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GETTING OUR FEET WET: A Response

Laura J. Schmidt

Zorrilla begins his paper by asserting that "the literary and theological cohesion in the Fourth Gospel is found in the Christological understanding of the life and the practice of Jesus." Thus, his exploration of the theological content is conducted primarily in terms of literary analysis. Zorrilla identifies an overarching chiasmic form in chapters 13-17, the center of which is a unity with Jesus "before the hatred of the world" in chapter 15. He sees broad parallels between references to Jesus' death in chapters 10, 13, and 15. He highlights the familiar Johannine structure of a sign or action followed by discursive material, as well as the structural elements of the traditional farewell form which are present in chapters 13-17. Chapter 13 itself is identified as another chiasm, the center of which is the commitment to Jesus (vv. 18-20). One section is described as having a lineal form (13:1-20). The introduction (13:1-3) contains yet another chiasm, this time centered in what are identified as "sentences of partici-

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pation" (vv. 1b-2).

Thus, the method of this paper is not a traditional historical-grammatical analysis but a literary and structural one. Recognizing this as one way to take the text seriously, one may yet raise some questions. There is finally no text apart from a read text. We can appeal to the text as our authority but still must determine which reading of the text functions for us. The method of this paper finds meaning at the literary level, and its elucidation requires some fairly elaborate structures. What is left if the reader does not buy into, or is not trained to navigate, these elaborate structures? What then? The same criticism might be made of any other type of analysis of the text, which leads me to ask, more broadly, at what level do we find meaning in the text? Is there a preferred level at which Scripture is authoritative? The text of John 13 has had many interpretations, by many different methods, throughout history. Does this mean there really are many ways to read a text? And if so, how relevant is the question of method? Does method reign supreme? And if it does not, what does?

Addressing the "Now" and "Later"

This question of the level at which we find meaning relates to a second question regarding historical distance. Zorrilla references the temporal tension of "now" and "later" in John's gospel. For him this seems to indicate the difference between the misunderstanding of Jesus' words and identity before his crucifixion and resurrection, and their meaning as recognized by the post-resurrection believers. How do we address the "now" and "later" of the historical distance between the text and us? Some texts have a more direct application; others are more historically bound. How do we know a text applies both then and now? The method of this paper has been to assume an essential similarity between Jesus' disciples and us, and thus to assume there is little [if any] historical distance to be bridged in appropriating this text. Zorrilla observes that "the element of continuity between the hearers of the testament of Jesus and the readers of this testament is real and genuine through the Spirit sent, and because each one has been a witness and continues testifying of Jesus in the world." But how do we know this text applies both then and now? What are the markers in the text, or our presuppositions as readers, which allow us to assume similarity between ourselves and Jesus' disciples? And, at least as importantly, what are the markers or presuppositions regarding the differences between ourselves and Jesus' disciples? How do the questions of similarity and difference impact our appropriation of texts?

Third, the notion of differences between ourselves and Jesus' disciples leads me to observe that we are all, Jesus disciples then and us now,

different from Jesus himself. This paper makes clear that Jesus' act is an example, a model of sacrificial love and service for all who follow Jesus. Yet Zorrilla also clearly understands the footwashing as an expression of Christological revelation. He observes that "Jesus' action results in the cleansing or purification of the disciples." This aspect of what the event accomplishes is not meant as an example for us or the disciples, but rather is unique to Jesus' action. While considerable energy is spent unpacking some ways in which we are to take Jesus as a model, little attention is given to exploring the implications of his unique contribution as the Christ. In interpreting texts with explicit Christological content, must we not have an approach which also allows us to explore the ways in which Jesus is not a model for us. We might even ask to what extent is identification with Jesus a helpful hermeneutical model for dealing with highly Christological texts.

Probing the Methodical Collapse of Differences

It strikes me that this methodological collapse of differences leads to several conclusions which need to be probed further. First, to the extent that the footwashing is a sign of the cross, it is nonrepeatable by us. Here, where the Christological significance is most clear, our dissimilarity to Jesus is most obvious. Does Jesus' "washing us" accomplish something which our washing of each other does not? If so, does our identification with Jesus differ fundamentally from our identification (or "solidarity" as Zorrilla terms it) with each other?

Zorrilla determines that "to have part with Jesus" is "to form a part with those crucified in our history today." But can we so easily collapse the difference between the crucified Christ and the crucified of the world? Does our identification with Jesus Christ differ fundamentally from an identification with the crucified of the world? It may be argued that the latter should grow out of the former, but is a simple identification between the two tenable? Also, in John's gospel, the world very clearly hates Jesus and his followers. How does this view of the world relate to the notion of identifying with the crucified of the world? Can we draw the latter principle from the text under examination?

Finally, Zorrilla asserts that "to have part with Jesus' is also to participate in the way to Calvary, it is to wet your feet." What is meant by "getting your feet wet" or being a community "with its feet in the water?" How does the direction of the action in these phrases fit with the direction of the action in the text, where the disciples receive the action from Jesus, and are instructed to receive it from each other as well? Is "getting our feet wet" the same as having our feet washed?

FINDINGS: APPROPRIATING THE BIBLICAL TEXT

We are Agreed that:

1. The Bible is the authoritative and normative guide for faith and life.
2. There are more and less accurate interpretations of biblical texts.
3. All reading/interpretation of the Bible begins with a question, with a world view.
4. Interpretation involves dialogue between the text and the interpreter.
5. We need to use multiple methods in interpretation; both historical and literary methods are helpful for a fuller understanding of the text.
6. We move from then to now, from understanding the text in its original context to its meaning today.
7. Our respective social and professional locations impact how we think about biblical interpretation and the application of the text to life.
8. It is important to think homiletically and pedagogically about how to use texts in our schools and in the life of the church.

We are Disagreed about:

1. Whether a text has one meaning or multiple meanings.

Issues that Need further Conversation:

1. Whether the meaning we interpret is that of the original author (authorial intent) or the canonical form of the text.
2. Whether we study texts by moving from the structure of the entire writing to specific texts, or by focusing intensively on the meaning of specific texts apart from their larger literary genres and structures (the methodological difference between Matties, Dyck, Poetker and Zorrilla vs. Geddert and Guenther).
3. How much we can determine of the original meaning of texts, e.g., Allen Guenther vs. Harold Dyck's reading of Deuteronomy 24:1-5.
4. How to bridge the gap between meaning "then" and "now," and about how to move from one context to another. How much historical distance is there between "then" and "now?"

Findings Committee members: John E. Toews, chair; Ken Esau, Lynn Jost, and Katrina Poetker. The committee reported the findings to the participants during the consultation, heard responses, and returned a revised and approved version.

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5. Whether, and if so how, application consists of more than distilling principles from the text.
 6. The relationship of understanding and obedience, or the role of a hermeneutics of obedience.
 7. How our theology of inspiration influences our views and approaches to the interpretation of biblical texts.
 8. The meaning and usefulness of “reader response criticism.”

We have Questions about:

1. How to exegete the culture/church/our students in the same way we exegete biblical texts.
2. Whether there are schools of thought, e.g., speech act theory, that could help us understand and advance our hermeneutical questions and struggles the way earlier schools of thought helped the church resolve theological and interpretive issues.
3. Where we as teachers in the church go from this Consultation regarding biblical interpretation.