The Johannine Cross as Revelation of the Father: Finding a Cruciform God in the Fourth Gospel

Christopher W. Skinner

It is an inescapable truth that the Johannine prologue (John 1:1–18) lays the foundation for our ability to understand the remainder of the Fourth Gospel. In a comprehensive revelation that looks back to "the beginning" (vv. 1a, 2) and progresses to the incarnation of the Word (v. 14), all while proleptically announcing the Word's rejection by the world (vv. 10–11) and triumph over darkness (v. 5), we are given a lens through which to interpret the words and works of the Johannine Jesus. The prologue's climactic statement announces that Jesus is the one who reveals the Father to the world (μονογενὴς θεὸς ὁ ὢν εἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκεῖνος ἐξηγήσατο, 1:18). In the narrative that follows, one can hardly comprehend Jesus's words or deeds apart from this critically important insight—a reality that stands in contrast to the various presentations of Jesus in the Synoptics.

John's conception of Jesus as revealer is foundational to our understanding of the gospel's christological program and much has been made of this theme in Johannine scholarship. In his epoch-making commentary on the Gospel of John, Rudolf Bultmann devotes nearly fifty pages to an examination of John's emphasis on Jesus as revealer. He notes:

> The cosmic and saving event is grounded in the eternity and unity of the divine will: the Logos is not an act of revelation by God, limited to the temporal order but is pre-existent. . . . [John's] *idea of God* is therefore determined from the outset by the *idea of revelation*. To speak of God, means: to speak of his revelation; and to speak of his revelation, means: to speak of

> God. And revelation is not here intended in any general sense; it is rather the saving will of God that can be experienced in the incarnate Revealer.[1]

Bultmann's treatment of Jesus as revealer in many ways sets the agenda for his brilliant, if tendentious, reading of the gospel. But it is important to note that for Bultmann, the crucifixion of Jesus was merely the culmination of the work begun in his incarnation; for him the Johannine cross has no special salvific significance. Rather, the *incarnation* is what really matters for understanding the gospel's position on salvation.[2] Bultmann is not alone in this assertion.[3] Teasing out the role of the cross in Johannine theology has proven to be a task fraught with difficulties. Some have argued that the death of Jesus should be understood in vicarious terms.[4] Others have argued that the cross is the primary means by which Jesus returns to the Father and thus gives life. Still others assert that the cross represents Jesus as victorious.[5]

The present study is concerned with investigating the cross event in the Fourth Gospel, especially as it relates to the Johannine conception of God. As our starting point, we assume that, as J. T. Forestell has persuasively argued, although in a way very different than Bultmann, revelation is the central theme of Johannine theology.[6] With that in mind, we aim to explore the cross (1) in

1. Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray, R. W. N. Hoare, J. K. Riches (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971), 35 (italics original); cf. also the discussion of Jesus-as-revealer in Bultmann's *Theology of the New Testament*, 2 vols., trans. Kendrick Grobel (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), 2:40–49.

2. "In John, Jesus' death has no preeminent importance for salvation, but is the accomplishment of the 'work' which began with the incarnation: the last demonstration of the obedience (14:31) which governs the whole life of Jesus" (Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 2:52).

3. Among others, see Alfred Wikenhauser, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes*, RNT 4 (Regensburg: F. Putset, 1961); Siegried Schulz, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes*, NTD 4 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975).

4. On this assertion, see the insightful discussion in the chapter entitled, "The Death of Jesus in John," in William Loader, *Jesus in John's Gospel: Structure and Issues in Johannine Christology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 147–281.

5. See the helpful survey of scholarly opinion in John Morgan-Wynne, *The Cross in the Johannine Writings* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011); cf. also, John Dennis, "Jesus' Death in John's Gospel: A Survey of Research from Bultmann to the Present with Special Reference to the Johannine Hyper-Texts," *CurBR* 4 (2006): 331–63.

6. Cf. J. Terence Forestell, who writes that "the evangelist presents the work of Jesus as a work of revelation. This revelation concerns the mystery of his own person in relation to the Father and to men. It is neither conceptual knowledge about God nor esoteric knowledge about the true nature of the self; it is a communication to men of that life which the Father

light of Jesus's role as revealer of the Father and (2) in conversation with Michael J. Gorman's articulation of cruciformity in some of our earliest Christian writings.[7] We will explore two questions: First, insofar as John's Jesus is the revealer, *what does his crucifixion reveal about the Father*? Or to ask it differently, how does the cross event demonstrate what the Father is like within the Johannine thought world? Second, how does that understanding of cross-as-revelation intersect with Gorman's presentation of a "narrative spirituality of the cross"?

