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## John's Gospel and the Ethics of Freedom and Love

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## FIFTEEN

# John's Gospel and Hope

*Ethics of Freedom and Love*

Alexandre A. Martins, M.I.

The Gospel of John is often read in light of particular differences from the Synoptic Gospels. One of these particularities, and at the same time one of the biggest challenges for interpreting the Fourth Gospel, is the evasive character of the ecclesial community, whose experiences produced the Johannine tradition. It seems that this community sought to incarnate an ethical way of living the teaching of Jesus, strengthened by an experience of his resurrection that allowed them to participate in “mystical union with God.”<sup>1</sup> There is a great debate, however, about whether or to what extent it is possible to talk about ethics in John's Gospel. This debate has become more intense in the last decade and has led to many publications about the topic.<sup>2</sup>

A related issue in Johannine scholarship, which has likewise caused dissension, is the Gospel's eschatology. Some biblical scholars affirm that John's Gospel contains a realized eschatology; others argue that John's eschatology is not totally realized in the time of the Gospel's setting (see Jn 16:12–14), and that there is something that will happen in the future. Synthesizing these positions, one might say that John's Gospel provides an eschatology of the “now and not yet.”

In this paper, I join these two Johannine emphases—its ethics of freedom and love and its mixed eschatology—to construct a framework that can assist moral reflection in our time. Motivated by the significant efforts of theologian Lúcas Chan to join biblical studies and theological ethics,<sup>3</sup> this paper will suggest that the Johannine community *did* have an

ethics—one of freedom and love, which was grounded in an experience of and an encounter with Jesus of Nazareth, and by which it ordered its common life. This ethic of freedom and love flowed forth from the gratitude and joy of experiencing God in Jesus and having the certainty of salvation. In particular, I will argue that the commandment to love one another in humble service, carried out in a relation of gratitude to God because of his gift in Jesus, forms the basis of a Johannine ethics that offers an important witness in the Church today.

Johannine ethics are also critically shaped by the community's eschatology. The "now and not yet" vision of the end cast the community's life in an atmosphere of hope, in which the disciples of Jesus could live their moral lives. The Fourth Gospel is animated by the logic of an ethical life sustained by freedom and joy in the expectation of a future completion of salvation. The content of this ethics, rooted jointly in the Johannine community's experience of Jesus and eschatology, can be called *expectant love-service*.

To unpack this thesis, this essay is divided into three parts. First, I investigate more deeply several unique aspects of the ethical discourse in John's Gospel. Second, I offer a short exegetical case study, using Jn 11:1–54 to understand the eschatological perspective and hope of John's Gospel. Third, I constructively discuss the implication of the eschatology of "now and not yet" for ethical life, synthesizing the vocabulary of the Fourth Gospel with the language of virtue ethics.

## ETHICS IN JOHN'S GOSPEL

John's Gospel contains peculiarities that make it different from the other biblical writings, especially the Synoptic Gospels. Even though all four Gospels recount the life of Jesus, the author of John's Gospel tells it in a unique way, with a perspective and narratives that one cannot find in Mark, Matthew, and Luke.

One well-known peculiarity of John's Gospel is the fact that Jesus appears not to provide any ethical discourse, as he does in the other gospels (e.g. Mt 5–7). This makes constructing an ethics from John's Gospel a complex task. Wayne A. Meeks, for instance, argues that John's Gospel has no ethical reference nor instruction. He claims that even the "new commandment" (Jn 13:34) is too vague to affirm that the author of John is referring to an ethical instruction.<sup>4</sup> Richard Burrige and Michael Labahn, however, disagree with Meeks. They assert that it is possible to discern an ethical perspective in the Fourth Gospel, even if it uses a different mode of expression than the Synoptic Gospels. Burrige admits there is no "explicit moral instruction" in John, as we find it in the Synoptic Gospels;<sup>5</sup> however, we learn about Jesus's ethics from his life and teaching.<sup>6</sup> Michael Labahn similarly affirms that "love is a basic ethical

criterion"<sup>7</sup> and the entire community life of Jesus's followers is based on this criterion. In addition, he presents the idea that love is not something vague, nor is it simply nice speech, but rather that in John, love is an action, grounded in faith, through which the Johannine community builds its identity of a mutual and egalitarian relationship.<sup>8</sup> Although controversial, then, scholars are gradually beginning to recognize that it is possible to speak of an ethics in the Fourth Gospel.

