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The world is looking for leaders who would be creative and who would set themselves as models for others to follow. Normally, the world thinks of a leader as an important figure who efficiently asserts his/her authority to subdue others. John’s Gospel, which was written at a time when there were competing claims for religious leadership, challenges such worldly understanding of leadership and portrays Jesus as a unique and exemplary leader, who, by an act of foot-washing, demonstrated that the true leadership authority lies in enduring love for others, in humility and service. By offering himself to die on the cross for human salvation, Jesus has become the source of life and the cleansing agent for those who yield themselves to him so that they might be aptly equipped to fulfill their mission in the world productively and with servant attitude. Since he has set himself as an example of love, humility, simplicity and service, and enables his followers to reflect these leadership qualities in the world, Jesus, whom John portrays, is the distinct example of leadership for us today.

Introduction

An important issue faced in our world today at the socio-political and ecclesiastical level is what is commonly said, ‘lack of proper leadership’. Those who hold leadership are often accused either of misusing their power or of being unable to exercise their power. Traditionally, leadership has been viewed in terms of exercising authority and power over individuals so that they might be fearful and be submissive. This traditional way of exercising leadership has caused the people under authority to be restrained from functioning creatively and constructively. It also runs into the danger of encroaching upon human freedom and choice and thereby of violating human rights. Some, therefore, suggest that we need to develop a new kind of leadership that will facilitate the process by which people can be freed from the constraining forces of authority and can express their own creativity. However, a leader does possess authority which cannot be compromised with human freedom. But the moot question is: with what attitude and for what purpose is the leader exercising that leadership authority?

The leadership crisis in many parts of the world is not directly related to the authority that our leaders hold, but to the attitude with which and purpose for which they exercise their authority. In the time of Jesus too there was a leadership crisis. Those who

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ruled over the Gentiles were 'lording it over them', i.e., they were exercising authority in such a way that the citizens' freedom and creativity were subdued (Mark 10:42). In other words, the rulers had a wrong approach and attitude in their dealings with the people. There has been a false understanding that leadership is an opportunity to enjoy power and subdue people. With this understanding, many have become ambitious to take up leadership positions. Such selfish ambition has always led into contention, conflicts, in-fights, insecurity and, in brief, to a deep leadership crisis.

At the time when John's Gospel was written (i.e., after 70AD) the Johannine community was facing, among other issues, the issue of leadership both within the community and in the Jewish nation. The various groups of Judaism were competing with each other to assume a leadership role in their attempt to rebuild and restore the temple to its former glory and to revive the religious life of the Jews.2 The death of the 'Beloved Disciple' and other eye-witnesses posed in the community not only the problem of the Parousia,3 but also, in all probability, that of leadership. The description of 'the Jews' in John as 'thieves and robbers' (John 10:8) and the reference to the 'hireling' who, unlike the shepherd, flee away from the sheep when danger comes (John 10:12) expose the worthlessness of the then leadership of Judaism (cf. Ezek. 34 which provides a formidable background to John 10). In contrast, Jesus is presented as the unique shepherd-leader who offers abundant life to all those who believe in him (10:9–10).4 In other words, John projects Jesus as the good and model leader at a time when there were conflicting claims for leadership. The portrayal of Jesus as king throughout his Gospel and Jesus' reference to 'my servants' (huplretai) associated with his kingship prove John's purpose to show Jesus as the leader, though not in the worldly sense of the term (John 18:36; cf. 12:26 which describes Jesus' servants as those who should follow him). The fact that Jesus is the teacher who is worthy to be followed is evident even in the early stage of his ministry (John 1:37, 38, 40, 43). Jesus, as the leader, had prophetic authority with which he cleansed the temple (John 2:13–17) and in recognition of this leadership authority the crowd acclaimed, 'This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world' (John 6:14–15 where Jesus is referred to as the prophet-king). The very purpose of John is to prove that Jesus is the Christ, (i.e., 'God's anointed') who will lead victoriously those who believe in him unto eternal life (20:31). The then prevalent idea of Christ as the political leader who will bring deliverance to Israel by war confirms that in John's presentation of Jesus as the Christ the mode and manner of leadership is in focus.

