

Ethics and Ethos in the Gospel according to John¹

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1. Introduction

1.1. An apparent problem: lack of interest in Johannine ethics?

Johannine ethics have proven to be a problematic and challenging area of research. As Matera contends, 'For anyone interested in the study of New Testament ethics, the Gospel according to John is a major challenge ... there are remarkably few references to moral conduct ...'² Theobald expresses similar sentiments by saying that 'Ein *ethisches* Interesse an der Gestaltung der Lebensbereiche der Gemeinde wird im Buch nirgends greifbar'.³ The limited interest in Johannine ethics seems to grow out of 'einer gewaltigen Reduktion ethischer Fragen und Aussagen'⁴ in the Gospel according to John.⁵

When Johannine ethical material is considered in publications, it is usually done in a restricted manner. Explicit ethical remarks in the Gospel seem to be limited to the *love* command, without giving concrete examples of

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² F. Matera, *New Testament Ethics. The legacies of Jesus and Paul*, Louisville 1996, 92.

³ M. Theobald, *Herrenworte im Johannesevangelium* (HBS 34), Freiburg et alii 2002, 565.

⁴ H.-D. Wendland, *Ethik des Neuen Testaments*, Göttingen 1975, 109.

⁵ W. Schrage, *The Ethics of the New Testament*, Edinburgh 1996, 297 remarks, 'we may ask whether a chapter on the Johannine writings even belongs in a book on the ethics of the New Testament'. B. Gerhardsson, *The ethos of the Bible*, Philadelphia 1981, 98 regards love as the only ethical theme of significance in John. K. Berger, *Im Anfang war Johannes. Datierung und Theologie des vierten Evangeliums*, Stuttgart 1997 does not give attention to the ethics in John in his 'theology' of this Gospel. J.L. Houlden, *Ethics and the New Testament*, London 1973, 35f. R.A. Culpepper, *Anti-Judaism in the Fourth Gospel as a theological problem for Christian interpreters*, in: *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel*, ed. R. Bieringer/D. Pollefeyt/F. Vandecasteele-Vanneuville, Louisville et alii 2001, 61–82, here 79.

what love actually involves.⁶ This is evident in the more or less descriptive analyses or paraphrases of the relevant material in books and sources that treat the ethics of the Gospel (see, for instance, Schrage⁷, Wendland⁸, Lohse⁹, and others¹⁰). The fact that these remarks concerning love are perceived to be limited to the ‘disciples’¹¹ (or ‘brothers’ in the Letters¹²) creates a sect-like impression that limits its application for today, as Meeks,¹³ Smith,¹⁴ or Matera¹⁵ aptly point out.

⁶ G.L. Borchert, *John 12–21*, Nashville 2002, 355 remarks that ‘Although the Johannine Gospel does not spend much time outlining the characteristics of the Christian life and ethical behavior, it epitomizes the transformed life in the commandment “to love”’. See also J.G. van der Watt, ‘Julle moet mekaar liefhê’. *Etiëk in die Johannesevangelie*, *Scriptura Suppl.* 9a (1992) 74–96 for a discussion of this issue. S. Schulz, *Neutestamentliche Ethik*, Zürich 1987, 486ff. L. Morris, *Love in the Fourth Gospel*, in: *Saved by hope*. FS Richard C. Oudersluys, Grand Rapids, MI 1978, 27–43. I.H. Marshall, *New Testament Theology*, Downers Grove, IL 2004, 522–523. J. Bolyki, *Ethics in the Gospel of John*, *Communio Viatorum* 45 (2003) 198–208, here 198.

⁷ Schrage, *Ethics* (see n. 5), 297ff.

⁸ Wendland, *Ethik* (see n. 4), 109–115.

⁹ E. Lohse, *Ethics in the New Testament*, Stuttgart 1987.

¹⁰ J.T. Sanders, *Ethics in the New Testament*, Philadelphia 1975, 91–100. Ethics is rarely or not at all discussed as a separate topic in theologies. See, for instance, T.W. Manson, *Ethics and the Gospel*, London 1962; L. Morris, *New Testament Theology*, Grand Rapids, MI 1986. A. Weiser, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments II*, Stuttgart et alii 1993. G. Strecker, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, Berlin et alii 1996 has a brief discussion on the ethics of this Gospel. Schulz, *Ethik* (see n. 6), 486–526 works descriptively, but gives attention to central aspects like law and love. W. Marxsen, ‘Christliche’ und christliche Ethik im Neuen Testament, Gütersloh 1989, 246–264 focuses more on Christological issues. K. Berger, *Theologieggeschichte des Urchristentums. Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, Tübingen 1994, 665–666 gives a brief description of ethical issues. H. Hübner, *Biblische Theologie des Neuen Testaments III*, Göttingen 1995 pays no direct attention to the ethics of the Gospel. Even the treatment by R.B. Hays, *The moral vision of the New Testament*, Edinburgh 1996, 138–157 is predominantly descriptive. P. Stuhlmacher, *Biblische Theologie des Neuen Testaments II*, Göttingen 1999, 249–264 discusses central terms like faith, love, and life. G. Voigt, *Licht – Liebe – Leben. Das Evangelium nach Johannes*, Göttingen 1991. Two unpublished dissertations on the ethics of John should also be noted – J.H. Wachs, *Johanneische Ethik*, Diss. Theol. Kiel 1952; W. Wittenberger, *Ort und Struktur der Ethik des Johannes-Evangeliums und des ersten Johannesbriefes*, Diss. Theol. Jena 1971.

¹¹ John 13,34–35; 14,21; 15,9–10 etc.

¹² For example, 1John 2,9–10; 3,15–16; 4,7.11.20–21; 5,1–2.

¹³ W.A. Meeks, *The Ethics of the Fourth Evangelist*, in: *Exploring the Gospel of John*. In honor of D. Moody Smith, Louisville, KY 1996, 317–326.

¹⁴ D.M. Smith, *The love command: John and Paul?*, in: *Theology and ethics in Paul and his interpreters. Essays in honor of Victor Paul Furnish*, Nashville 1996, 207–217.

¹⁵ Matera, *New Testament ethics* (see n. 2), 92.

Alternatively, where publications treat ethically related themes in more depth they are usually limited to individual elements like love¹⁶, law¹⁷, or sin¹⁸ without aiming at a more comprehensive treatment of the full scope of ethics in the Gospel.¹⁹

Meeks²⁰ mentions some other difficulties in writing an ethics of the Gospel according to John (from here 'the Gospel'). Meeks contends that one should not, and could not, speak of ethics in John's Gospel. Rather, he chooses to approach the Gospel simply as an 'instrument for moral formation'.²¹ Some of his reasons are as follows:

- The Gospel offers no explicit moral instruction. The teachings of Jesus are focused on Jesus himself and the maxims (gnomes), for moral instruction, that are so characteristic of Jesus elsewhere for moral instruction are missing.

- 'The narrative does not provide a plausible and universalizable model for behavior'²², since the focus in the Gospel is on a small embattled community in the first century. Contextualizing such specifically intended material for today is highly problematic.²³

- 'If we take the narrative as supplying neither rules for behavior nor models of character or action but simply as rendering a narrative world to which readers are invited and challenged to respond by imaginatively appropriate performance, this narrative is profoundly troubling to rational kinds of moral discourse'.²⁴

Johannine ethics, as an area of research, indeed remains problematic.

¹⁶ J. Augenstein, *Das Liebesgebot im Johannesevangelium und in den Johannesbriefen*, Stuttgart et alii 1993.

¹⁷ J. Augenstein, *Jesus und das Gesetz im Johannesevangelium*, *KuI* 14 (1999) 161–179; W.G.R. Loader, *Jesus' attitude towards the Law*, Grand Rapids, MI 2002.

¹⁸ R. Metzner, *Das Verständnis der Sünde im Johannesevangelium*, Tübingen 2000.

¹⁹ D.M. Smith, *Ethics and the interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, in: *Word, theology, and community in John*, ed. J. Painter/R.A. Culpepper/F.F. Segovia, St. Louis, Missouri 2002, 109–122, illustrates the difficulty of determining the content of 'love one another' by arguing that both George W. Bush and Hillary Clinton are Christians – both try to apply the love commandment, but obviously the applications are quite different. Apart from the diversity in effect, no clear pattern emerges of the difference the love commandment makes or could make. According to W.C. van Unnik, *Het Nieuwe Testament en de Ethiek*, Kampen 1970, 6 this is a major task of New Testament ethics – it must be possible to enter houses and make this message concrete.

²⁰ Meeks, *Ethics* (see n. 13), 317–326.

²¹ Meeks, *Ethics* (see n. 13), 317. W.A. Meeks, *Understanding early Christian ethics*, *JBL* 105 (1986) 3–11.

²² Meeks, *Ethics* (see n. 13), 318.

²³ See, however, W. Marxsen, *Der Streit um die Bergpredigt – ein exegetisches Problem? Anmerkungen zum Umgang mit der Sprache*, in: *Studien zum Text und zur Ethik des Neuen Testaments*. FS Heinrich Greeven, Berlin/New York 1986, 315–324.

²⁴ Meeks, *Ethics* (see n. 13), 319.

1.2. Analytical categories? Behaviour as a point of entrance into the narrative

The intention of this article is to consider another way of approaching the ethical material²⁵ in the Gospel. In the past not enough attention was given to the development of categories specifically suitable for analysing the ethical material in the Gospel according to John. However, through the work of *inter alia* Wolter²⁶ or Schmeller²⁷ attention was drawn to new analytical categories for investigating New Testament ethical material and this opened up new possibilities for analysing the relevant texts. In particular the work of Wolter influenced the analysis of the main lines of the ethically related material in this Gospel.

Ethics and *ethos* are sometimes used as synonyms,²⁸ while, in other cases, the habitual – often unreflected – behaviour of a group is specifically linked to the concept of *ethos*.²⁹ However, terms used to distinguish between different

²⁵ For theoretical considerations related to analyzing ethical material see, for instance, H. Burkhardt, *Wie kommen wir zu einer biblischen Ethik?*, JETH 7 (1993) 33–39; J. Fischer, *Theologische Ethik und Christologie*, ZThK 92 (1995) 481–516; T. Hausmaninger, *Ethik und Ethos im christlichen Sinnhorizont*, in: *Berechtigte Hoffnung*, hg.v. P. Schmidt-Leukel, Paderborn 1995, 125–174; R.B. Hays, *Scripture-Shaped Community. The Problem of Method in New Testament Ethics*, *Interp.* 44 (1990) 42–55; E. Lohse, *Kirche im Alltag – Erwägungen zur theologischen Begründung der Ethik im Neuen Testament*, in: idem, *Die Vielfalt des Neuen Testaments*, Göttingen 1980, 187–200; P. Pokorny, *Neutestamentliche Ethik und die Probleme ihrer Darstellungen*, *EvTh* 50 (1990) 357–371; W. Schrage, *Zur Frage nach der Einheit und Mitte neutestamentlicher Ethik*, in: *Die Mitte des Neuen Testaments*, FS Eduard Schweizer, Göttingen 1983, 238–253; R.W. Wall, *Introduction: New Testament Ethics*, in: *The New Testament as Canon. A Reader in Canonical Criticism*, ed. R.W. Wall/E.E. Eemcio, Sheffield 1992, 300–334; P. Perkins, *Love commands in the New Testament*, New York/Ramsey 1982, 1–8.