Many scholars have claimed that the peculiarity of John's ethics reflects the contextual and cultural situation of a specific community, having its own unique history of the faith and encounter with Jesus. This community lived in a context of conflict, struggling to find its own identity. Specific elements in John's Gospel play a central role in illuminating its ethical perspective and the life of the Johannine community. These elements contribute to a different picture of Jesus's mission than the one found in the Synoptics and have ethical implications for the entire community in its specific socio-cultural context. As Lindsey M. Trozzo suggests, the identity of the community is shaped by its belief in Jesus and his unity with the Father, and that this unity extends to Jesus's followers. Thus, she argues, "central to the Johannine presentation of ethics is the idea that Jesus's unity with the Father is extended to the believers. This unity offers the believers a new identity and mission that determines their actions in the world."<sup>9</sup> The ethics of John's Gospel are not grounded on following this or that specific teaching, presented as a commandment, nor merely in imitating Jesus; rather the implication is that the belief in Jesus supernaturally produces a practice of love-service within the community that reflects the unity between the Father and the Son and mysteriously allows the community to participate in that unity.

In addition to Jesus's discourses, the narratives of the Fourth Gospel allow—and in fact, facilitate—an encounter between the text and the reader, meant to influence the thoughts and actions of the community members. Trozzo names it *moral efficacy* because the stories in the text are meant to influence the moral behavior of those who read it.<sup>10</sup> Some of these stories narrate the miraculous actions of Jesus. John presents seven sign-miracles that show the faith of a community where the Gospel author (or authors) was certainly an active member. Two unique Johannine narratives, the miracle in Cana and the raising of Lazarus, present the faith of this community as an experience of being with Jesus: a process that leads one to believe in him as the Son of Man.<sup>11</sup> From of the grave of this friend Lazarus, Jesus affirms he is "the resurrection and the life" (Jn 11: 25). This life is not merely something that will happen in the future, but a new life that begins now for those who believe in him. Those who do not believe in Jesus do not have this experience of a new life, and these people are enemies of Jesus.

This ethical approach to John's Gospel requires a theological comprehension of the Gospel's literary structure. The first part of the Gospel

recounts narratives of Jesus's miracles, presented by the author(s) as signs and known as the *Book of Signs* (Jn 1:19–12:50). These signs, and the Christology they signify, are meant to create a kind of encounter between the reader and Jesus that provides “a more gradual approach to becoming a follower of Jesus”<sup>12</sup> than direct deontological mandate.

The second part of the Gospel, the *Book of Glory* (Jn 13–20), is also essential to understanding ethics in John. This book contains the declaration of the central ethical principle for this community of followers of Jesus: the “love commandment” (Jn 13:21–38). John's Gospel does not present a moral discourse of Jesus as one finds in the Synoptic Gospels, such as the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:1–7:29 and Lk 6:17–49). However, Jesus has frequent, long speeches in John, especially in his farewell discourse (Jn 13:31–17:26), where the love commandment is placed. These discourses have theological and practical implications. They reveal that the love commandment has a divine origin with historical, practical implications.

