

**JESUS OR MOSES? ON HOW TO KNOW THE MANIFESTATION OF GOD IN JOHN  
9:24-41**

by

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I declare that

JESUS OR MOSES? ON HOW TO KNOW THE MANIFESTATION OF GOD FROM JOHN  
9:24 – 41

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates, via the socio-rhetorical approach, how the Jewish-Christian conflict that occurred during the formative period of early Christianity, and the environment contemporary to the writing of John, took shape around three main questions to which the researcher's answers are given. The event described in John 9 is an historical and significant illustration of the conflict. Jesus is shown rhetorically, by the writer, as the Son of Man, in whom "divine reality" operates away from the temple or other traditionally sacred places like the synagogue, and finds a new locality in the persona of Jesus himself. From a polemical view, John endeavours to portray Jesus as holy man, the only one to mediate heavenly and earthly realities, and that is why Jesus is presented as the real locus of the encounter between God and human beings, a locus of the divine presence, or "the conduit for the transmission of the divine."

## KEY WORDS

Holy man, Moses, Jesus, Son of Man, "to know" or "not to know", *"pisteuein eis"*, Messiah, Manifestation of God, worship, light, Prophet, Man from God, Lord or God, Sabbath, faith and signs, judgment, exegesis, Johannine community, loyalty, Mediterranean world, Graeco-Roman world, Gnosticism, "Jews", Pharisees.

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## CONTENTS

Statement	2
Abstract	3
Dedication	4
Acknowledgements	5
<b>CHAP I INTRODUCTION AND FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY</b>	<b>9</b>
1.1 Introduction of the Study	9
1.1.1 The Scope of the Research	9
1.1.2 The History of the Interpretation of John 9.24-41	11
1.1.3 The Thesis	17
1.1.3.1 The Question of the Holy Man and Divine Mediation	18
1.1.3.2 The Son of Man Issue	21
1.2 Framework of the Study	27
1.2.1 Justification of the Text's Choice	27
1.2.2 Methodological Issues	29
1.2.2.1 Application of the Socio-Rhetorical Approach in Reading John 9.24-41	32
1.2.2.2 Context of the Text	33
1.2.2.3 Inner-Texture Analysis	35
1.2.2.3.1 Repetitive Texture	36
1.2.2.3.2 Progressive Texture	38
1.2.2.3.3 The Opening-Middle-Closing Texture/Structure of the Text	40
1.2.2.3.4 The Sensory-Aesthetic Texture of the Text	42
1.2.2.4 Authorship, Dating, Location and Context of Writing the Gospel of John	46
1.2.2.4.1 Authorship	46
1.2.2.4.2 Dating and Location	48
1.2.2.4.3 Context and Circumstances of Writing	50
Summary	53
<b>CHAP II DETAILED EXEGESIS OF JOHN 9.24–41</b>	<b>55</b>
2.1 John 9.24 – 41 in the Narrative Setting of the Gospel	55
2.2 The “Jews” in John	62
2.3 The Use of “ <i>oida</i> ”	67
2.4 Jesus-Messiah of Unknown Origin	71
2.5 Moses, a “ <i>theios aner</i> ” (v. v. 28, 29)	73
2.6 Hellenistic “ <i>theosebes</i> ” & the Jewish Expression of “To do God's will”(v. v.31,32)	75
2.7 The Expression “ <i>pisteuein eis</i> ” (v. .35)	78
2.7 To Believe in “the Son of Man” (v. v.35–37, 39–41)	79
2.8 To Worship Jesus as Lord (v.38)	84
Summary	86

<b>CHAP III</b>	<b>CHRISTOLOGY IN JOHN</b>	<b>87</b>
3.1	John 9.24-41 in the Socio-Cultural Context	88
3.2	Christology in John 9	89
3.2.1	The Light	95
3.2.2	Prophet	100
3.2.3	Man from God	105
3.2.4	Messiah	106
3.2.5	Son of Man	117
3.2.6	Lord (God)	122
	Summary	124
<b>CHAP IV</b>	<b>CONFLICT AND DISCIPLESHIP IN JOHN 9: THE SACRED TEXTURE ANALYSIS</b>	<b>127</b>
4.1	The Sabbath Issue	127
4.2	Moses and Jesus	130
4.3	Faith – Signs and Discipleship in John’s Outlook	132
4.4	The sin and judgment in John 9	141
	Summary	143
	<b>FINAL CONCLUDING REMARKS</b>	<b>145</b>
	<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>147</b>



## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION AND FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

#### 1.1 Introduction to the study

This section provides an overview of the focus of this study. The representative interpretations of the text submitted for the purpose of this study will be examined in order to reach my own conclusions and outlook. The goal of this investigation is to read John 9 within the context not only of the literature of Jewish and Christian circles of influence, in which Jesus was portrayed as a holy man, but within the context of the wider range of literature available to the Mediterranean world. To this effect it is useful to resort to a comparative method of analysis, namely, a socio-rhetorical reading.

##### 1.11 The scope of the research

This study will focus upon the Jewish-Christian conflict that took place during the formative period of early Christianity, and contemporary to the writing of the Gospel of John. Towards the end of the first century, there is convincing evidence that the conflict was about the relation, if any, between Jesus and Moses. The questions one needs to ask are:

- Who is the revealer of God: Moses or Jesus?
- Until the time the Gospel of John was written, what did Moses represent in relation to Jesus for the leaders of the Synagogue, and what did Moses and Jesus represent for the Church in John's text?
- Who is the heretic?
- And what did adherence to Jesus as a disciple mean to the contemporaries of John's Gospel, and what was considered the ethical imperative for the disciples of Jesus in the Johannine Church?

This study will demonstrate that the event described in John 9 is historically significant as an illustration of the conflict between the Jews and the Christians over their respective views of

Moses and Jesus – and the “spin” John tries to put on this heated debate with rhetoric language, with the world view signified within his narrative, in delocalizing the presence of divinity from the Temple and the synagogues and locating the new presence of divinity in the persona of Jesus, and with its ethical imperative of adhering to Jesus, even in the face of opposition. This study should argue on the following constituent elements:

- 1 Discipleship demonstrated in adherence to Jesus in the light of sacred texture, an analysis which helps to describe how the text speaks of God or the gods, or about the domain of religious life. The main thing here is to see how, in relation to Jesus, the formerly blind man, as faithful follower, expresses his commitment to him.
- 2 Ways of speaking about Jesus that highlighted aspects of first century Jewish religion/mythmaking/social formation (see the relevant titles for Jesus in John 9).
- 3 Implied historical context of polemical social interaction. In order to bring out the mythmaking, social formation and historical context of the polemical social interaction, we will refer to socio-cultural texture that is helpful to investigate how, through the text’s language, the evangelist constructed a social and cultural world exhibited as such to the reader.
- 4 The way this social interaction is narrativised into the story line of John. The words used in the text considered as tools of communication, it is indispensable to bring out all meanings from these words themselves. Through an analysis of inner texture, we will concentrate on repetitive, progressive, opening-middle-closing and sensory-aesthetic texture, in order to see John 9 creates the context for the inner meanings of the text itself.

There are few texts in the New Testament that share the same theological depth or are as profoundly elaborated, Christologically, as John 9. The healed blind man is at the root of the Christology. Initially he acknowledges Jesus as man, but he confesses later that he is a prophet, and he reaches the height of Christology of the New Testament when he confesses Jesus as Lord, or God. The blind man makes progress in faith and by the close of the narrative he has attained the “πληρωμα”, or the fullness of faith. This poignant journey to a state of faith is deepened by the words of Jesus, which reveal that his identity as the “divine agent”, the Son of Man, has been revealed (see Asiedu-Peprah 2001:149). The progress of the blind man in the knowledge of Jesus echoes the evolutionary experience of earliest followers as formulated in the New Testament. Jesus, known as a prophet in the early group of followers, was eventually

confessed as God. The blind man is the model of the disciple, not only of John, but also as one of the most prominent figures of the Gospels. The blind man's refutation of the Pharisees in John 9.24-34 is such a clever and provocative passage that it prompted this author's present intensive analysis.

### **1.12 The history of the interpretation of John 9.24-41**

My concern, here, is to see how the commentators treat the flow of verses 24-25, and verses 28-33 in relation to my own outlook; and, secondly, to find out how the dialogue between the former blind man and the Jews is orientated towards Christological issues. Brown rightly points out that verses 24-41 in John 9 are some of "the most cleverly written dialogues in the New Testament" (1966:377). The commentators selected to assist this study have been chosen for their representative nature and selected insofar as they offer standardised interpretations. They are Brown (1966), Meeks (1967), Morris (1971), Martyn (1979) and Schnackenburg (1980). We shall begin with the earliest commentators and end with the most recent.

Brown is the first commentator who covered many aspects of the Johannine story that cannot all be touched upon here. In his important multi-volume commentary "*The Gospel According to John*", Brown offers a thorough and detailed introduction. His interpretation of John 9.24-41 does not comment on the first four verses (24-27), but rather on the ensuing verses. His interpretation of verse 28 states that the title "disciples of Moses" does not occur regularly (Brown 1966:374; Barrett 1978:300), although it is used for the Pharisees in a *baraitah in Yoma 4a*. A later instance of the principle involved here is found in the *Midrash Rabbah* 8.6 on Deuteronomy, where the Jews are warned that there is only one Law and that Moses revealed it. Verse 29, in which the Pharisees say, "we do not even know where this fellow comes from," recalls John 7.27 and 41, where the people of Jerusalem thought, mistakenly, that Jesus came from Galilee. The response of Jesus is to emphasise that he comes from above and from the Father, and it is this heavenly origin of which the Jews are unaware (John 8.14). Here, argues Brown (1966:374), the Pharisees question his claim to be from God and contrast it with the known relation between Moses and God. The certainty of the Jews reveals itself as false.