²⁶ M. Wolter, *Ethos und Identität in paulinischen Gemeinden*, NTS 43 (1997) 430–444; idem, *Die ethische Identität christlicher Gemeinden in neutestamentlicher Zeit*, in: *Woran orientiert sich Ethik?*, ed. W. Härle/R. Preul, Marburg 2001, 61–90. idem, *Christliches Ethos nach der Offenbarung des Johannes*, in: *Studien zur Johannesoffenbarung und ihrer Auslegung*, FS Otto Böcher, Neukirchen-Vluyn 2005, 189–209.

²⁷ T. Schmeller, *Neutestamentliches Gruppenethos*, in: *Der neue Mensch in Christus*, hg.v. J. Beutler, Freiburg et alii 2001, 120–134.

²⁸ H. Preisker, *Das Ethos des Urchristentums*, Gütersloh 1949, for instance, uses the terms *ethos* and *ethics* with little semantic variation.

²⁹ See L.E. Keck, *Rethinking 'New Testament Ethics'*, JBL 115 (1996) 3–16; idem, *Das Ethos der Frühen Christen*, in: *Zur Soziologie des Urchristentums*, ed. W.A. Meeks, München 1979, 13–36, and Wolter, *Ethos und Identität* (see n. 26), 430–444. Wolter, *Ethische Identität* (see n. 26), 61–90. Wolter, *Christliches Ethos* (see n. 26), 189–209. The concept of *ethos* is seldom used as a category of interpretation in New Testament research in general and specifically in Johannine research. (It seems to be more popular in dogmatic and dogmatic-ethical studies than in Biblical studies.) Works by G. Theißen, *Soziologie der Jesusbewegung*, München 1989; R. Prostmeier, *Handlungsmodelle im*

analytical categories often confuse rather than clarify matters. This more than often leads researchers into a labyrinth of confusion and vagueness.

For this reason the emphasis in this article will adopt functional descriptions to communicate meaning, rather than using specific technical terms, although the latter will be used sparingly when necessary to do so. Three relevant areas will receive attention, namely, the *identity* of believers insofar as this identity influences the commandments or rules ('ought to' or 'should' language, is broadly referred to as *ethics* in this article) that regulate and inform a person's behaviour (broadly called *ethos* in this article – it can be used in a narrower sense, strictly referring to habitual behaviour. Alternatively, it can be used in a broader sense referring to reflected behaviour on the basis of fixed and excepted commandments in a particular community).

The 'port of entry' into the Gospel material will be the behaviour of (A)ctors in the narrative of the Gospel giving due attention to the action lines. Behaviour is based on the interpretation of 'rules' (commandments) and express what the underlying ethical informants of these commandments are i.e., the how and why of the evident behaviour. If John says that disciples should 'love one another' a 'rule' is formulated. However, how it should be understood and implemented are not yet clear. By analysing the way in which the Johannine community conducted themselves (their *ethos*³⁰) in relation to these commandments one will be able to gain an insight into how the commandments are interpreted and understood. In this way concrete behaviour serves as a heuristic instrument for understanding the intention of particular commandments or 'rules'.³¹

By analyzing the functional relationship that exists between commandments and behaviour a clearer picture of the moral profile of this Gospel evolves. What follows next is an effort to 'enter' into the 'narrative world' of this Gospel and to follow the lines of behaviour of the characters therein. This studied behaviour is both concrete (Judas steeling or people lying) and expected ('should' or 'ought to' language). The aim is not to delve into every minute detail, but rather to give a somewhat broader description of different

ersten Petrusbrief, Würzburg 1990; R. Heiligenthal, *Werke als Zeichen*, Tübingen 1983; V.P. Furnish, *Theology and ethics in Paul*, New York 1968 may nevertheless be mentioned here.

³⁰ Behaviour and ethos go together. However, certain definitions of ethos limit its scope and meaning to habitual behaviour that functions mostly unconsciously in societies (Keck, *Rethinking* [see n. 29], 3–16). A more inclusive definition includes not only the customary behaviour, but also behaviour people reflect on based on accepted or fixed laws or 'guidelines' i.e. behaviour where people find themselves in a new situation and decides what to do on the basis of the accepted and customary 'rules' of the particular society they belong to – it is a type of 'event ethics'.

³¹ Referential fallacy should be avoided and what is said should therefore not be read as an effort to draw a straight line from the Gospel to the original or real Johannine readers.

forms of behaviour. The perspective of this article is therefore more the ‘eagle’s eye’ approach than the ‘ant’s step’.

2. *Shared values in this Gospel*

2.1. Shared social behaviour

Within the Gospel narrative there are many identifiable action lines that reflect shared customs, irrespective of whether the person is a follower of Jesus or not. Certain behavioural patterns are assumed to be operative on the basis of a commonly accepted value system. These actions partly constitute the social fibre of that society. For instance, *socio-culturally* there are shared practices like marriage (2,1 ff.), education (5,19–20; 8,38), burial (19,38–42), or eating and footwashing (13,1 ff.). *Economic* practises are shared like buying food (4,8; 6,5–7), food production, and procurement such as sowing or reaping (4,36–37), or fishing (21,1–3). Certain *religious* activities are presented as common practices like visiting or teaching in the temple or synagogues (8,20; 18,20), attending religious feasts (5,1; 6,4; 7,2; 12,12), or even giving money to the poor (13,29). *Juridical* action lines are also shared such as calling witnesses, investigating a particular matter (5,31 ff.; 8,13 ff.; 11,47–52; Ch. 18–19), and arguing according to forensic conventions (8,12 ff.), or accepting the juridical authority and decision of Pilate (Ch. 18–19). The disciples and Jesus partake in these events with the rest of the (Jewish) society without showing any sign of distancing themselves or disagreeing with these lines of action. It seems fair to assume that these lines of action point to commonly shared customs and values evident in the ordinary lives of persons in that society irrespective of whether the person was a follower of Jesus or of Moses.

2.2. A shared value system ...? When moral issues are at stake

2.2.1. Values stemming from a context determined by Jewish moral tradition (law). Moral decisions are inherently part of behaviour in situations like those mentioned above. Moreover, such moral decisions are commonly shared. When behaviour becomes deviant or socially unacceptable, discussions of the underlying values in such behaviour soon surface. To what extent do such values become evident in the Gospel, and what are they?

Surveying the action lines within the context of this narrative, it becomes evident that the full scope of moral situations envisaged by the Decalogue is indeed present and addressed in this Gospel (except for the tenth commandment which is not explicitly dealt with).

It must first be noted that the Decalogue is not mentioned explicitly in the Gospel, neither are the situations in this Gospel where moral issues are addressed explicitly or directly linked to the Decalogue (*vóμος* should not be equated with the Decalogue in this Gospel). This does not exclude the possi-

bility of the presence, at least implicitly, of the Decalogue. However, where this is the case it is likely to be in its interpreted form. The Decalogue in the Jewish society seems to have had a generic function. Miller also argues this in detail correctly maintaining that the commandments of the Decalogue were interpreted in such a way that it was applied to all spheres of life in society.³² The living tradition of the Jews in all spheres of life was based on a discernable tradition that could somehow be traced back to the Decalogue.³³ In the Gospel the material related to the different spheres of reality suggests such an implicit link.³⁴

An overview of some of the relevant texts must first be briefly considered to map the field.

In 10,33 his Jewish opponents accuse Jesus of blasphemy, because he as *man* wanted to make himself God (ὅτι σὺ ἄνθρωπος ὦν ποιεῖς σεαυτὸν θεόν; 10,33), a remark that has associations with the first and third commandments. This is clearly a Jewish issue related to the holiness and honour of the God they worship. Issues of worship are treated according to the values and guidelines associated with Jewish tradition. In 4,23–24 worship of God, the Father, is confirmed. This is true worship – the worship of the only true God (17,3) who was still worshiped at the temple in Jerusalem at that stage in the narrative (2,13ff.). In 16,2 the λατρεία as religious service or worship of God³⁵ confirms the zealotry of such worship of God. This religious zeal is also apparent in the behaviour of Jesus when he cleanses the temple (2,17). These remarks reflect a Jewish religious context that could plausibly be linked to the second commandment of the Decalogue. Little needs to be said about the Sabbath (the fourth commandment), since it is a major point of contention in this Gospel (5,9; 7,22ff.; 9,14 etc.).

Family honour and appropriate filial behaviour – which is typically linked to the fifth commandment – are confirmed in this Gospel, although earthly filial relations are constantly

³² P.D. Miller, *The way of the Lord. Essays in Old Testament theology*, Tübingen 2004, 6 states, ‘the Commandments do belong to the body of material commonly called torah. That is the word most often translated as ‘law’, but it too does not strictly mean that. It actually means ‘instruction,’ which is what the Commandments are, instruction for life, the teaching of God about what is necessary to do in order for the community to live according to God’s way and in harmony with one another’.

³³ Miller, *Way of the Lord* (see n. 32), 6ff. points out that the Decalogue was foundational for the basic principles and norms shaping the rest of the legal material of the Old Testament. This may be seen in the order or structure of the Decalogue that is meant to bring together all that is important for Israel’s life – religious, familial, social. It moves from the fundamental requirements of Israel’s relation to God to the basic guidelines for life in community, he argues.

³⁴ J.J. Kanagaraj, *The implied ethics of the Fourth Gospel*, *TynB* 52 (2001) 33–60 discusses the presence of the Decalogue in the Gospel. His argumentation tends to be a bit forced at certain points.

³⁵ This word is used in this sense by, for instance, Plato, Philo, or Josephus as well as in the LXX (Exod 12,25) and Paul (Rom 9,4). See W. Arndt/F.W. Gingrich/F.W. Danker, *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature*, Chicago 1996, ad loc.

downplayed in the light of the heavenly family of God.³⁶ Elsewhere I have argued that the family metaphor is strongly developed in this Gospel according to accepted ancient social conventions.³⁷ This indicates acceptance and acknowledgment of these conventions that are based on the Law (fifth commandment) in Jewish societies. Murder is regarded negatively throughout the Gospel (5,18; 7,19 in the light of 8,44; 11,53 etc.). Two passages reflect on marriage, namely, the discussion with the Samaritan woman (4,16–18) and the woman caught in adultery (7,53–8,11) – both reflect Jewish conventions of those days.³⁸

A negative remark is made about Judas, because he stole money from the common purse (12,6), which is of course dealt with in the eighth commandment. The ninth commandment deals with false witness (especially in court of law). In 8,44 Jesus calls the devil the father of lies. Obviously children emulate their father (8,39³⁹–41). This is seen in the opponents' false witness concerning Jesus. Moreover, the crucifixion of Jesus displays their denial of the truth that Jesus is the Son of God (8,48; 18,30; 19,7).

