Just as the previous incarnations of the Roman Rite adopted aspects of local culture to better express the truth of Christ, attention to culture and social change needs to be a continuing concern when we gather to pray. We ignore the dynamic nature of both our local and global context at the risk of worsening the “disconnect” between the way we worship and the way we live our Christian lives—precisely the gulf that the liturgical reforms of Vatican II attempted to bridge. As Catholics of the Roman Rite we cannot afford the luxury of thinking that, now that we have made some minor ritual and textual changes in the standard editions of the liturgical books, we do not need to continue to help our worship become a true expression of the people with whom we celebrate Christ’s paschal mystery.

“The Church has been sent to all ages and nations and, therefore, is not tied exclusively and indissolubly to any race or nation, to any one particular way of life, or to any set of customs, ancient or modern” (GS 58). This affirmation of the Second Vatican Council still needs to be received and implemented through liturgical inculturation. I can think of no better way of ending this presentation than to give the last word to Fr. Anscar Chupungco. In a talk he gave just a year before his death in Bacolod City he said:

The Church, after the example of Christ, has the duty to incarnate itself in the culture of its people; . . . our local [Filipino] culture possesses beauty, dignity, and nobility worthy of divine worship. We ought to revere our ancient Christian traditions, but that does not mean that we should live in the past and ignore the present reality of the Church in the modern world.37

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FRANCIS J. MOLONEY, SDB

“He Loved Them to the End”

Eucharist in the Gospel of John

Each of the so-called Synoptic Gospels, Mark, Matthew, and Luke, expresses a unique “point of view” by means of a story of Jesus. When we turn to the Fourth Gospel, we find ourselves in a different world. The overall story hardly ever fits the scheme of the Synoptic Gospels, and John’s understanding of the life, preaching, death, and resurrection of Jesus is unique. The Fourth Gospel is dominated by the conviction that God gave the gift of his Son to the world that he loves so much, that the world might have life (see John 3:16-17).3

Contemporary interpretations of the Fourth Gospel take a variety of positions on the presence or absence of sacramental teaching in this gospel. Some scholars have argued for an understanding of many of the events from the life of Jesus as deeply impregnated with a sacramental understanding of God’s action in Jesus. Where there is the possibility of sacramental teaching, John implies such

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1 This paper was delivered at a Plenary Session of the International Eucharistic Congress Theological Symposium on Wednesday, January 20, 2016, in Cebu, The Philippines. A more detailed and fully documented version of this study will be published in Francis J. Moloney, Johannine Studies 1975–2017, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017). I am using my own translation of the text throughout.

2 There is no literary dependency of John on the Synoptic Gospels. On this, see D. Moody Smith, John Among the Gospels, 2nd ed. (Columbus: University of South Carolina Press, 2001). John knows the Synoptic Gospels (particularly Mark and Luke) but does not use them as, for example, Matthew uses Mark. The Fourth Gospel is the product of a long Christian and literary history. It is the result of great originality in marrying traditional narratives and other sources with a unique Johannine contribution. The final document, which would have appeared about 100 CE, is arguably the most subtle theological work in the New Testament. See Raymond E. Brown, An Introduction to the Gospel of John, ed. Francis J. Moloney, The Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 2010).

teaching. Others have claimed that John has no interest in the idea of sacraments and may well be anti-sacramental. There is no overtly sacramental teaching in the Johannine story, but many contemporary scholars find hints of eucharistic teaching throughout this subtle gospel. The miracle of the marriage feast at Cana (John 2:1-11) can be interpreted symbolically to see the wine that Jesus provides as eucharistic. The Johannine version of the miracle of the multiplication of the bread (6:1-15), like the Synoptic stories, reflects a eucharistic background. A symbolic reading of the gospel has also been applied to Jesus’ gift of himself at the footwashing (see especially 13:15) as “analogous in content within the context of the narrative of the supper.” The allusion on the vine (15:1-5) is sometimes seen as eucharistic in its repeated use of the theme of “abiding.” Although John has no explicit report of a final meal and so-called words of institution, there are clear hints in the narrative that the community celebrated Eucharist.