Johannine Jesus is delineated as the leader in terms of shepherd, king, prophet, teacher, and, above all, of the Messiah whose attitude and approach are different from those of the messianic king, as expected by the people, and from those of the shepherds and teachers of that day. The leadership authority of Jesus, as John shows, consists in his humility, obedience to the Father's will, suffering and supremely in his death on the cross. Even his cleansing of the temple by force is symbolic of his death, the true sacrifice offered on the cross.5 Jesus' leadership quality is nowhere described with greater clarity than it is in Jesus' washing of his disciples' feet (John 13:1–20), which is the subject of our study. Since a good leader sets himself/herself always as a model for others to

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2 See M. Asedu-Peprah, Johannine Sabbath Conflicts as Juridical Controversy (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 217, 225.
4 Asedu-Peprah, Johannine Sabbath Conflicts, 225.
Johannine Jesus, The Supreme Example of Leadership

follow, the interpretation of foot-washing as an ‘example’ (hypodeigma) for his disciples to imitate (John 13:14–15) calls for a closer study of the passage not only for understanding the what and how of Jesus’ leadership, but also for addressing the leadership issues involved in Christian mission today.

The exemplary significance of Jesus’ leadership (13:1–20)

While Jesus was about to depart from the world to go to the Father by way of crucifixion, he gave to ‘his own’ his final words that began with the symbolic act of foot-washing (13:1, 3). In chapters 13–17 John records what Jesus does and says privately with his disciples and it is probable that he is engaged in a training session with the twelve whom he will leave behind in the world (17:11, 15, 18). The fact that Jesus’ foot-washing is linked with his death indicates the immense importance of the act, for in the Mediterranean culture the final works and words of a dying person are to be keenly observed and obeyed.

Jesus, the leader, recognises the value of each human

The statement that Jesus, who had been loving his followers in the world, loved them to the end (cf. the twice repeated verb agapōn in 1b put in participle and indicative mood) shows that the foot-washing was an act of Jesus’ love. The love commandment of Jesus given precisely in this context (13:34–35) confirms this all the more. The expression of Jesus’ agapē-love by means of a foot-washing indicates how he recognised human values inherent within the disciples and how he made them realise their worth in life. His love is dramatically expressed by seven related acts: Jesus rises from the meal, lays aside his garments, takes a towel (reference to this act is missing in the RSV, NRSV, NIV, etc., but not in the NEB), girds himself with it, pours water into a basin, washes the feet of his disciples and wipes them with the towel with which he had been girded (13:4). Both washing and wiping share a common verb, ‘began’, which shows that washing and wiping are the two sides of the same act. The act of girding himself with a towel reflects the posture of a household servant in India, who appears

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5 It is true that Jesus exercised violence while cleansing the temple. However, it was not a symbolic act that was given by Jesus for others to imitate. This is symbolic of the replacement of the old system of temple sacrifice with the sacrifice of his own body offered once for all on the cross (2:19–21). Thus even Jesus’ authority to act violently flows from his humility and obedience to Father’s will to die on the cross.

6 That the Christian leader is a model whom others could follow is clear from Paul’s injunction to Timothy to set himself as an example to the believers (1 Tim. 4:12, though the Greek word used is types [type] and not hypodeigma as John has). A.J. Fernandez comments that it is by an exemplary life that a leader could command respect even from critics – see A. Fernandez, ‘Leadership Lifestyle: A Study of 1 Timothy’ (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1985), 94–97.

7 I take liberty not to mention henceforth ‘John’ whenever references are made to John’s Gospel.

8 Note that the foot-washing takes place at the feast of the Passover when Jesus knew that ‘his hour’ had come to depart from this world to go to the Father. The event also marks the end of his life on earth and is linked with Judas’ betrayal (13:2, 11, 18, 21) which inaugurates the process of Jesus’ deliverance to death; see also below.

9 As observed by B. Molina and R.L. Rohrbaugh, Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 221.

10 The Gospel of the Hebrews adds one more act, narrating that Jesus kissed the disciples’ feet after wiping them – see B. Lindars, The Gospel of John (London: Oliphants, 1972), 45.
before his master by girding a towel around his waist as the mark of his humility, loyalty and submission to the master. In the Jewish society, washing of the feet of exceptional persons was the duty of a slave, particularly that of a Gentile slave.\footnote{It was not only the duty of a slave, but was also one of the duties that a wife should perform for her husband, and sons and daughters for their father – see R. Schnackenburg, \textit{The Gospel According to St John 3} (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 399 n. 41.} Thus Jesus takes up the position of a servant/slave. By washing and wiping the feet of his associates, he treats them as guests of honour and affirms their value in his company. He also communicates the message that human value is to be identified and exerted only by serving one another. That is why Jesus describes his act as an example and calls them to wash one another’s feet (13:14–15). The Johannine Jesus thus gives his followers the awareness that true greatness lies not in exercising lordship over others, but in serving others with a humble attitude (cf. Mark 10:42–45). That is, true leadership consists in lowliness, humility and service motivated by agapé-love. If Thomas Gordon’s thesis that society is looking for a kind of leadership that puts human values first\footnote{Gordon, \textit{Group-Centered Leadership}, 7.} is true, then John 13 shows that Jesus is the one who exhibited such quality of leadership. Jesus is, then, the significant model of leadership, for by humbling himself, he sought to bring the best from each of his team members.