The tenth commandment differs from the others since it lacks concreteness in determining trespasses. Normally a law is set, the way trespasses are determined is fixed and a punishment is given for trespassing. In the case of coveting this is difficult, since coveting is an attitude. Accordingly, how do you determine whether coveting actually transpired? Although the problem cannot be explored any further here, the solution seems plausible that the tenth commandment has an overarching function within the Decalogue, namely, to provide the reason why things like stealing, murder, false witness, and the like, occur.⁴⁰

³⁶ See J.G. van der Watt, *Die funksie van verwysings na fisiese families in die Johannesevangelie*, *Verbum et Ecclesia* 22 (2001) 158–177.

³⁷ J.G. van der Watt, *Family of the King. Dynamics of metaphor in the Gospel according to John*, *Eeiden et alii* 2000.

³⁸ Most ancient textual authorities lack 7,53–8,11 and it is commonly regarded as a later addition and therefore not part of the original form. Nevertheless a large measure of agreement exists that there is not thematic tension between this section and the rest of the Gospel. For a summary of arguments see G.R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, Waco, TX 2002, 143.

³⁹ There are textual variants that have the reference in 8,38 to God, the Father, and not to 'their father' (= the devil). See the following remark in B.M. Metzger, *A textual commentary on the Greek New Testament*, London/New York 1994, 192: 'A majority of the Committee regarded ὑμῶν after τοῦ πατρὸς (or τῷ πατρί, the dative having been introduced for the sake of uniformity with the preceding clause) and ταῦτα as scribal refinements, the former having been inserted in an attempt to clarify what was taken to be a contrast between God and the devil. (This contrast, however, seems to be introduced at verse 41.) Without the possessive pronouns, both instances of the word 'father' in verse 38 seem to refer to God, and ποιεῖτε is probably imperative mood'.

⁴⁰ J.I. Durham, *Exodus*, Waco, TX, 1987, 297–299 argues for this possibility. Miller, *Way of the Lord* (see n. 32), 15 draws attention to the following consideration, 'The commandment against coveting is by its very character the vehicle that opens up the Commandments as a whole to a broader understanding. It is a guard against an internal, private attitude or feeling that tends to erupt into public and violent acts against one's neighbor'.

The underlying value system in this Gospel could plausibly be linked to the Jewish law and tradition⁴¹ that goes back to, or at least is based on, the Decalogue. As far as the Jewish value system is concerned there are no evident contradiction. The value system is commonly accepted although the interpretation of this value system differs, as will be explained shortly. I am not suggesting that the author specifically had the Decalogue as Decalogue in mind – to start with, he does not mention it explicitly. Some of the values that emerged were common to ancient Mediterranean societies, whether they were Jewish or not, such as the prohibition of murder, many familial matters, or false witness. These are not necessarily Jewish, neither are they unique to the Decalogue.

The question arises whether one may legitimately link these relevant values to the (indirect) influence of Decalogue rather than to general convictions of the ancient Mediterranean societies. Obviously there are values like not stealing or killing that were shared by the Mediterranean societies as a whole, irrespective of social orientation (Jew, non-Jew, or Christian). However, there are also distinctive values like the Sabbath, or honouring the only true God in specific ways, that are not typical of non-Jewish communities that determine action lines in the Gospel.

It must be remembered that the context of the narrative world in the Gospel is Jewish (the Greeks – that might have been Diaspora Jews – only appear later in the narrative, in 12,20–21. Then there is the Samaritan woman that receives salvation from the Jews – 4,22). Jesus' opponents are pictured as people of Moses and the law, following the law as their moral guideline (1,17; 7,23; 18,29–31; 19,7). The thematic issues that are themes in the forensic discussions, like Jesus' identity (5,39–40; 7,50–52; 19,7 etc.), the Sabbath (7,20–24), murder or lies (5,18; 7,1; 8,44 etc.), are all related to the law or are discussed in the context of the Jewish law. The context of the narrative is Jewish, the opponents are Jewish, and in virtually all cases where there are discussions about moral issues they are presented within the juristic framework of the Law of Moses. Within this context Jesus and his followers, as Jews, live and argue about moral issues. Some of the major issues like blasphemy or the Sabbath are so specifically Jewish that one cannot deny that the frame of reference is specifically that of the Jewish law and tradition.

The Jewish law and tradition seem to be the moral bedrock of the value system in the Gospel. It seems fair to assume that the burden of proof rests with people who disagree to show that the intended context is not that of the Jewish law and tradition but some other moral context.

⁴¹ See P.J. Tomson, 'Als dit uit de Hemel is ...'. Jezus en de schrijvers van het Nieuwe Testament in hun verhouding tot het Jodendom, Hilversum 1997, 70 on the role of the law in Jewish societies. The influence of the law should not be limited to prescribing behaviour; it also outlined social identity both internally and externally.

2.2.2. *The law is accepted, but it must also be interpreted.* Jesus does not reject the law and Scriptures as invalid;⁴² to the contrary. However, his approach and interpretation of the law and Scriptures differ from that of his Jewish opponents. The law and Scriptures witness to him – something the Jews did not acknowledge (5,39) – turning him into the focal point of the law and Scriptures, and as a result, Jesus also takes on the position of judge and re-interpreter of both (5,22). Right judgment (τὴν δικαίαν κρίσιν κρίνετε; 7,24) should be made in the light of the functional and revelatory presence of Jesus. The judgment of Jesus is what ratifies and qualifies other judgments as valid and true (καὶ ἐὰν κρίνω δὲ ἐγώ, ἡ κρίσις ἡ ἐμὴ ἀληθινή ἐστιν; 8,16) since it is judgement in line with the judgment of the Father, the original giver of the law (5,22–23; 8,16).⁴³

On this basis Jesus did not challenge the law itself, but the way the Jews interpreted the law. In his discussion with the Jews about the Sabbath he warns them not to judge by appearances, but to judge with right judgment (μὴ κρίνετε κατ' ὄψιν, ἀλλὰ τὴν δικαίαν κρίσιν κρίνετε; 7,24). In another instance he accuses them of judging by human standards, according to the flesh (ὁμοίως κατὰ τὴν σάρκα κρίνετε; 8,15), because they misjudged Jesus and therefore lack true judgment. Moreover, they have the law, but their judgments are not right and they are not able to identify Jesus as the one the Scriptures are witnessing to, the One who is from the Father.

This signifies an important change in dealing with the law and indeed constitutes a crucial break. It formed a distinctive difference between Jesus and his opponents. Jesus is presented as the authoritative focus of the law and Scriptures. They witness to him (5,39–40,46–47) and this is confirmed by the Spirit-Paraclete (14,15–16; 15,26; 16,7–11). The value system is not devalued, but the way the value system is interpreted is altered (i.e. Jesus does not suddenly propagate murder or dishonouring God. However, how this value system is applied and murder or honouring God should be understood, is changed). For example, to crucify Jesus is seen by the Jews as lawful execution (18,30; 19,7) and not murder. To kill the followers of Jesus is seen as a service to God (λατρείαν προσφέρειν τῷ θεῷ; 16,2), which technically also falls within the traditional view of what the law expects and should be categorized as lawful execution. The Jews indeed regarded these actions as lawful. However, from the point of view of the followers of Jesus, this equates murder and

⁴² A. Verhey, *The great reversal. Ethics and the New Testament*, Grand Rapids, MI 1984, 142 aptly remarks, 'The law of Moses apparently still stands ... John never discards or discredits the law ... the refusal to come to Jesus is a refusal to ... keep the law ... The law still stands'.

⁴³ The relationship between lawgiver and judgment undergrids this remark. The lawgiver (normally the king in secular situations and in religious situations the [G]od) is judge exactly because he is lawgiver. He is the giver and protector of the law, knows what it means, and can therefore judge whether it is trespassed or not.

killing. There are no lawful grounds for the death of Jesus and his followers. In fact the narrative assumes the contrary position. That is why these acts are presented negatively, as killing, within the ideological context of this Gospel (5,18; 7,1.19.25; 8,37.40.44.53; 10,33). The same commandment is interpreted in two different ways.

The same applies to the value of truth versus lies. Lies have their origin in the devil (8,44). The Jews crucified Jesus as criminal (18,30). According to them he falsely claimed to be the Son of God (19,7). This is what they stated in their accusations to Pontius Pilate, and judged that according to their law he must be executed (19,7). Both these accusations brought by the opponents are seen to be false, and therefore qualify as false witness. Jesus is neither a criminal nor blasphemer (10,33); he is the Son of God (and not a Samaritan or possessed by a demon; 7,20; 8,48.52; 10,20). Hence, truth – in the light of which false witness is defined – is therefore redefined by Jesus who indeed is the truth (14,6). The Jewish accusations are simply false witness in light of the divine truth Jesus represents. In this way the basic value of witnessing to the truth is confirmed, but the interpreted application differs between Jesus and his opponents.

A last brief example: In the discussion about the Sabbath, the same line of argument is followed.⁴⁴ The opponents of Jesus fail in their judgment (7,21–24). When it comes to worshipping God, their blindness prevents them from true worship of Jesus (9,35–41), which technically means that they broke the law that witness in relation to Jesus. To do the works of God (τί ποιῶμεν ἵνα ἐργαζώμεθα τὰ ἔργα τοῦ θεοῦ; forensic language in 6,28) they must believe in him who God has sent (6,28–29). This they failed to do this and thus are trespassers of the law.

This points to the conclusion that Jesus and his followers honoured and shared the Jewish value system. However, there is clearly a difference in the interpretation of these values between Jesus and his followers in relation to the Jews of the time.

2.3. What are the works of God? The major ethical decision

Where should we look for the root of this difference in interpretation?⁴⁵ It was based on what may be called the basic ethical decision in the Gospel.

In 6,28 the crowd approaches Jesus as Rabbi (6,25) with an *ethical* question about the required behaviour to please God and receive eternal life (τί ποιῶμεν ἵνα ἐργαζώμεθα τὰ ἔργα τοῦ θεοῦ; the section following in

⁴⁴ S. Ringe, 'Holy as the Lord your God Commanded you'. Sabbath in the New Testament, *Interp.* 59 (2005) 17–24, here 17 confirms the view that the Sabbath is not rejected, but that there was disagreement about how it should be honoured.

⁴⁵ Augenstein, *Jesus und das Gesetz* (see n. 17), 161–179.