In verse 33, while the Pharisees are comfortable asserting that they do not know where Jesus is from, the blind man logically states that: "...if this man were not from God, he could do nothing." What Jesus has done shows that he is from God. Brown estimates (1966:373) that the use of

the plural first person “we” by the Pharisees in verse 24 (“we know that this man is a sinner”), and the similar use of this word by Jesus in John 3.11 (“we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen”), are a reflection of the polemics between Jesus and the Jews, and between the later Christians and the later Jews. When, in verses 35-37, Jesus presents himself to the formerly blind man by the title “the Son of Man”, this presentation is inserted into the theme of judgment, for judgment is frequently the setting for the figure of the Son of man (see John 1.51) and Luke 8.8: “when the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?” (Brown 1966:375). In John, the Son of man finds faith in a blind man, the prospective disciple.

For Brown, the blind man in John emerges as one of the foremost figures of the Gospels. Three times, the one who is truly growing in knowledge is shown to humbly confess his ignorance (verses 12, 25, 36). In contrast to this, the Pharisees’ deep ignorance of Jesus contrasts with their surprisingly confident statements about what they know of him (verses 16, 24 and 29).

In his book entitled *The Prophet-King: Moses Traditions and the Johannine Christology*, published in 1967, Meeks points out that the Johannine Church included both Jewish and Samaritan people of a deep piety akin to that of Moses. In the light of this piety, “Moses was regarded as a king as well as a prophet” (Kealy 1997:733). Apart from seeing him as a prototypical king and prophet, Israel’s view of Moses was that he was enthroned in heaven, where he received the Torah and, with or within it, all truth (Meeks 1967:286). In connection with this belief, Moses was considered as God’s emissary, agent or vice-regent on earth. It is from this point of view that Moses, in Jewish traditions, has been exalted as “the center of their religious concerns, as the intermediary, in some sense, between them and God” (Meeks 1967:286).

In John, there are almost eleven occurrences of the name “Moses”, including those in John 9.28-29. In the context of the interrogation by “the Jews”, the man born blind asks them: “Do you want to become his disciples?” They retort: “You are his disciple, but we are Moses’ disciples. We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he is from.” In John 9, the interrogation is in effect a formal trial, which culminates with expulsion from the synagogue (v. 34). According to Meeks (1967:293), this trial parallels that of Jesus before Pilate in order to underline the fact that the followers of Jesus must be prepared to experience the same hostility from the world that Jesus himself endured. The blind man of John 9 is shown in contrast to the paralysed man of John 5 who did not know who cured him, as he had never entered into a

positive relationship with Jesus. He is also contrasted with people who were attracted to Christianity but, according to John 12:42-3 remained in the synagogues as secret disciples: "Nevertheless many, even of the authorities, believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they did not confess it for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved human glory more than the glory that comes from God." The blind man, unlike these fearful authorities, or the paralysed man who was healed, provides a strong testimony before the Pharisees. He does not fear expulsion from the synagogue, and confesses Jesus as Son of man and he worships him. Meeks (1967:293) notes that this man appears to represent the Christian community as witnesses of Jesus who stand together with Judaism and who came under the influence of the Christian proclamation.

Though the Church inherited piety from Moses, John shows Jesus as the legitimate heir to Moses, for he has "a position almost of equality with God", for John's answer is that it is not "Moses, but Jesus [who] is the equal of God and the supreme revelation" (see Kealy 1997:733). Alienation from the synagogue and the theology of John's community reinforced each other. Like Martyn, Meeks notes the hostility in John between the Jewish leaders and Jesus, and the Gospel is written to provide reinforcement for the community's isolation from society. That is why Meeks speaks of the "continual, harmonic reinforcement between social experience and ideology", since Moses was regarded as the primary defender of Israel before God. That is why, for Meeks (1967:294), it is on the question of the prophetic functions of Moses and of Jesus that the controversy in chapters 5 and 9 finally turns: "we know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he is from." Meeks concludes that the point at issue, in both chapters, is "whether Jesus is the true or the false prophet predicted in Deuteronomy 18" (1967:294). The Johannine community was convinced that they were re-enacting and reliving the rejection undergone by Jesus himself. The theology made the synagogue leaders suspicious, which further increased their estrangement from the Christians.

Morris, in his book entitled *The Gospel According to John* (1971), makes the point that when the religious leaders say "we know that this man is a sinner" (v. 24), they use "we" to show emphatically that they are those who know best and that everyone would be wise to follow their lead (Morris 1971:490). The astonishing thing is that the blind man does not go into the theoretical question of whether Jesus was a sinner or not (Morris 1971:490). He sticks to the facts of which he is certain he has knowledge, and this produces the classic answer: "one thing I know." Mere words cannot alter the irrefutable fact of the gift of his eyesight. In verses 29-33,

while the Jewish leaders continue to speak of Moses out of certainty, the man continues with his independent line of reasoning. He finds astonishing the fact that they do not know from whence Jesus comes. The term used in Greek may well signify “this is the really marvellous thing; your unbelief in the face of the evidence is more of a miracle than my cure” (Morris 1971:492). He is astonished that the religious experts cannot work out a simple thing like this. He connects the “we know” of the Jews with the “we know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will” (v. 31). In this way he makes an ingenious challenge to the Jewish leaders and, in Morris’s view (1971:492), he shares with his questioners, and perhaps with the community at large, the knowledge that God does not hear sinners. He goes on to point out that the gift of sight to a man born blind is unparalleled in all history. At any rate, if Jesus were not from God (v. 33), such a miracle simply could not have happened.

Unlike his predecessors, Martyn, in his book *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (1979), took the tension and hostility between “the Jews” and Jesus seriously and saw it as the key to the historical life setting and purpose of John. Martyn proposes that John 9 (and 5 and 7) was a dramatic expansion of a synoptic-like miracle. Likewise, Nicodemus is the secret believer who is moving towards faith in Jesus as Son of man. In John, such stories have become parallel dramas that speak simultaneously about the time of Jesus and about the time of the Risen Lord, who is redemptively active in the struggles and failures of the present Johannine community (Kealy 1997:739). Martyn views the man born blind as a Jew of Jerusalem, who also represented those Jewish members of a church separated from its Jewish parent in an unidentified Diaspora city.

Martyn (1979: 28) also asserts that Jesus, as depicted by John, has a dual role, that of Jesus during his “earthly lifetime” and that of Jesus after his resurrection. The “continuation of Jesus’ works as an activity of the Risen Lord” is to be perceived in the deeds of Christian witnesses as it is in the case of the man born blind. According to Martyn, the Johannine text bears witness to Jesus on both levels:

- Firstly, it is a witness to Jesus’ earthly lifetime, which was “*einmalig*.”
- The text is also a witness to Jesus’ powerful presence in the actual events experienced by the Johannine church (Martyn 1979:30), as is demonstrated in this reading of John 9.

This twofold representation of Jesus is the result of the Johannine church’s emphatic denial that

Jesus was now absent, in an absolute sense, from the world. For that community of faith, the Christian witness in the synagogue mediated Jesus' presence. The Johannine community was conscious, not merely of Jesus' power, but also of his very presence in the community and in his witnesses. John may be considered as unique, having made a "metahistorical presentation of Jesus", to borrow Moody's words (1984:184-5). The Jesus of the Fourth Gospel is also the Jesus of the church's present and future: he is the source of the Spirit-Paraclete who abides with the Church in its witness and, especially, in its adversity.

In John 7.1 the writer of the Gospel makes it clear that "the Jews" were waiting to take Jesus' life. The reasons are evident in John 5.18, for not only did Jesus break the Sabbath, but "he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God." Jesus is accused of "leading the people astray" (Martyn 1979:74), in other words, leading people into the worship of a god alongside God himself (Martyn 1979:75). The leaders resort to the legal process to have Jesus arrested, tried and executed.

The question that follows is how did John construct that legal process? Was it a piece of Christian tradition, or a construct created by John himself? It should be borne in mind that, according to the Mishnaic tradition, those who "performed magic" and "misled Israel" were to be stoned (Martyn 1979: 78). When John describes the action against Jesus as having been taken on the legal charge of "leading the people astray" (John 7), John is not dependent on a "Jesus-tradition" but, primarily, on his own experience. Beyond excommunication, the missionaries who persuaded others to worship Jesus as a god alongside God (John 5.18) were charged with leading the people astray in a technical and legal sense. The requisite process was to be arrested, tried, and if found guilty and denounced as an "*atheos*", the requisite punishment was execution, although this sentence would not be carried out by "the Jews" themselves.

Jewish sources tell of the expectation among Jews that a figure like Moses would come – one in whose mouth God would put his words so that he might tell them everything God commanded. He would show miraculous signs, and would be able to give an answer to a difficult question. He would be a prophet like Moses, a definite eschatological figure, distinct from the Messiah (Martyn 1979:107). In the Qumran literature, the men of that community were to be instructed until the "coming of a prophet and the Messiahs of Aaron and Israel." Various eschatological figures are mentioned, for example, a Jacob's star or the Messiah of Israel; a Redeemer like Moses, expected by the Samaritans – a Moses come back to life, called Taheb (Martyn

1979:108); and the Priestly Messiah or the Messiah of Aaron.

In Martyn's view (1979:106), Moses was considered as "a type either of the Messiah or of some other eschatological figure." Many texts confirm the widespread hope that existed in the Jewish thought of the first century that a figure like Moses, a prophet and redeemer, would appear. In response to this expectation, John presents Jesus not only as the "Mosaic Prophet" (Martyn 1979:112) – supported by the signs in John 6.14; 7.40 and 9.16f as proof – but also as "Mosaic Prophet-Messiah" (Martyn 1979:113) of John 6.15; 7.31 and 7.40ff. The Johannine community distinguished between the figures of the Mosaic Prophet, and the Messiah. John confirms, for instance, that Jesus does not speak as the Rabbi, on the authority of Moses. Being from God, his teaching is from God.