\textit{Jesus, the leader, seeks to establish a viable relationship in his school}

The Johannine Jesus is not only dealing with human values, but also with human relations. While referring to the new leadership patterns in educational institutions, Gordon mentions that the teacher, as a group leader, needs to make an influence upon the ‘learning behaviour of the students’.\footnote{Ibid., 14.} By stating that leaders must be skilled in dealing with human relations and must facilitate a change in people rather than in the curriculum,\footnote{Ibid., 15–16.} he suggests that the adult educators should try methods which involve the learner in self-motivated activity.\footnote{Ibid., 16.} In the exemplary act of foot-washing, which is accompanied by an emphatic command to wash one another’s feet, one can see Jesus fulfilling the role of an ideal leader or educator. For by this act Jesus motivates and trains his pupils to relate with one another in an attitude of love, humility, and servanthood. The long ‘farewell discourse’ begins not with Jesus’ spoken words, but with his act that directly deals with the attitude of his followers with which they should relate with one another. In the leadership model of Jesus, deeds precede words!

Jesus chose the twelve disciples. In John, we do not have the reference that Jesus chose them to be with him and to be sent out to preach and have authority to cast out demons, as we have it in Matthew and Mark (Mark 3:14–15; Matt. 10:1). But definitely the idea is present. Throughout his ministry Jesus spent time with the twelve, rebuked them, corrected them, instructed them, prayed for them, and washed their feet in order to motivate them to be servant-leaders in the world. We have seen that by foot-washing, Jesus put human values first and sought to bring the best out of his learners. He also dealt with their attitude and inter-personal relationship with one another by the same act of love and humility. In this sense, the Johannine Jesus is portrayed as a group-centred leader, the one who showed a genuine interest in the development of the group and in the achievement of its goal (see also opposite).
Jesus, the Lord and Teacher, influences his team by demonstrating servanthood

The mysterious relationship between servanthood and leadership is also brought out by the Johannine Jesus by linking with his act of foot-washing the two prestigious titles, the Lord and the Teacher (13:13–14). Jesus rendered this humble service as an eminent leader in Jewish society, as his followers themselves acknowledged. The title ‘the Lord’ shows Jesus as a leader who holds unique authority over their lives, because he is worthy of all honour and worship due to God alone (5:23; 12:20–26). John portrays Jesus as the Lord in the sense that he is the revelation of the Lord God, the object of human worship and faith and the one who has overcome ‘the prince of this world’ (12:31–32; 20:28).16 The title ‘the Teacher’ is derived from the Hebrew ‘rabbi’ which was used in Jewish society for the teachers of the law who educated and trained their pupils. During the Passover meal here Jesus, the Rabbi (13:38; 20:16), is engaged in a training session with his pupils. He teaches them the ideals of servant-leadership by demonstrating it first and then by directing them to follow his example. Learning in Judaism demanded the learner to sit at the feet of his rabbi (Acts 22:3) and on occasions to wash the rabbi’s feet as well as to tie or untie his sandals (Matt. 3:11 par.). The teachers had the right to receive such services from their students. Jesus, however, did not use any of his rights (cf. 1 Cor. 9:3–12), but voluntarily took up the place and work of a slave (Phil. 2:7). He did not use his authority to subdue his team members, but taught them the virtue of humility and service.

