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**AN AFRICAN CHRISTIAN CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE SYMBOLIC  
VALUE OF WATER IN THE FOURTH GOSPEL**

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**Abstract**

Water, a universally shared commodity by all religious traditions that is vital for the growth and preservation of life, is a dominant motif and expanding core symbol in the Fourth Gospel. In half of the 21 chapters of the Fourth Gospel, water, water pots, rivers, wells, springs, the sea, pools, basins, thirst and drink are used in context and discourse to provide clues to the symbolic value of water. This symbolic power of water is not only specifically tied to Jewish beliefs but also to African culture. Water is over-determined in the African history, particularly in the African Christianity. Previous studies on water in the Fourth Gospel have focused largely on water serving as an integral cleansing agent for ritual defilement, Christian baptism, and conditional change. However, there is a dearth of literature on the eternal relationship between God and humankind which water as metaphor fosters. The paper, therefore, examines the symbolic value of water in the Fourth Gospel within an African Christian cultural context. This is with a view to establishing water as metaphorical agent of the eternal relationship between God and humans. Abogunrin's approach of Decolonisation of New Testament Interpretation in Africa was adopted. Data are subjected to exegetical analysis. Findings of this study have implications for the African value of the image of water in the African Christianity.

**Keywords:** African value and African Christianity, God and humans relationship, Symbols in the Fourth Gospel, Water in the Fourth Gospel, Water as metaphor

### Water in the Fourth Gospel: An Introduction

The image of water appears very frequently in the Fourth Gospel and with the most varied of associations than any of John's symbols. There are conversations about water, water pots, rivers, wells, springs, the sea, pools, basins, thirst and drink. Context and discourse provides clues to the symbolic value of water in the various passages. While water is a dominant motif and expanding core symbol, it is less unified and more variable than, say light or bread. Water images in Scripture relate to humans stories of creation, conflict, deliverance, repentance, rejection, invitation, healing and praise (Culpepper, 1983: 192).

Ariarajah (1982: 271) claims that water, a universally shared commodity by all religious traditions, is vital for the growth and preservation of life. People from ancient times perceive water as sign and symbol of life itself because a majority of the living organisms having their home in water. Yet, water can also be a threat to life as in the case of thunder storms and floods. In the biblical tradition creation emerges from the waters of chaos (Genesis 1: 2) and in the Exodus experience water serves both as an agent of deliverance and destruction. Although the Noachic flood was a means of destruction, the resultant covenant promised in the rainbow was to be a sign of life to all. In the wilderness wanderings, water became a cause of conflict. While the story of Flood, the drowning of the Egyptians in the Red Sea, and the general fear of the sea and deep waters expressed in Psalm 18: 16; 32: 6; 46: 3; 69: 1ff indicate that water could in Yahweh's hands be an instrument of judgment, it could be thought of, at the same time, as salvation through danger for the faithful people of God in Isaiah 43: 2; 59: 19 (Taylor, 2007: 1232).

Water, in the biblical accounts, describes the relationship between God, nature and humankind. At least half of the 21 chapters of the Fourth Gospel deal with water images. They refer to water in one of the two ways: water symbolises either the blessings of the new age or that of the Holy Spirit in particular (John 4: 10, 14). John's reference to water includes: water of recognition (John 1: 26, 31, 33; 21: 1ff), water of renewal (John 3: 5, 23; 19: 34; 1John 5: 6-8), water of joy (John 2: 1-11), water of life (John 4: 14; 7: 37-39), water of healing (John 5: 1-15; 9: 5,7) and violent water (John 6: 16-21). The use of symbols is a peculiar nature of language in the Johannine writings. Previous studies (Feneberg, 1994: 380-381; Guthrie, 2004: 1021-1965; Tsumura, 2006: 840-841; Tenney, 1964: 121: 13-21; and Joubert, 2007: 92-95) on Johannine language have attempted to interpret John in relation to the other aspects of language use such as signs, metaphors, discourses and apocalyptic concepts. However, John's symbolic use of water imagery, which is major characteristic feature of his writings, has not been given adequate attention from the context of African Christianity. Water is probably the only natural resource that touches all aspects of human civilisation, that is, from agricultural and industrial development to the cultural and religious values embedded in society. The need and demand for water have been a driving force for health, society, economic prosperity, cultural significance, and development throughout human history (Water and Culture, 2019). In the light of this, it is probable that cultural differences play a key role in the way water is perceived, valued and managed in different societies.