We will begin by examining how proleptic statements in the gospel anticipate Jesus's crucifixion, after which we will examine John 13:1–17—a text that both anticipates and helps explain the revelatory significance of the Johannine cross event. After these texts help us come to terms with the revelatory "how and what" of Jesus's death in John, we will explore the potential value Gorman's notion of cruciformity has for our understanding of God in the Fourth Gospel.

Anticipating the Cross: Johannine Prolepsis

Prolepsis is a feature within narrative literature "that consists of narrating or evoking in advance an event that will take place later."[8] Even a cursory reading of the gospel reveals this as a common feature of Johannine discourse. Gilbert van Belle has helpfully noted that the term prolepsis is used to describe both a Greek grammatical construction and a literary device.[9] We are concerned here

has in himself and which he has given to the Son" (*The Word of the Cross*, AnBib 57 [Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1974], 17–57, here 57).

7. E.g., Michael J. Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul's Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001); *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul's Narrative Soteriology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009); "Cruciformity according to Jesus and Paul," in *Unity and Diversity in the Gospels and Paul: Essays in Honor of Frank J. Matera*, ECL 7, ed. Christopher W. Skinner and Kelly R. Iverson (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2012), 173–201; "Paul and the Cruciform Way of God in Christ," *JMTh* 2 (2013): 64–83; "Cruciform or Resurrectiform? Paul's Paradoxical Practice of Participation in Christ," *ExAud* 33 (2017): 60–83.

8. Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), 40. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan notes similarly that prolepsis is "a narration of a story-event at a point before earlier events have been mentioned. The narration, as it were, takes an excursion into the future of the story" (*Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* [London: Routledge, 1983], 46).

9. Gilbert van Belle, "Prolepsis in the Gospel of John," *NovT* 43 (2001): 334–47, here 335. For a discussion of the former category in the traditional grammars, see A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, 3rd ed. (Nashville:

with the latter category. Additionally, Adele Reinhartz, relying upon categories provided by Gerard Genette, has divided the Johannine rhetorical device into two sub-categories: (1) external predictive prolepses, or statements which refer to events that will take place outside the temporal framework of the narrative, and (2) internal predictive prolepses, or events which are eventually narrated within the gospel.[10] Again, we are concerned here with the latter category, and even more restrictively concerned with those prolepses that anticipate Jesus's death.[11] Reinhartz has also argued that John's use of prolepsis sets Jesus apart as a prophet in the mold of Moses and other great prophets in the Hebrew Bible. Recognizing the revelatory value of these predictive statements, she notes:

> The main purpose of this device is not, however, to indicate Jesus' place among the prophets but to point to his unique identity as the Son of God, who has been given the authority to speak God's words and to do God's works in the world. . . . Hence the crucifixion-resurrection event . . . is not to be viewed as a rupture or a crisis in the relationship between God and the believer, *but as a bridge, or perhaps a ladder*, which, by means of the paraclete, *allows revelation to continue*.[12]

It is thus important to realize that prolepsis is one of the primary ways in which the evangelist prepares the audience for Jesus's death. As such, our appreciation of how these texts function will help us further apprehend the

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Broadman Press, 1934), 423; F. Blass, A. Debrunner, and R. Funk, eds. *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 252; Maximillian Zerwick, SJ, *Biblical Greek: Illustrated by Examples*, 4th ed. (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1994), 84–85. In his "Liste des caracteristiques stylistiques," Marie-Émile Boismard is the first commentator to identify the grammatical construction as a *uniquely Johannine feature*. He identifies eight passages in the Fourth Gospel under the title, "Prolepse" (4:35; 5:42; 7:27; 9:8, 29; 11:31; 14:17; 16:4), contrasting these with only eight other occurrences across the Synoptics and Acts (M-É Boismard, A. Lamouille, and G. Rochais, *L'évangile de Jean Commentaire, Synopse des quatre évangiles en français*, 3 [Paris: Cerf, 1977], 514b). For a fuller perspective, compare Turner's discussion of the grammatical construction in each of the canonical gospels (James H. Moulton and Nigel Turner, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek, Volume IV: Style* [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1976], 12, 16, 33, 36, 47, 69, 70, 93, 151).

10. Adele Reinhartz, "Jesus as Prophet: Predictive Prolepses in the Fourth Gospel," *JSNT* 36 (1989): 3–16, here 4.

11. Examples that fall into Reinhartz's second category but do not concern the death of Jesus include 4:21; 14:16, 26; 15:26.