Chapter 6, life-terminology is the most dense in the whole Gospel).⁴⁶ Jesus' answer is that they should *believe* in the one whom God has sent to do the works of God.⁴⁷ In this way they will work for food that endures for eternal life (6,27; 3,15–17; 5,24 etc.). Faith in Jesus is therefore the first and most crucial action required to do the works of God. Without this deed of fully associating with Jesus,⁴⁸ persons will morally stay in darkness and die in their sin (3,17ff.; 8,21.24). The way sin is described in this Gospel confirms this. The essence of sin in this Gospel likewise focuses on the unwillingness of people to accept and believe in Jesus (16,9).⁴⁹ In 3,36 belief is contrasted with disobedience (ἀπειθέω) and not unbelief. Disobedience is presented as negative behaviour that would result in the wrath of God. The result is that believing in Jesus becomes the major ethical action persons can perform. Not only that; it also refocuses their total moral behaviour, since now their examples for behaviour come from the Father and his Son (8,38–41; 13,15; 14,10–11). Through faith believers receive a new identity. They are reborn (3,3.5) as members of the family of God.⁵⁰

By believing in Jesus the works of God are done. Faith is of course strongly relational (see 15,1ff.) which implies in the Gospel that people's behaviour will be Christologically determined by this relation. The servants will do what their master does (13,13–16). But what does the Master do?

3. *The new command – love*⁵¹

This brings us to the central and essential commandment of Jesus that is usually equated with the ethics of the Gospel. Jesus ethically guides the behav-

⁴⁶ Jesus answers the question of the rich man in Mark 10,17 (τί ποιήσω ἵνα ζῶν αἰῶνιον κληρονομήσω;) by referring to the commandments. (See also the parallels in Matthew and Luke).

⁴⁷ See D.R. Liechtenhan, *Gottes Gebot im Neuen Testament*, Basel 1942, 122–123.

⁴⁸ J.G. van der Watt, *Salvation in the Gospel according to John*, in: *Salvation in the New Testament. Perspectives on soteriology*, ed. idem, Leiden 2005, 119–122.

⁴⁹ See Metzner, *Verständnis der Sünde* (see n. 18), for detailed treatment of this issue; M. Hasitschka, *Befreiung von Sünde nach dem Johannesevangelium*, Innsbruck/Wien 1989; J. Alison, *The man blind from birth and the subversions of sin*, *Theology and Sexuality* 7 (1997) 83–102. For occurrences of the word ἀμαρτία see John 1,29; 8,21.24.34.46; 9,34.41; 15,22.24; 16,8.9; 19,11; 20,23; 1John 1,7.8.9; 2,2.12; 3,4.5.8.9; 4,10; 5,16.17.

⁵⁰ See for detailed discussion van der Watt, *Family* (see n. 37), 166–200.

⁵¹ ἀγαπάω/ἀγάπη and φιλέω are used interchangeably in this Gospel without any semantic difference. The idea that φιλέω refers to human love and ἀγαπάω to divine love, cannot be substantiated (see also J.A. Louw/E.A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament based on semantic domains* I, New York 1989, 4, 859). See also E. Stauffer, *Art. ἀγαπάω*, TDNT 1 (1974) 21–55.

iour of his followers by giving a 'new' commandment.⁵² In 13,33–35 the commandment given by Jesus determines their future lines of expected action (15,10.12.17). As Houlden states: "‘Love one another’ is the *only* moral rule given by John".⁵³ Due to the wide scope of this theme in the Gospel it cannot be treated in detail here.⁵⁴ Remarks will be restricted to some of the themes emerging from this central command of Jesus. He says: 'I give you a new⁵⁵ commandment that you *love one another* (ἀγαπήτε ἀλλήλους). Just *as* (καθώς) I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this *everyone* will know (γνώσονται πάντες) that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another'. (13,34–35).

3.1. Love one another according to the example of the Father and Son

The love commandment is characterized by *reciprocity*.⁵⁶ Believers should love one another. This is emphasized by the use of ἀλλήλους in 13,34. Where this word (ἀλλήλων) is linked to expressions of love in ancient literature it is virtually always done in connection with families or friends. It expresses an egalitarian relationship expecting common reciprocation within that particular group.⁵⁷ In the Gospel this word points to the social interde-

⁵² Jesus never refers to the law (νόμος) as his own and never lays down a νόμος. Jesus lays down ἐντολαί. The difference between νόμος and ἐντολή cannot be discussed in detail here but the former focuses more on the moral tradition of the Jews in the way they interpret the law. Jesus however gives ἐντολαί that serve as commandments that should be followed by his disciples. See J.A. du Rand, *Entolē in die Johannesevangelie en -Briewe*, Pretoria 1981 for a detailed treatment of the concept of commandments in the Gospel according to John. See also G.C.A. Fernando, John 1:17 as window to the realities of Law and love in the Fourth Gospel, *Biblehashyam* 24 (1999) 172–191.

⁵³ Houlden, *Ethics* (see n. 5), 36; R.E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, 2 vols., London 1966/1970, 497; V.P. Furnish, *The love command in the New Testament*, London 1972, 135; Wendland, *Ethik* (see n. 4), 109.

⁵⁴ Thorough research on love in the Gospel of John is available and need not be repeated here. See for an overview Augenstein, *Liebesgebot* (see n. 16), 11–21. J.G. van der Watt, *Liefde in die familie van God. 'n Beskrywende uiteensetting van familiële liefdesverhoudinge in die Johannesevangelie*, HTS 53 (1997) 543–556.

⁵⁵ See R. Bultmann, *Das Evangelium des Johannes*, Göttingen 1978/1986, 404–405, Schrage, *Ethics* (see n. 5), 314–317, and Furnish, *Love command* (see n. 53), 138. Cf. also R.F. Collins, 'A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another' (Jn 13,34), in: idem, *These things have been written*, Louvain 1979/1990, 217–256 for some of the ways to interpret the new commandment in John.

⁵⁶ See J. Beutler, *Das Hauptgebot im Johannesevangelium*, in: *Das Gesetz im Neuen Testament*, hg.v K. Kertelge, Freiburg et alii 1986, 222–236, here 225.

⁵⁷ See Wolter, *Ethische Identität* (see n. 26), 61–90 who notes the following supporting uses: Test.Seb. 8,4–6; Test.Dan. 5,3; Test.Gad. 6,1; Test.Jos. 17,2f; Jub. 36,4; Xenophon, *Mem.* 2,7,1; Dio Chrysostomus, *Or.* 74,12; Philo, *Virt.* 225. In the New Testament the following may serve as examples: Mark 9,50; John 6,43; 13,14.34; 15,12.17; Rom 12,10.16; 13,8;

pendence of a particular group of people.⁵⁸ What is expected of the one is also expected of the other. These interpersonal relations are egalitarian – differences of status and roles are suspended within the confines of the community.⁵⁹ Johannine love is indeed ‘a poignant cry for solidarity’.⁶⁰

This love between believers is patterned on the exemplary love of the Father and the Son. Believers should love as (καθώς⁶¹) Jesus has loved them (13,34); Jesus’ love is again modelled on the love of God (15,9). The love of the Father and Son remains exemplary although it forms part of the network of family love in the Gospel (15,10). Stauffer⁶² correctly points to the chainlike pattern of the Father as the source and Jesus as the example of love for believers who must again return that love and of course also love one another. As Roloff puts it, *Als die von Jesus Geliebten sind sie zur Liebe untereinander be-rufen*.⁶³ This exemplary love contains an element of reciprocity, but is not egalitarian in the case of the Father and Son. Their roles and status are not changed within this network of love that characterizes the family of God.

There are explicit statements about all the different (A)ctors loving one another, but it is not explicitly stated that the believers love the Father.⁶⁴ As will become clearer in the more detailed argumentation later, believers are not explicitly said to love the Father, but their actions of obedience to Jesus who reveals the will of the Father follow the lines of what love is. Obedience⁶⁵ is indeed love in action. Augenstein⁶⁶ argues that this link between love and obedience goes back to Leviticus 19,17–18 and even Deut 6:4f. although it is Christologized within the Johannine group of believers.

14,13,19; 15,3,7; 1Cor 11,33; Gal 5,26; 6,2; Col 3,9; 1Thess 4,9; 5,11.13,15; 2Thess 1,3; Hebr 10,24; Jas 4,11; 5,9; 1Pet 5,5; 1John 3,11.23; 4,7,11; 2John 5.

⁵⁸ B.J. Malina/R.L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-science commentary on the Gospel of John*, Minneapolis 1998, 228 remark, ‘In the Mediterranean world, love always had the underlying meaning of attachment to some group’.

⁵⁹ See Wolter, *Ethische Identität* (see n. 26), 61–90. He also quotes 1Cor 7,19; 12,13; Gal 3,28; 5,6; 6,16; Col 3,11.

⁶⁰ Hays, *Moral vision* (see n. 10), 147. See also Collins, *A new commandment* (see n. 55), 258.

⁶¹ Culpepper, *Anti-Judaism* (see n. 5), 80–81 argues that both analogy and authority are introduced by the ‘just-as’ principle.

⁶² Stauffer, ἀγαπάω (see n. 51), 53.

⁶³ J. Roloff, *Die Kirche im Neuen Testament*, Göttingen 1993, 302. Cf. Wendland, *Ethik* (see n. 4), 112. In 13,15 Jesus sets the example of love (see 13,1) by washing his disciples’ feet and in 15,13 he uses the example of death for (on behalf of) a friend as evidence of what love really is. This must be the nature of their love for one another. See van der Watt, ‘Julle moet mekaar liefhê’ (see n. 6), 83–88; Schrage, *Ethics* (see n. 5), 301.

⁶⁴ An exception may be 5,42 since the genitive might be objective or subjective.

⁶⁵ Brown, *Gospel I* (see n. 53), 504; du Rand, *Entolê* (see n. 52), 345–346.

⁶⁶ Augenstein, *Liebesgebot* (see n. 16), 61.66. See also S. van Tilborg, *Imaginative love in John*, Leiden et alii 1993.

The basis of this love is not emotion⁶⁷ but relationships that are expressed in actions. Love exists in activity.⁶⁸ When God loves, he *gives* his Son (3.16), as Schrage points out: 'The Johannine ethics of love stands and falls solely on God having demonstrated his love by sending and sacrificing his own Son'⁶⁹. When Jesus loves intensely he *washes* feet and *gives* his life for his friends (13,1ff.; 15,9ff.), when believers love they follow the example of Jesus of serving and caring, even if it means shifting their own interests aside in order to serve God and one another (13,12–20; 12,24–26).⁷⁰ Love becomes visible through actions – therefore everyone will know that the believers are Jesus' disciples (13,35).⁷¹ Love, loyalty,⁷² and a willingness to fulfil one's responsibility, all go hand in hand in expressing belonging to the group one belongs to, irrespective of what is asked of one. Indeed, the nature of love in John's Gospel is 'not an emotion or an affect, not a theory or an idea, but simply living for others'.⁷³ This is confirmed by looking at the opposite of love, namely hate. In passages like 15,18–16,4a hate is also expressed in terms of actions such as excluding people from the synagogues or even in killing them.⁷⁴

These reciprocal and exemplary elements underline that love takes place within well-defined relationships.⁷⁵ The 'one another' are members of the group of followers of Jesus (13,34).⁷⁶ The example that Jesus gives to his followers is that of a Master, Teacher, and Lord to servants (13,12–20). Love

⁶⁷ So also T. Larsson, *God in the Fourth Gospel*, Stockholm 2001, 276.