Among several suggested passages that have a eucharistic background, three stand out: 6:1-15, 51-58 and 19:34.

John 6:1-15
The Johannine version of the miracle of the loaves and fish contains many uniquely Johannine themes. For example, consistent with John 5:1-10:42, which deals with the celebration of the feasts of the Jews, John locates the miracle at the time of Passover (see 6:4). He also wishes to associate Jesus’

5 The classical statement of this position is found in Hugo Oedeberg, The Fourth Gospel: Interpreted in Relation to Contemporaneous Religious Currents in Palestine and the Hellenistic-Oriental World (Uppsala: Almqvist, 1929). On John 6, see pp. 235-69.

9 The use of the expressions “he took” (Greek: elaben) and “when he has given thanks” (Greek: kai eucharistiasen) together is found elsewhere in the New Testament only in Paul’s version of Jesus’ words at the Last Supper in 1 Corinthians 11:23b-24.
10 A Jewish document that appeared about the time as the Gospel of John expresses this hope: “And it shall come to pass at that selfsame time that the treasury of manna shall again descend from on high, and they will eat of it in those years, because those are they who have come to the consummation of time” (2 Bar 29:8). In his deeply flawed recent study, Brant Pitre, Jesus and the Last Supper (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 197-99, 227-28, identifies this “now Moses” link via 2 Baruch, but claims that it comes from Jesus’ self-identification with the now Moses. In fact, it is part of the Johannine post-Easter message to an early Christian community.
This teaching can only generate difficulties for the post-Easter Johannine community: those who “believe without seeing” (20:29). Where do they encounter this life-giving revelation of God during the period of the physical “absence” of Jesus (see 29, 35, 40, 47)? Jesus closes the discourse by providing an answer to that question for the original audience and for believers of all time. In vv. 51-58 Jesus speaks of eating the flesh of the Son of Man and drinking his blood (vv. 53-54). At the end of the first century members of a Christian community hear, in the explicit eucharistic terminology of vv. 51-58, that they are to decide for or against God’s revelation in his Son at their celebration of the Eucharist. There they encounter the revelation of God in and through his Son, as they eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of Man. In the broken body and the spilt blood of the Eucharist they shall “look on him whom they have pierced” (19:37).

JOHN 19:34-35
The same issue, living the “absence of the physical Jesus,” lies behind the account of the blood and water flowing from the pierced side of the crucified Jesus after his death in 19:34. Johannine thought is dominated by a theology of the cross as Jesus’ supreme achievement. There Jesus is lifted up and exalted (see 3:13-15; 8:28; 12:23, 32-33), glorifying the Father (7:37-39; 12:28; 13:31-32; etc.). But John’s presentation of the crucified Jesus as the revelation of God who so loved the world that he handed over his own Son (see 3:16) raises a further question, similar to the discourse of 6:25-50. Where can the Johannine community, “who have not seen and yet believe” (20:29), experience this revelation of a God of love upon the cross? Where do they “gaze upon him” (19:37)? The answer is found in John’s account of the blood and water flowing from the side of the pierced Jesus in 19:34. What is especially important for an understanding of the report of the flow of blood and water in v. 34 is the following rare direct intervention of John into the narrative. He insists with some passion that what they are being told is true. They are

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11 The revelation of Jesus as I AM HE in vv. 16-22 only to the disciples in the boat is a significant narrative strategy. At the end of the discourse, these same disciples find that Jesus’ word is “too hard,” and they leave him (vv. 60-66).
as the message of Jesus’ discourse in 6:25-59 would lead the members of the Johannine audience to seek an experience of the revelation of God in his Son in their life as a believing community, so also the account of the revelation of God’s glory on the cross generates a parallel need in the community. In 19:34 John responds to the needs of an early Christian community asking its members that they will find the presence of the pierced one in hisarist and baptism.16

Johannine community took for granted the celebration of Eucharist. But John Eucharist is not “going to communion.” He asks Christians to find in Eucharist the revelation of God in the broken body and the split blood of crucified Jesus. He understands Eucharist as “presence,” as throughout the other gospels, but John develops that theology of “presence” to address the context of a community sensing its distance from the saving events of the life of Jesus (see 20:29). “It is in the Sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist that the Johannine Church can find the presence of the absent one.”17

His message was addressed to a community wondering, at the end of the first century, where and how they might encounter the Christ, the Son of God, in their life in his name (see 20:30-31). John was offering significant response to a troubled community.18 But his message contains a

back to the loving self-gift of Jesus in crucifixion. Both 6:51-58 and 19:34 make sense only in the light of the cross. All New Testament witnesses look to the community’s celebration of the Eucharist as the saving presence of the crucified one for its meaning, however differently they might do so.