Love in John's Gospel is not an abstract concept nor a vague notion. The foot-washing narrative (Jn 13:1–17) serves as the foundation of the ethics of love, showing what loving one another means concretely.<sup>13</sup> Once more, Jesus's life and actions are the model of the ethical life of the Johannine community, as well as the source of its empowerment. The love commandment is a virtue expressed through service. The foot washing is a symbol of Jesus's ministry and an example of loving service for his disciples to follow.<sup>14</sup> It is an active love that cannot be separated from faith in Jesus, who he is, and what he reveals.<sup>15</sup> So the Christological perspective of the gospel has a crucial role for an ethical approach to John's Gospel.<sup>16</sup>

To summarize, it is possible to find an attention to ethics in John's Gospel, even an ethics that is not entirely vague. However, discerning John's ethical teaching requires approaching the text in a specific way, especially if we compare this gospel with the others. John's ethics have their roots in Jesus and his relationship of love and service to God and his disciples. John's ethics is Christological, as his central virtue (love) has a theological origin in the relationship between Jesus and the Father, as well as practical implications from Jesus's ministry of service. As we will see in the next section, it is also through Jesus that the Father empowers the community to experience anticipated joys that create an atmosphere of hope to live the love commandment in freedom.

#### HOPE AND REALIZED ESCHATOLOGY IN JN 11:1–54

The raising of Lazarus is a central event in John's Gospel. This sign presents Jesus as light and life in a pedagogical process of growing in faith that begins with a misunderstanding. Raymond E. Brown suggests

that the raising of Lazarus, the seventh sign, has a distinct structure from the six previous ones.<sup>17</sup> In the other signs, the Johannine author usually presents Jesus performing a miracle. Following the miracle, Jesus offers an explanatory discourse and a controversy dialogue ensues. In the seventh sign, however, the explanation occurs throughout the whole narrative, in dialogues between Jesus and his disciples, Jesus and Martha, and Jesus and Mary.<sup>18</sup> There are misunderstandings that require a process of growing in faith, which typically happens following Jesus's explanations in the other signs.<sup>19</sup> In Jn 11:1–54, the author modifies his pattern, but maintains the same portrait of followers growing in faith.

To see how narrative and ethics interrelate in John 11, it will be helpful to look at some specific details of the chapter. The reciprocal movement of the characters, especially Martha and Mary, gives a rhythm to this narrative. While Martha and Mary move to meet with Jesus, he moves to meet with death. Jesus will meet death to prevail over evil and give life to those who meet him. The death of Lazarus becomes an opportunity for God to reveal his power and glory in the present.

Martha is the figure of a disciple who does not fully understand Jesus's message. She believes in the resurrection on the last day, but Jesus gives life to those who believe in him now. A new life begins in history and extends to eternal life in a single movement. This is the realized dimension of John's eschatology, God's gift to those who believe in his Son. It is the inauguration of a new time within history that extends to eternal life.<sup>20</sup> The realized eschatology and the certainty of eternal life provided a new framework to the Johannine community, which had ethical implications. The incarnation of the *Logos* makes the eschatological gift realizable among those who changed their lives to follow Jesus. The presence of Jesus breaks the retributive logic of relationship with God that shaped a moral life rooted in fear. Now the identity of the community is rooted in Jesus through a relationship of joy and gratitude that shapes their ethics of freedom and love in an atmosphere of hope because the new life begins now in history and extends to eternal life.

### ETHICS OF FREEDOM AND LOVE IN THE "NOW AND NOT YET"

The Johannine community's experience of faith in Jesus was responsible for shaping an atmosphere of hope, wherein members lived out the love commandment in freedom. This commandment was the heart of the Johannine community's ethics, guided by the assistance of the Holy Spirit who ensured the ongoing presence of Jesus in history and anticipated eschatological joys. Beginning from this Johannine perspective, and putting it in dialogue with virtue ethics, I believe we can construct a moral vision that illuminates our life today.<sup>21</sup>

In what follows, I focus on five virtues: *faith, hope, love, humility, and hospitality* within a broadly Thomist framework. I will divide these between *primary virtues* (faith and hope) and *secondary virtues* (love, humility, and hospitality). This division reflects the ethos of the Johannine community,<sup>22</sup> and the language appears more appropriate to our time than the classical categories of cardinal and theological virtues championed by Aquinas.