12. Reinhartz, "Jesus as Prophet," 12 (emphasis added).

revelatory value of the crucifixion. Leading up to the revelatory ὑπόδειγμα in John 13, there are five specific instances in which Jesus or the narrator proleptically announce his death: 2:19–22; 3:14–15; 8:21–30; 10:11–18; 12:12–16. We will briefly examine each here.

John 2:19–22: Temple Logion as Paradigmatic

Taking into account the development of John's narrative rhetoric, we are still coming to terms with what has been revealed in 1:1–18 when we reach 2:19–22. There we read:

> Jesus said to them, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it." Then "the Jews" said to him, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you will raise it in three days?" But he had been speaking of the temple of his body. Therefore, when he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he said this. And they believed the scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken.[13]

This narratorial clarification is the first reference to the death of Jesus and as such, is a paradigmatic moment for the audience. Everything that has been revealed about the Johannine Jesus to this point must be interpreted in anticipation of his impending death and resurrection. We now know that there is *revelatory value* not just in Jesus's signs and speeches, but also in his forthcoming death, but we are yet to discover what his death is actually meant to reveal.

John 3:14–15: What Does It Mean to Be "Lifted Up"?

At the end of his initial encounter with Nicodemus, Jesus chides "the teacher of Israel" for his ignorance about earthly and heavenly matters (John 3:10–12). After commenting that only one individual has both ascended into heaven and descended to earth—the Son of Man—Jesus tells Nicodemus, "And just as Moses lifted up (ὕψωσεν) the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up (ὑψωθῆναι), in order that everyone who believes in him might have eternal life" (vv. 14–15). This is an obvious reference to the story

13. All translations in this chapter are those of the author unless otherwise specified. There is not space here to rehearse the linguistic and theological difficulties associated with translating οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι in John. I have chosen to translate the phrase—placed in quotes—as "the Jews," in recognition of these concerns.

in Num 21:6–9 where, in response to the grumbling of the people, the Lord allows venomous serpents to enter the camp and bite the Israelites, after which many die. In turn, the Israelites petition Moses for relief from the poisonous serpents and the Lord provides a solution: Moses is to fashion a bronze serpent and lift it up on a pole. Whomever has been bitten and looks on the bronze serpent will live.

At least one element of this parallel is clear: whoever looks upon (viz., acknowledges) Jesus will find life. But what is the significance of the verb ὑψόω? While it is important to note that the verb refers to the literal raising of an object into the sky, it can also be used figuratively of exaltation.[14] Jesus is "lifted up" both literally and metaphorically during his crucifixion, so both meanings are likely operative here.[15] While it might seem odd in some instances to think of the crucifixion as a moment of exaltation, this is actually a key emphasis in the Johannine presentation of Jesus's "glorification."[16] Thus, we have here the second reference to the death of Jesus, *and the first reference to what it will accomplish*: it brings eternal life.

John 8:21–30: Where Is Jesus Going?

By the time the audience reaches this pericope, there has been a steadily advancing antagonism between Jesus and various groups: his brothers (John 7:1–9), various attendees at the Feast of Tabernacles (7:10–24), the crowds (7:25–31, 40–44), and the Jewish leaders (7:45–52; 8:12–20). Announcing his

14. E.g., Ps 117:28, LXX: θεός μου εἶ σύ, καὶ ὑψώσω σε ("You are my God, and I will lift you up" [viz., "glorify you"]).

15. A number of Johannine interpreters see the Son of Man as a descending and ascending figure whose real home is in heaven, with the implication that ὑψόω also means "to ascend" in this particular context. I regard this as problematic first on the basis of its use in 3:14. There is no sense in Num 21 in which the serpent ascends into heaven. A second problem for this thesis is the use of the verb in John 12:32–33, where ὑψόω is used "to indicate the kind of death he was going to die." On the assertion that ὑψόω refers to Jesus's ascension, see Loader, *Jesus in John's Gospel*. Cf. also, John Ashton who argues that ὑψόω means "raise" or "exalt" and represents Jesus's ascent to heaven rather than the crucifixion (*Understanding the Fourth Gospel* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007], 468).