JOHN 13:1-38

John 13:1-38 is sometimes interpreted as “sacramental.” The narrative of the footwashing (13:1-17) is sometimes associated with baptism, and the gift of the morsel (vv. 21-30) may have eucharistic hints. As is well known, despite Jesus’ lengthy presence with his disciples the night before he died (13:1-17:26), the Fourth Gospel contains no account paralleling the setting and the ritual at the table reported in the Synoptic Gospels. Can this be traced in John 13:1-38?19

THE LITERARY DESIGN OF JOHN 13:1-38

The comment of 13:1 on Jesus’ love for his own “to the end” points the narrative in a new direction. Jesus is alone with his disciples in the upper room. It is “the most significant transition in the Gospel, introducing not only the scene of the foot-washing but the entire second half of the Gospel.”20 But many claim that vv. 31-38 open the final discourse (13:31-16:33) and do not serve as a conclusion to 13:1-38.21 But the material in vv. 31-38 is narrative, not discourse (like 14:1-16:33). It tells of an encounter between Simon Peter and


19 Pitre, Jesus and the Last Supper, 251-373, uses passages from 13:1-38 in his helpful and wide-ranging discussion of the date of the Last Supper. He never considers the possibility that 13:1-38 may contain a significant Johannine message on the Eucharist (and baptism). He maintains a myopic focus on a historical Last Supper rather than what we can learn from New Testament narratives about the faith and life of the Church.


Jesus (vv. 36-38). The future denials of Simon Peter are foretold, matching similar prophecies, earlier in the narrative, telling the future betrayal of Judas (vv. 10b-11, 21-22). It also catches up Peter's earlier misunderstanding of Jesus' gesture in the footwashing (see vv. 6-10a). Another important link between the opening and closing passages of 13:1-38 is Jesus' promise that what Peter cannot know and understand now will become clear later (v. 7; vv. 36-37).

The expression “Amen, amen I say to you” appears four times in 13:1-38 (see vv. 16, 20, 21, 38). This expression is found only in the Fourth Gospel. It appears in 13:1-38 more often than in any other chapter of the gospel. The use of the Johannean expression “amen, amen I say to you” at the beginning and the end of the prophecies of betrayal and denial reported in vv. 21-38 (see v. 21 and v. 38) keeps vv. 31-38 more closely associated with 13:1-30 than with the following discourse. The theme of the failure of Judas and Peter does not reappear until the passion narrative (see 18:1-11, 15-18, 25-27).

John has deliberately positioned double “amen” sayings in vv. 16-17, 20, 21, and 38 to create the following structured narrative plot:

1. **Verses 1-17**: The footwashing is reported, and a number of discussions surround the narrative. This section features John's comments (see vv. 1-5), dialogue between Jesus and Peter (vv. 6-10a), and Jesus' words on Judas (vv. 10b-11). The section concludes with the double “amen” in vv. 16-17.

2. **Verses 18-20**: Jesus speaks to his disciples, and his words form the literary center of the passage. The section concludes with the double “amen” in v. 20.

3. **Verses 21-38**: In a narrative that matches vv. 1-17, John tells of Jesus' gift of the morsel, and a number of discussions surround the narrative. The context of betrayal and denial intensify (vv. 21-30, 36-38). The section opens and closes with a double “amen” in v. 21 and in v. 38.

