-5) have highlighted three major themes: the arrival of “the hour” of Jesus, Jesus’ love for his own, no matter how sinful they might be (vv. 1-3), and Jesus’ bringing to perfection his task by means of a consummate act of love (v. 1).42

41 Although not normally pointed out by those who advocate the literary unity of John 1:1-21:25, there is a close link between this “later” following of Peter in 13:36, and Jesus command to follow, associated with the death of Peter in 21:18-19.

42 See the appropriate remarks of Christopher W. Skinner, “Virtue in the New Testament: The Legacies of Paul and John in Comparative Perspective,” in Unity and Diversity in
Another theme is added as the episode closes: the glorification of Jesus and the revelation of the glory of the Father (vv. 31-32). This theme has also been present at the centre of the passage, in Jesus’ claim that his disciples would come to recognise him as the unique revelation of God (v. 19). John 13 is a description of the glory shown by unconditional love. Jesus asks, by both deed and word, that his disciples live and love in imitation of him. This is his example (v. 15) and his new commandment (vv. 34-35). In the end, the example and the new commandment coalesce.

Themes adumbrated during the ministry reappear: “the hour has come” (v. 1), the Cross as the moment of Jesus’ glorification (see 11:4; 12:23, 33), and the revelation of the glory of God in and through the Cross (see 3:13-14; 8:28; 12:32). Most of all, 13:1-38 tells a tale of the revelation of love in the actions of Jesus. Jesus commits himself to fragile disciples, loving them until death (13:1), washing their feet (vv. 4-11) and sharing bread, even with his betrayer (vv. 21-30). At the centre of the narrative (vv. 18-20) we find the point of these actions. Jesus knows whom he has chosen: these disciples, whose feet he has washed (vv 1-17) who have received the morsel (vv. 21-38), and who will turn against him (see v. 18).

The cruel reality of their turning against him (vv. 2-3, 10-11, 21-30, 36-38), their lifting their heel against their host (v 18b), alters nothing. Indeed, he will send them forth as his representatives and as the representatives of his Father (vv. 18a, 20). In the acceptance of these failed, yet loved, disciples one will receive both Jesus and the Father (v 20). In Jesus’ choosing and sending ignorant and failing disciples, dramatically portrayed in the failure of both Judas and Peter, his uniqueness and oneness with God can be seen. Jesus’ love for his failing disciples is, above all, the final proof for his claim to be the one who makes God known (see v. 19: ότι εἰμί eγω eἰμι). God’s love, which transcends and challenges all human criteria and experience, is revealed. “The way God gives limitlessly exceeds all human and created forms of self-giving.”44 Equally surprising is that, despite their ignorance,
failure, betrayals and denials, the disciples are to imitate Jesus, loving one another as he has loved them, so that the world might recognise them as disciples and sent ones of Jesus Christ (vv. 15, 20, 34-35).