The questions arising from the above submission are what is the symbolic value of water in the Fourth Gospel within African Christian cultural context? In what ways can the symbolic value of water in the Fourth Gospel serves as a catalyst to the understanding of this symbol as a metaphorical agent between God and humans in the

African Christian cultural milieu? In attempting to proffer solutions to these questions, the paper adopts Abogunrin's approach of Decolonisation of New Testament Interpretation in Africa, which posits that biblical interpretation must be relevant and meaningful in the context of Africa (Abogunrin, 2005: 267).

### Literature Review

Dunn (1990: 169) says that the symbolic value of water is notified as it represents the old dispensation in contrast to what Jesus offers after his baptism by John the Baptist (John 1: 26, 31 and 33); and the water baptism of John the Baptist is in contrast with the Spirit baptism of Jesus. Indeed, John indicates that his baptism is only to reveal the one who will come (John 1: 31) to baptise with the Holy Spirit (John 1: 33). With this, John establishes the initial connection between water and the Spirit. In this sense, it may seem right to agree with Vandana (1980: 289) when he submits that water serves a double purpose in contrasting the water baptism of John with the Spirit baptism of Jesus and thereby revealing his identity.

For Leon-Dufour (1981: 451) water symbolises the Spirit that is responsible for humans' rebirth, particularly in the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus (John 3: 1-10); this rebirth through the Spirit has been promised for the end time (Joel 2: 28). For instance, in the encounter with Nicodemus, the Fourth Gospel strengthens the spiritual connection (John 3: 5), but with it adds the element of rebirth "from above" (John 3: 3). On this Smith argues, "Probably it would be correct to say that the water imagery of the Fourth Gospel alludes to baptism without referring to it. It evolves the liturgical act without being exhausted by it" (Smith, 1995: 156). The conjunction of water and Spirit express in terms of this metaphorical contrast, reveals God as the originator of this new relationship and consequently points to the recurring water imagery in the Fourth Gospel as symbolic of the salvation that Jesus brings (John 4: 7-42; 7: 37-39; 13: 1-11).

Commenting on the symbolic value of water in the Fourth Gospel, Beasley-Murray (1989: 49) opines that jars of water intended for ritual cleansing of people about to drink became in the hands of Jesus vessels of wine for celebrating the miracle of God (Isaiah 25: 6-9 and John 2: 1-11), in so doing the ordinary water becoming the water of joy. In other words, the water found in Jewish ritual containers, indicates that for John, water becomes much more than an association with a Jewish cleansing ritual. Wine at the wedding is symbolic of the beginning of the possibility of new life in the wedding couple. Thus, water as a symbol becomes something entirely different than what the readers of the Fourth Gospel expect. While water symbolises the purification and life Jesus brings, yet it also signifies an intentional allusion to the sacramental wine in the Synoptic Gospels (Mark 14: 24-25; Matthew 26: 27-29; and Luke 22: 20) (Smith, 1995: 156).

Loepp (2019) claims that the symbol of water in the Fourth Gospel is perhaps the most sophisticated motifs of the Fourth Gospel's penman. The symbol of water is used repeatedly to tie together significant episodes in the Gospel that signal a coming to faith in the lives of the characters that the author wanted to portray. Tenney (1964: 13) asserts that the imagery in the Fourth Gospel is clear, concise and rather limited, and filled with spiritual significance. The author employs it to convey his thought. Consequently, the Fourth Gospel contains some of the profoundest truth in the New Testament, but there are no other writings which express it more simply. Water, a