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**Eucharist in John 13:1-38**

The final section of the narrative, vv. 21-38, focuses on Jesus' gift of the morsel to Judas and its aftermath, within the context of misunderstanding, prophecies of betrayal, and denials, accompanied by Jesus' command to love as he has loved (vv. 34-35). But vv. 21-38 must be read with the broader narrative setting of the footwashing in vv. 1-17, a passage that has many parallel features with vv. 21-38. We must also devote attention to the central statement of vv. 18-20. These powerful words of Jesus provide a key to the significance of the actions that precede (vv. 1-17) and follow (vv. 21-38).

**The Footwashing and Its Aftermath (vv. 1-17)**

Jesus is aware that the hour of his return to the Father is imminent. However, the “end” of his life among his disciples is at hand: “having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end” (13:1). The expression “to the end” (Greek: εἰς τέλος) has a double meaning. It refers, obviously, to a chronological end. For John this means Jesus’ death, resurrection, and return to the Father. But the expression also indicates the quality of Jesus’ love for his own. He loved them in a way unimaginable by human standards. He loved them “consummately.”

With a declaration of love heading the account of Jesus’ washing the disciples’ feet and giving the morsel to Judas, its first narrative section, ending with the typically Johannean double “amen” (vv. 16-17), 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). These

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24 For my recent detailed study of 13:1-38, see Francis J. Moloney, Love in the Gospel of John, 99-117.

25 I use the quaint English word “consummately,” as it catches the link between noun telos and the verb used when Jesus dies and pours down the Spirit in 19:30: “It is finished.” The verb used is a form of the Greek noun to telos (13:1): tetelestai (19:30). The Latin Vulgate caught the link between 13:1 and 19:30: “It is consummated.”
words are immediately followed by an indication that the devil had already decided in his heart that Judas would betray Jesus (v. 2). Too often he translators report that “the devil had already put it into the heart of theudas” (RSV). This does not render the Greek correctly. It also disturbs the narrative as Satan enters Judas only in v. 27, after Judas takes the morsel. “Knowing” these things does not deter Jesus from moving into action. He prepares himself and washes the disciples’ feet (vv. 3-5). Jesus’ love and knowledge (vv. 1-3) flow into action (vv. 4-5).

Verses 6-11: Peter objects to Jesus’ washing his feet, and Jesus dialogues with him (vv. 6-10b). The link between the footwashing and the practice of baptism emerges. Peter can “have no part” with Jesus unless he is prepared to be washed by Jesus (v. 8). Through the footwashing, the disciple “has part” in the saving effects of Jesus’ death and resurrection. This leads to Jesus’ first statement on Judas’ future betrayal (vv. 10c-11).

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 pattern of teacher and lord kneeling in self-gift for his own must continue as a mark of the followers of Jesus. The choice of the Greek word for “example” (v. 15. Greek: hypodeigma) 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 Jewish texts that speak of exemplary death (LXX Mac 6:28; 4 Macc 17:22-23; Sir 44:16). Jesus’ death . . . as it is here interpreted through the footwashing is the reverse of death.

As the section opened, Jesus’ love and knowledge flowed into action in vv. 1-5. In a beautifully balanced sentence, opening with the double “amen,” Jesus tells the disciples: “If you know these things, blessed are you, if you do them” (vv. 16-17). Jesus has demonstrated love in action. He has given them an example (v. 15): they are to demonstrate love in action by following his example (hypodeigma)—to the end (eis telos).

THE CENTRAL STATEMENT (vv. 18-20)
The centerpiece of 13:1-38 is found in vv. 18-20. Between vv. 1-17 and vv. 21-38 Jesus spells out the rationale for both the footwashing and the gift of the morsel. This brief passage is articulated in three affirmations:

1. Verse 18: Jesus has chosen fragile disciples, one of whom will betray him.

2. Verse 19: He explains why he has done this: “that you may believe that I AM HE.”

3. Verse 20: Closing 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 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 (Greek: ἐν τῷ κρύπτῳ καὶ τῷ τοίχῳ) has lifted his heel against him (v. 18). The betrayer, who has lurked throughout this narrative (see vv. 2, 10c-11), is explicitly mentioned in v. 18. Despite the misunderstanding (Peter) and the betrayal (Judas), Jesus has chosen these disciples. In v. 20, closing this central section with a further double “amen,” Jesus affirms that he will send out these disciples to make known both the Father and the Son. For this unique mission (v. 20), Jesus has chosen and sent out ignorant, fragile disciples, even one who will betray him (v. 18).