*Primary virtues* originate directly from an experience of transcendence. In John's Gospel, they are faith and hope<sup>23</sup> and are responsible for creating a new atmosphere and fostering the practical way to embody the second group of virtues. *Secondary virtues* express the identity of the community as a practical way to embody a moral life in the world. In this schema, these are love, humility, and hospitality. Secondary virtues are rooted in Jesus and are fostered by faith and hope, and the community lives them in an environment of freedom in egalitarian relationships.<sup>24</sup> Both primary and secondary virtues are co-dependent and have an intrinsic connection.

#### *A Virtue Ethics Framework: Character in Relationship*

To complement this picture of Johannine ethics, I want to draw on the resources of virtue ethics. Virtue ethics focus on our ordinary lives,<sup>25</sup> reflecting on how people can improve their moral lives. As James Keenan writes: "The task of virtue is defined . . . as the acquisition and development of practices that perfect the agent into becoming a moral person while acting morally well."<sup>26</sup>

From a virtue ethics perspective, *love, humility, and hospitality* are not simple concepts, but are comprised of concrete practices. *Faith and hope*, on the other hand, foster and sustain these concrete actions from a relationship with Jesus. This seems to be the same perspective that John's Gospel has, since the Gospel's author does not present Jesus *teaching* rules for a moral life, but rather presents Jesus *living* these virtues as an example which the community must follow.

The human being is a relational being, limited by time and space. In relationships, everyone constructs his or her personality and identity in a context that also shapes his or her identity. The first vocation of all human beings is to *be* human in their relation to others and everything that exists in the world. Consequently, human beings have basically three kinds of relationships: relationships of objectivity, relationships of subjectivity, and relationships of transcendence.<sup>27</sup>

A *relationship of objectivity* happens between a person and an object that he or she finds in the world. This relation is instrumental, in that the human person uses everything that exists in the world to build a structure to support his or her life. The second type of relationship is a *relationship of subjectivity*; this kind of relationship exists between two or more

people. Social life happens in these types of relationships; all members are subjects/agents rather than instruments to be manipulated by others. If a person uses another as an instrument, he or she will be dehumanizing another human making him or her an object. This is an oppressive relationship. The moral life occurs amid human beings in relations of subjectivity. Human beings need these kinds of relationships to build their social and cultural world, which is not possible only through relations of objectivity. The third form of relationship is a *relationship of transcendence*. This happens between a person and "something" bigger than his/her historical existence.<sup>28</sup> Speaking sociologically, a relationship of transcendence is connected to a person's cultural background and is concretized within a group based on shared values and religious experiences. Speaking theologically, a relationship of transcendence exists between a human person and a *trans-mundane* and *trans-historic* reality<sup>29</sup> that provides meaning to his or her existence and, at the same time, will give meaning to social life. These relationships create conditions for values to be embodied by members of a social group while these values open to an experience of transcendence.

The Aristotelian-Thomist tradition argues that moral life is guided by universal principles originating in an unwritten law. This law generates the values of various cultures, insofar as it is experienced in relations of transcendence. These values are lived in society through virtues that, at the same time, make a value concrete in real life. Faith, hope, love, humility, and hospitality are the values that ground the experience of the meaning in Christian life. According to the previous anthropological perspective, these five virtues entail concrete acts, carried out in the relations of subjectivity. They are virtues originating relations of transcendence. Therefore, as virtues, faith, hope, love, humility and hospitality are not concepts, but concrete ways to live morally in a cultural and historical context. This constant return to the experience of transcendence is necessary to sustain hope and the moral life in freedom. In the Christian tradition, this experience and foundation are not possible without faith in Jesus. Thus, I argue that the experience of the Johannine community expressed in the Gospel does not provide a deontological moral code, nor has one to shape their moral identity. Rather the moral life of the community is grounded on a relationship of transcendence with Jesus who shapes an ethics of freedom and love.