⁶⁸ See van der Watt, 'Julle moet mekaar liefhê' (see n. 6), 83–87. Hays, *Moral vision* (see n. 10), 145.

⁶⁹ Schrage, *Ethics* (see n. 5), 300.

⁷⁰ Strecker, *Theologie* (see n. 10), 540 argues, 'Wo auch immer der Mensch sich von dieser Liebe bestimmen läßt, ist er von ihr vollständig in Anspruch genommen, ist er zum Tun der Liebe bis zur Selbsthingabe gefordert. Jede Beschränkung ist ausgeschlossen'.

⁷¹ See K. Wengst, *Das Johannesevangelium II*, Stuttgart et alii 2001, 112.

⁷² See Malina/Rohrbaugh, *Gospel* (see n. 58), 228 maintain, 'It takes on the dimensions of interpersonal attachment, of loyalty, and of the value of reliability revealed in practical actions'.

⁷³ Schrage, *Ethics* (see n. 5), 318. Cf. Hays, *Moral vision* (see n. 10), 145.

⁷⁴ See D.F. Tolmie, 'Jesus' farewell to the disciples. John 13:1–17:26 in narratological perspective', Leiden 1995, 213–214. O. Michel, *μισέω*, TDNT 4 (1975) 683–694, here 691. See B. Lindars, *The Gospel of John*, Grand Rapids/London 1987, 493. F.F. Segovia, 'The Love and Hatred of Jesus and Johannine Sectarianism', CBQ 43 (1981) 258–272.

⁷⁵ See M. Lattke, *Einheit im Wort. Die spezifische Bedeutung von ἀγάπη, ἀγαπᾶν und φιλεῖν im Johannesevangelium*, München 1975, 18ff. on love in relations.

⁷⁶ Bultmann, *Evangelium* (see n. 55), 405 remarks that 'das Liebesgebot durch das ἀλλήλους eine Einschränkung zu erfahren scheint'. Elsewhere (R. Bultmann, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, Tübingen 1984, 435) he says that 'für die Welt ständing die Möglichkeit besteht, in den Kreis des ἀλλήλους ἀγαπᾶν einbezogen zu werden'.

functions within a framework of relationships with practical consequences; these relationships become functional through the actions of love.⁷⁷

References to love (especially in Ch. 13–17) are networked – the Father, the Son, and the disciples all love one another (i.e. the Father loves the Son and the Son the Father; the Son loves believers and believers love the Son, and so on; 14,21.23; 15,9–10 etc.).⁷⁸ The manner in which the family of the Father is bound and cemented together is through love. Dietzfelbinger correctly remarks, ‘In der wechselseitigen Liebe der Glaubenden waltet die Liebe Gottes, dieselbe Liebe, die am Anfang der Schöpfung stand und die in der Sendung Jesu am Werk ist’.⁷⁹ The following pattern emerges that will briefly be illustrated by references to the action lines taken by the relevant (A)ctors in the narrative.

God is the source of love.⁸⁰ As Hahn aptly expresses it: ‘Das sittliche Verhalten des Menschen soll gleichsam “eingebunden” werden in eine Bewegung, die von Gott ausgeht und auf Gott hinzielt’.⁸¹ His love for his Son⁸² and the believers is expressed in his gifts, for instance:

- He shows the Son everything and gives him power to give life and judge (5,19ff.).
- He gives commandments to his Son (10,17–18; 12,49–50).
- He gives his Son to the world and believers (15,9; 17,24.26).⁸³

⁷⁷ Larsson, *God in the Fourth Gospel* (see n. 67), 276 also emphasizes the relational aspect in the love of God, ‘God is not viewed as filled with an affection, but God as love means God as giving life and sharing and desiring fellowship. God’s love establishes and cultivates a living fellowship’.

⁷⁸ See C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel according to St John*, London 1978, 215. Van Tilborg, *Imaginative love* (see n. 66), 158–161.

⁷⁹ C. Dietzfelbinger, *Der Abschied des Kommenden. Eine Auslegung der johanneischen Abschiedsreden*, Tübingen 1997, 135. Love indeed functions as ‘key term for the bond of community’ according to Houlden, *Ethics* (see n. 5), 38. It is the ‘law of its (the heavenly family) life’, as Stauffer, *ἀγάπη* (see n. 51), 53 remarks.

⁸⁰ Schnackenburg, *Agape* (see n. 64), 36–47. Culpepper, *Anti-Judaism* (see n. 5), 80.

⁸¹ F. Hahn, *Neutestamentliche Grundlagen einer christlichen Ethik*, TThZ 86, (1977) 31–41, here 36.

⁸² M.M. Thompson, *The God of the Gospel of John*, Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge 2001, 98–100. D.M. Smith, *The theology of the Gospel of John*, Cambridge 1996, 148. Stauffer, *ἀγάπη* (see n. 51), 52. J. Gnlika, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, Freiburg et alii 1994, 258.

⁸³ Strecker, *Theologie* (see n. 10), 538 maintains that ‘Grundlage der Ethik des Johannes-evangeliums ist demnach die im Sohn manifestierte ἀγάπη θεοῦ’. See also H. Schlier, *Die Bruderliebe nach dem Evangelium und den Briefen des Johannes*, in: *Mélanges bibliques*. FS Bédaride Rigaux, Gembloux 1970, 235–245, here 236. W. Günther/H.-G. Link, *Art. Love*, NIDNTT 2 (1976) 538–547, here 546 describe it as ‘the archetype of all love’. As D.A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, Leicester 1991, 570 says: ‘God’s own love for his Son will become their love’.

- He gives believers to his Son (6,44; 17,6).⁸⁴
- He gives glory to his Son (17,24).
- He loves the followers of Jesus and gives them his direct presence, unity⁸⁵, and openness for what they ask (14,21.23; 16,27; 17,23) – all relational concepts.

These are all gifts related to the salvific work of Jesus. The focus of the active love of the Father is the well-being of his family.

Jesus loves the *Father* (14,31; 15,10) – by *obeying* his commands.⁸⁶ Obedience to what is commanded equals ‘returned love’.⁸⁷ Riedl speaks of a ‘Wirk-Identität’ which exists between the Father and the Son.⁸⁸ This is not unique to the Gospel. According to Beutler⁸⁹ the fixed link between love and obedience goes back to the relationship between Law and obedience to the Law as found in ancient Israel (Exod 20,6; Deut 5,10 and Deut 7,9; 10,12; 11,1.13.22; 19,6; 30,6.16.20).

Jesus also loves his *followers*, the believers, intensely (13,1.34; 14,21; 15,9.12 etc.) and therefore gives his life for them (10,17–18; 15,12ff.).

As was the case with God the Father, Jesus’ love is also seen in his *gifts*, like a good shepherd giving his life for his sheep. He also gives commandments as guiding principles to his followers (13,1.34; 14,21.23. 15,12.17). Jesus’ love is indeed modelled on the love of the Father (15,9).⁹⁰ Socially speaking the Father, Son, and believers form a patriarchal family.⁹¹ The active love of the Father applies to the whole family.⁹² The child cannot prescribe to his Father, but shows his love by obeying the Father.⁹³ As this was the paradigm for Jesus so it also becomes the paradigm for the believers.⁹⁴

The love of believers is also networked into the love of the family. They love Jesus – by *believing* and *obeying* his commandments (14,15.21.23.28;

⁸⁴ M. Theobald, *Gezogen von Gottes Liebe* (Joh 6,44f), in: *Schrift und Tradition*. FS Josef Ernst, Wien 1996, 315–341.

⁸⁵ For a detailed discussion of this issue, see K. Scholtissek, *In Ihm sein und bleiben*, Freiburg et alii 2000.

⁸⁶ Du Rand, *Entolé* (see n. 52), 364–365.

⁸⁷ See Carson, *Gospel* (see n. 83), 520. Van der Watt, ‘Julle moet mekaar liefhê’ (see n. 6), 82. Augenstein, *Liebesgebot* (see n. 16), 66.

⁸⁸ J. Riedl, *Das Heilswerk Jesu nach Johannes*, Freiburg et alii 1973, 200.

⁸⁹ Beutler, *Hauptgebot* (see n. 56), 232.

⁹⁰ Strecker, *Theologie* (see n. 10), 539 claims, ‘Daher ist die durch Jesus vermittelte Gottesliebe die Grundlage für das Selbstverständnis der Gemeinde.’ Jesus becomes the ‘konkrete Bezugspunkt’ of believers (540). See also Schrage, *Ethics* (see n. 5), 300. Schulz, *Ethik* (see n. 6), 489. Günther/Link, *Love* (see n. 83), 546.

⁹¹ See van der Watt, *Family* (see n. 37), 397ff.

⁹² See Stauffer, *ἀγαπᾶω* (see n. 51), 52. Gnllka, *Theologie* (see n. 82), 258.

⁹³ See Brown, *Gospel I* (see n. 53), 504. Du Rand, *Entolé* (see n. 52), 345–346.

⁹⁴ See Houlden, *Ethics* (see n. 5), 37. Tolmie, *Jesus’ farewell* (see n. 73), 212. Carson, *Gospel* (see n. 83), 520.

15,9.10.12.17; 16,27). 'Jesus lieben heißt, sein Gebot der geschwisterlichen Liebe innerhalb der Jünergemeinschaft zu erfüllen'.⁹⁵ That is the commandment of Jesus (13,34–35). They love one another (13,34.35; 15,12.17) by hating their own lives and serving one another as Jesus served them. Loving one another is expressed in the deeds of caring for the members of the community (13,34–35; 15,9–10.12–13.17; Peter is an apt example of this care – 21,15–17). Jesus underlines this mutual love by declaring the disciples his friends, and friends should be willing to lay down their lives for one another (15:12 ff. in the light of 15:9–10).⁹⁶

They also love the Father through Jesus. It is not explicitly stated that the believers love the Father (contrary to the Letters⁹⁷). In line with what was said of Jesus, the obedience of people to Jesus, as the Agent of God, is an active expression of their love for both the Son and the Father.⁹⁸ Loving, and therefore also obeying, the Son equal loving the Father. (See the interrelatedness expressed in 14,21.23.24; 15,9.10; 16,27.)

Action lines of love move in two directions, except in the cases of the Father – he does not obey anyone; and the believers – they are not in a position to dominate or control one another.

i) The one direction of love flows from the person in a higher position to those in lower positions up to the lowest point where reciprocity results in service on an egalitarian level:

- The Father gives to his Son and the world and specifically the followers of Jesus.

- The Son gives his life for his followers.

- Jesus' followers give to one another (reciprocity).

The gifts may be classified into two groups:

- Giving something of oneself – the Father gives his Son, the Son gives his life and the followers of Jesus give their lives by hating their lives (serving others).

- Giving commandments – The Father gives commandments to his Son and his Son gives commandments to his followers (15,10.12). Followers do not give commandments due to their reciprocal relations.

⁹⁵ Roloff, Kirche (see n. 63), 301.