The two titles, ‘the Lord’ and ‘the Teacher’, bring out, on the one hand, the greatest degree of Jesus’ love for and claim over his disciples and his generosity to humble himself as a servant, on the other. Both his status and service make Jesus a leader who seeks to influence the lives of his associates by way of service done to them and thus he proves to be a servant-leader. Jesus’ enactment of servant-leadership puts an obligation on those who received his service of love and humility to express the same love, simplicity, and service to the world (13:14–15). The conditional clause, ‘if I have washed your feet’, introduces the conclusion derived from Jesus’ demonstration and the command, ‘you also ought to wash one another’s feet’ (opheilete ... niptein) lays the moral obligation on the trainees to love and serve. Although the Greek word hypodeigma, used in verse 15 for ‘example’, means a ‘model’ or ‘image’ or ‘copy’ of the true and original things, implicitly the things in heaven, here in John, it implies more than an example. As H. Schlier puts it, ‘It is a definite prototype. In a typical act they (i.e., the disciples) experience the love of Jesus and are to cause others to have the same experience’.17 Thus, the word ‘example’ is used in an active sense, referring to an act that was done to motivate the learners for mutual service.

Jesus’ demand to imitate him is reiterated by the proverbial saying, ‘A servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him’, (v. 16) as well as by the beatitude, ‘Blessed are you if you do them’ (v. 17), and is confirmed by the revelatory formula ‘truly, truly I say to you’. Any master or teacher is greater in status and function than his disciples. Naturally, the students follow the teacher and if the teacher exemplifies and expresses his leadership in humble attitude as a servant, then his followers ought to do the same. The followers of Jesus are sent into the world as

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16 The first-century Christians ascribed the Name ‘the Lord’, which is the Name of Yahweh, the God of Israel, to the risen Jesus whom they found worthy to receive worship and praise due to God alone.

17 See H. Schlier, ‘hypodeigma’, TDNT II, 32–33. See also below n. 22.
servants just as the Father sent Jesus into the world (20:21). Both in status (as servants) and function (as the sent ones) they are not greater than their Lord and Teacher. Their greatness lies precisely in serving one another in obedience to the Master’s command and drawing their life from him (12:26). Both servants and sent agents are expected to fulfill not their own will, but the will of their masters under whose authority they function. So also, Jesus’ followers have no other task except to carry out their Master’s command: serve one another with love (Gal. 5:13).

The Johannine Jesus sets his foot-washing as an ‘example’ (hypodeigma) for his disciples to relate with each other as members of his community. That is, his exemplary act is the ethical norm, ‘the ground on which this discipleship rests and the source from which it gains strength’ (cf. the statement, ‘that you also should do as I have done to you’, in v. 15).18 Jesus is seeking to make an impact on the lives of his followers by exhibiting his love expressed in humble service. Leadership has been defined as ‘a process of influence’,19 and the foot-washing is an effective step taken by Jesus to influence his followers by revealing his divine nature inherent in his humanity (cf. ‘that you may believe that I am he ἐξ ὑμῶν εἰμί’ in v. 19). However, the process of influence is not complete until Jesus will sacrifice his life as on the cross to which the foot-washing points.

Jesus, the Servant-Leader, sets the goal and objective for his team

In the narrative of foot-washing, John describes how Jesus foresaw the betrayal by one of his own disciples that will lead to his death. The statement, ‘I tell you this now, before it takes place’ (13:19a) may refer to the betrayal by Judas (13:21, 25–26). However, the following reference to the resultant faith of the disciples that Jesus is the ‘I AM’ (13:19b) points forward to a still greater event, the lifting up of Jesus on the cross (cf. 8:28). For, after all, the betrayal initiates the process of Jesus’ trial and death. Thus, the Johannine Jesus brings the foot-washing into a climactic point of saying that his death will eventually reveal that Jesus is the ‘I AM’, i.e., he is the revelation of one God, the God of Israel. In the over-all mission of Jesus, the foot-washing, which symbolises his death, reveals in a smaller scale the glory of God in Jesus.

Whereas the ultimate purpose of Jesus is to enable his team to see God’s love and power in him, the group’s objective that will lead to fulfill that goal is spelt out by him in verse 20 in terms of the disciples’ mission to the world. Here Jesus declares the relevance of Christian faith, mentioned in verse 19, to the life and mission of the Church. That is, those who believe that Jesus is the revelation of God’s name ‘I AM’ have a mission to do in the world. Their mission is nothing but the continuity of Jesus’ mission. Since Jesus’ mission itself proceeds from the Father (17:18; 20:21), he says, ‘He who receives any one whom I send receives me; and he who receives me receives him who sent me’ (cf., similar mission statement in Matt. 10:40). Both Jesus’ mission and the Church’s mission flow from God and hence they constitute God’s mission. It is impossible, therefore, for the world to receive one and reject the other. Those who receive anyone who is anointed and sent by Jesus receive Jesus and those who receive him receive the Father who anointed and sent him. This tripartite relationship will lead the world to see God in Jesus through the community he formed. Those who see Jesus