### *Returning to John's Gospel with a Virtue Ethics Approach*

In the Synoptic Gospel tradition, ethical relations of transcendence and subjectivity can be expressed by the double love commandment: "love God" and "love your neighbor as yourself." The Fourth Gospel has only one moral rule: the love commandment rooted in the experience of Jesus and transformed into practice. While John's Gospel thus lacks the

double love command in Synoptic terms, a similar ethical logic is operative in the narrative. From the experience of God's love and grace—right relationships of transcendence—the community receives a pattern to be emulated. When Jesus says: “love one another,” he does not define love, but he says: “Love one another as I have loved you” (Jn 13:34). In addition, after Jesus has washed the feet of his disciples, he affirms: “I have given you an example so that you may copy what I have done to you” (Jn 13:15). Love is washing one another's feet; in other words, love is not merely a feeling, but an act of humble service. The experience of transcendence supplies the language of love with an ethical content. Love comes from God and becomes visible in a concrete life when someone embodies love. In the relation of transcendence, one finds the origin and the meaning of love.

John's narratives describe an experience of faith in Jesus that forms the identity of the Johannine community and shapes how this community lives morally.<sup>30</sup> *Love-service* is how the community embodies the love command rooted in the experience of encounter with Jesus and his example. The foot-washing passage best reflects what love, humility, and hospitality mean inside the Johannine community. This pericope (Jn 13:1–17) reveals foot washing as an ethical foundation.<sup>31</sup> Jesus washed the feet of his disciples as an act of love and humble service, performing a gesture of hospitality that was usually done by a servant. He wanted to show what love means and to leave an example to be followed.

Therefore, love and humility work together in practice as service. They are values that constitute the Johannine community's identity. Originating in the experience of anticipated eschatological joys, hope provides an atmosphere that makes Jesus's disciples free and thankful. Consequently, love becomes a concrete expression of this gratitude and freedom that the community practices through humble service.<sup>32</sup>

### *Virtue Ethics and Our Current World*

Having synthesized Johannine ethics with virtue ethics, I now look to ways that faith, hope, love, humility, and hospitality might play a role in forming our ecclesial communities in the contemporary world. I propose a simple scheme using these five virtues and suggesting their respective correspondences with five other virtues (including three of the Cardinal virtues) and five targets.

Quoting Paul Ricoeur, James Keenan affirms: “Love and justice must define one another; alone each virtue is insufficient.”<sup>33</sup> I apply a similar logic to suggest that faith and gratitude mutually define one another, leading to freedom; similarly, that hope and courage lead to transformative action in the world; that hospitality and caring lead to an egalitarian community; and that humility and prudence lead to dialogue in a pluralist world.

Virtue A	Virtue B	Target
Faith	Gratitude	Freedom
Hope	Courage	The World
Love	Justice	The Poor
Hospitality	Caring	The Community
Humility	Prudence	Dialogue

**Figure 15.1. Five Johannine Virtues, Corresponding Virtues, and Targets.**  
Source: Alexandre A. Martins

The Christian life arises from the experience of faith in Jesus Christ that gives a real hope and makes the disciples of Jesus free. John's Gospel tells how this experience of faith led a community to live an ethic of freedom and love rooted in Jesus. The anticipated joys of a realized eschatology and the certainty of salvation in the future create an atmosphere of hope in which the community moves. This atmosphere is sustained by the Holy Spirit who ensures the ongoing presence of Jesus in history and enables this new community of joy and salvation. The Holy Spirit is responsible for the experience of faith that frees all Christians to live the love-service as a sign of gratitude.

Living an ethics of freedom and love remains one of the greatest challenges for the Catholic Church presently. Unfortunately, some Catholic environments still reflect an ethics of fear by fostering a relationship with God as a vertical authority. John's ethics of freedom and love invites the Church to rethink her vertical structure and move toward an atmosphere of hope and freedom in which the Christian community expresses its faith by a love-service and a moral life rooted in Jesus, not in an ecclesial authority. As *Lumen Gentium* affirms, the Church is the People of God who follow Jesus Christ in history.<sup>34</sup> This suggests a community of equals inside a horizontal form of authority.