⁹⁶ H. Thyen, 'Niemand hat größere Liebe als die, daß er sein Leben für seine Freunde hingibt' (Joh 15,13), in: *Theologia Crucis – Signum Crucis*. FS Erich Dinkler, Tübingen 1979, 467–482. M. Pfeiffer, *Einweisung in das neue Sein. Neutestamentliche Erwägungen zur Grundlegung der Ethik*, Gütersloh 2001, 266ff.

⁹⁷ See 1John 2,5; 3,17; 4,10.12.16.19.20.21; 5,1–3.

⁹⁸ 'The love displayed by Jesus is not only the basis for love within the community, it is also paradigmatic of its nature and manner', as Schrage, *Ethics* (see n. 5), 307 remarks. So also Hays, *Moral vision* (see n. 10), 144.

ii) The other direction of love flows towards the person in a higher position. Love takes the active form of obedience in this case.⁹⁹ Obviously it cannot 'flow higher' in the case of the Father who is the source of love.

- The believers obey the Son as an expression of their love.
- The Son obeys the Father as an expression of his love for the Father.

A clear pattern of mutual gifts and obedience emerges:

The Father *gives* in the form of his Son and commandments

The Son returns love in the form of *obedience*

and *gives* himself as well as commandments

Disciples return love in the form of *obedience*

and *give* themselves (by serving)

What is the significance of this survey for our purposes?¹⁰⁰ The following may be noted:

i) Based on the reciprocal and exemplary nature of loving identity, ethics (in the sense of rules or commandments) and ethos (in the sense of behaviour in a fixed way) are interrelated and indeed merged. Believers are drawn into a group that is fully determined by the love of God, which is mediated through Jesus and results in eternal life. Loving reaction to these gifts comes in the form of obedience that is expressed in concrete actions. In this way actions, commandments, and identity are intricately and inseparably linked. Dettwiler correctly remarks that love has an immanent revelatory power that ensures continuity and identifiability.¹⁰¹ Who you are leads to whom you listen to and that leads to what you do. This follows a stair like pattern: God is the source of both love and our identity – love and creating identity come to the world through his Son – believers are taken up through faith that leads to life and love.

ii) The nature of love in this Gospel is found in the sustenance of functional relations, that means, relations in which members of a group care for and serve one another, according to the example given by the unique Son and Father of the family. This elevates ethics above a list of rules to reciprocal *interpersonal relationship*-orientated loyalty that is constantly ready to be ex-

⁹⁹ Augenstein, Liebesgebot (see n. 16), 71.

¹⁰⁰ It should be noted that there are significant imageries in this Gospel that confirm and even expand what is being said here and are therefore crucial in any discussion of ethical material in the Gospel. There are imageries like light and darkness, the vine and branches, the seed that dies to produce fruit, the relation between a father and son which results in the son doing what the father does, the imagery of setting slaves free, friendship that requires total loyalty, etc. These and similar themes cannot be developed in an article like this. It forms part of a monograph by me that will appear shortly.

¹⁰¹ A. Dettwiler, *Die Gegenwart des Erhöhten. Eine exegetische Studie zu den johan-neischen Abschiedsreden (Joh 13,31–16,33) unter besonderer Berücksichtigung ihres Re-lecture-Charakters*, Göttingen 1995, 300–301.

pressed in productive activity (bearing fruit; 15,1–8.16–17)¹⁰². No matter what the situation, the believer must act to the benefit of the group or family. By describing love in this way, *all* possible situations are covered, because the simple question that determines what the loving action in a particular situation should be is: how can I benefit my brother or sister?¹⁰³ Love is thus constantly focused on protecting, expanding, serving, and maintaining the family of God.¹⁰⁴

iii) Giving and obeying are the two central elements of love. Giving implies self-sacrifice (expected of Jesus and the believers; see 10,11ff.; 12,24–26; 15,12ff. etc.). Love searches for the goal and purpose of one's actions outside of oneself, and always focuses on who one is – a disciple of Jesus. Like a branch one should remain in the vine as an expression and result of love (15,1–10). Self-sacrifice implies total service to Jesus (12,24–26). That is why obedience is also part of this love – if you serve Jesus or the Father, you should follow their commandments. Love involves giving – giving yourself to ... (self-sacrifice) as well as giving back to ... (obedience).

iv) Love as a commandment is fairly vague – specifics as far as actions are concerned are somewhat lacking. We did however see that a Jewish value system, interpreted in a Christological light, serves as basis for the moral decisions in the Gospel. If a person loves his group and specific decisions must be taken to benefit the group, the Jewish value system should guide those decisions. Love in this Gospel means love based on the value system informed by the Decalogue, but interpreted in the light of the presence of Christ.

4. A family with an ethos: sharing meals, washing feet, and continuing Jesus' mission

This brings us to the question: did the community perform any habitual actions by which they identified themselves as a unique group? To put it differently: if we looked for the 'Johannine group'¹⁰⁵ in any particular town, what

¹⁰² See A. Dettwiler, *Umstrittene Ethik – Überlegungen zu Joh 15,1–17*, in: *Johannes-Studien. Interdisziplinäre Zugänge zum Johannes-Evangelium*, ed. M. Rose, Zürich 1991, 175–189 for discussion of John 15,1–17.

¹⁰³ The well-known problem Matera, *New Testament ethics* (see n. 2), 92 notes, namely, that 'the most explicitly ethical teaching of the Fourth Gospel – that Jesus' disciples should love one another as he has loved them – raises a series of questions ... has love become exclusive and sectarian?' cannot be discussed here in detail.

¹⁰⁴ Schlier, *Bruderliebe* (see n. 83), 241.

¹⁰⁵ The exact social description of the Johannine community is still a matter of debate. It is described in different ways, for instance, as a community (Brown), a sect (Meeks), a circle (Schweizer), a 'Konventikel' (Käsemann), a school (Culpepper), etc. Since there is no space to argue one or the other position, a more neutral description ('group') is used here.

would have been their distinctive visual behavioural characteristics that would have led us to conclude: here we have the Johannine group distinctive of all other groups? The word *ethos* (in its a narrower sense) is often used in relation to the aforementioned understanding.

It will now be argued that the Johannine group could be identified as a closely-knit group that gathered during meals, expressed their mutual interdependence and relations to one another by washing feet. Leaving the meal they continue the salvific mission of Jesus in this world as people who are guided by the Spirit-Paraclete.

4.1. A group sharing meals

In the Gospel of John meals (eating and drinking) are very prominent.¹⁰⁶ Meals seem to be the framework within which this community gathered and social interaction took place. Gathering at meals seemingly formed a central tenet of the overall ethos of the community.

Having meals together was by no means a unique event; to the contrary,¹⁰⁷ the major daily social event in ancient times was the meal or table fellowship. The setting of Jesus' discussion with his disciples, which forms the second part of this Gospel (Ch. 13–17), is put in the context of a banquet or at least an adapted form of a banquet, as was aptly argued by Smith.¹⁰⁸ He argues that the common more formal meals even in Palestine were more or less

¹⁰⁶ References to feasts and meal related events occur at regular intervals in the Gospel. For instance, the wedding feast with the wine (2,1 ff.); in 4,8 the disciples went to buy food and Jesus asked the Samaritan woman for water (4,7 ff.); in Ch. 6 Jesus multiplies the food and declares himself bread of life; Jesus metaphorically feeds his people (sheep) in 10,9; Jesus eats with Lazarus in 12,2; his discourses with his disciples in Ch. 13–17 take place at a meal; Jesus is thirsty on the cross (19,28–30); and Jesus and his disciples have breakfast together in 21,9–15. See A.C. English, *Feeding imagery in the Gospel of John*, PRSt 28 (2001) 203–214. This article points out the evolving nature of the references to food and drink. The argumentation is somewhat forced, but it rightly stresses the structural function of meal-related themes in this Gospel. J.S. Webster, *Ingesting Jesus. Eating and drinking in the Gospel of John*, Atlanta 2003 discusses the whole range of references to 'ingesting Jesus', as she calls it.

¹⁰⁷ N. Denzey, *The limits of ethnic categories*, in: *Handbook of early Christianity. Social science approaches*, ed. A.J. Blasi/J. Duhaime/P.-A. Turcotte, New York 2002, 489–507, here 506 mentions that the Romans often noted Christians as a distinct 'people' for things like their opposition to gladiators, their convictions about sex, the care they took for their ill, etc., but not for the traits John identify them with, namely, table fellowship, footwashing, and spiritually guided mission.

¹⁰⁸ See also G.L. Parsenios, *Departure and consolation. The Johannine farewell discourses in light of Greco-Roman literature*, Leiden 2005, 113 who notes that the discussions in Ch. 13–16 'sounds very much like the conversation of the symposium'.

shared in the form of a banquet.¹⁰⁹ This seems to be the case in Chapters 13–17 too where Jesus and his followers are together as a closely-knit social group sharing table fellowship. Separated from the world they gather at a meal to discuss issues relevant to them.

Sharing meals has definite ethical implications.¹¹⁰ Choosing a banquet-like meal as the setting for the final and only prolonged meeting between Jesus and his disciples (Ch. 13–17) symbolizes social cohesion and draws social boundaries. It is in this context (which may be equated with the symposium) where Jesus and his disciples have discussions, questions, teaching, a prayer to the Father, ritual cleansing, etc.

The centrality and significance of this farewell narrative could and most probably does point to the community's primary meeting place, namely, in a house around a table and no longer in the synagogue. They are presented in the narrative in terms of a house community with strong social bonds – this is in contrast to the temple (or synagogue) society of the opponents (see 2,19–22; 9,22.35; 12,42; 16,2). This constitutes them as a distinctive group.

However, having table fellowship was not unique to the Johannine community at all: 'Whenever they met as a church, early Christians regularly ate a meal together.'¹¹¹ This did not only happen in the church; meals as social events were the basis of ancient societies – to put it bluntly, everybody had to eat. The meal was therefore not the unique event identifying the ethos of the community, but it does supply an important setting.

4.2. Footwashing

Although the discourse in Ch. 13–17 takes place in the context of a meal, it is not the food, but the footwashing that dominates the narrative.

When arriving at a meal¹¹² it was customary for the host to supply some water for his guests to either wash their hands¹¹³ or their feet.¹¹⁴ It was *inter*

¹⁰⁹ D.E. Smith, *From symposium to Eucharist. The banquet in the early Christian world*, Minneapolis 2002.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 10–12.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹¹² J.C. Thomas, *Footwashing in John 13 and the Johannine community*, Sheffield 1993, 47 points out that 'By far the best documented and most frequent accounts of footwashing are to be found in contexts where the washing precedes a meal or banquet'. Footwashing usually functions as greeting or welcoming gesture. Augenstein, *Liebesgebot* (see n. 16), 30. A.J. Hultgren, *The Johannine footwashing (13.1–11) as symbol of eschatological hospitality*, NTS 28 (1982) 539–546, here 541–542. It is also attested in ancient Greek societies, see Homer, *Od.* 19,308–319; Herodotus 2,172; Plutarch, *Phok.* 1,20,2.