Schnackenburg, a Catholic professor at Wurzburg, produced in 1980 a magisterial commentary on John. He is interested in the repeated "*oidamen*" (see verses 24 and 29), where the Jews insist on their authority by the stressed "*hemeis*" (verses 24, 28 and 29), and again in the appeal to Moses and the attack on the man resisting them (verses 28 and 34). Schnackenburg (1980:251) states that the arrogant certainty of the Jews conflicts with the experience of the blind man healed by Jesus, and his refusal to relinquish his hold on this fact. Verses 28-29 reveal that, for the Jews, to be disciples of Jesus is cause for blame and shame, for Jesus is an obscure man whose origin is unknown. That is why they describe themselves as "disciples of Moses", and yet, as guardians of the Torah faced with the divine revealer, about whom Moses wrote, they were mistaken and therefore did not recognize him.

Schnackenburg's analysis of verses 30-33 (1980:251) asserts that the formerly blind man contrasts the Jewish lack of knowledge with the knowledge of belief. The healed man recognised Jesus as a prophet (v. 17) authorised by God (v. 33). He moved as far as he could do within the Jewish sphere. While he did not know him, he is brought to know Jesus as the "Son of man", the eschatological bringer of salvation. He is invited to leave the old sphere completely behind him. When Jesus asked him: "Do you believe in the Son of man?" the blind man is confronted with the self-revelatory nature of the title.

What is evident in these interpretations is the contrast between "the Jews" or Pharisees and the blind man. The former group's negative perception of Jesus' healing contrasts sharply with the capacity of the blind man to understand progressively who Jesus is. The ensuing debate



between them reflects, as almost all the commentators note, the tension between two opposed groups. Martyn is the first to take bring out the tension and hostility between “the Jews” and Jesus and to consider it as the key to the historical setting and purpose of John. Moreover, Brown asserts that the blind man emerges as one of the foremost figures of the Gospels, yet he does not justify the perception of the blind man as a model of the disciple. None of the above authors manages to show how the blind man emerges from the story as a disciple in the environment of the persecution of Christian believers that existed towards the end of the first century and the ethical implications of such an identity. Secondly, John’s rhetorical construct in John 9 seems to have been motivated by the necessity to stress Jesus’ identity. None of the above-mentioned shows that Jesus, as an answer to the catastrophic fall of the Temple in 70 CE, is portrayed as Son of man, and especially as holy man mediating the divine. These two important issues have to be addressed in the study of John today.

### **1.13 The thesis**

The formerly blind man contrasts vividly with the Pharisees. As Brown (1971:377) comments, the way the evangelist carefully portrays the increasing insight of the blind man beside the willful blindness of the Pharisees is masterful. Three times the formerly blind man humbly confesses his ignorance (verses 12, 25, 36), and three times, the Pharisees, who plunge deeper into ignorance of Jesus, make confident statements about what they know of him (verses 16, 24, 29). The story is a rhetorical construct and an effective theological device. The formerly blind man emerges as a disciple in light of the history of the community of the first century, and his miraculous experience allows him to share with them the identity of Jesus as the Son of man and his worship of him as Lord.

While, traditionally, the worship had to take place in the Temple, the man, surprisingly, worshipped Jesus where he met him. The writer strives to demonstrate how, in the Son of man “divine reality” operates away from the temple, or other traditionally sacred places like the synagogue, and finds a new locality in Jesus himself. Jesus, in John’s perspective, is presented as the answer to the catastrophic fall of the temple in 70 CE. He is “the new Temple”, the place of encounter between God and human beings. As holy man, Jesus is a locus of the encounter between God and human beings, a locus of the divine presence, or “the conduit for the transmission of the divine.” In Smith’s view, the divine is no longer accessed via a sacred place that, essentially, does not exist, but is accessed rather through the divine man, a magician, and

an entrepreneur without fixed office (see 1977:238). John's portrayal of Jesus shows him as a holy man from above, with no fixed abode, an entrepreneur from God who mediates the divine. Jesus is depicted as the entrepreneur who does not require a formal place of worship for his followers for he may be worshipped anywhere. Any place may be made sacred by virtue of the presence of the holy man, who represents or mediates God. This standpoint is shared by Craffert in his study of 1999, as is shown below, especially of the holy men as mediators of divine power. In John 9, the issues of holy men as divine mediators and of the significance of the Son of man are very important and they will be discussed in some detail below.

While the contact with divine powers was mediated by the Temple, John is aware of the fact that traffic between gods and men operated through holy men in the Graeco-Roman world, and when writing his Gospel, long after the destruction of the Temple, he endeavours to imagine Jesus as a means of contact with the divine. As we will try to demonstrate later, Jesus is portrayed as a holy man in the story of John 9. In the Graeco-Roman world, it was through actions and words that holy men were able to give access to divinity; it is surprising to find such a correspondence in the narrative of John 9. The Fourth evangelist skillfully and rhetorically shows the blind man develop a progressive knowledge of Jesus' identity (through Jesus' action of healing) to the point where he reaches a depth of faith expressed in his acknowledgement of Jesus as Son of man and in his worship of him (in response to Jesus' words of self-revelation). By dealing with the question of the holy men, for instance, Apollonius of Tyana, a well-known and esteemed thaumaturgist in Ephesus, and the issue of the Son of man, we will attempt to justify such a correspondence in John 9.

### **1.131 The question of the Holy Men and divine mediation**

It is generally admitted that contact with divine powers was mediated by the temple institutions, temple traditions, temple personnel and the rituals for civic or public religion of the country, city or community. Besides these, there were also holy men who embodied divinity and who, by their example, actions and words, were able to give access to divinity. The holy men were "divine" philosophers like Plotinus or Apollonius of Tyana, or miracle-workers or healers, like the Jewish Honi, the rainmaker, and Hanina ben Dosa. Still others were ascetics, like the early Christian saints, whose Apollonius of Tyana, a contemporary of Paul was one of them. In this study, the term holy man is used in an interchangeable manner with such terms as divine man, magician or

miracle worker. All these terms refer to the same type of religious entrepreneur, “people who functioned without fixed office in mediating divine power directly to people” (Smith 1977 quoted by Craffert 1999:128). The second important point to note is that holy men operated in cultural settings where the line between humans and gods was porous. Hellenistic people counted many kinds of experiences as manifestations of the divine, *hic et nunc*. This is asserted by Smith quoted by Craffert (1999:128) in these terms:

... divine or deified men and their many varieties lay the Greek notion of the gods as being like men, possessing the human virtues to a higher degree, and possessing also gifts that men wanted, above all immortality and eternal youth. Hence it was natural and common to describe as ‘divine’ any man who excelled in any desirable capacity – beauty, strength, wisdom, prestige, song, fame, skill in speaking, or success in love.

That is why prophets, poets, philosophers, rulers, athletes, physicians and magicians, were regarded as holy or divine men and in this sense able to mediate with the divine world. This divine power was directly available to men through personal miracle, ritual or word, as opposed to such indirect means as communal rituals or sacrifice (Craffert 1999:129). Some of these holy men will be examined more closely, namely, the Graeco-Roman Apollonius of Tyana, and the two Jewish holy men, Honi the Circle-Drawer<sup>1</sup> and Hanina ben Dosa<sup>2</sup>. In this study, we refer to Honi and Hanina ben Dosa merely as a rough guide.

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<sup>1</sup> The story of Honi is part of the tradition that prophets like Elijah and Elisha had the power to exert their will upon natural phenomena, and which lead to traditional liturgical prayers and sacrifices for rain. In the Mishnah it is written: They said to Honi, the circle-drawer, “Pray for rain”, “Go and take in the clay ovens used for Passover, so that they not soften [in the rain which is coming].” He prayed, but it did not rain. What did he do? He drew a circle and stood in the middle of it and said before him, “Lord of the world! Your children have turned to me, for before you I am like a member of the family. I swear by your great name – I am simply not moving from here until you take pity on your children!” It began to rain drop by drop. He said, ‘This is not what I wanted, but rain for filling up cisterns, pits and caverns.’ It began to rain violently. He said, “This is not what I wanted, but rain of goodwill, blessing, and graciousness.” Now it rained the right way, until Israelites had to flee from Jerusalem up to the Temple Mount because of the rain. What is so interesting about this story, remarks Craffert (1999:132), is the combination of elements, which clearly give it a magical character. Circles were solar symbols in Hellenistic magic, to the extent that by drawing a circle around himself, Honi was acting magically, and by excluding people from his environment, he had protected himself from attacks by dangerous spirits.

<sup>2</sup> Hanina ben Dosa, another Jewish miracle worker, lived, like Jesus of Nazareth, in the first century CE, prior to the destruction of the Temple in a small Galilean village in the district of Sepphoris (Craffert 1999:134). He was renowned for his ability to heal from a distance. His name appears in the Mishnah as an example of holy men of great piety who spent a long time directing their hearts to God before prayer. One of the stories tells of the son of Gamaliel, who was ill with a mortal fever. Two servants were sent to Hanina, who then retired to his upper room to pray. He returned to say that the fever had departed. Back at home it was confirmed that the fever had left at exactly that moment. Besides miracles such as these, Hanina was also credited with bringing forth rain in a drought period and multiplying food.

### *Apollonius of Tyana*<sup>3</sup>

Apollonius of Tyana, a well-attested historical figure, was educated in Tarsus in the middle of the first century. Craffert (1999:129) says that he started his career as “a wandering philosopher/miracle worker and is accredited with dreams, previsions of events, exorcisms, healings and finally ascension into heaven only to appear later from heaven to convince a doubting disciple of the soul’s immortality.” He was an itinerant philosopher and thaumaturgist esteemed in Ephesus because of his wisdom, lifestyle, oracular knowledge, prophetic powers, and therapeutic skills (Oster 1990:1684). Oster contends that he should be acknowledged for saving Ephesus from a devastating plague which he accomplished by locating an evil demon, in the guise of an old man, and ordering the Ephesians to stone him<sup>4</sup>. This event underlies the worship of Apollonius in a hero cult. Apollonius of Tyana was raised up, as Klauck understands it (2000:170), as a rival figure to Jesus Christ in the light of the book by Philostratus:

The birth and the end of the hero are surrounded by miraculous events: an Egyptian god speaks to his mother in a dream (1.4), at his birth swans sing, a rather ‘flowery’ touch, and lightning falls from heaven to earth (1.5), so that those who dwell in the countryside declare that he is the son of Zeus (...) His end remains an open question: Apollonius vanishes, but it is not quite certain how. No grave is found, and he appears [in a dream?] to an unbelieving disciple. A kind of ascension to heaven from a temple is described, while a choir of virgins sings: ‘Leave the earth and come to heaven’ (8.30f).