common staple of life, is illustrative of the indispensability of Christ to Christians. Water is emblematic of eternal life (John 4: 14; 6: 51, 54). On two occasions Jesus used the metaphor of water to convey this truth. On the one hand, it was used for the woman who came to the well of Sychar to draw water for her household (John 4: 10-15). In this context, water is a physical necessity which Jesus used as a picture of the satisfaction for the spiritual dearth of the Samaritan woman. Just as a spring is the source of water in the natural world, so is Jesus the source of "spiritual" water that will satisfy eternally (John 4: 14). With this revelation and the encounter with Jesus, the woman forgets about her task in the natural world (John 4: 28) and attends to relaying her revelation of the Messiah (John 4: 29). Through the encounter with Jesus which began with a discussion about water, she and others come to believe in the true identity of Jesus (John 4: 39-42). As a result, Jesus offered her an unfailing spring of joy, constantly pouring out refreshing life, thereby receiving spontaneous joy by believing in Jesus Christ. On the other hand, water was used for the crowd at the Feast of Tabernacles when they assembled at the temple for the ceremonial pouring of the libation. Water, the symbol of the libation, at the Feast of Tabernacles memorialises God's provision for His people in the wilderness. The ritual celebration had become an empty tradition which conferred no individual spiritual potency. The pilgrims went home from the feast without a consciousness of reality; they were still "thirsty."

The symbolic value of water is evident in its usage as agent of healing on the directions of Prophet Elijah (healing of Naaman who was stuck with leprosy in 2Kings 5: 10-14) and particularly Jesus Christ (healing of the paralytic in John 5: 2-9; the restoring sight to the blind in John 9: 1-12). Furthermore, water is connected to the Spirit, washing of eyes and washing of feet. For instance, those who drink water ultimately receive the Spirit after Jesus' death (John 7: 39); the man born blind must wash his eyes to be able to see (John 9); and Mary "washes" Jesus' feet with her hair (John 12: 3), and Jesus washes the disciples' feet (John 13: 3-4).

Troster (2019) posits that water is inextricably intertwined with life...covering over 70% of earth's surface, it was the original channel for the emergence of life itself. Humanity needs an ethic that places a high value on water. Water remains a *sine qua none* of civilization. An attempt to live one day without it, may lead to realize the meaning of dependency. Thus, it is probable to agree with Oestigaard (2005: 7) who affirms that water is the very essence of life; the life-giving waters are for the welfare of society. The numerous and varied ways to express life and humanity are best sought through a comprehensive knowledge of the spheres where water is the main component.

In sum, none of the above studies on Johannine symbols or metaphors gave attention to water as metaphorical agent of the eternal relationship between God and humans from an African Christian cultural perspective. Therefore, an attempt is made to exegete the symbolic value of water in the Fourth Gospel.

### **Exegesis of the Symbolic Value of Water in the Fourth Gospel**

The Fourth Gospel is well-known for its wealth and depth of symbols. John uses different images, prominent among which is water. The theme ὕδωρ, that is developed in John 1 and 2, reaches a convergence in John 3 where ὕδωρ is mentioned only briefly in connection with birth from above (John 3: 5). Burge (1987: 97-99) argues that the Fourth Gospel is the only New Testament writing to mention living water.

Among others, Burge contends that ὕδωρ was a metaphor for the Spirit in both the Old Testament and Rabbinic thought; the Qumran also uses ὕδωρ and Spirit as a metaphor, but from the standpoint of a ritual sense of purification; Jesus referred to ὕδωρ καὶ πνεῦμα in the story of Nicodemus (John 3: 5); the metaphor of the living water depicts the valueless institution which Jesus replaces in his person and the newness he brings.