16. Cf. John 7:39; 12:23, 28; 13:31–32; 16:14; 17:1, 4, 5. BDAG notes that the Aramaic equivalent of ὑψωθῆναι is אזדקיף, which can mean both "to be exalted," and "to be crucified or hanged" (s.v. ὑψόω, 1046). Additionally, Keener observes that the combination of ὑψόω (lifting up) and δοξάζω (exaltation/glorification) is found in the tradition of the Suffering Servant in Isa 52 (Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary, Volume 1* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003], 566).

departure once again, Jesus tells the religious leaders that he is going away and that they are incapable of following him (8:21). Like others in the narrative, the leaders become obsessed with the literal meaning of Jesus's words and fail to understand their deeper significance. They wonder aloud if he plans to kill himself (8:22). This confusion leads to an even more antagonistic exchange where Jesus points out their inability to understand because they are "from below," while he has come "from above." After a few back-and-forth interactions (8:22–26), the narrator clarifies that the religious authorities failed to understand that Jesus had been talking to them about the Father (8:27). At this moment Jesus announces: "When you have lifted up (ὑψώσητε) the Son of Man, then you will know that 'I am' and that I do nothing on my own. Rather, I say those things which the Father has instructed me to say" (8:28). This culminates in many people believing in Jesus (8:30).

In this third proleptic announcement of Jesus's death, we again see (1) ὑψόω used in reference to the crucifixion and (2) Jesus's reference to himself as the Son of Man. Also present is the assertion that the actions of Jesus correspond fully to the will of the Father and as a result, the Father is pleased with him. We thus continue to see a steadily unfolding picture of how the death of Jesus is proleptically announced and what that death reveals about the Father.

John 10:11–18: The Good Shepherd Will Lay Down His Life

On four different occasions in the so-called Good Shepherd discourse (John 10:1–18), Jesus again discusses his impending death, this time in terms of "laying down his life" for the sheep (vv. 11, 15, 17, 18). Jesus is the faithful shepherd who, in deference to the will of the Father, lays down his life on behalf of his people (viz., "the sheep"). Bultmann has argued that the phrase lay down one's life (τιθέναι τὴν ψυχήν) "means to stake one's life, to risk it, to be prepared to lay it down as in LXX Judg. 12.3; I Sam 19.5; 28.21."[17] Similarly, Susan Hylen has recently argued that the language of laying down one's life need not explicitly refer to death here but denotes the *risking* of one's life, especially as this relates

17. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 370n5. Other commentators opt for a soft rendering here. For example, J. Ramsey Michaels notes, "What makes a shepherd 'good' is that he 'lays down his life for the sheep,' that is, *he puts his very life on the line* to protect his flock" (*The Gospel of John,* NICNT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010], 585). Similarly, Marianne Meye Thompson comments, "Precisely because the shepherd faithfully guards his sheep, he puts himself in their place, willingly *facing death* so that they may live. The shepherd does so because the sheep belong to him (10:12, 14) and he cares for them (v. 13): a hired hand has no vested interest in the sheep" (*John*, NTL [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015], 226).

to discipleship.[18] This suggestion is compelling on grammatical grounds, and I do not wish to dispute that such an idea could be present. However, this suggestion fails to take into account that this passage is *principally about Christology*. The immediate context of this παροιμία is a dispute between Jesus and the Pharisees over who is fit to lead God's flock, and both predicated ἐγώ εἰμι statements (10:7, 11, 14) and proleptic announcements are expressly related to the Fourth Gospel's presentation of Christology, which I have further argued is intimately connected to the evangelist's emphasis on revelation. Therefore, even if "to risk one's life" is an acceptable translation of the phrase τιθέναι τὴν ψυχήν elsewhere within Greek literature, it does not capture the *primary* sense of the phrase used here or throughout the rest of the Fourth Gospel (cf. e.g., 13:37; 15:13). These four references (10:11, 15, 17, 18) are explicitly about Jesus laying down his life and should be understood as pointing to his impending death, which the audience has, by now, begun to anticipate.

John 12:12–16: A Triumphal Entry Lost on the Disciples

As the crowds gather in Jerusalem in preparation for the Gospel's third Passover, Jesus is acclaimed as king (John 12:12–13a). During his triumphal entry into Jerusalem they shout, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the king of Israel!" (v. 13b). The evangelist connects this event—specifically the act of Jesus riding on a young donkey—to the prophecy in Zech 9:9 (John 12:14–15). This is obviously a moment dripping with both christological and soteriological significance, but as we have come to expect, it is completely lost on the disciples. Similar to the comment in 2:19–22, the narrator notes that the disciples did not initially understand this event. Only after Jesus is glorified (viz., crucified and resurrected) are they able to remember these events and realize both *what was written about* and *what was done to* Jesus (ἀλλ᾽ ὅτε ἐδοξάσθη Ἰησοῦς τότε ἐμνήσθησαν ὅτι ταῦτα ἦν ἐπ᾽ αὐτῷ γεγραμμένα καὶ ταῦτα ἐποίησαν αὐτῷ, 12:16). Here again we have the tension between John's narration of present time events alongside the anticipation of a future, post-resurrection viewpoint. The crucifixion is in view as the audience grapples with the revelation that Jesus is the long-awaited messianic king.