A careful reading establishes the parallels between both Apollonius and Jesus portrayed as such in the Gospels. The birth is surrounded by miraculous events according to the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. He was declared as the Son of God. After resurrection he appears, obviously not in a dream, to Thomas, a doubting disciple (John 20.26-29). His ascension is similar to that of Apollonius of Tyana. Likewise, there is a parallel to the gospels in the combination of an itinerant life, teaching, and the working of miracles, especially since these include exorcisms.

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<sup>3</sup> Apollonius was a Neopythagorean philosopher, and while this narrative recounts his philosophical expositions and exploits as travelling sage, he is also portrayed as a holy man, cult reformer and miracle-worker. Van den Heever & Scheffler (2001:32) find the combination of philosopher and healer-cum-miracle worker of particular interest. The emergent Christian tradition casts Jesus in a similar light, namely as a teacher who is simultaneously a miracle-worker and a healer. When one moves later into the world of second and third century Christian literature, especially the *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles*, the literature brims with portrayals of the apostles as holy men who work miracles.

<sup>4</sup> The story is developed in *Life of Apollonius* 4.20 by Philostratus, quoted by Van den Heever & Scheffler (2001:31); see also Oster (1990:1685).

The existence of a loosely constituted group of disciples is also striking. Did Philostratus create an alternative to the Christian tradition describing the life of Apollonius, or do these conventions or devices simply pertain to the popular tradition of the hero?

### 1.131 The Son of man issue

The concept of the Son of man is a very important issue in New Testament studies (Donahue 1986:484) and, in Charlesworth's estimation (1985:88) it is the most intractable problem in the study of Christological terminology. In the attempt to understand how, when and why the title took on a significant Christological connotation, it is useful to refer to two Jewish documents, that is, Daniel and 1 Enoch.

Jesus, as Son of man, is depicted in the Fourth Gospel as coming from "above", and descending to earth "below." He is present on the earth as a Mediator between the realms of "above" and "below." In the Gospels, we find the term Son of man always on the lips of Jesus as a self-designation.<sup>5</sup> When dealing with this term, is it an eschatological proof? There are forty Son of man sayings in the gospels, and of these, eighteen are eschatological, ten are earthly references, two could be assigned to the suffering and resurrection of the Son of man, and ten occur in John (Crossan 1991:454-455).

Before trying to settle the argument, it is important to note that, in pre-Christian Judaism, the designation "Son of man" was used as a messianic title. In the canonical and foundational text of

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<sup>5</sup> In relation to the authenticity of the designation "Son of man", it is pertinent to remember the contention of Jeremias who attributed the interest to the Aramaic spoken by Jesus. He argued that "Son of man" is the only title used by Jesus himself, whose authenticity is to be taken seriously" (1975:258). He brings out four assumptions:

- i) The term was in use in the Aramaic speaking early Church in the pre-Pauline period. One can go back a step to Jesus himself, because the sayings of Jesus can lay claim to considerable antiquity, and note the references to Daniel 7 (Luke 12.32; Matthew 19.28; Luke 22.28).
- ii) Jesus spoke of the "Son of man" in the third person. If it had been a construction of the primitive church it would have been in the first person because the identification of the Son of Man with Jesus went without saying after Easter;
- iii) No use of the "Son of man" title speaks of both resurrection and parousia at the same time. Jesus saw both as alternate ways of describing the same thing and thus would not have used them together. The distinction between resurrection parousia was a post-Easter phenomenon;
- iv) The Greek Church avoided the title, but it is still found it in the gospels and exclusively from the lips of Jesus. The conclusion one must draw is that although they avoided the use of the term, it was sacrosanct because Jesus used it and no-one dared to eliminate it (see Jeremias 1975:265-7).

Daniel 7.13, for instance, the figure who is “like a human being” is identified explicitly with “the people of the saints of the Most High” (Daniel 7.27), that is, with the true and final People of God to whom ultimate dominion is promised. In this last sense, the title “Son of man” is granted a collective dimension. However, in the Ethiopic Book of Enoch 46.1-3, the apocalyptic description of Daniel 7 is imitated, and a “being whose countenance had the appearance of a man” represented as “*ho huios tou anthrōpou*”, appears to be identified with the “Elect One”, and is called Messiah (Dodd 1953:241-242). It is in apocalyptic literature that this Son of man is seen as an individual, “the Elect one”, and this is particularly so in the Book of Enoch where the basic theme of the book is summed up in its first verses (Enoch 1.3ff):

The great Holy One (=God) will march forth from his dwelling, and the God of the world will appear on Mount Sinai; he will become visible with his hosts and in the strength of his power appear from heaven. Then will all fear, the watchers will quake, and great fear and anguish will seize them unto the ends of the earth. The high mountains will be shaken; they will fall and pass away; the hills will sink and melt in the flame as wax before fire ... and a judgment will take place over all. But with the righteous he will make peace and he will guard the elect. Grace will reign over them and they will all belong to God ... and the light of God will shine upon them (see Otto 1957:178-9).

The tradition preserved in the Book of Enoch dealt with visions of the final judgment, the consummation of the blessed lot of the righteous and the damnation of the wicked, and so on. The book is written for Jews and deals with the final deliverance of the Jewish people, but in the light of the nationalistic viewpoint, the contrast between righteous and wicked had long since moved into the foreground. The interest of the Book stems from the fact that it establishes a relation between the Son of man and Enoch<sup>6</sup> himself. It is this “Son of man” of the Apocalypse

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<sup>6</sup> In the highest, most solemn moment, the revelation of Enoch as the Son of man is treated as the highest secret of the entire book: “you have asked: ‘who is this Son of man and whence is he?’ It is you yourself Enoch!” That is the solemn installation of Enoch himself as Son of man; it has been preceded by exaltation coupled with spiritual transformation, and is accompanied by the words: “Righteousness dwells over you, and the righteousness of the Aged Head does not forsake you.” With regard to these words, the Aged One does not, as His Majesty, refer to Himself in the first person, but in the circumlocution of the third person (see Otto 1957:208). Jesus would be understood to refer to the Son of man whom the *Book of Enoch* talks about. In this sense, he was exalted to the place of Enoch and to the Elect One of whom the *Book of Enoch* continually speaks. Otto claims (1957:219-220) that through the following lines, Jesus was connected with the Messianism of Enoch, but what sort of Messianic self-assertions might be expected from him and what form? Enoch was to be exalted and become Son of man. He evidently preached in the power of this destiny, and proclaimed the future Son of man, but he did not proclaim himself as the Son of Man. It was God and not himself who revealed the Son of man as such. Similarly, Jesus knew himself to be the “*filiius hominis praedestinatus*.” He therefore worked and acted as the one upon whom the choice had fallen and he worked with the powers of “the Son of man”, with divine commission and divine anointing. Like Enoch, he preached the Gospel of the Son of man, the judgment and the salvation which would come with it; he said that he who confessed him would also be confessed by the Son of man. Empowered by this call, he acted as the wisdom, the power and the faithfulness – like the Son of Man in Enoch – but he did not teach that he himself was the Son of Man. He acted as the

of Enoch, as a messianic figure, who is recognised as such in pre-Christian Judaism. In the Apocalypse of Ezra 8, the seer beholds “as it were the form of a man arising out of the sea”, and “flying with the clouds of heaven.” That expression obviously recalls Daniel in which the Son of man is likewise identified with the Messiah.

Hahn’s interesting study argues, from the philological perspective (1963:20), that the expression “*ben hanasha*” is a description of the individual man, but not the only one possible. However, the collective understanding of the Son of man, which exists in Daniel, is lacking in 2 Apocalypse of Ezra 13 and the similitudes of the Apocalypse of Enoch. A great deal of discussion, Brown contends (2003:257-8), centres on whether the pre-existent and descending/ascending aspect of the Johannine Son of man can be derived from the Jewish apocalyptic background. John’s Gospel, in accordance with that perspective, should be taken to share its background with some of the synoptic usage, but scholars do not generally admit such a point of view. However Wink (2002:21) says that the expression “*ho huios tou anthrôpou*” (Son of man), rendered in Hebrew by *ben hadam* and in Aramaic by *bar enasha*, is not to be related to the Jewish apocalyptic tradition:

We can scarcely argue that “the son of the man” is a mistranslation. Anyone capable of rendering a sentence from Aramaic into Greek would know that “son of” is an idiomatic expression simply meaning membership in a class. So why was “the son of the man” preserved at all? ... We can list a few things that the “son of man” is not ... in the time prior to Jesus it was not the title of an apocalyptic figure expected to come to earth to judge and redeem humanity. The capitalization that one encounters in Bibles and scholarly writings give the false impression that the “Son of Man” is a title. But the translators have added the capitalization ... Nor was the pre-Christian “son of man” a messianic deliverer. It had not been amalgamated with the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53. It was not a heaven-appointed judge who would preside over the last judgment.

The Fourth Gospel’s understanding of the Son of man is not to be seen as grounded upon the synoptic tradition which was thoroughly influenced by the Jewish apocalyptic background, which portrayed the Son of man as the expected figure of the future. For the Johannine descent motif, scholarship oscillates between two Old Testament tendencies, outlined by Brown (2003:258-9) in these terms:

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eschatological redeemer and saviour, to join, to follow, and to confess whom guaranteed both future fellowship with the coming Son of man and entry into his kingdom. He went and sought the lost of the house of Israel. He released those imprisoned by Satan, healed the sick, forgave sins, preached the kingdom, threatened and comforted with the appearance of the coming Son of man, preached the way of God as the way of repentance and of faith, ... he opened men’s eyes to see the powers of the dawning kingdom already operative; all this by virtue of the fact that the power of the future was operative in him and working in advance.