Culpepper, “The Johannine Hypodeigma,” 144.

The English captures this balance, but the original Greek is very clear: ei TAUTA oikute [conditional] — makariol esti [beatitude] — eai poiète AUTA [conditional].

I provide the Greek, as I return to it later.
Choosing and sending out those who fail, betray, and deny makes no sense. Verse 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 [Greek: hina pistensête botan genêtai hoti eō eimi]—provides Jesus’ reason for behaving in this way. Jesus’ act of footwashing, symbolizing his consummate love-untodeath, reveals the God and Father of Jesus. This is the meaning of Jesus’ claim to be “I AM HE” (Greek: eō eimi). The story of Jesus’ unconditional self-gift on the cross is yet to come. But the loving gestures of the footwashing and the gift of the morsel anticipate it. The disciples in the story do not yet know these truths. Thus they continue in their ignorance, their false promises, and their misunderstanding. Later they will understand and believe.

Jesus 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: I AM HE). 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, disciples 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 to the end, consummately (eis telos), in a way that the world can never comprehend. The love of Jesus for his own to the end 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 readers and hearers of the story of John’s gospel, themselves fragile disciples of Jesus.

32 The use of “I AM HE” in the Gospel of John in an absolute sense (i.e., without any modification, as in “I am the light of the world” [9:5], “I am the way, and the truth, and the life” [14:6]) is a feature of this gospel. Based in the revelation of the name of God to Moses as “I am who I am” in Exodus 3:14, the expression “I am he” was used throughout the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible: ani hu; Greek LXX: egō eimi) to refer to the revealing presence of God (see LXX Deut 32:39; Exod 41:4; 43:10-11; 25; 46:4; 48:12; Isa 43:10; 45:18). John takes this tradition further by having Jesus boldly proclaim “I AM HE” (see 4:26; 6:20; 8:24, 28, 58; 18:5-8) and thus claim that he is the revealer of God par excellence.

THE GIFT OF THE MORSEL AND ITS AFTERMATH (vv. 21-38)
Matching the structure of vv. 1-17, the closing section of 13:1-38 also 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 between Jesus and Judas follows the gift of the morsel. 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 cockcrow.

In v. 21 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. In v. 1 words that spoke of Jesus’ love for his own to the end established a link with the cross. The cross is again close at hand in the words “troubled in spirit.” Jesus indicates that one of the disciples, present at the table (see vv. 12, 18), will betray him (v. 21b). These words confuse the disciples around the table. They are “uncertain [Greek:

33 These words echo Psalms 42-43, a psalm associated in the tradition with the passion (see also 11:33 and 12:27, where it is used to point to the passion). See Charles H. Dodd, Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 37-38, 69-71.
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 honor, he is included in the perplexity of v. 22. Peter asks, “Tell us who it is of whom he speaks” (v. 24). This special disciple is ignorant of the full meaning of Jesus’ words and thus asks: “Lord, who is it?” (v. 25). The one who is to betray him will be part of an intimate human gesture: at table, dipping the morsel and sharing it (v. 26a).

Jesus’ actions fulfill his words: “So when he had dipped the morsel, he took 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 “he took and” (lambanei kai) as original.36 We will return to the significance of this detail below. After the reception of the morsel, 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 program, diametrically opposed to God’s program revealed in Jesus. Yet, in an exquisite final gesture of love, Jesus shares the dipped morsel with his future betrayer (v. 26). Does the most evil disciple in the story (see 6:70-71; 12:4-6; 13:2) share a morsel that points to the Eucharist (13:26)?37 Does the unbelievable continue to occur as Jesus’ unconditional love (v. 1: eis telos) is revealed in his actions?

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34 The Greek verb aporrê (“to be at a loss, to be uncertain or perplexed”) appears only here in the Gospel of John. Its other rare appearances in the New Testament (Mark 6:20; Luke 24:4; Acts 25:20; 2 Cor 4:8; Gal 4:20) always refer to ignorance and perplexity.