Taken together, the cumulative force of these five scenes (2:19–22; 3:14–15; 8:21–30; 10:11–18; 12:12–16) points the audience ever forward as it both wres-

18. Susan E. Hylen, "The Shepherd's Risk: Thinking Metaphorically with John's Gospel," *BibInt* 24 (2016): 382–99.

tles with the reality of Jesus's death and unpacks the revelatory significance of the Johannine cross event. What the audience has learned so far is that Jesus pleases the Father by doing his will, by voluntarily laying down his life for humanity, which will result in eternal life for those who acknowledge him. This still leaves us with the question: What exactly does the death of Jesus reveal about the Father?

Prefiguring the Cross: Jesus's ὑπόδειγμα (John 13:1–17)[19]

At the outset of the Farewell Discourse,[20] Jesus provides for his disciples an example (ὑπόδειγμα, John 13:15) that finally begins fleshing out how the cross will reveal the nature and will of the Father. We soon learn that this ὑπόδειγμα functions more like an implicit command to the disciples, and by implication, is meant to extend beyond the particular behaviors associated with washing another person's feet. It is, quite literally, an "example" that prefigures the cross.

The scene is set just before the Passover (John 13:1a), when Jesus knows his "hour" is approaching.[21] Jesus loves his own who are in the world "to the end" (εἰς τέλος, v. 1d). This phrase, like many throughout the gospel, likely carries several different shades of meaning. It can be used to suggest that Jesus's love endures to the very end (viz., his crucifixion). However, εἰς τέλος can also indicate the ultimate "goal" or "aim" of an activity and can thus be understood to describe Jesus loving his own "fully" or "completely." Taken in this way, the phrase indicates that the activity this statement anticipates—Jesus's washing of his disciples' feet as an exemplar of this service to humanity on the cross—is an embodiment of the fullest or most complete expression of his love for them. This is an important point insofar as it lays the groundwork for our appreciation of the christological and revelatory significance of the footwashing.

Knowing that his departure is near, Jesus demonstrates the extent of his

19. Some of the material in this section is adapted from my chapter, "Love One Another: The Johannine Love Command in the Farewell Discourse," in *Johannine Ethics: The Moral World of the Gospel and Epistles of John*, ed. Sherri Brown and Christopher W. Skinner (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017), 23–42. It is used here with the permission of the publisher.

20. There remains significant debate among scholars over what material belongs to the Farewell Discourse. My discussion here assumes that all of 13:1–17:26 falls into the category of what the evangelist intends as a farewell address.

21. Jesus's hour (ὥρα) is a particularly important theme in John. It appears in passages meant to evoke the impending crucifixion and resurrection events. Jesus has previously spoken about his hour in 2:4; 4:21, 23; 5:25, 28; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23, 27.

love toward the disciples while providing them with a model on which to base their future service to others in his name. First, the narrator reports that the devil had already put it in mind that Judas Iscariot should betray Jesus. This statement is meant to recall Jesus's earlier comment to his disciples: "Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? But one of you is a devil" (καὶ ἐξ ὑμῶν εἷς διάβολός ἐστιν, John 6:70). Commentators recognize a Semitic idiom in verse 2 ("to put in mind"),[22] which is best expressed in Barrett's translation: "the devil had already *made up his mind* that Judas should betray him."[23] R. Alan Culpepper points out that the heart of the devil rather than the heart of Judas is the object of "put it into" (βάλλω εἰς).[24] At the same time, the audience learns that Jesus knows "everything has been handed over to him by the Father," and that just as he has come from the Father, he will soon return to him. This sets up a critical contrast between the heart/mind of the devil (John 13:2) and the heart/mind of Jesus (vv. 1, 3). Later, in v. 20, Satan will enter into Judas and the two worlds will clash. God's design is being enacted in Jesus while Satan's design is worked out in the actions of Judas.