Borgen is a particularly strong proponent of a parallelism with the descent of Moses from the presence of God on Sinai with divine revelation embodied in the Law, and indeed from the very beginning John 1:17 tells us of the centrality of the Moses/Jesus comparison. That really does not cover the preexistence motif. The other proposed OT background is the career of personified divine Wisdom. These points are shared by the Johannine Son of Man and Wisdom: preexistence with God, coming from heaven into this world, communication of revelation or divine knowledge, offer of spiritual food, producing division or self-judgment when some people accept and others refuse. Some think that the Son-of-Man and Wisdom motifs were joined in pre-Christian Judaism (F-M. Braun, Moeller) or in Christian tradition prior to John (Schnackenburg, Maddox, Moloney); others think John made the union (Dion, Meeks), at times invoking an identification of the Word with Wisdom.

The Fourth Gospel belongs somewhat to that last tendency and thus “stands apart from the other Gospels in its presentation of Jesus’ incarnate revelation descended from on high, indeed from another world, to offer people light and truth” (Brown 2003:259). Although the personified divine Wisdom is a female figure and Jesus is male, the former is described as having descended from heaven to dwell with human beings (Proverbs 8.31; Sirach 24.8; Baruch 3.37; Wisdom 9.10; James 3.15), and so also Jesus is the Son of Man who has descended from heaven to earth, in John 1.14; 3.31; 6.38; 16.28. Johannine originality may be perceived in the fact that while “Wisdom was a poetic personification,” Jesus was a living historical figure. If Jesus was incarnated Wisdom, “the incarnation occurred at a particular place and time, once and for all” (Brown 2003:263). That is to say that the Fourth Evangelist demythologised the Wisdom concept by incorporating it into salvation history, by using not the word “wisdom” to refer to Jesus but rather the term “Logos”, through which God creates the cosmos and addresses men. The eschatological figure of the synoptic tradition and of the Jewish apocalyptic becomes, in Johannine understanding, a figure of the present divine revelation. John’s intentional references to figures like Abraham, Jacob, Moses, and Isaiah compels one to look at Jesus as the supreme example of divine Wisdom active in history, the one through whom God definitively reveals himself.

The Son of man is God’s Son, beloved by His Father and like him. He is the light of the world and the life of men. He descends “*ek to anō*” (from above), and takes on a material body. He ascends again to His Father, and those who are united with him have knowledge of God revealed to them and enter into life and light, for the heavenly realities are realised in the ministry of Jesus, the Son of man on earth. To know the man from God is to effectively replace Moses with Jesus, the one true mediator between heaven and earth. It is also to ground the faith in him, and to displace the signs that have to be viewed in connection with Jesus’ words, through



which the revelation of the divine in Jesus attains its fullness. To be a believer, in John's terms, does not mean simply being convinced by the signs, but like Jesus, the believer has to be willing to face opposition. Faith remains a testing way of life.

John's use of the title "Son of man" has usually been considered to depend upon "a myth of the primal or archetypal man, which appears elsewhere in apocalyptic and Gnostic or Platonic expressions" (Barrett 1978:73). Such a view cannot be influential in terms of John's interpretation, since the Christological conviction of John is that "in Jesus, deity and manhood are united in indissoluble unity." For Philo, besides the origin of empirical humanity encountered in the story of the Garden of Eden, there is another Man, made in God's image, the pure archetype of Man, the Platonic Idea of Man. This is a heavenly man having no part in corruptible or earthly substance, different from the earthly man made of seminal matter (Dodd 1953:70). That figure of the divine *anthrôpos* is to be traced back to a personage of primitive mythology (Dodd 1953:43) of whom *Poimandres* talks about. There is an equivalency between *Poimandres* and Philo. In Philo's understanding the heavenly Man, being the eternal archetype of mankind, is Logos, and the first-born Son of God. The relevance of the "archetypal man" stems from the fact that, in dealing with the Johannine doctrine of the Son of Man who is in heaven, who is the Son of God and identical with the Logos, through whom men can attain eternal life, we have to take into account what Philo says of the "*alêthinous anthrôpos*". In my opinion, such an idea should not be related to the Fourth Evangelist who portrays Jesus as Logos and Son of Man (and not as the "*alêthinous anthrôpos*"). However, Christ is spoken of as "*alêthinon phôs*", "*artos alêthinous*", "*ampelos alêthinê*." The contrast between Philonic and Johannine thought lies in the qualifier "*alêthinon*", which, in Philo, is not used to mean "true" as distinct from "false", as is the case in Johannine understanding, but means the "real" as distinct from the "phenomenal" (see Brown 1953:72), that is, the Platonic idea of the real world as distinct from that of phenomena. In this sense, the Johannine eternal Logos is not a metaphysical abstraction according to the Hellenistic understanding, but an incarnate Logos, "fully personal, standing in personal relations both with God and with men, and having a place in history" (Dodd 1953:73). The evangelist is "speaking of a real person, that is, of a concrete, historical individual of the human race" (Dodd 1953:240), the one who incorporates within Himself the people of God, or humanity in its ideal aspect. When incorporated with Him, men ascend in Him out of "*ta katô*" into "*ta anô*", out of darkness into light, out of death into life eternal. This is brought out in the illumination experienced by the man born blind, whose portrait is the very type of a disciple in John's rhetorical construct.

In order to demonstrate that Jesus should not be taken as the archetypal man of Greek thought, we may turn our attention to three texts. In John 3.13, the Son of man is simultaneously man and God, and is simultaneously on earth and in heaven. Through John 1.51, we come to comprehend that the Holy Spirit makes Jesus present on earth as the Son of Man and that he binds together heaven and earth. He is the way of angelic traffic between heaven and earth. In John 6.27 it is he who gives to mankind the true food of eternal life. According to Barrett (1978:72), this all reveals that the Son of man is the one true mediator between heaven and earth. He passes from the one to the other and, through his earthly sojourn, he bestows upon men the revealed knowledge and the eternal life in virtue of which they, in turn, come to the life of heaven. Jesus bears the eschatological title Son of man by which John aims to underline a “realized eschatology” (Brown 1978:264). Brown concluded that “the heavenly realities are realized in the ministry of Jesus viewed as the Son of Man on earth.” Moreover, Bultmann (1971:338) convincingly argues that the title “Son of man” as attributed to Jesus does not refer to a figure that is to be expected in some future age,<sup>7</sup> but to one who is present and who encounters men in the here and now. That is why, when Jesus asks the healed blind man: “do you believe in the Son of man?” (John 9.35), such a question cannot refer to the expectation of the Son of man who is going to come from the clouds of heaven, but to the recognition of a

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<sup>7</sup> The words concerning the coming Son of man stand at the beginning of the evolving tradition. According to Hahn (1969:28-31), amongst these words two different groups are to be distinguished. Firstly, there is the question of the function of the Son of man as judge, and, secondly, of his appearance at the end of time. The motif of judgment in Luke 12.8f: “and I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before others, the Son of man also will acknowledge before the angels of God; but whoever denies me before others will be denied before the angels of God ...” is paralleled in Mark 8.38 with: “those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father.” Mark 8.38b shows, in various ways, that a later expansion for apocalyptic elements borrowed from Daniel 7.13f have been added and there is, moreover, a reference to the “glory of his Father” which implies a very different Christological outlook. The parallel passage in Matthew 10.32f, in spite of its similar structure and formulation, demonstrates a fundamental transformation, in so far as the “I” has been introduced into the later clause, which expressly equates Jesus with the future judge, and the Son of man denomination has been effaced. It is precisely characteristic that for Luke 12.8f and Mark 8.38 Jesus and the Son of man remain clearly distinguished. It should be noted that in the saying, such as that of Luke at 12.8f, the point at issue is salvation that is concentrated in a situation of immediate appeal – men are not to wait for judgment in the apocalyptic sense, the Son of man will only later confirm the judgment which is made here and now, and will then make manifest that God’s final verdict stands behind the claim and the authority of Jesus. When comparing the sayings about the judgment of the Son of man in the Similitudes of the Ethiopic Enoch and in 2 Esdras, there it is always a question of the destruction of the impious and the salvation of the elect. To judge always means the decision about salvation or reprobation. It is the same in Luke 12.8 where the Son of man makes his final judgment according to man’s attitude to Jesus. Thus, in Luke 12.8f and Mark 8.38, the saying refers to the function of the Son of man as judge, in accordance with the apocalyptic tradition from which of course the Son of man stems. It is this conception of the Son of man that John reworks, portraying Jesus, the Son of man, as judge in the present of revelation.

present figure. Jesus, the Son of man, is a heavenly man insofar as he has come down from heaven, but John does not wish to affirm this merely as a fact. According to Moloney (1976:152), his coming down from heaven gives him a unique authority as the light, the revealer of the Father who sent him and, consequently, as the place where men will judge themselves as they accept or refuse the revelation.

When John 1.51; 3.13; 6.27, 62 are read together, we learn that the Son of man was pre-existent in heaven, that he descended from heaven and, through his death he ascended into heaven once more. Therefore, the Son of Man cannot be located exclusively either in heaven or on earth.

Jesus, as Son of Man, is a site where people judge themselves. In other words, his presence as life-giver also provokes judgment, depending on people's attitude of belief or unbelief towards him (Asiedu-Peprah 2001:149). John's wordplay upon the verb "to hear" and "to see" (9.39) is intended to demonstrate that Jesus as Son of man is "the one in whom God can be seen and heard in human history", Jesus being the divine agent of God's fullness of revelation. It is through his words and actions that God himself may be seen and heard. This is the climax of the narration, beyond which the narrator surprises the reader with the "climactic gesture" of the man worshipping Jesus as Lord, a significant act in the story. It is true that John has used a traditional title, rendering present what was once future. In John's understanding, the "end-time" is rendered present, and this is justified by his use of the title "Son of man" to begin the present judgment.