Exegeting John 4: 10-14 and 7: 37-39 ὕδωρ, as a recurring Johannine core symbol, clearly refers to the Paraclete-Spirit. Koester (2003: 14) contends that those who receive the Paraclete-Spirit or who “drink” Jesus’ teaching will have the Spirit (living water) welling up in their hearts as Jesus promised the Samaritan woman in John 4: 13-14. The water from Jacob’s well could extend life for a while, but τό πηγῇ ὕδατος, “the living water” from Jesus would issue into the everlasting which, according to the Johannine perspective, refers to life lived in relationship with God. Referring to John 4: 1-42, Koester (2003: 14) says “If Jesus is both Messiah and Saviour of the world, the living water is both revelation and the Spirit.” Likewise, Brown (2003: 259) notes that living water is interpreted as a metaphor for “spirit” in the story of Nicodemus (John 3: 5) where Jesus speaks of being born of ὕδωρ καὶ πνεῦμα. The term “being born of the spirit” opens up “the possibility of receiving the eternal life available through Jesus.” Drinking living water means a transition from the “earthly realm” into becoming one of God’s children. The living water, that is, the Holy Spirit that Jesus offers opens up the “possibility of entrance into the realm of God and eternal life by allowing believers a new ascribed honour status as children of God.” In this sense, water could be interpreted as metaphorical agent of the eternal relationship between God and humans.

In addition, water functions as a symbol of cleansing in the Fourth Gospel. For instance, the verbs, *νίπτειν* “to wash,” *βαπτίζειν* “to baptise,” and *ἐκμάσσειν* “to wipe dry” are associated with water in the Fourth Gospel, tend to demonstrate this. During the final ritual at the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem, the priest brought water from the pool of Siloam and poured it in the funnel beside the altar, amid the singing of worshippers. The event was a joyous one, in anticipation of Messiah’s glorious reign (Zechariah 14: 16-21). During that event Jesus proclaimed, *ἐάν τις διψᾷ ἐρχέσθω πρός με καὶ πινέτω. ὁ πιστεύων εἰς ἐμέ, καθὼς εἶπεν ἡ γραφή, ποταμοὶ ἐκ τῆς κοιλίας αὐτοῦ ῥεύσουσιν ὕδατος ζῶντος.* “If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water’” (John 7: 37-38). The next verse gives the expectation: *τοῦτο δὲ εἶπεν περὶ τοῦ πνεύματος ὃ ἐμελλον λαμβάνειν οἱ πιστεύσαντες εἰς αὐτόν· οὐπω γὰρ ἦν πνεῦμα, ὅτι Ἰησοῦς οὐδέπω ἐδοξάσθη* (John 7: 39). Both primary subject, that is, the Paraclete-Spirit and secondary subject such as life-giving water are evident in the above text. While life-giving water as a quality of the Holy Spirit signifies that Jesus Christ is the source of eternal life, anyone that has the Paraclete-Spirit will have life in abundance (John 4: 14; 7: 37-39). Water also signifies a reception of the Holy Spirit (Ezekiel 36: 25-27 and John 7: 39). John 7: 39 announces that the blessings promised to be part of the Messianic Age would come when the Spirit comes (cf. Isaiah 12: 3 and Joel 2: 28-32). Therefore, an attempt to examine the symbolic value of water outside the Fourth Gospel may be of help to the understanding of this symbol.

### **The Symbolic Value of Water outside the Fourth Gospel**

The symbolic value of water is readily understood by most cultures, but is particularly important in the cultural milieu of Palestine where water is used to support life (human, plant and animal) and hygiene. This is explained in the presence of the primeval ocean already existing before creation in the Genesis account (Genesis 1: 2). Furthermore, Jewish rituals utilise water to cleanse the hands before meals (Mark 7: 3) and ritual washings are prescribed in the Old Testament law as signs of cleansing (Leviticus 11: 1-39; 14: 8; and 15: 1-21) (HCBD, 1200-1201). Water is also a symbol of spiritual renewal and refreshment for Israel. This use of water as a symbol in the Old Testament (Ezekiel 36 and Isaiah 44) seems to foreshadowing its powerful use in the Fourth Gospel as a symbol of rebirth. Besides, Judaism is rich with resources that foster an ethic for the respect and protection of water. For instance, in Jewish theology, abundant rain is an expression of divine blessing and approval, a means of measuring Israel's commitment to the covenant, and a matrix from which life emerges (Deuteronomy 11: 10-17). In the final redemption of the Messianic age, Jewish texts eagerly anticipate that water will flow unceasingly in Israel, the deserts will be well-watered, and Israel will contain a river as constant as the Nile. Out of the Temple will flow a great deep river eastward to the Dead Sea, which will itself become fresh water. This river will be full of fish and the Jordan desert will blossom with fruit trees and other creatures. This vision of the desert blooming as part of the national redemption of the people from exile created a powerful image for later Zionism; redemption is found in the verses chosen to begin the *Havdalah* ceremony: "Joyfully shall you draw water from the fountains of salvation (Isaiah 12: 3).