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see God (1:18; 12:45; 14:9) and those who believe in Jesus, in fact, believe in God (12:44). John expresses in verse 20 the oneness that exists between Jesus and God who sent him in functional terms, while in verse 19 the same oneness is expressed in revelatory terms. In other words, the team’s goal, set by the Servant-Leader by means of foot-washing, is to manifest God in Jesus and this goal could only be reached by means of its ‘mission to the world’, that is, by loving and serving the humankind as Jesus loved and served. The foot-washing is not only the symbolic of Jesus’ redemptive death on the cross (see further below), but also the symbolic of the Church’s mission to the world. Obviously, it is a teaching method adopted by Jesus so that the disciples might learn this goal and fulfil it with love and humility. By perceiving in advance what will happen in future and by setting on that basis the team’s goal and objectives, the Johannine Jesus demonstrates himself as the supreme example of leadership.\textsuperscript{20}

The Servant-Leader makes Servant-Leaders

Jesus’ foot-washing inaugurates the process of his suffering and death. Scholars, in general, agree that the foot-washing is a symbolic act that points to the death of Jesus, which is the point of his glorification.\textsuperscript{21} R.A. Culpepper, for example, argues that the foot-washing is a proleptic and metaphorical interpretation of Jesus’ death, for his death on the cross, his instruction that the disciples wash one another’s feet, the love command, the betrayal by Judas, and Peter’s denials cannot be understood in isolation from one another.\textsuperscript{22} We will also see below that the cleansing effect of foot-washing is the sign of the cleansing effect of Jesus’ blood shed on the cross (13:7, 8, 10). It was in his suffering and death that Jesus revealed his utmost humility and simplicity. Pilate’s words with which he introduced Jesus, ‘Behold the man!’ (19:5) and ‘Behold your King!’ (19:14; cf. 19:19–22) picture Jesus as the messianic King who revealed the glory of his leadership in humility, suffering and death. John portrays Jesus as the King-Leader in lowliness and humility also in his account of Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem on an ass (12:13–15), an event that can be understood rightly only in the light of Jesus’ death and resurrection (12:16).

Similarly, the paradoxical combination of leadership and lowliness is envisaged in the foot-washing of Jesus, which points forward to his shameful death on the cross. What does this imply? This means that the self-sacrifice of Jesus is the source of life for any human who believes in him and the driving force to love and serve one another in the community. For the blood of Jesus cleanses and equips his followers to be servant-leaders. According to John, the only example that Jesus leaves with his followers is his act of self-giving love, humility, simplicity, and servanthood. It is imperative for a leader to set an example to these virtues (1 Tim. 4:12) and only then can they could command others to imitate them (1 Cor. 11:1; Phil. 4:9; cf. Rom. 15:7; Eph. 5:2; Heb. 12:2–3; 1 Pet. 2:18–25). However, this does not mean that anyone could imitate Jesus in his death.

\textsuperscript{20} While referring to planning as the first and most important function of leadership, Hrangkuma observes that a leader should be able to foresee what the future is going to be like, to establish goals or targets, and to do programming by setting up short-term objectives – F. Hrangkuma, Effective Christian Leadership (Bombay: GLS, 1981), 18–20.

\textsuperscript{21} See the list of scholars in J.C. Thomas, Footwashing in John 13 and the Johannine Community (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, reprint, 1993), 14 n.1; 16 n. 2.

\textsuperscript{22} R.A. Culpepper, ‘The Johannine Hypoegigma: A Reading of John 13’, Semera 53 (1991), 133–52. Culpepper holds that because the term hypoegigma in v. 15 elevates a virtuous and noteworthy death, the interpolation in vv. 12–17 is closely related to v. 6–11.
on the cross, which has redemptive significance and which is the only means to wash away human sins. The disciples are only called to draw their strength from Jesus’ life-imparting death and make it the basis for their daily relationship with one another. Thus, the leadership qualities found in Jesus — his love, expressed in self-sacrifice, simplicity, humility and service, and spiritual authority — are inseparably bound up with the cross. No one will be able to exhibit these qualities unless they accept Jesus’ death as imparting salvation and allow his blood to do their inner cleansing. The leaders’ job will become incomplete, if they do not equip others to become leaders. Here the servant-leaders, besides setting themselves as models to emulate, themselves becomes the life-imparting sources to make servant-leaders. This leads us to study the so-called ‘first interpretation of the foot-washing’ (13:6–11) that unveils the pre-requisites to become a servant-leader.