## **1.21 The framework of the study**

### **1.211 Justification of the choice of Text**

Many scholars claim that John 9 is noteworthy as a clear and straightforward instance of the objections typically raised by both Christians and Jews in their encounters. I think that the writer's elastic employment of the verb "*oida*" (to know) is intended to foreground what lay at the heart of the fighting and opposition between the two groups. My attention was drawn by the concentration on the issue of "to know" or "not to know" which are played off against one another so dramatically in the story. The Jewish authorities claim to know both that the healer is not from

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God but is a sinner (v. 24) and to know that God has spoken to Moses, but that they do not know where Jesus is from (v. 29). Meanwhile, the healed blind man is amazed that the religious leaders do not know where this man who gave him sight comes from (v. 30). Hitting the nail on the head, he goes on to assert: “We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will” (v. 31). While the theme of knowing and not knowing is also dealt with elsewhere,<sup>8</sup> its concentrated usage in verses 24 – 31 seems to be theological. “We know” is how the Jewish authorities express their certitude that Jesus is a sinner, something which recalls Nicodemus’s assertion of his knowledge about Jesus in John 3.2.<sup>9</sup> This expression carries the weight of official Pharisaic authority, and so they claim that Jesus is not from God and is, at any rate, a sinner because of his violation of the Sabbath law (v.16).

The healed man does not engage with the Jewish authorities to question their expertise on such matters as what constitutes a sin according to the law (see v. 25a), but instead contrasts their claim with the reality of his encounter with the divine. This blind man’s experience is not a mystical one, since that cannot be studied, but in the interpretation of his healing, he stands as a representative of the Church, in “relation to whatever he considers the divine,” as Smith puts it so aptly (1995:919), and it is upon this that his knowledge (v. 25b) is grounded. It is necessary to try and comprehend what kind of experience he had. His attitude, in the text, raises the question who knows and who does not, the authorities or the blind man? The blind man’s refusal to bend to the knowledge of the authorities is in itself a challenge to their authority, as is the content of his words. The man’s insistence on what he knows confronts the Jewish authorities with a contradiction inherent in their definition of sin and in their focus on technical violations of the Sabbath [Jesus is not “*para theou*” for he broke the law of Sabbath (v. 16)]. The blind man lived in a community that had never heard of a congenitally blind person being healed, and so he felt certain that if Jesus were not from God he would not have been able to perform the miracle (v. 33-34). In this text both experiences are juxtaposed. The Jewish authorities and the formerly blind man are shown in the narrative to represent the diversity of religious life, interpreting their experiences, according to Smith (1995:920), by means of the concepts, beliefs, assumptions, and images that are available to them. That is why the concepts “to know” or “not to know”, the

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<sup>8</sup> The blind man is the first to declare that he “does not know” when he is told where the healer is by his neighbours (v. 12). His parents, interrogated by the Pharisees, declare “we know that this is our son and that he was born blind” (v. 20), but they admit that they “do not know” how it is that now he sees or who opened his eyes (v. 21).

notion of “sin” in respect of the Sabbath, the expression “to believe in Jesus as the Son of Man”, the beliefs constructed around Moses and around the titles attributed to Jesus as “the Prophet”, the “man from God”, the “Son of man”, the “Lord”, the assumption that God does not listen to sinners, as well as what exclusion from the synagogue meant for the Jewish authorities and people, are all to be properly interpreted only when situated in the religious context of the Graeco-Roman world.

In this construction of the story, John emphasises that the experience of healing is not sufficient in itself (see John 9.35-38). The first experience of faith (in the form of Jesus, called prophet and man from God) needs to be completed by the spoken, intelligible word through which Jesus reveals to man the meaning of his own experience (Bultmann 1971:339). The relationship between faith and sign is theologically focused in this Johannine narrative. By the question: “Do you believe in the Son of man?” (v. 35), John creates a displacement, for Jesus is no longer to be viewed as the figure expected in the future, as portrayed in the Synoptic Gospels, but as a present figure who encounters men in this age. The formerly blind man, confronted by the self-revelation in Jesus’ word has to leave aside the old sphere and join the new, as represented by Jesus the Son of man, the bringer of eschatological life. Culpepper contends (1998:98), that in John’s view, “believing is not a static response; it is a way of life. Those who believe can change, both for better and for worse.” “The Jews”, although believing Moses, persecuted the Christians and barred them from the synagogue. The Christians, represented by the blind man, challenged the Jewish authorities but faced persecution as a result and ran the risk of being excluded from the synagogue.

To confess Jesus as Lord and even to worship him, is to engage in a way of life opposed to that practiced by the common people of the Graeco-Roman world. It meant taking the risk of being expelled from the synagogue by religious Jewish leaders and to be treated as *atheos* by the Roman power.

## 1.22 Methodological Issues

In order to be properly understood, John 9.24-41 needs a multi-dimensional approach to form

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<sup>9</sup> John 3.2: He came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.”

the basis of a socio-rhetorical reading.<sup>10</sup> This approach is needed since it “integrates major strategies of the new movements and methods through a rhetorical approach that focuses on literary, social, cultural and ideological issues in the text” (Robbins 1996a:1).

The socio-rhetorical approach of reading is helpful to the reading of a text because it considers all the elements that interact within the text, for example, social class, social systems, individual status, the marginalised and the powerful. The interpreter that uses this method focuses intensely upon the multiplicity of meanings of the words of the text in order “to create the context for the inner meanings of the text” (Robbins 1966b:37). The interpreter seeks all possible meanings from the words themselves and concentrates on the ways the words are used. At this stage, the interpreter resorts to six different kinds of textures: repetitive, progressive, narrational, opening-middle-closing, argumentative and sensory-aesthetic textures (see Robbins 1996a:7; 1996b:46).

Next, the interpreter takes recourse to the social and cultural intertexture present in references in the text to the phenomena that lie in the “world”; in other words, the interpreter endeavours to see how the language of the text interacts with reality outside the text – with physical objects, or historical events (historical intertexture), language from other texts cited orally or in written works (oral-scribal intertexture); allusions and references to texts that evoke the world in which they communicate, *references* that point to a personage, a concept, or a tradition, or an *allusion* to people, goods, and traditions in Jewish and Graeco-Roman culture.

Following this, the interpreter relates the social and cultural texture to the social and cultural nature of the text as a text. This includes exploring the social and cultural “location” of the language and the type of society and culture which that language evokes and creates. The text is to be seen as a way of constructing a social and cultural world by seven religious responses – conversionist, revolutionist, introversionist, Gnostic-manipulationist, thaumaturgical, reformist and utopian – which show what is to be done to live in the world or to change it. The Gospel of

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<sup>10</sup> This study should employ the socio-rhetorical method of interpretation. Rhetoric refers to the art of persuasion, and rhetorical criticism is concerned with how the components of argumentation are arranged in the text to persuade its audience (Stamps 1997:221). Rhetorical interpretation is, therefore, concerned with strategies that change attitudes and induce action. The Gospel of John being skillfully constructed by the writer, leaves no option but to use the socio-rhetorical approach to understand the message running through the text, and by analysing the text “as a strategic statement in a situation characterised by ‘webs of significance’ containing an intermingling of social, cultural, religious, and literary traditions and conventions in the Mediterranean world” (Robbins 1984:6).

John seeks to reconstruct, through a utopian view, the entire social world according to given and divine principles adopted in order to survive.

Then, the ideological texture is examined, and it is concerned with the biases, opinions, preferences and stereotypes of a particular writer and a particular reader. It is approached like intertextual analysis since the interpreter has to analyse himself, or herself, as a writer and reader, and as one or more other writers and readers. Ideologies are shaped by specific views of reality shared by groups – by specific perspectives on the world, society and men, and on the limitations and potentialities of human existence. There are four steps involved: individual locations, relation to groups, modes of intellectual discourse and spheres of ideologies. It is important to outline that ideology does not concern people; however, it concerns the discourse of people. There are some helpful ways to analyse the social and cultural location of the implied author of the text; to analyse the ideology of power in the discourse of the text, and to analyse the ideology in the mode of intellectual, both in the text and in the interpretation of text.

Lastly, the sacred texture is examined, and this has to do with the relationship between human life and the divine, or transcendent. An analysis of the sacred texture describes how the text speaks of God or the gods, or about the domain of religious life (van den Heever and Van Heerden 2001:132). Robbins distinguishes eight faces of sacral texture: *deity or deities* (most religious texts speak of gods or transcendent beings and, sometimes, God speaks and acts like another character in the story). The first step will be to describe the nature of god in order to move towards an analysis and interpretation of the sacred texture of a text, *holy persons* (people with a special relationship to God or to divine beings), *spirit being* (in ancient religious texts, the forces that act on human lives are often personified as spirit beings ; *the conflict between good and evil*, between angelic and demonic influence, forms the context for the portrayal of the relationship between human beings and gods), *divine history* (many religious or sacred texts presuppose that divine powers direct historical processes and events toward certain results; they intervene directly in historical processes or events for certain purposes), *human redemption* (religious texts mediate the advantages of a relationship with gods for the readers of such texts ...), *human commitment* (the sacred texture of a text, regularly, includes a portrayal of humans who are faithful followers and supporters of people who play a special role in revealing the ways of God to humans (Christian texts refer to this phenomenon as “discipleship”); *religious community* (which includes commitment to God, to people inside and outside the community), *ethics* (which concerns the responsibility of humans to think and act in special ways in both

ordinary and extraordinary circumstances when religious texts speak of the relationship between human beings and God, they include guidelines in how to express the commitment to God).

### **1.221 Application of the socio-rhetorical approach to reading John 9.24-41**

After the introductory section which describes the framework of the study, the following chapter will contain the exegesis of John 9. The detailed exegesis of the relevant section of the text demonstrates, by means of inner texture, the thematic lines that set out the narrative structure of John 9. The third chapter will deal with the titles of Jesus, and the references to the Jewish debates that reflect the social and cultural texture of the passage. Finally, the fourth chapter dealing with discipleship in John 9 will focus on the sacred texture.

In order to construct a meaningful view of this text, I am going to seek to understand the relationships between language, discourse, and situational context in John's communication as he seeks to persuade his audience. It is this relationship, as Robbins puts it, between language, discourse, and situational context as "intertexture" that reveals how a text refers to the phenomena that lie in the "world" outside the text. In other words, it is the interaction between the language of the text and the reality outside it – either physical objects, or historical events (historical intertexture), texts themselves (oral-scribal intertexture), customs, values, roles, institutions and systems (social intertexture (see Robbins 1996b:40)).