The ethics of freedom and love in the Johannine community was possible because of the experience of faith in Jesus as light and life in the world. It recalls the experience of joy and salvation by Jesus's disciples in their historical time. Looking back to this original experience in our own day opens us to the action of the Holy Spirit in creating an atmosphere of hope for the Christian community to embody an ethics of freedom and love, a sign that a new world of justice, dialogue, and tolerance is possible.

## NOTES

1. Lindsey M. Trozzo, *Exploring Johannine Ethics: A Rhetorical Approach to Moral Efficacy in the Fourth Gospel Narrative* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck: 2017), 185.

2. During many years, Johannine scholarship ignored the understanding of ethics in the Fourth Gospel. Some scholars even affirmed that this effort was not possible because this Gospel did not have ethical commandments. The volume edited by Jan G. van der Watt and Ruben Zimmermann opened again the question on Johannine ethics by showing that there is an ethical teaching in this gospel. See: Jan G. van der Watt and Ruben Zimmermann, eds., *Rethinking the Ethics of John: "Implicit Ethics" in the Johannine Writings*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 1.291 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012). Following this significant publication for Johannine studies, other recent publications have also addressed Johannine ethics. See, e.g., Christopher W. Skinner and Sherri Brown, eds., *Johannine Ethics: The Moral World of the Gospel and Epistles of John* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017); and Christina Hoegen-Rohls and Uta Poplutz, eds., *Glaube, Liebe, Gespräch: Neue Perspektiven johanneischer Ethik*, Biblisch-Theologische Studien 178 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2018). I also suggest the monograph, *Exploring Johannine Ethics: A Rhetorical Approach to Moral Efficacy in the Fourth Gospel Narrative*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2.449 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck: 2017).

3. Lúcas Chan was pioneer in developing a hermeneutic approach that connected biblical studies and theological ethics. See (Yiu Sing) Lúcas Chan, S.J., "A Hermeneutical Proposal: A Hermeneutic of Virtue Ethics," in *A Lúcas Chan Reader: Pioneering Essays on Biblical and Asian Theological Ethics*, ed. G. Griener, and J. F. Keenan, S.J. (Bengaluru, India: Dharmaram, 2017), 65–91.

4. Wayne A. Meeks, "The Ethics of the Fourth Evangelist," in *Exploring the Gospel of John*, ed. R. A. Culpepper and C. C. Black (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 317–26.

5. Richard Burrige, *Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 291.

6. Burrige, *Imitating Jesus*, 292.

7. Michael Labahn, "'It's Only Love'—Is that All? Limits and Potential of Johannine Ethics—A Critical Evaluation of Research," in Watt and Zimmermann, *Rethinking the Ethics of John*, 3–43, at 4.

8. Labahn, "It's Only Love," 22, 26.

9. Trozzo, *Exploring Johannine Ethics*, 185.

10. Trozzo, *Exploring Johannine Ethics*, 15.

11. New studies on Johannine ethics have shown that belief/faith in Jesus and his relationship with the Father is a moral act for the Johannine community. See Cornelis Bennema, "Virtue Ethics and the Johannine Writings" in Skinner and Brown, *Johannine Ethics*, 261–81, at 267.

12. Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., *Following Jesus: What the New Testament Teaches Us* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2012), 37.

13. Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (New York: Harper, 1996), 344.

14. Burrige, *Imitating Jesus*, 300.

15. Labahn, "It's Only Love," 31.

16. Trozzo affirms that the Fourth Gospel provides a Christological answer for the ethical question. According to her, "Christology elicits belief, and belief is the bridge to a proper ethical perspective and thus to proper behavior in the world" (*Exploring Johannine Ethics*, 94).

17. Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 2 vols., AB 29/29a (Garden City, NY.: Doubleday, 1981), 1.419.

18. Charles H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), 363.

19. Harrington, *Following Jesus*, 36–37.

20. According to Charles H. Dodd, Jn 11:25–26 presents a realized eschatology and also affirms a future eschatology (*Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, 356).

21. Approaching John from a virtue ethics perspective remains a field to be explored. While Johannine ethics scholarship continues developing, new perspectives open for explorations in virtue ethics. One of the initial studies relating virtue ethics and Johannine ethics is Bennema, "Virtue Ethics and the Johannine Writings," 261–81.