In John 13:4 Jesus rises from the meal, removes his outer garments (τίθησιν τὰ ἱμάτια), and takes a towel (λαβὼν λέντιον) to wrap around his waist. It is important to highlight the use of τίθημι and λαμβάνω (here and in v. 12) as they call attention back to the image of the Good Shepherd in 10:11–18. There, Jesus announced that the Good Shepherd lays down his life (τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ τίθησιν, 10:11, 15, 17, 18) in order to take it back up again (ἵνα πάλιν λάβω αὐτήν, 10:17, 18). The use of τίθημι also recalls the words of Jesus in 11:34, when he inquires about the burial place of Lazarus: "Where have they put him?" (ποῦ τεθείκατε αὐτόν;). These linguistic cues here in verse 4 link to the Good Shepherd discourse and the encounter with Lazarus and look forward to the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, thus signaling his actions here as both *symbolic and prophetic*. They also serve to highlight the extent of Jesus's

22. We see this construction in Job 22:22 (LXX): καὶ ἀνάλαβε τὰ ῥήματα αὐτοῦ ἐν καρδίᾳ σου (and lay up these words in your heart); the corresponding Hebrew phrase in the MT is וְשִׂ֣ימִ֔י אֲמָרָ֖יו בְּלִבֶּֽךָ. Another example from the LXX that does not have a counterpart in the MT is 1 Sam 29:10: καὶ λόγον λοιμὸν μὴ θῇς ἐν καρδίᾳ σου ("and do not put an evil word in your heart").

23. C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel according to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), 439. Brown translates the idiom as "*The devil had already induced Judas*, son of Simon, the Iscariot, to betray Jesus" (Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John XIII–XXI*, AB 29a [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970], 548, emphasis added).

24. R. Alan Culpepper, "The Johannine *hypodeigma*: A Reading of John 13:1–38," *Semeia* 53 (1981): 133–52, here 136.

service to his disciples. On this point, Barrett comments, "When Jesus lays aside his garments in preparation for his act of humility and cleansing he foreshadows the laying down of his life."[25] This point cannot be emphasized strongly enough. The footwashing is *symbolic* in that it provides a depiction of sacrificial self-giving, and *prophetic* in that it anticipates *Jesus's ultimate act* of sacrificial self-giving—his death on behalf of the world.

Jesus begins in earnest to wash and dry the disciples' feet (John 13:5), which leads to a brief exchange with an incredulous and uncomprehending Peter (vv. 6–9). In the course of their conversation, Jesus comments that though Peter fails to understand now, he will understand in the future. This present-future schema appears in numerous passages throughout the gospel, where the audience is invited to reflect on the narrated events from two perspectives: one related to the real-time narration of events and one from a distinctly post-resurrection perspective. When Jesus tells Peter that he will understand *in the future*, he is pointing forward to a time when all that has happened will be explained by and interpreted through the lens of crucifixion and resurrection. Peter's misplaced literalism, and in fact initial rejection of the footwashing (see vv. 6, 8a), misses the larger point that this symbolic and prophetic action has consequences beyond both a *particular time period* and a *particular type of service*. Emphasis should not be placed on the "here and now" but on the future; likewise, emphasis should not be placed on a particular type of service (viz., the literal practice of footwashing), but rather on various forms of sacrificial self-giving—the highest of which is embodied in the crucifixion of Jesus on behalf of his followers. This will become clearer only in a future, post-resurrection perspective.

Jesus's explanation at the close of the footwashing reinforces our understanding of this event as both symbolic and prophetic (John 13:12–17). It is somewhat ironic that Jesus asks his disciples—who are often represented by the voice of Peter—if they understand what he has just done for them. It seems unlikely that they have, given Peter's protestations and requests during his dialogue with Jesus in vv. 6–9. Their Lord and Teacher seemingly instructs them to continue washing one another's feet (v. 14b),[26] but if our interpretation of Jesus's actions ends there, we will be guilty of the same type of misplaced literalism displayed by characters throughout the gospel. An agenda of outward

25. Barrett, *Gospel according to St. John*, 439. Brown also sees potential parallels between the present text and 10:11, 15, 17, 18 (*Gospel according to John XIII–XXI*, 551).

26. On the suggestion that this ὑπόδειγμα is to be regarded as a literal command to continue the footwashing, see the discussion in Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, 735–36.

behavior that is characterized by sacrificial self-giving—beyond the simple behavioral parameters associated with footwashing—is at the heart of this command. "Jesus' instruction is a call to his disciples to repeat in their lives what he has done for them. He has given them the example of a loving gift of self in love, symbolized by the foot washing, which they must now repeat."[27] This point becomes clearer in verse 15: "I have given you an example [ὑπόδειγμα], in order that, just as I have done for you, you should also do." This example clearly anticipates his sacrificial self-giving in the form of his death on the cross, but it also prescribes a certain normative ethic.[28]