Van den Heever (1999:347) outlines how an ancient text that has survived the ongoings of history needs to be interpreted: "one aspect of interpretation is to enter into the world projected by the text and to imagine the fit between the text and the world-view contemporaneous to it." When studying the Gospel of John, we have to ask ourselves in what way the text reflects the world of the historical patterns in the communication event and how it speaks about this world. What type of world is projected and constructed in it? It should be kept in mind that the rhetorical genius of the Fourth Evangelist is visible in his endeavour to speak well and to successfully move the audience whom he is addressing. The type of world projected and constructed in John 9.24-41 can be understood through the concepts used in it, which are to be situated in their own context, namely the Mediterranean world. This text refers to *explicit data* in terms of places (synagogue), the names of characters or historical figures (Pharisees or Jewish authorities, the man born blind, Jesus) and historical events (the healing of the blind man and the expulsion



from the synagogue which took place, not before Jesus' lifetime, but after it). The text also reflects the socio-political context of Ephesus regarding the title of Lord attributed to Jesus.

The Gospel of John is to be read as a direct conversation with his Ephesian audience. All the names and titles given to Jesus, as it shall be indicated below in chap 3, are answers to the question "who is he?" and suggest what meaning his followers should attach to him. In John 9.24-41, Jesus is identified as Prophet, the Light, Man from God, Messiah (Christ), Son of man, Lord. In such a way, Jesus is portrayed as anti-emperor. For instance, John's conception of "Lord", a title given to Jesus, in its usage throughout the first century, becomes an important indication of the divine character of the one so named (van Tilborg 1996:41). According to Schnackenburg (1980b:529-42), the title "Son of man" stems from the apocalyptic tradition and indicated a figure that traverses the realms of heaven and earth, conversing with God, who will appear again as end-time saviour. The use of the title "Lord" characterises "the culture of the time in which authority figures were seen as *kyrioi* – the lord of the house who rules the *oikos*" (van Tilborg 1996:31). One needs to remember that Trajan was called "Lord of Earth and Sea." The same title was used for Artemis, and also in later inscriptions, when society became even more hierarchical, and emperors took an even higher position (van Tilborg 1996:31). In the Johannine text,<sup>11</sup> this title expresses the ideology of the time and, by using it, John stands behind his Church in opposition to every emperor who calls himself Lord for, theologically, Jesus, after his death and resurrection, is the "κύριος" over life and death.

### **1.222 Context of the text**

The text selected for this study encompasses three of the five scenes which structure the "dialogue and interrogation" (9.13-41) subsequent to the miracle story of the blind man. As Morris (1971:489-497), Beasley-Murray (1989:158-162), L'Eplattenier (1993:203-7), and very particularly Martyn (1979), have concluded, John 9.24-41 is to be seen as the climax of the

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<sup>11</sup> Jesus plays a central role in John's Gospel. Jesus is portrayed as King, God, Lord and Saviour. All these titles have their own ideological implications. Scientific research upon John, Van Tilborg contends (1996:25), shows that the various titles used for Jesus influence each other mutually in meaning and function. From such a view, Jesus as king receives his authority from God, as Son of God, Jesus is sent to the cosmos by the Father as an emissary; as *kyrios*, Jesus becomes visible (van Tilborg 1996:26). By using this title for Jesus, the writer seems to recall the imperial Ephesian cult in which, for Domitian, a link was established between the title of *kyrios* and the title "God" – *dominus et deus* – Trajan who is called "Lord of Earth and Sea", the parallel use of *kyria* for Artemis, at least from the time of Trajan; and the use of *kyrios* in later inscriptions, when society becomes increasingly hierarchical and the emperors assume

Johannine narrative in its depiction of the struggles between Jews and Christians at the end of the first century. This text has been chosen because of its focus on the relationship between Jesus and Moses in respect of how “to believe” in John’s outlook. John 9, according to Martyn’s contention (1979:39 note 44), and with whom I agree, has particular relevance because it contains the “Christ-versus-Moses motif” which “is struck repeatedly” in the Fourth Gospel, “and constitutes ... not only the nuclear expression of the synagogue-church rivalry, but also one of the key problems with which John himself wrestled.”

John 9 contains a narrative of the healing of the blind man at Siloam and a dialogue in the form of a trial scene. Panackel (1988:145) observes that “John 9 is undoubtedly a masterpiece of dramatic art and Christological doctrines fused into one single narrative.” In it, Jesus reveals himself to be the Light of the world (v. 5) and in confirmation thereof gives sight to a poor man blind from birth (v. 6-7). The rest of the chapter is divided into “dialogic scenes” in the form of a trial through which shows neighbours whose superficiality, in relation to Jesus, is incontestable (v. 8-10.12), the parents who are afraid to witness to what they know (v. v. 20-23), the self-sufficient Pharisees (v.28-29.34.40) and the healed blind man who is of remarkable courage in his willingness to witness at the risk of being expelled from the synagogue (v. 15, 17, 25, 27, 30-33). The healed man is led to the light of faith in Jesus (v. 35-38) while the proud self-righteous leaders of the people are judged by Jesus as spiritually blind (v. 39-41). Brown notes (1966:354) that the episode depicted in John 9 does end with the close of chapter 9, for chapters 7 and 8 present Christ “manifested to the world” as life and light, but rejected. This rejection runs through all the episodes of these three connected chapters. The key word which indicates the connection with the foregoing episode is *phôs eimi tou kosmou* of John 9.5, which repeats in 8.12.

That is why “the healing of the blind is conceived as a sign of the triumph of light over darkness, in the sense of the Prologue: the *phôs alêthinon* shines in darkness, and the darkness, far from “overwhelming” it, is overcome and dispelled” (Brown 1953:357). It further recalls John 3.19-21 “and this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.” It is this theme, contends Dodd (1953:357), which is dealt with in the preceding chapters 7-8 and thus

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an ever higher position (van Tilborg 1996:55). The manner in which the *kyrios* title is applied to Jesus in the Johannine text is parallel to this as will be demonstrated later.

receives more explicit treatment in chapter 9. Throughout the narrative, the man whom Christ enlightened pleads the cause of the Light in the sphere of darkness. In the rhetorical genius of the writer, Jesus, who is present at the beginning of the story (John 9.1-7), is, as the story goes on, “judged *in absentia*” and reappears at the end, after the formerly blind man was driven out of the synagogue (v. 35-41) playing a double role.<sup>12</sup> The writer ingeniously connects the miracle of healing experienced by the blind man to (in light of John’s purpose) his necessary act of coming to believe in Jesus as Son of man, and pronouncing the judgment against “the Jews” blindness, whose claim to see is evident of their unbelief, and proof of “the sin that remains.”

John 9.24-41 is poised between two literary units, namely the middle section (v. 8-34), and the theological conclusion (v. 35-41). The central topic of the entire chapter is “Jesus the Light of the World” whose healing of the man born blind intended to manifest the identity of Jesus. From that perspective, Panackel (1988:146) outlines that:

The cure of the man born blind is one of the semeia worked by Jesus so that “the works of God might be made manifest in him” (v. 3). As every Johannine semeion, this stupendous miracle serves to manifest the identity of Jesus. It does not intend to show the pedagogic purpose of God in each suffering, but is totally concerned with the person and mission of the healer, namely, of Jesus. As in Jn 7 and Jn 8 (7,12.15-18.27-29.35-36.40-44; 8, 19.25.27.33.48.53.58), so also in Jn 9, the true centre of interest is the revelation of the person of Jesus. That this Christological theme becomes the principle of unity and the element of cohesion for the entire chapter is clearly seen in the fact that all through the periscope, even in Jesus’ absence the narrative is woven around the person of Jesus (v. 4-7a.11-12.15b.17.22.24-25.29-33.35-38.39-41). The Christocentric character of John 9 is best seen both in its main theme and in its revelation of Jesus’ identity.

### **1.223 Inner texture analysis**

The inner textural analysis will reveal how, by focussing on words as tools for communication, we can “remove all meanings” from the words and simply look at and listen to “the words themselves” in order to perform such an analysis (see Robbins 1996b:7). This kind of analysis facilitates the identification of four kinds of inner texture in John 9 from which is drawn the text that is the object of this investigation, namely John 9.24-41. By doing repetitive, progressive, opening-middle-closing and sensory-aesthetic texture, these tables help to identify the theme running through the text and how the text composition guides us to the central thought.

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<sup>12</sup> Panackel notes: “in this chapter, wherein John shows his rare artistic talent and theological genius, surprisingly enough, Jesus plays a direct active role only in the beginning (v.1-7) and in the end (v.35-41).”



26				eyes				said		
27								told		List/he
28		God					Jesus			Disc. (twice)
29	Man									We know
30	Man			eyes						We don't know
31		God				sinners				We know
32				eyes	World					
33		God								
34			blind			sin				
35										
36	He (man)						Son of Man			
37							Lord	said	seen	
38							Jesus			
39			blind		World			said		Do/don't see
40			blind				Jesus	said		
41			blind			sin/sin remains			see	

This table shows that the man born blind is a subject of central interest throughout John 9.1-41; the occurrences of man and blind traverse the entire story. Twelve references to man and thirteen references to the blind occur in John 9.1-41. The verbal form (especially 'asked,' to be connected to 'said' and 'told') that the narrator attributes to the Pharisees or Jews occur 14 times from John 9.1 to 40 and twelve references "to see" or "sight" occur as well in vv.1-41; eight references "to sin" or "sinners" occur in John 9.41, while eight references to "Jesus" occur in vv.3-40. In this context, seven references to "parents" and three references to "works" and four references to "world" occur in John 9.10-32 and five references to "God," in the debate concerning whether or not Jesus is a man from God, occur in John 9.16-33 and six references to Pharisees or Jews occur in vv.13-41.