The pre-requisites for servant-leadership

The foot-washing in John projects Jesus as the unique example of leadership. He is the Teacher and Lord who trains his own to develop a humble and serving attitude and to motivate them to relate with one another with love. We should note that this training session does not take place in an artificial situation such as a classroom lecture or public gathering, but that it takes place in a real life situation when Jesus had the Passover meal exclusively with his disciples. Jesus is the leader par excellence because he himself provides the ground and basis to function as servant-leaders. That is, his foot-washing has the cleansing power from which the true authority of a leader flows. It is impossible, then, to understand the significance of Jesus’ foot-washing without 13:6–11 where he explains the cleansing effect of his act. Bultmann argues that 13:12–20, which interprets the foot-washing as an exemplary act, and 13:6–11, which interprets it as a symbolic act, run contrary to each other. However, he fails to notice the unifying theme that those who come into communion with Jesus by the cleansing power of his blood should emulate his love, humility, and his ministry of foot-washing. This leads us to examine some of the pre-requisites for servant-leadership.

To acknowledge the cross of Jesus

It is a social custom in India for the people of inferior status to fall at the feet of any dignitaries: worshippers at the feet of deities, children at the feet of their parents or elders, learners at the feet of their gurus, and followers at the feet of their leaders. It is an embarrassment to anyone who sees the superiors falling at the feet of their juniors. It was this embarrassment which led Peter to prevent Jesus from washing his feet by saying, ‘Lord, do you wash my feet?’ (13:6). Peter represents here those who have the worldly view of leadership according to which a leader is not supposed to do any menial job. The world perceives the leaders not as servants, but as those who are in higher places to make people submissive by authoritarianism. It was to pull the attention of his

23 R. Bultmann, The Gospel of John: A Commentary (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, ET 1971), 461–62. The statement that the disciples will comprehend the significance of the foot-washing only at a later stage (v. 7) is not indifferent from vv. 12–20, for the disciples will understand the cleansing power of the foot-washing only later in the light of the cleansing power of Jesus’ blood to be shed on the cross, whereas vv. 12–20 speak of the act of foot-washing in general (see also n. 22).
disciples to the true significance of leadership implied in his act of foot-washing that Jesus said to Peter, 'What I am doing you do not know now, but afterward you will understand' (13:7). In the light of Jesus' consciousness of his suffering and death during his meal with his disciples, we need to understand his response in verse 7 as a veiled reference to his death and resurrection. Those who have the worldy understanding of leadership will not be able to understand the concept of servant-leadership that is displayed in such a humble act as foot-washing until they come to the cross of Jesus where his love, forgiveness, and servanthood were supremely displayed. It is the cross of Christ and the subsequent bestowal of the Holy Spirit that are going to reveal to the disciples the secret of servant-leadership (cf. 2:22; 12:16). The pre-requisite for understanding and practising servant-leadership is the acknowledgement of Jesus' death and resurrection. One should acknowledge humbly God's way of salvation and cleansing that was made through the cross of Christ.

To draw life from Jesus by letting him serve

It was imperative for Peter to yield himself fully to his master and allow him first to serve him. To prevent Jesus from washing his feet means that the learner denies the master's love, forgiveness, and cleansing. It also amounts to non-submission and non-availability to fulfill the master's mission of serving the needy. Before we serve others, it is important for us to allow Jesus first to serve us so that we might experience his love, forgiveness, and total cleansing. In other words, Jesus' followers need to let him deal with them completely so that they might be better equipped to serve the world. It is the servant attitude, demonstrated by Jesus, that makes the intimate fellowship with Jesus possible for his followers. Participation in Jesus' life is possible by yielding oneself to serve the people in communion with him. It is in this sense that Jesus said to Peter, 'If I do not wash you, you have no part in me' (13:8). For to have a part with someone means 'to have a share with, to be a partner with someone'. Thus, the Johannine Jesus means that only those who are washed by him are able to be united with him. In other words, we are made servant-leaders when we are cleansed by the blood of Jesus shed on the cross (1 John 1:7) and thereby we share in the life of Jesus in union with him. The necessity to absorb the life of Jesus in communion with him is sufficiently emphasised in John (6:56; 14:19; 15:4-10) and the reference to 'having a part with' him also conveys the same idea. Unless Jesus cleanses those who come to him, they can hardly enjoy communion with him and in him with God (15:2-3). If anything, it is the servant attitude that will unite with Jesus those who are cleansed by him. If 'to have a part with Jesus' implies a participation in the life of Jesus, then it includes also the disciples' share in the mission and destiny of their master in this world. It means to be sent into the world as Jesus himself was sent (4:31-38; 20:21-23) and to die for his cause (12:24-26; 13:36; 21:18-19). If Jesus came to the world to serve and to give his life for its salvation, then those who acknowledge him as Lord and Teacher are also kept in the world as servants who would renounce themselves for the salvation of humankind. Thus, by washing the feet, the Johannine Jesus prepares his associates to face persecution, or even martyrdom, in their pursuit to accomplish the group's goal of manifesting God by reaching out the world with the gospel of love and service.