The term ὑπόδειγμα, translated variously as "example" and "model," appears in several contexts associated with noble death and righteous behavior, and provides for the disciples and the audience a link between the sacrificial self-giving of the footwashing and that of the death of Jesus.[29] That Jesus's death should be connected to the example of footwashing as the premier display of sacrificial self-giving is not a new suggestion, and it fits neatly within the cumulative narrative rhetoric of the gospel to this point. Having learned of Jesus's "arrival" through incarnation (John 1:14), the audience is now being systematically prepared for his departure in a return to the Father. This departure is the *telos* of Jesus's ministry, which will result in the sending of the παράκλητος, who will further prepare the disciples to live as Jesus instructed and as the Father commands. The footwashing is not to be regarded as an end unto itself but as an event that invites the disciples into the mode of sacrificial self-giving soon to be realized in the crucifixion. Barrett's comment here is instructive: "There stands first a symbolic narrative, the washing of the disciples' feet, which prefigures the crucifixion itself, and in doing so points the way to the interpretation of the crucifixion. The public acts of Jesus on Calvary, and his private act in the presence of his disciples, are alike in that each is an act of humility and service, and that each proceeds from the love of Jesus for

27. Francis J. Moloney, *Glory Not Dishonor: Reading John 13–21* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 16.

28. On the question of whether normative ethics can be derived from the Fourth Gospel, see the various essays in Brown and Skinner, eds., *Johannine Ethics*.

29. E.g., 2 Macc 6:28 (NABRE): "I will leave to the young a noble example (ὑπόδειγμα) of how to die willingly and nobly for the revered and holy laws"; 4 Macc 17:22–23 (NRSV): "And through the blood of those devout ones and their death as an atoning sacrifice, divine Providence preserved Israel that previously had been mistreated. For the tyrant Antiochus, when he saw the courage of their virtue and their endurance under the tortures, proclaimed them to his soldiers as an example (ὑπόδειγμα)"; Sir 44:16 (NABRE): "Enoch walked with the Lord, and was taken that succeeding generations might learn by his example (ὑπόδειγμα)." For more on these parallels, see Culpepper, "Johannine *hypodeigma*," 142–43.

his own."[30] Having both provided an example for his disciples (vv. 1–17) and celebrated a final meal (vv. 18–30), Jesus will begin to speak in detail about his departure. In verses 34–35 he announces, "I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know you are my disciples, if you love one another." Three times in the span of these two verses Jesus instructs his disciples to love another, and in that same context he notes, "as I have loved you." There can be little doubt that this hearkens back to the image of 13:1, where Jesus loves his disciples εἰς τέλος. By imitating the manner in which he has demonstrated his own love toward them—what I have termed sacrificial self-giving—the disciples will be a light to all humanity. While it must be admitted that the audience still has much to learn about the meaning of the crucifixion in John, this passage, more than any other in the gospel has elucidated the significance of the Jesus's forthcoming death.

We are thus now in a position to begin deliberating on the question: What does the Johannine cross event reveal about the Father?

1. First, the God of the Fourth Gospel is concerned to initiate and maintain a relationship with humanity. If the incarnation is the means of inaugurating this relationship, the cross is the means of securing it once and for all.
2. Second, insofar as the cross-anticipating-ὑπόδειγμα is characterized by sacrificial self-giving, it is possible to affirm that the God of the Fourth Gospel is characterized by an attitude of sacrificial self-giving. The crucifixion of Jesus is quite literally an act of service to humanity.
3. God's act of entering into relationship with and serving humanity is ultimately rooted in and driven by his love. [31]

The God of the Fourth Gospel loves, seeks out, draws near to, serves, and secures a relationship with humanity by means of the cross. This ignominious and torturous death is actually, for John, an unveiling of the heart of the Father toward the world. How does this description of the Father in John intersect, if at all, with ideas about cruciformity that have been advanced by Gorman?

30. Barrett, *Gospel according to St. John*, 346.

31. We see this as early as 3:16–17. On the importance of this text for our understanding of the Gospel, see Francis J. Moloney, *Love in the Gospel of John: An Exegetical, Theological, and Literary Study* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), esp. 56–61.

Cruciformity in John?

Michael Gorman has written extensively about cruciformity in Paul and has similarly applied the term to the teaching of Jesus in Mark's Gospel.[32] However, his work on John has focused more on ideas of mission and theosis, though cruciformity plays a role in those deliberations.[33] Based upon the above discussion, what can we say of John's relationship to notions of cruciformity? Is it possible to affirm that the Fourth Gospel also provides its audience with some vision of a cruciform God?