22. About the ethos of the Johannine community, see: Jan G. van der Watt, "Ethics and Ethos in the Gospel According to John," *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der Älteren Kirche* 97, no. 2 (2006): 147–76.

23. Some may question why love is not a primary virtue since God is love according to Johannine literature. As a clarification, love *can* be present as a primary virtue, just as Aquinas defines love as a theological virtue. However, love in John is defined in a practical way and as an example that should be followed. Therefore, love is more an altruistic practice than a personal experience in the Fourth Gospel. This altruistic practice is rooted in a faith in Jesus that is a concrete expression of God's love.

24. Equality is a central character of the Johannine community. See Johannes Nissen, "Community and Ethics in the Gospel of John," in *New Readings in John: Literary and Theological Perspectives from the Scandinavian Conference on the Fourth Gospel in Åhrus 1997*, ed. idem and S. Pedersen, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series* 182 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999), 194–212, esp. 210–11.

25. (Yiu Sing) Lúcas Chan, S.J., *The Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes: Biblical Studies and Ethics for Real Life* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012), 10. Virtue ethics has more interest in ordinary life. However, some scholars have used the virtue ethics perspective to reflect bioethical dilemmas such as genetic engineering and enhancement. See: James F. Keenan, S.J., "Whose Perfection Is It Anyway? A Virtuous Consideration of Enhancement," *Christian Bioethics* 5, no. 2 (1999): 104–20.

26. James F. Keenan, "Proposing Cardinal Virtue," *Theological Studies* 56, no. 4 (1995): 711.

27. I develop this anthropological conception in a previous essay. See Alexandre A. Martins, "Antropologia Integral e Holística: Cuidar do Ser e Busca de Sentido," *Revista Bioethikos* 3, no. 1 (2009): 87–99.

28. The Brazilian philosopher Henrique de Lima Vaz, S.J., develops a deep reflection about the relation of transcendence from a scholastic perspective. He presents how this relation has happened in the early history of Christianity. See Henrique de Lima Vaz, "Transcendência: Experiência Histórica e Interpretação Filosófico-Teológica," *Síntese: Nova Fase* 19, no. 59 (1992): 443–60.

29. Lima Vaz, "Transcendência," 444.

30. Johannes Nissen, "Community and Ethics in the Gospel of John," 198.

31. Patrick J. Hartin, "Remain in Me (John 15.4): The Foundation of the Ethical and Its Consequences in the Farewell Discourses," *Neotestamentica* 25, no. 2 (1991): 341–56, esp. 344–45.

32. There is a debate about whether mutual-love as a commandment is to be embodied only inside the Johannine community, considering the sectarian nature of this community argued by some New Testament scholars such as Wayne A. Meeks; or whether non-community members are included as well. The way love is shown in the Gospel as a service to others leads me to understand that this community also affirms a love-service that goes beyond its own borders. In a detailed examination of the language of love in Johannine literature, Jörg Frey presents a semantic connection between John's love language and Jesus's public ministry, farewell discourses, and the passion narrative. Based on this semantic analysis, Frey concludes that Johannine love was not sectarian, but universal. Jörg Frey, "Love-Relations in the Fourth Gospel: Establishing a Semantic Network," in *Repetitions and Variations in the Fourth Gospel: Style, Text, Interpretation*, ed. Gilbert Van Belle, Michael Labahn, and Peter Maritz, *Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium* 223 (Leuven: Peeters, 2009), 171–98.

33. Keenan, "Proposing Cardinal Virtue," 721.

34. See *Lumen Gentium* §§9–10.

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- . "A Hermeneutical Proposal: A Hermeneutic of Virtue Ethics." Pages 65–91 in *A Lúcas Chan Reader: Pioneering Essays on Biblical and Asian Theological Ethics*. Edited by G. Griener, S.J., and J. F. Keenan, S.J. Bengaluru, India: Dharmaram, 2017.
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