24 The pronoun 'you' appears in an emphatic position, implying, 'Is it you, the Lord and Teacher, who wash my feet? No, I will never allow this happen' (cf. Matt. 3:13-15).
To have prior cleaning and continuous cleansing

Washing of the feet presumes prior cleaning by a ‘bath’. Peter realised that if fellowship with Jesus, the servant-leader, is denied to those who are not washed by him, then he should be thoroughly washed, notwithstanding his hands and head (v. 9). He thus appealed for a complete bath. Peter’s unreserved yielding denotes his complete openness for Jesus to deal with him. Though Peter exhibited such a zeal for his master, still it seems to be at the human level (cf. 13:37). With a partial understanding of Jesus’ words, Peter thought that if foot-washing is going to keep him in association with Jesus, then it would be better to have a washing of his entire body rather than settling for a little. He gave himself up fully to Jesus expecting from him not just a washing of his feet but a complete bath, if that would enable him to maintain fellowship with his guru. However, Jesus refused to wash Peter’s hands and head, by saying that those who are already clean by a bath need no washing of the whole body except for the feet (v. 10). This means that the one who has bathed has no need to wash the hands and head as Peter is suggesting, but only the part, in this case the feet, that has become dirty.

Some scholars interpret verse 10 that those who have already received the benefit of Jesus’ death are entirely clean without any need for further washing. They treat the verbs ‘to bathe’ (λουέιν) and ‘to wash’ (νιπτεῖν) as having identical meaning, symbolising the event of the cross with a secondary reference to baptism either as a sacrament or as the interpretation of the sacrament implying, ‘the one who has been baptised into his death’. As Jesus’ foot-washing constantly points to the cross, it is probable that the idea of participation in the life of Jesus by the cleansing effect of his blood is present in verses 8 and 10.

It is possible that the phrase, ‘He who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet’, is a proverbial saying, denoting a common truth explained in verse 10b. The guests at the meal are not expected to take a complete bath, because they are already clean. All they need is a slave who, on their arrival, will wash their feet to remove the dust that was collected on the way. Similarly, the disciples are already ‘his own’ possessions (10:3–4, 14; 13:1) and are clean by the word of salvation spoken to them (15:1). Therefore they need not wash their whole body now. In spiritual terms, the Johannine Jesus says that his disciples are already united with him by his life-giving

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25 The first part of v. 10 has more than five different readings in the Greek manuscripts. The main issue is whether the phrase ‘except for his feet’ is the original part of the reading or something that was added later. It is more probable that the phrase ‘except for his feet’ might have been added later lest Jesus’ foot-washing is discredited – see Schnackenburg, St John 3, p. 20.