Besides the cultural Palestinian perception of water, it plays a central role in many other religions and beliefs (For instance, in Islam, "We made from water every living thing" in Qur'an 21: 30 is a powerful statement that sums up the importance of water in Islam. In Hinduism, Feldhaus (1995) and Barth (1990) affirm that rivers are not only goddesses but also mothers who protect and feed their children) around the world: water represents source of life and (re)birth. Water cleans the body, and by extension purifies it, and these two main qualities confer a highly symbolic, even sacred, status on water. Water is, therefore, a key element in ceremonies and religious rites. It is often perceived as a god, goddess or divine agency in religions. Rivers, rain, ponds, lakes, glaciers, hailstorms or snow are some of the forms water may take when interpreted and incorporated in cultural and religious spheres. Religious water is neither neutral nor passive. It is considered to have powers and capacities to transform this world, annihilate sins and create holiness. It carries away pollution and purifies both in a physical and symbolical sense. It is a living and spiritual matter, working as a mediator between humans and gods. Water often represents the border between this world and the other.

### **The Symbolic Value of Water from an African Christian Cultural Perspective**

In the past, water attracted the formation of commercial cities and towns along the lakes and coasts of Africa. Africans recognised and respected bodies of water as their source of spirituality. For instance, before Lake Victoria in East Africa was named so by John Hanning Speke, a British officer, it was called Nalubaale, which literally means the home of spirituality. A huge body of water connects Africa to America; and through the conventional systems water connects mountains with valleys, plants with animals, by sharing products or by-products essential to each. Since water facilitates

the natural phenomenon of interdependence, bodies of water were owned and protected by communities, and people worshipped the spirit of water freely. All activities relating to water were conducted in accordance with peoples' customs and cultural beliefs.

The sacredness of water has diverse sources. On the one hand, water provides a shining mirror to the universe and its transparency offers a model and a path to creation. It is through water that humans are physically and spiritually interrelated and interconnected with the living and non-living beings of earth and to the whole of life. On the other hand, water produces synergy and becomes "water as a Being". Oceans, rivers, lakes, ponds, creeks, streams, rains, floods, waves, humidity, wetness, dampness, hurricanes, tornadoes, rainbows, and the teardrops of babies are evident in water.

However, the civilisation of Africa by the Western world changed native people's attitudes and rights to water as a natural resource. The sacred relationship between people and water almost ended with the advent of Western ideology of political governance in Africa. Water became a commodity to be taxed. Commercial fishing was introduced. Corporations were established to process and supply fresh water for payment. Western religious teachings demonised native cultural practices and the indigenous attitude and moral responsibility towards water as a sacred being gradually changed. Their teachings associated African cultural beliefs and practices with Satan and primitivity. In addition, the faith institutions preach the supremacy of a divine being, which is beyond humanity according to the spiritual hierarchies, though humanity is accountable to this divine nature.

In spite of the westernisation of Africa and the teachings of European missionaries in Africa, the symbolic value of water is intrinsically unalterable. Water is still perceived among Africans as one of the mysterious gifts of nature that supports and holds life on earth. Many indigenous communities in Africa knew the value of water and to them water was considered to be the source of life, especially among the Beninois Christians of Benin Republic. In the worldviews of the Gun of Benin republic (Capo-Chichi, 2014), water is seen as food, a means of transport, a ground for recreation or an element for cleansing, purification, initiation in cultural ceremonies, and a sacred being that holds life on earth. This is to say that a seed in the soil does not germinate until it receives water, which demonstrates that it is the spirit of water that ignites the production of life.