35 The Greek expression indicating this closeness to the breast of Jesus (en tōi kolpōi tou lēsou) is very close to the expression used in 1:18 to speak of Jesus’ loving union with the Father (Greek: eis ton kolpōn tou patros) during his ministry.

36 The words “he took it [lambanei kai]” are found in all gospel narratives of Jesus’ gift of bread at a final meal with his disciples. Reasons for accepting this reading as original will be given below.

37 Almost all contemporary scholars reject this suggestion.

38 Although he does not see the morsel as eucharistic, Saint Augustine recognizes the significance of this moment. He comments: “Quid erat autem panistrictioribus, nisi demonstratio cui gratiae suiisset ingratus?” (In Johannis Evangelium Tractatus CXXIV, 62.1-6. [CCSL 35:483-85]): “Why was the bread given to the traitor, but as a demonstration of the grace he had been treated with ingratitude,” Judas is damned, but he has been graced by Jesus’ gift.

39 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. Text critics advocate a principle that chooses the “more difficult text” (lectio difficilior) as original. The inclusion of “he took end” is the lectio difficilior in v. 26.
of the morsel (vv. 21-38), just as baptism is a subtheme to the footwashing (vv. 1-17). Jesus gives the morsel to the most despised character in the gospel’s narrative. Its audience and all subsequent Christian readers of the gospel have been horrified by this suggestion. But Jesus’ never-failing love for such disciples, a love that reaches out 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).

For centuries, Christians, reading John 13:1-38 as if it were an exact report of what actually took place on that night, have been horrified by the suggestion that Jesus might have shared the eucharistic morsel with Judas. Given the variety of eucharistic traditions in the New Testament (at least Mark/Matthew; Luke/John, and the central role of the “memorial” of this meal across the centuries, it is impossible to find in the New Testament an accurate description of what actually took place at the meal that night. Many contemporary Christians continue to be shocked by an interpretation that suggests a eucharistic background to Jesus’ gift of the morsel to Judas in John 13:26.

We must detach ourselves from our impressions of what actually happened on that night, to recognize that John has given us a superlatively narrative to communicate the overwhelming enormity of God’s love, manifested in and through Jesus. We are unable to construct exactly who was there and what happened on that night with any ceritude, but the inspired and authoritative narrative of the Word of God in the gospel makes our God known to us. Large unrecognized is the fact that in the Synoptic accounts of the Last Supper Judas is present (Mark 14:17-21; Matt 26:20-25; Luke 22:14, 21-23), even though he had already associated himself with the plot to kill Jesus (Mark 14:10-11; Matt 26:14-16; Luke 22:3-6). Indeed, Luke has Jesus state: “the hand of him who betrays me is with me on the table” (Luke 22:21).

The audience has been told several times that Jesus knows Judas’ intentions (John 13:2, 10c-11, 18, 21-26). Satan now entered into Judas (v. 27a), and Jesus sends Judas on his way, recommending that he do his task as quickly as possible (v. 27b). Jesus’ dramatic words lead to vv. 28-29, indicating the universal ignorance of the disciples. Not one of the people at the table understood. The “no one” (Greek: undei) includes the beloved disciple (v. 28), despite the clear indications in vv. 26-27.

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 darkness of the night (13:30a).

Judas’ action leads to a “shout of triumph” from Jesus. The author links Jesus’ proclamation in vv. 31-32 with the departure of Judas. The audience 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 glorification; but his death will reveal “the glory of God.” The term “glory” (Greek: doxa), once used to describe the visible manifestation of God at Sinai, has been consistently applied in this gospel to refer to the works of Jesus (see 2:11; 5:44; 7:18; 11:4, 40; 12:41, 43). In these works...

40 An attempt to establish “history” is the overarching defect of Pitre, Jesus and the Last Supper.


42 Most major commentators who read v. 31 as the beginning of the discourse (13:31-16:33) ignore the reference to the exit of Judas in v. 31a. Correctly, Peter Ellis, The Genius of John: A Composition-Critical Commentary on the Fourth Gospel (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1984), 213, states: “Judas’ departure into the night to betray Jesus elicits the declaration that the hour has now indeed come.”
God has been manifest, and the cross will be the time and place where that manifestation reaches its perfection, its goal, its consummation (telos).43

Because Judas has been taken over by Satan after receiving the morsel, in a radical rejection of the love of God revealed in 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 through 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). Judas’ exit sets in motion the events promised by Jesus in vv. 18-20 as the time and the place where the disciples, chosen and sent by Jesus, might come to believe that Jesus is the revelation of God (v. 19).