¹¹³ Augenstein, *Liebesgebot* (see n. 16), 30.

¹¹⁴ The practice of washing feet was more refined than the descriptions in most commentaries would like to believe. Thomas, *Footwashing* (see n. 112), 27 distinguishes between three situations at which footwashing was generally observed: a) cultic settings, b) do-

alia a symbolic token of social recognition and honour. In the Johannine narrative a particular issue related to footwashing is drawn into focus.¹¹⁵ It was the practise that a socially lesser person (customarily, but not necessarily, a slave¹¹⁶) should wash the more important person's feet. Jesus turns these social conventions around.¹¹⁷ His socially deviant behaviour becomes the focal point of the narrative.¹¹⁸ The unwillingness of Peter to allow Jesus to wash his feet (13,8) as well as Jesus' remarks about the example he as Lord and Teacher sets to his disciples (13,13–14) illustrate this clearly.

The question now is: what exactly did Jesus want to communicate when he washed the feet of his disciples? Obviously there are different layers of meaning, referring to the death of Jesus¹¹⁹, cleansing¹²⁰, sanctification¹²¹, hav-

mestic settings for personal hygiene and comfort, and c) domestic settings devoted to hospitality. The latter is obviously intended in John 13, although some scholars tend to interpret the foot-washing event as a cultic event related to cleanness.

¹¹⁵ W. Lohse, *Die Fusswaschung* (Joh 13,1–20). Eine Geschichte ihrer Deutung, Diss. Theol. Erlangen 1967.

¹¹⁶ Thomas, *Footwashing* (see n. 112), 50 remarks about the Greek world: 'Without doubt, this task was generally the duty of slaves or servants'. He supplies many references in ancient literature. On p. 54 he further remarks: 'In Greek literature it is extremely rare for a non-slave to wash someone else's feet. These occasions ordinarily call for special comment by the author(s)'. This underlines the significance of the deed of Jesus.

¹¹⁷ C.S. Keener, *The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament*, Downers Grove, IL, 1993, ad loc. remarks, 'Unlike Greco-Roman society, Judaism stressed humility; but like other societies, it also upheld societal roles. Jesus overturns even positions of social status'. That there was no slave in the dining community is made clear by the remark that they reclined (13,12). Only free people were allowed to recline. However, as Borchert, John (see n. 6), 80–82 points out, there is no example of a lord or leader washing the feet of his followers or servants. This makes the action of Jesus unique.

¹¹⁸ Augenstein, *Liebesgebot* (see n. 16), 34.

¹¹⁹ B. Oestreich, *Die Bedeutung der Fusswaschung in Johannes 13*, in: *Abendmahl und Fusswaschung. Studien zur adventistischen Ekklesiologie*, Hamburg 1991, 159–171 links the footwashing with the death of Jesus. See Beasley-Murray, John (see n. 38), 234. Borchert, John (see n. 6), 86 ('dying Lamb'). J.D.G. Dunn, *The washing of the disciples' feet in John 13:1–20*, ZNW 61 (1970) 247–252, here 249. R.A. Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, Philadelphia 1983, 195. Barrett, *Gospel* (see n. 78), 436. J. Gnllka, *Johannesevangelium* (NEB.NT 4), Würzburg 1983, 106.

¹²⁰ Thomas, *Footwashing* (see n. 112), 150 remarks, 'the footwashing signifies the disciples' spiritual cleansing for a continued relationship with Jesus' and then continues, 'As such, the footwashing functions as an extension of the disciples' baptism in that it signifies continual cleansing from the sin acquired (after baptism) through life in a sinful world'.

¹²¹ H. Weiss, *Footwashing in the Johannine community*, NT 21 (1979) 298–325, here 314 remarks, '... the act of Jesus produces the sanctification of the disciples'.

ing part in Jesus and his mission¹²² and thus being part of the community and sharing in their benefits.¹²³ This list could go on.¹²⁴ However, Jesus' remark in 13,15 that the footwashing should serve as an example (ὑπόδειγμα) for the behaviour of the disciples needs more attention. What was the exact example Jesus wanted to give to his disciples?

Although there are numerous efforts to explain the significance of the footwashing, two possibilities stand out (obviously with finer nuances). One focuses on humble service and the other on unquestionable love. The one is that Jesus wanted to give his disciples the example of unrestricted, unrestrained, humble service almost to the point of humiliation.¹²⁵ Washing feet defines humble service to one another as a fundamental value.

The other possibility is that Jesus wanted to give them an example of absolute, unquestionable love. This love would not hesitate to serve others, even though it is not expected of a person on the basis of social stratification. The clearest example of such humble, selfless, loving action can be seen in the story of Joseph and Aseneth.¹²⁶ It is a love story in which Aseneth sends her slaves away and washes Joseph's feet herself as a token of her loving service to him.¹²⁷ Through this action her serving love was illustrated. Other examples of a person who washes feet as act of love might be Abigail who offered to wash the feet of David's servants although she had servants of her own who could have done that (1Sam 25,41), or even Abraham who himself washes the feet of his heavenly guests (Test.Abr. A 3). Niemand points to other similar situations where footwashing can be seen '... als Ausdruck besonderer *Anhänglichkeit*,

¹²² 'This act then is a sign of continued fellowship with Jesus, but it also functions as a sign of their continued readiness for participation in his mission', Thomas, Footwashing (see n. 112), 150 states.

¹²³ Jesus affirms 'that if Peter is not "washed" he will not share in the benefits of Jesus' death, and so will have no place among God's people'. B.M. Newman/E.A. Nida, A translators handbook on the Gospel of John, New York et alii 1980, 432.

¹²⁴ J. Beutler, Die Heilsbedeutung des Todes Jesu im Johannesevangelium, in: Der Tod Jesu. Deutungen im Neuen Testament, hg.v. K. Kertelge, Freiburg et alii 1976, 188–204, here 198 and Thomas, Footwashing (see n. 112), 11–17 lists even more ways in which different scholars understand the footwashing. Apart from that Weiss, Footwashing (see n. 121), 324–325 holds the following view: 'within the Johannine community the footwashing ceremony ... acquired a peculiar symbolic meaning in reference to the experience of martyrdom by members of the community. Thus the cleansing produced by the act had eschatological rather than ceremonial or sacramental meaning'.

¹²⁵ See Marshall, Theology (see n. 6), 505. Barrett, Gospel (see n. 78), 441 warns against over-emphasizing the humiliation.

¹²⁶ Thomas, Footwashing (see n. 112), 39–40.

¹²⁷ Brown, The Gospel II (see n. 53), London 1970, 564 refers to Jos.As. 20: 'It is possible that, besides being seen as an act of humble devotion, the footwashing would have been understood as a traditional act of love'. C. Niemand, Die Fußwaschungserzählung des Johannesevangeliums, Rome 1993, 178.

Treue und Wertschätzung.¹²⁸ This option seems quite plausible as an interpretative framework for the footwashing in Ch. 13, especially because the love of Jesus for his own is so strongly emphasized at the start of the narrative (13,1). Moreover, he does not describe himself as a slave of the disciples but remains their Lord and Teacher while washing their feet (13,13–14).¹²⁹ He did not switch roles from being Lord to becoming their slave. This then boils down to the typical situation where a person from an equal or higher social stratification wash the feet of those who occupy a lower social status. In such a case unquestionable love seems to stand in focus rather than humiliating service.¹³⁰

This brings us to the question of the continued symbolic significance of the footwashing; in other words, did the disciples of Jesus continue with this practice by imitating him¹³¹ and if so, what significance did they attach to it?

Is there any indication that footwashing as symbolic practice was continued in the early church?¹³² In the New Testament the phenomenon of footwashing is rarely attested to; the following may be mentioned:

*Luke 7,36–50*¹³³ tells about a woman washing Jesus' feet with her tears, drying¹³⁴ them with her hair, and then anointing them. *Luke 7,44*¹³⁵ makes it clear that Jesus was not given water to wash his feet by the host. The love of

¹²⁸ Niemand, *ibid.*, 178. On p. 183 he also gives examples of students that washes the feet of their rabbi, or children the feet of parents, or a mother the feet of her learned son. See, for instance, *tQid* 1,11 (336); *bKetub* 96a. This does not make them slaves but rather illustrates their love and respect. See also *ISam* 25,41 f. Likewise the anointment of Jesus' feet by Mary in 12,3 should be seen as a form of footwashing and signifies devotion and love. Petronius (*Sat.* 70,8) was another person whose feet were anointed with oil.

¹²⁹ See also U. Schnelle, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes*, Leipzig 1998, 216.

¹³⁰ S. Schneiders, *The footwashing* (John 13,1–20). An experiment in hermeneutics, *CBQ* 43 (1981) 76–92, here 91 confirms that humiliating service does not stand central, but rather the overturning of existing structures of domination in favour of positive relations of love.

¹³¹ Imitation of Jesus forms a central concept in the Gospel. It is a comprehensive theme that cannot be dealt with in detail here. It is developed on different levels in the Gospel, for instance, through the proverbial expression of the dying grain that is applied to both Jesus and his disciples. Like him they should also give up their lives (12,23–26). The disciples are sent like Jesus is sent (17,18; 20,21–22). In receiving hate from this world the servants are like their master (15,18 ff.). Augenstein, *Liebesgebot* (see n. 16), 92.

¹³² Cf. Beasley-Murray, *John* (see n. 38), 236–237.

¹³³ See Niemand, *Fußwaschungserzählung* (see n. 127), 82 ff. for a more detailed discussion of the relation between *Luke* 22,27 and the footwashing in *John* 13. On p. 110 he concludes that evidence in favour of the development of a tradition lacks. I.R. Kitzberger, *Love and Footwashing: John 13:1–20 and Luke 7:36–50 Read Intertextually*, *Biblical Interpretation* 2 (1994) 190–206.

¹³⁴ According to Niemand, *Fußwaschungserzählung* (see n. 127), 61 the anointment and washing of feet form part of one process.

¹³⁵ See *Luke* 22,24–27; 12,37.

the woman (Luke 7,47) is therefore emphasized and contrasted to the actions of the host (Luke 7,44–47). The host even made negative remarks about the woman's social status (Luke 7,39). Jesus accepts her token of loving service and she receives forgiveness and peace as a consequence (Luke 7,48.50).

In *1Tim 5,9–10* there is a positive reference to washing the feet of holy men, but the reference is vague, since it forms part of a virtue list. It is too brief to gather much from it. It does however show that the practice of washing feet was known in the early period of Christianity. It further serves to show that these men, whose feet were washed, are called 'holy', and puts this action in a frame of respect and honour. This action was most probably performed to serve and honour them.

The only other reference in the New Testament is in *John 12,1–3* where Mary anoints Jesus' feet.