27 Some scholars believe that the verb ‘to be bathed’ refers to baptism and the washing of the feet refers to the eucharist or even to penance (see Schnackenburg, St John 3, p. 401 n. 57; for a reference to baptism see R.H. Lightfoot, St John’s Gospel: A Commentary (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), 252; Brown, John XIII–XXI, 566–67). However, sacramental interpretation reflects only the attempt to read into the text to support the Church’s ritual practices. If the eucharist was in John’s mind, why is there no reference to the Words of Institution as well as to bread and wine together? If ‘washing’ denotes baptism, then it implies that one cannot have intimacy with Jesus unless one undergoes the ritual of baptism (13:8) and that baptism makes the recipients completely clean (13:10). Sacramental interest does not seem to be the concern of the passage.
word. We can also say that even today Jesus' followers remain cleansed by the words of Jesus proclaimed in the Church's proclamation and by his blood poured out on the cross. However, they need continuous cleansing by Jesus' word (17:17) and Spirit (7:38–39) so that they might remain united in his love. Thus, the 'first interpretation' of Jesus' foot-washing makes it clear that no one can exercise servanthood without becoming clean first by Jesus' words and redemptive work, and allowing him to continue his work of inner cleansing. In other words, those who have experienced the salvation found in Jesus and allow him to deal with them continuously can, by nature, exhibit the quality of servant-leadership. For, as Ridderbos comments, by his symbolic act of foot-washing, Jesus presents himself to his disciples for all time as the one who came as a servant and thus foot-washing represents Jesus' servanthood.

Nevertheless, not all who came into contact with Jesus became eventually clean. For example, Judas Iscariot could not become fully clean, although he was one of 'his own' (13:10b, 11). Instead of yielding himself to Jesus for cleansing, he gave himself up to fulfill the plan of the devil to betray his teacher (vv. 2, 11). Therefore the foot-washing and Judas's close association with Jesus became ineffective to train him to live in the world as a leader - a servant-leader. At the end, he was led into darkness by being separated from the company of Jesus forever (13:30). So also, all those who have experienced the salvation of Jesus are not eventually equipped to become servant-leaders in the world unless they yield themselves without reservation to live in fellowship with the master by acknowledging his love and service every day. Those who do not reflect Jesus' attitude of love, humility, and service finally join hands, consciously or unconsciously, with the enemies of Christ, pushing themselves to lead a life of worthlessness and destruction. On the other hand, we can cite at least two women in John, who loved Jesus and rendered service to him when Jesus was at the threshold of his death and who later became the leaders of two different house churches in Asia Minor. They are Martha who 'was serving' (12:2) and Mary who anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped them with her hair (12:3; 11:2) It is Jesus' cleansing power that makes his 'beloved' the servant-leaders!

Conclusions

At a time when there was leadership crisis both in Jewish and Christian circles in the late first century AD, John presents Jesus not merely as the Christ, King, Shepherd, Lord, and Teacher, but more as an exemplary leader who expressed his leadership qualities by love, humility, simplicity, and sacrificial service. Jesus sought to train, motivate, and influence those who were committed to him to become leaders with servant attitude. As their Lord and Teacher, he loved 'his own' till the end and expressed his love by doing a slave's work of washing their feet. This shows that he put human values first and led them to

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28 Cf. Schnackenburg, St John 3, p. 22, who regards v. 10a as a little parable, followed by an application to the disciples.

29 See Ridderbos, John, 460.


31 Ridderbos, John, 460–62.

realise their worth in life. The Jesus of John’s Gospel is the leader par excellence whose authority flowed from his humility and who firmly charged that his servant attitude needs to be emulated by all men and women who belong to him. In other words, by displaying servanthood before his pupils, Jesus sought to build up right attitude and inter-personal relationship in his school. John projects Jesus as a group-centred leader, who worked out the group’s goal as to exhibit God who was revealed in Christ and its objective as to involve in Christian mission to reach out the world with the gospel of love and service.

The foot-washing symbolically points to Jesus’ death on the cross and the cleansing effect of his blood by means of which one can be united with him. Jesus’ humble act, then, was not merely an example for his adherents to follow, but also an effective means of communicating the truth that the one who laid down his life himself becomes the life-giving and enabling source for them to accomplish their mission in the world as servant-leaders. By being a model as well as the enabler, the servant-leader proves himself as the supreme leader who is capable of making others the servant-leaders. In this sense, Jesus, portrayed in John, is a unique figure whose leadership quality surpasses that of the earthly leaders.

It is imperative for human beings to become clean by Jesus’ words and Spirit and allow him to cleanse them continuously by his blood shed on the cross. Only by yielding oneself fully to the dealings of Jesus can one be united with him in love and fellowship. If anything, it is the servant attitude which is the common bond and the unifying factor between Jesus and his followers. By narrating the story of foot-washing, John calls the people of his time to believe in a suffering messiah whose death and resurrection provide the ground and source for effective leadership. Any leadership that is not rooted in the death and resurrection of Jesus will lead to self-glory, insecurity, and authoritarianism. Without union with the servant-leader, Christians today can hardly prove themselves to be typical leaders.

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