In Yoruba episteme water is regarded as the ultimate medicine. Water is the real doctor and pharmacist in Yoruba episteme (Jegade, 2019). According to Jegede, there is no sickness water cannot cure including diabetes, paralysis, gonorrhoea, malaria, haemorrhage, etc. Looking for trees, plants, animals to cure disease is neglecting the potency of water to heal, as these creatures equally depend on it for survival. In Osun-Osogbo, in Southwestern part of Nigeria, water is called *agbo* "prepared medicine for human consumption," "spring forth." Babatunde says, "There was an everlasting covenant between the goddess of the river and the founding fathers of Osogbo land. It was a unique covenant and the covenant cannot be broken. Since we have always honoured our own part, the goddess of the river has to honour hers. Little wonder Osun festival has turned to an international festival that is now celebrated not only in Osogbo or Nigeria, but in some other foreign countries of the world like Brazil and France" (Babatunde, 2015). While killing animals and felling trees can go into extinction, water has the power of 'self-replacement or self-renewing'. There is no

amount of water you take from a runny river or sea that would not be replaced immediately.

In the Yoruba indigenous religion (For example, Idowu (1962) and Awolalu (1979) avers that in the annual Osun Osogbo Festival in Osun State of Southwestern Nigeria, there is a deep rooted age-long belief among the people that the river goddess can cure infertility and it is interesting to see thousands of people across the world gathered to either watch the votary maid empty the sacrificial materials into the river or wash themselves in it. Many people drink from the river, not minding the pollution it is usually subjected to due to the heavy traffic of human legs inside it on the festival day. See "Osogbo agog as the People celebrate yet another Osun Festival") in particular, water, whether of runny streams or from wells, plays inestimable roles (positive or negative) in all forms of divine worship (whether minor or major), ritual ceremonies, and socio-religious rites performed in honour of preternatural beings and on behalf of human beings. It is axiomatic that no ritual takes place without water (Adewale, 1982: 2). Water occupies so significant a position in African indigenous thought that there is hardly any ritual where its use is left out.

The use of water for multipurpose rituals is a response to African Christianity yearning for a form of Christianity that is psychologically, physically, as well as spiritually satisfying, such that demonstrates power. Besides the cultic use of water for multifarious purposes in African Christianity, water is more of an indigenous attempt at making Christianity relevant to an African religious consciousness and worldview. The African worldview gives a spiritual interpretation to virtually all problems of life and as a result seeks for solutions that are equally spiritually based to confront the challenges of life. An average African believes that most problems encountered in life (for instance, barrenness, protracted illness, joblessness and even a common headache) have spiritual roots and can be better solved through spiritual measures. This explains the importance of water rituals for healings, deliverances, and other related forms of spiritual assistance in the African initiated churches.

There is equally a wholesale adoption of the use of water as a source of life to solve varied life problems in African Christianity. African initiated churches, especially the indigenous ones, in their struggle for the contextualisation of Christianity in Africa through incorporation of elements from African indigenous religions into Christianity, attach much more importance to the use of water in their cultic practices than the historic (that is, foreign mission-based) churches or any other church movements in Africa. These churches so much depend on water in their cultic practices that some of them consider it a necessity to locate their church buildings near water sources such as rivers, streams, and oceans. The profuse use of water in these churches has earned them the sobriquet "Water Churches" from some quarters (Fatokun, 2008: 351).

The symbolic value of water is specifically revealed in its cultic use in the African indigenous churches at naming of a child, for sanctification and/or purification, protection, socioethical and moral rehabilitation, and for business.

**The symbolic value of water at naming a child:** In some African indigenous churches like Aladura, water is symbolically employed in praying for divine refreshing, satisfaction, and an abundant flow of blessings into the life of the new born child (cf. Genesis 1). A common Yoruba idiom used in water-ritual prayers is, *Omi ni akoda aiye: ko si alagbara aiye kan tio le eri idi omi tabi ta omi ni koko, nitorna, ko si alagbara kan ti yio ri omo yi mu* "water is the foundation of the earth; no powerful human being



has ever been able to discover the end/secret of the seas." Based on this natural fact, no single human being will be able to harm the child.