Jesus turns to his disciples and addresses them with a term of endearment, “little children” (v. 33. Greek: tekna), reinforcing the presentation of Jesus’ unconditional love for his failing disciples. But he looks back to words spoken to “the Jews” in an angry encounter with them recorded in 7:33.44 Jesus recalls that moment in the past, marked by conflict and danger, and 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 audience finds in one verse (v. 33) 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 potential 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 might also be 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, symbolized by the footwashing and the morsel. It was also implied by the command 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, to render present the unconditional love that marked the lifestyle of Jesus (vv. 34-35), rendered “present” among them in baptism and Eucharist.45

In v. 7a Jesus told Peter: “What I am doing you do not know now.” In proof of Jesus’ statement, Peter 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), he shall follow “afterward” (v. 36c; see v. 7b). A tension exists between the “now” of the story, as failing and misunderstanding disciples are the center of the action (v. 7a, 36b), and the time of an “afterward” when this situation will be transformed (vv. 7b, 36c; see 2:22; 12:16; 21:18-19).46

But Peter claims there is no tension. Earlier he attempted to dictate terms to Jesus about whether he should have his feet washed (vv. 6-8) and then about how he should be washed (v. 9). He now asks Jesus a question, indicating there is no journey he is not prepared to make (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, and the audience recognizes that they are at cross purposes. Peter claims he is prepared to lay down his life for Jesus, as the Good Shepherd had earlier said that he would

43 On the Johannine use of “glory” (Greek: doxa), see Moloney, Love in the Gospel of John, 51-54, 91-96, 122-33.

44 Readers will notice that I place citation marks around “the Jews.” These characters in John’s gospel are not the people known to us as the Jews. They are people in the story who have made a decision against Jesus, his revelation of God, and, subsequently, his followers. John Ashton, Understanding the Fourth Gospel (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 151, points out correctly that one must “recognise in these hot-tempered exchanges the type of family row in which the participants face one another across the room of a house which all have shared and all call home.”

45 The theme of v. 17 returns: “If you know these things, blessed are you, if you do these things” (AT).

46 A close literary and theological link exists between this “later” following of Peter in 13:36 and Jesus’ command to follow, associated with the death of Peter in 21:18-19.
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 worldview 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 in the light of Jesus' incredible demonstration of his unconditional love for "his own" to the end (v. 1), made even more brilliant by the surrounding darkness of Judas' forthcoming betrayal of Jesus (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 Peter's future denials (v. 38).

CONCLUSION

John 13:1-38 tells of the ignorance, betrayal, and denial of Jesus by the disciples with whom he shares his table. But Jesus commits himself to these same disciples, "his own," "little children," loving them consummately until death (13:1), washing their feet (vv. 4-11), sharing a morsel of bread, even with his betrayer (vv. 21-30). The center of the narrative (vv. 18-20) is crucial for the overall message of 13:1-38. Jesus knows whom he has chosen. These disciples, whose feet he has washed (vv. 1-17), Judas who has received the morsel (v. 21-38), will turn against him (see v. 18). The cruel reality of their turning against him (vv. 2-3, 10-11, 21-30, 36-38), lifting their heel against their host (v. 18b), alters nothing. In fact, he will send them forth as his representatives and as the representatives of his Father (vv. 18a, 20). In accepting these failed yet loved disciples one will receive both Jesus and the Father (v 20).

Jesus' choosing and sending ignorant and failing disciples dramatically portrayed in the abject failure of both Judas and Peter reveals Jesus' uniqueness and oneness with God. His love for his failing disciples is, above all, the final proof for his claim to be the one who makes God known (v. 19: I AM HE). Jesus does not reveal the love of God through any acclaim gained by a human success story, but through loving, unto death, those intimate friends and associates who have betrayed and denied him.