At its core, cruciformity—as articulated by Gorman—is about conforming to the death of Christ and all that implies. He writes:

> Cruciformity is the spiritual-moral dimension of the theology of the death of Jesus by crucifixion found in Paul, in the rest of the New Testament, and throughout much of the Christian tradition. With respect to Paul, at least, this conformity to the crucified Messiah is not an abstract moral principle but a spiritual, or even mystical, reality. This mystical reality is rooted, paradoxically, in a profoundly this-worldly reality (Jesus' crucifixion) and produces, no less paradoxically, a variety of very this-worldly results.[34]

Frank Matera helpfully reminds us that it is ever important to respect the diverse unity of New Testament theologies, and thus avoid conflating the various voices at work in the New Testament.[35] In this case we can and probably should draw important parallels between major foci in Pauline and Johannine texts without attempting to equate the two. With that in mind, however, we can affirm that John's presentation of the cross event and its significance aligns with this initial description provided by Gorman. For John, Jesus's crucifixion is a return to the Father that results in the sending of the παράκλητος (John 14:16). This sending will produce a mystical or spiritual reality (to use Gorman's

32. Cf. bibliographic details in n. 7 above. While the term, "cruciform," existed in the Christian theological lexicon prior to Gorman's work on the subject, it is safe to say that his articulation of "cruciformity" is the primary one to which theologians refer when they use the term in contemporary theological discourse.

33. Cf. Michael J. Gorman, *Abide and Go: Missional Theosis in the Gospel of John* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2018).

34. Gorman, "Paul and the Cruciform Way of God in Christ," 66.

35. This is a major emphasis in Matera's published work; nowhere is it more prominently on display than in his study, *New Testament Theology: Exploring Diversity and Unity* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007).

words) that will, among other things, lay bare the truth to those who believe (16:8–11), guide believers into truth (16:13), speak words of truth (16:14–15), and instruct future disciples (16:26–27). All of these are—again, to use Gorman's words—"very this-worldly results." Without drawing a straight line from Paul to the Fourth Gospel, we can easily recognize these points of "cruciform overlap" between the two.

Gorman continues:

> Cruciformity, then, is cross-shaped existence in Jesus the Messiah. It is letting the cross of the crucified Messiah be the shape, as well as the source, of life in him. It is participating in and embodying the cross. . . . In fact, we might even refer to the ethical results of this indwelling as non-identical repetition, as long as the qualifier "by the power of the Spirit" is included. As we will now see, the events that are repeated are constituted by the narrative of Christ's self-giving faith and love that were quintessentially expressed in his (incarnation and) death on the cross.[36]

Again, we see notable points of contact between this description and the picture presented in the Fourth Gospel. In Johannine terms, the ὑπόδειγμα of chapter 13—which serves as an exemplar for the cross—is an invitation to Jesus followers to, in Gorman's words, "let the cross of the crucified Messiah be the shape, as well as the source, of life in him." While the practice of washing one another's feet may in fact be a repeatable phenomenon and mode of worship-in-remembrance, it is not the immediate focal point of Jesus's teaching here. Rather, he is calling for other forms of sacrificial service, which Gorman, borrowing the language of John Milbank, has labeled, "non-identical repetition." And when the παράκλητος comes, they will live and move and breathe in and through its power. On this very passage Gorman comments, "since Jesus is the 'unique self-exegesis of God' . . . then *Jesus* in motion is *God* in motion; the act of foot washing tells us something profound, not only about the self-giving love of Jesus, but also about the gratuitous, hospitable, kenotic love of God."[37]

There is not space in this brief chapter to explore all the nuances arising from the breadth of Gorman's exposition of cruciformity. Such an ambitious endeavor could easily occupy an entire monograph. The more modest pursuit in this essay has been to explore the possibility of locating a cruciform

36. Gorman, "Paul and the Cruciform Way of God in Christ," 67.
37. Gorman, *Abide and Go*, 87.

vision of God in the Fourth Gospel. We can recognize that John—with his own voice—provides a unique spin on the cruciform God in ways that are both similar to and different from that which has been articulated by Gorman in his treatments of Paul and Mark. John demonstrates the critical importance of the cross and its implications for (1) God's divine condescension in pursuing and entering into relationship with humanity, (2) ongoing discipleship by means of the Spirit-Paraclete, and (3) the impartation of eternal life. In these we see the Johannine version of a cruciform God, and in this way, Gorman's work remains both instructive and suggestive for our ongoing attempts to speak meaningfully about the theological outlook of the Fourth Gospel and other early Christian texts.[38]

38. Since 2005, Mike Gorman has been a mentor to me both personally and professionally, and more importantly, he has been a friend. It is not an overstatement to say that I would not be where I am in this field without Mike's influence, help, and friendship. I have the highest regard for Mike as a teacher, scholar, husband, father, grandfather, and man of faith. It is one of the great privileges of my vocational life to count Mike among my friends. I offer this essay as a very small token of both my great esteem for him and my appreciation for his impact upon my life and career.