**The symbolic value of water for sanctification and/or purification:** The use of water in African Christianity contributes to divine healing, even in cases that have defied Western scientific medical solutions. There have been different testimonies of divine healing from diverse sicknesses and diseases in Southwestern Nigeria through the use of sanctified water. The 1930 revival, in particular, reportedly witnessed the manifestation of the healing and deliverance power of God through the in-take of holy water, and led to the exit of a number of adherents of the indigenous religion from idol worship with its associated barbaric rituals. Olusheye (1983: 20) says, "Hundreds of thousands repented of their sins and accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour." In the words of Adegboyega (1978: 24-25), "the dumb spoke, the lame walked, the deaf heard, lunatics were delivered, lepers were cleansed, [and] long standing years of pregnancies were wonderfully delivered." He further reports that a number of hospitals became empty as patients left for divine healing at crusade grounds. As a consequence of this, the older churches almost became empty as members trooped out to the scenes of the revival. In addition, the use of water is reputed as an effective means of frustrating the activities of witches and wizards, and liberating people from their enemies. Through the use of sanctified water, African initiated churches have rendered witchcraft and sorcery, nefarious activities of witches and wizard posing major threats to African development by rendering a number of African who could have contributed positively to the development of the society useless. Early Pentecostal history in Southwest is full of cases of people set at liberty from the bondage of witches and wizards through the use of sanctified water. In the deliverance perspective of African initiated churches, problems such as poverty, joblessness, barrenness, and late marriage have spiritual roots linked with demonic influences.

Sanctified water is also claimed to have a neutralising effect on those possessed of familiar spirits and people with diabolic powers. Witches, wizards and other cultists who drank the sanctified water in their quest for divine healing (and those who attempted to move near the revival ground with evil intents) were reportedly arrested by the power of the Holy Spirit—falling down and rolling on the floor, vomiting all kinds of objects, including living creatures like tortoise, reptiles and birds (connected in African thought with occultism). These were followed by a series of open confession by witches and wizards. Some witches, in the course of their confession, "held out for others to see, men's genital organs strangely possessed by them" (Alokan, 1991: 63).

**The symbolic value of water for spiritual protection:** water rituals are claimed to be efficacious in providing spiritual protection against any forms of attack. This explains why a number of African Christians frequently employ sanctified water as a protective measure against attacks from enemies. Compounds and doorsteps of residential houses, offices, and business centres are occasionally sprinkled with sanctified water to ward off attacks by robbers and other wicked spirits.

**The symbolic value of water for socioethical rehabilitation and moral reconstruction:** African initiated churches often employ water rituals, alongside moral instructions, in their rehabilitation of those infected with social vices. For instance, drug addicts, street fighters, chain smokers, alcoholics, and others allegedly restored to being useful members of the society through the use of water.

**The symbolic value of water for business:** The use of water provides good business opportunities for people in plastic industries, which to some extent is a

positive contribution to the economic development of the country. A recent survey of demands and supplies in the plastic industries reveals that there is a greater demand for plastic kegs for religious rituals than other uses. This is indeed one of the symbolic values of water for African development. While some plastic sellers, in the market strategy, tactically locate their shops close to the “water churches,” other sellers to the churches located in remote areas use the opportunity for economic exploitation by selling at exorbitant prices.

From the above-mentioned reasons, the symbolic value of water is evident with what water gives and with what water represents to all cultures, especially to African Christianity.

### Conclusion

The paper brings to the fore the ways in which the Fourth Gospel uses water to portray the life Jesus brings, the progression of belief in Jesus Christ; and represents him as the living water and the mediator between God and humans. However, an African Christian cultural perspective symbolises water as (i) a mysterious gift of nature, (ii) doctor and pharmacist, (iii) a source of life, (iv) a custodian of life, (v) a living being, (vi) the border between this world and the other, and (vii) the emblematic of eternal life.

An African Christian cultural perception of water reveals the depth of the eternal relationship between God, humans and water which is at work among the human sphere. Such relationship is made possible through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ on the Cross. This sacrificial love of Jesus fosters an eternal relationship between God and humans, thereby likening the person of Jesus Christ metaphorically to the symbolic value of water.

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