This is the message the Johannine Jesus leaves his disciples, as they gather at his table on the night before he died. Only after the events of the near future, when these things "take place," may the disciples come to know and believe that Jesus can claim I AM HE. They will have been loved "to the end" (13:1) by one whom they have betrayed and denied. This is a remarkable understanding of God, of Jesus, and of his self-giving love for his disciples. God's love, transcending and challenging all human criteria and human experience, is revealed. Equally surprising is that, despite their ignorance, failure, betrayals, and denials, the disciples are to imitate Jesus, loving one another as he loved them, so that the world might recognize them as disciples of Jesus Christ (vv. 15, 20, 34-35). "As the tragedy of human blindness is worked out so is the eminence of divine love."47 Both the disciples in the story and the audience require more instruction before the events of "the hour," which transforms the failures of "now" into knowledge (v. 6) and the following "afterward," take place.

The eucharistic elements in John 13 are not the main features of the chapter. However, the story of the gift of the eucharistic morsel is central to the overall and larger message of the Johannine Jesus who summoned the church to a new quality of love (13:13-17, 34-35). He was able to do this because he gave himself in love to disciples who did not love him in anything like the same way. Indeed, he even gave himself to Judas!

Xavier Léon-Dufour has perceptively indicated that the eucharistic traditions of the earliest church have been transmitted in two forms: the cultic form and the testamentary form.48 In his analysis of the Johannine material, he explains that, while chapters 13–16 avoid the cultic form, they contain an important eucharistic witness in testamentary form: "The love Christians have for one another is the real symbol of Christ's presence in this world."49 I am suggesting that this same message, based in the prior and extraordinary revelation of the love of God in Jesus (13:18-20), can be traced through an analysis of the

49 Ibid., 252. See pp. 249-52 for his remarks on John 13-16.
structure and theology of 13:1-38, where Jesus' gift of the morsel still has hints of the Johannine community's eucharistic cult.

John continues the tradition that associated the Eucharist with a bread miracle (6:1-15, 51-58) and adds another eucharistic hint to link the revelation of Jesus' self-giving love on the cross (19:34-35). These passages reflect the eucharistic practice of the post-Easter Johannine community. A community that no longer had a physical experience of Jesus in their midst is instructed that he can be found in the broken body and the spilt blood of their eucharistic celebrations. The author of this story of Jesus would not have been able to tell it in this way unless an early Christian community celebrated the Eucharist. John takes eucharistic traditions and practices for granted. Despite the difference of pastoral and theological applications that are apparent across the books of the New Testament, one element remains firm: the Eucharist is centered on Jesus' loving self-gift on the cross.

THOMAS A. KROSNICKI, SVD

By Way of Comment

The 2014 Homiletic Directory

On November 9, 2015, the feast of the Dedication of the Basilica of St. John Lateran, Pope Francis ordained Monsignor Angelo DeDonatis as an auxiliary bishop to assist in shepherding the Diocese of Rome. Although the homily on that occasion was basically excerpted from the Italian edition of the Roman Pontifical, the pontiff characteristically inserted, in his inimitable style, several points of practical note. One piece of pastoral advice Pope Francis gave to Bishop DeDonatis pertained to his future preaching: "Announce the Word at every opportunity and also at less opportune moments; admonish . . . but always kindly, exhort with magnanimity and doctrine. May your words be simple, so that everyone can understand, rather than long homilies." ¹

Of course, Pope Francis knows that preaching is not easy—as if it were just a slapdash attempt to organize one's thoughts and make the delivery brief. He is well aware that much more goes into the remote and immediate process of preparing and delivering a good homily. Francis understands to what extent preachers of the Word are challenged to call on their theological—especially biblical—knowledge, deploy and apply their training in homiletic skills, and witness to a personal spirituality in order to offer even a brief but timely message gleaned from the assigned Scripture texts and appropriated for both the community and liturgical occasion.

¹ Quoted from the Zenit news service, November 10, 2015: www.zenit.org/en/articles. See also Evangelii Gaudium 138, where Francis stressed brevity in preaching so that a homily not "take on the semblance of a speech or lecture."
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