There is therefore some evidence of the physical practice of footwashing in early Christian communities.¹³⁶ Thomas however argues that it must be assumed that the ethos of the Johannine community would have included some form of footwashing, obviously with symbolic overtones.¹³⁷ He remarks 'the narrative contains not one, but three directives to the disciples to practice footwashing. It seems improbable that either the disciples (in the narrative) or the implied readers would understand such emphatic language as not having as its primary reference the actual practice of footwashing'.¹³⁸ He continues, 'Therefore, not only have the disciples received footwashing from Jesus as sign of continued fellowship with him, but they are now also instructed to continue this practice'. Therefore he concludes: '... in all probability, footwashing was practiced as a religious rite by the Johannine community'.¹³⁹

It seems plausible that this practice could have taken place at the gatherings of the Johannine community and formed a significant part of their religious expression during their meals. 'It is not too difficult to envisage a footwashing of this sort in the context of the house church of the late first century. The environment of the home, as well as the small number of people involved,

¹³⁶ Niemand, Fußwaschungserzählung (see n. 127), 30–31 argues against Weiss, Footwashing (see n. 121), 298–325, esp. 302–305 who wants to link the footwashing with Philo (Quaest. Ex. I,2; Quaest. Gen. IV,5.60, Vit. Mos. I, 206f; II, 138) and the Hellenistic synagogue practices that the Christians could supposedly took over. Evidence for such a construction lacks. Footwashing rather copied from common social practices and not specific religious customs.

¹³⁷ Thomas, Footwashing (see n. 112), 112ff.147. J.H. Neyrey, The Foot Washing in John 13:6–11; Transformation Ritual or Ceremony? in: The Social World of the First Christians. Essays in Honor of Wayne A. Meeks, Minneapolis 1995, 198–213 supports this idea: 'Jesus mandates in 13:12–15 that the feet of church members be regularly washed as a standard part of their gatherings'. So also Weiss, Footwashing (see n. 121), 298–325, 398ff.

¹³⁸ Thomas, Footwashing (see n. 112), 112.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 184.

would be conducive to such mutual confession and intercession'.¹⁴⁰ This would have been part of their ethos, marking their identity.

What could the significance of the footwashing have been if it was continued as symbolic practice? The possibilities are numerous, including: symbolizing continuing fellowship or close unity with Jesus,¹⁴¹ and identifying the disciples with the reality of Jesus' death and resurrection.¹⁴² It is even seen as a prophetic action that symbolizes forgiveness,¹⁴³ while some scholars link it to established sacraments like baptism¹⁴⁴ or even the Lord's Supper. Thomas remarks: 'If the disciples in the Fourth Gospel are instructed to observe footwashing in an ongoing fashion, perhaps the act is best understood as a sign of preparation for mission which denotes fellowship with Jesus, made possible by continual cleansing'.¹⁴⁵ Niemand again argues that the footwashing serves 'als Motiv *Liebe* und als Ziel das *Einladen* der Seinen ins Leben mit dem Vater'.¹⁴⁶ This would have been a rich, symbolic action,¹⁴⁷ not only confirming their group alliance, but also confirming their willingness to adhere to the requirements of being part of that group¹⁴⁸, namely, of serving one another in love.¹⁴⁹ By honouring one another in this way, the Father and the Son would also have been honoured. This also makes sense of the remark in 13,17–18 where Jesus explained the importance of washing one another's feet. He immediately men-

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 185.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 112.

¹⁴² Ibid., 112.

¹⁴³ Malina/Rohrbauch, Gospel (see n. 58), 220.

¹⁴⁴ See Borchert, John (see n. 6), 83–84; Brown, Gospel II (see n. 53), 567–568. Beasley-Murray, John (see n. 38), 234–235 also gives an overview of opinions in this regard.

¹⁴⁵ Thomas, Footwashing (see n. 112), 116.

¹⁴⁶ Niemand, Fußwaschungserzählung (see n. 127), 189. On p. 410 he further summarizes the meaning of the footwashing in these words, 'das Motiv und das Ziel für sein Tun war und ist: Liebe zu den Seinen, die ihnen Anteil am göttlichen Leben gibt und sie dahinein aufnimmt. ... Es ist nicht so, daß die erlösende Kenosis Jesu sekundär zum ethischen Vorbild für demütig-kenotisches Verhalten in der Gemeinde gemacht wurde'.

¹⁴⁷ It should be noted that the timing of the footwashing seems to be awkward, since it is not attested (as far as it can be established) that feet were washed after the commencement of a meal. It was usually done before. Augenstein, Liebesgebot (see n. 16), 29.32. This means that it was not a gesture of greeting or welcoming, or a ritual washing, or the usual washing before dinner. This adds to the argument that the footwashing in Ch. 13 could have been a conscious symbolic action. So also Malina/Rohrbauch, Gospel (see n. 58), 221.

¹⁴⁸ 'Jesus makes clear that the footwashing is not optional, but necessary for the disciples to maintain a share in his identity ... the footwashing by Jesus' hand serves as a sign of continued fellowship with Jesus and additional cleansing in the disciple's lives'. Thomas, Footwashing (see n. 112), 115–116.

¹⁴⁹ J.R. Michaels, John, New York 1984, 232 remarks, 'Such a practice would be a way for the Christian community to dramatize the responsibility of its members to be servants to one another and so bring to full realization in the world the forgiveness and love of Jesus'.

tions Judas, who will humiliate Him by raising his heel against him, an action intended as humiliating and dishonouring a person.

Obviously we cannot determine the practical and even less clearly the emotional effect of these symbolic actions on the members of the Johannine group. We can only assume (on the basis of the text itself) that gathering at the meal and washing one another's feet reminded them of their unity with Jesus and all that this identity implied; namely his commandments (ethics), that it further encouraged them to live accordingly.¹⁵⁰ Through these symbolic actions at and around the meal, an expression, as well as confirmation, of whom they experienced themselves to be took place.

In brief, the followers of Jesus gathered at meals, which identified them as a socially cohesive group, and at these meals they most probably (in any case according to the Johannine narrative) washed one another's feet as a symbolic expression of their unreserved love for one another, which served as a primary source in forming their identity. This was a visible expression of their ethos (habitual behaviour).

4.3. The disciples of Jesus are people with a mission like Jesus

Another significant (habitual) action that can be identified among the followers of Jesus was their mission. In both 17,18 and 20,21–22 their obligation to continue the mission of Jesus is underlined. This is typical of ancient group orientated families. What the mission of Jesus involved is discussed elsewhere and need not be repeated here.¹⁵¹ Suffice to say that under the guidance of the Spirit-Paraclete the followers of Jesus should witness to him (15,26; 16,13), thus continuing his mission as living children of the light (3,14–21; 12,36). Their behaviour in this regard would most probably constitute habitual actions, especially since this was the commandment Jesus gave to them when he baptised them with the Spirit (20,21–22 read in the light of 1,33). Therefore it could be classified as 'ethos' according to the analytical categories used in the analysis in this article.

We may conclude that when it came to habitual actions (ethos in the narrower sense), there were actions (eating and washing feet) that were focused on the inner workings of the community. It confirmed their identity and reminded them of their obligations. But there were also actions focused on the

¹⁵⁰ Neyrey, *Foot Washing* (see n. 137), 198–213 points out that we are not sure how often the community gathered. This is true. A few arguments might support frequent gatherings, for instance, the frequency and importance of meals in the Gospel indicate this as the favoured meeting opportunity; Jesus links his example of footwashing to a meal; this meal is also not a special meal like the Passover meal linked to a specific time, but an ordinary supper meal, which fits the scenario of regular meetings.

¹⁵¹ Van der Watt, *Family* (see n. 37), 296–302. See A.J. Köstenberger, *The missions of Jesus and the disciples according to the Fourth Gospel*, Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge 1998.

outside world, namely, the mission under the guidance of the Spirit-Paraclete. The believers were part of the loving action of God who wants to save the world (3,16).

These two foci (to the inside and to the outside of the group) overlap in the symbolic action of the footwashing. The footwashing did not only strengthen the inner-group identity, but is also focused on the mission (see the references to mission when Jesus explains the example he gave his disciples; 13,12–20).

5. *Concluding remarks*

The above analysis followed the action lines of the narrative of the Gospel. References to concrete situations outside the narrative world were not part of the question addressed in this article. Obviously the historical situation of the group(s) addressed in this Gospel is highly significant for understanding the full scope of the message. Through the works of Martyn¹⁵² and Brown¹⁵³ the Johannine community hypothesis came close to general acceptance, although Smith¹⁵⁴ recently challenged it. Part of this hypothesis is that the Gospel was written in a situation of conflict between the Jewish opponents of Jesus and his followers. Loader (2002:432), for instance, remarks: 'The Johannine community looks back to a period of conflict with synagogue Judaism leading to its expulsion, and before that to a period of activity as part of the Jewish community'¹⁵⁵, and this is confirmed by Verhey specifically in relation to the ethical material.¹⁵⁶ The exact nature, situation, stage, and locale¹⁵⁷ of this conflict is still open to debate, but that does not negate the fact that there most probably was such a conflict and that the material in the Gospel relates to such a conflict. Although it is not the purpose of this article I am convinced that the ethical material does relate to a situation of conflict and that the emphases found in the Gospel are even determined by such a conflict.

¹⁵² J.L. Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, Louisville 1968.

¹⁵³ R.E. Brown, *The community of the Beloved Disciple*, New York 1979.

¹⁵⁴ D.M. Smith, *Future directions of Johannine studies*, in: *Life in abundance. Studies in John's Gospel in tribute to Raymond E. Brown*, S.S., Collegeville, MN 2005, 52–64.

¹⁵⁵ Loader, *Jesus' attitude towards the Law* (see n. 17), 432.

¹⁵⁶ Verhey, *Great reversal* (see n. 42), 142 maintains, 'The crisis John addresses is understood as a crisis within Judaism, specifically the crisis of the Jewish response to Jesus, their Messiah, a crisis already enacted in Judea and Galilee, then being repeated among Jews of the Diaspora. John's Jewish kin were confronted with a choice between light and darkness, between truth and falsehood, between life and death. They were making the choice in their response to their Messiah'.

¹⁵⁷ Martyn's thesis that it relates to the *birkat ha-minim* is no longer regarded as plausible; see P.W. van der Horst, *Hellenism – Judaism – Christianity*, Leuven 1998, 115–116.

The Johannine group did not stand in rebellious reaction against the society they lived in – they still acted according to the general customs (buying, eating, marrying, etc.) of the society. Neither did they reject the Jewish religion as religion, but rather seemed to absorb it. The values of the law are embraced although the community's interpretation of these laws differed from that of their Jewish opponents, since their interpretation was done in light of the presence of Jesus. It was the Christological interpretive framework of the community, which formed the basis for the conflict and led to a radical interpretation of the law in terms of love for the family of brothers (and sisters). Because of the need of radical social redefinition in relation to their Jewish environment it was necessary to show that the only true love, the love of God, was focused in only one place: the family of God as it becomes evident in loving the followers of Jesus. Their identity is further confirmed by habitual actions like washing feet while meeting at their common meal. This confirmed their shared and unique identity. They also pursued the shared mission Jesus had given them through the power of the Spirit-Paraclete. Within a context of hatred and opposition, they know who they are, what they should do, and indeed did it.



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