*1.2232 Progressive texture*

Progressive texture, as will be shown, resides in sequences (progressions) of words and phrases throughout the unit. Repetition itself is indeed one kind of progression, since movement from the first occurrence of a word leads to a progressive movement in the discourse.

1	Man	blind from birth				Rabbi
2	Man	blind				Jesus
3	Man	blind				
4						
5						
6						Light of the World
7						
8	Man					
9	Man					
10			eyes opened			
11	Man		eyes			The man called Jesus
12				Pharisees		
13	Man	blind				
14			opened eyes			Jesus
15				Pharisees		
16	Man					Prophet
17			eyes he opened			
18		blind				
19		blind				
20					we know	
21			opened his eyes		we do not know (twice)	
22				Jews (twice)		Jesus to be Messiah

23					we know	
24	Man	blind				
25		blind			I do know/don't know	
26			opened your eyes			
27						
28						
29	Man				we know/we don't know	
30	Man		opened my eyes		you don't know	
31					we know	
32			opened eyes			
33						
34						
35						
36	Man					Believe Son of Man
37						Son of Man Believe
38						Lord
39		become blind				I believe
40		blind				
41						

This table reveals the progression of the man born blind, healed by Jesus, and who, when he confronts the Pharisees, hears them claim to know that Jesus is not from God but a sinner, and that it is Moses who is from God since God had spoken to him. The blind man, from the moment of his healing makes a progression beyond the disciples of Jesus, who acknowledged him as Rabbi, while he himself reveals that he is the Light of the world. The blind man progressed from acknowledging "a man called Jesus" to recognising him as the Son of man, and even better, the Lord worthy of worship. Moreover, the blind man passes from a vague knowledge to deepened insight. The rhetorical construct of the evangelist is demonstrated in his artful contrast of the blind man with the Pharisees who claim to know or to see, but are veritably blind and whose sin remains, and which justifies the present judgment of the Son of man.

*1.2233 The opening-middle-closing texture or structure of text*

First block: vv. 24 – 34

A - So for the second time they called the man who had been blind and said: 'Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner.

A' - He answered: 'whether he is a sinner, **I do not know. I know** that I was blind, now I see'.

B - He told him: What did he do? How did he open your eyes?

B' - They answered them: I already told you and you do not understand ...

C - Then they reviled him: you are his disciple: we are disciples of Moses.

C' - We know that God had spoken to Moses,

D - This man we **do not know** where he is from.

D' - The man answered: this is an astonishing thing that **you do not know** where he is from, and (yet) he opened my eyes.

E - We know that God does not listen to sinners but, if anyone worships him and does his will, he does listen.

F - Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind.

G - If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.

H - They answered him: "you were born entirely in sin, and are you trying to teach us." And they drove him out.

Within the first block of John 9.24-34, the theme which runs throughout that structure is to be found in the debate between the Pharisees and the so-called "the man", that is the former blind man, and Jesus. The term "the man" occurs six times, attributed either to the blind man himself, or to Jesus. When attributed to Jesus, it is in the expressive form "this man" (v. 24, 29 and 33). The emphatic term "we know"/"we do not know" occurs seven times. Both terms may be viewed, throughout the first block, as "sense-bearers" insofar as the debate between the former blind man and the Pharisees, or Jewish authorities, is concentrated on these terms. The debate is constructed upon religious claims, on Jesus accused of being a sinner, while the formerly blind man is called to testify about him (v. 30 and 32). Against the certainty of the Pharisees that



Jesus is not from God, the man opposed another certainty grounded in his experience “I was blind now I see” (v.25), evidence which does not impress the Pharisees, comfortable in their position of acknowledging the evidence in the course of the debate, they consciously refuse to be disciples of Jesus – instead, they proclaim that they are disciples of Moses for they know who he is and that he is from God and, furthermore, they know God had spoken to him (v. 26-29), but not, in their eyes, to Jesus, dismissively called “this man” about whom they do not know from whence he comes.

Second block: vv 35 – 41

A – Jesus heard that they had driven him out

- And when he found him, he said ‘Do you **believe** in the Son of man?’

B – He answered: “and who is he, Sir? Tell me, so that I may **believe** in him’.

A’ – Jesus said to him: “you have **seen** him, and the one speaking with you is he.”

B’ – He said: “Lord, **I believe**” and he worshipped him.

C – Jesus said: “I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not **see may see**, and those who do see may become **blind.**”

D – Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him: “Surely we are not **blind**, are we?”

C’ – Jesus said to them: “If you were **blind**, you would not have sin. But now that you say, ‘we see’, your sin remains.”

Within the second block, verses 35-41, Jesus reappears, finding the blind man, and here arises the comprehensiveness of the revelation as it operates through the implicit language of the miracle. He presents himself as the Son of man, in whom the blind man is invited to believe. Faith reaches a climax when works are connected to the words of Jesus.

From that contextual perspective, the opening-middle-closing inner texture, operated through this structure, presents to us how the Christian Church and the synagogue held opposing views about Moses and Jesus. This structure also reveals the meaning of the miraculous sign embodied in the healing of the man born blind; how the new Church had to fight against the Synagogue, and how the act of Jesus, reflected at the beginning of the story, when he healed the man born blind is *hic et nunc* an eschatological act or judgment of God “at the present.” The third form in the inner texture that helps connect miracle, wisdom and eschatological discourse

may be found in John 9.24-41 where he explores the zone of self-expressive speech. Many people use such words as “called”, “said”, “answered”, and “told” and these verbal signals are very important for the narrational dialogue, firstly between the Jews and the healed man, then between Jesus and the formerly blind man, and later between Jesus and the Pharisees. Jesus and the blind man, talking to each other, do not share the same level of understanding regarding the sign performed by Jesus. Yet, the understanding of the Jesus event is extremely important in Johannine theology. The miracle encountered is an event of Jesus’s past ministry, but reinterpreted in the light of the new reality of the Church which was facing persecution by the Jews. The blind man shows the wisdom he has gained through the miracle, as described by the writer, despite the fact that Jesus disappeared during the course of the story. For God reveals himself through the works of his Son, Jesus.

#### *1.2234 The sensory-aesthetic texture of the text*

The zone of self-expressive speech, throughout John 9.24-41, is invaluable for allowing wisdom to be demonstrated through the works and words of Jesus, which constitute another kind of discourse in the text, namely the discourse of revelation. This allows the dialogue to be persuasive. In v. 27 “He answered them, ‘I have told you already and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again’?” The expressions “hearing,” which appear thrice in the text and “listening,” which appears twice in the text, arise directly from the lips of the blind man addressing the leaders. When he was witnessing they could have listened but they did not. The formerly blind man, aware of this, reverts to irony: “Do you also want to become his disciples?” and the word “also” alludes to his discipleship, an obvious proof that he is a genuine follower, a “true Israelite”, unlike “the Jews” who are proud of their discipleship to Moses and thereby reject Jesus. When the man replies that: ‘We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to anyone who worships him and obeys his will,’ there is a reference to rabbinic statements and common biblical principle according to which the miracle is, in every case, given by God. The Jews portrayed this as the answer to prayer (Bultmann 1971:337 note 2). In terms of the blind man adopting the “we” of the Pharisees, just as Nicodemus (“we know that you are a teacher who comes from God”) and Jesus did (“...we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony”), Brown rightly contends that “undoubtedly, such passages were used in the polemics between Jews and Christians” (1966:375). God does not listen to sinners, yet does listen to anyone who worships and obeys him. The term “*theosebes*”, is a common term in Hellenistic religious circles for describing piety (Brown 1966:375) and the

expression “*to thelêma autou poiein*” (to do the will of God or to obey) is, according to Bultmann (1972:364), a Hebrew description of piety. The unprecedented miracle performed by Jesus and the way it intersects with the zone of self-expressive speech is somewhat surprising, for no miraculous healing of a man born blind is recorded in the deuterocanonical books of the Old Testament (Brown 1966:375). Tobias’s sight was miraculously restored, but he was not born blind.

The last zone of sensory-aesthetic texture is the zone of purposeful action. This zone is the outcome of miracle, wisdom and eschatological discourses. In John 9.34 we read: “you were born entirely in sin and are you trying to teach us?” And they drove him out.” This act of expulsion has divided scholarship into two groups – those who claim that this act is a simple ejection of the man from their presence (Bernard:337; Brown 1966:375 ; Moloney 1976:295), and those who (like Barrett 1978:364; Morris 1995:493; Carson 375) understand the expression as indicating some kind of formal excommunication of the healed man. As for Asiedu-Peprah (2001:147), influenced by Lagrange, the idea of a formal act of expulsion or excommunication is not present in the text, and should therefore be considered as mere conjecture. In verse 35, there are three active verbs (“*ekousen*”, “*heuron*” and “*eipen*”). The act of Jesus finding the man is a conscious and deliberate effort on the part of Jesus to seek the man out, and not merely a chance meeting. That is why Asiedu-Peprah asserts that: ‘Jesus’ action of finding the man is a clear indication that the two are making common cause in the ongoing controversy between Christians and “the Jews.” The blind man who acknowledges Jesus as “prophet” (v. 17b), “a man from God’ (v. 33), is now drawn to show that he may come into a full understanding of Jesus’s identity. Jesus seeks and finds him for this purpose.

John 9, a skilfully elaborated text, is multi-faceted (comprising elements of miracle, wisdom and eschatological discourse). *Wisdom discourse* focuses on the transmission of wisdom from Jesus to his followers and then from Christian believers to others. The discourse presupposes that Jesus is a transmitter of wisdom from God to humans; his followers perpetuate this tradition by transmitting from Jesus to others (e.g. the wisdom can be found in James 1.5 and in Matthew 5.44-45 and in the Gospel of Thomas 94-95 whose central thought is that God gives generously to all humans – good or evil, just or unjust, grateful or ungrateful). The *miracle discourse* is based on the assumption that God can miraculously intervene to the benefit of the believer. The believer is expected to fulfil certain conditions for the attainment of divine benefits according to the presupposition that God responds to humans in contexts of danger or disease and that

Jesus is the mediator of these benefits to humans. These values are displayed in the ancient healing cults, but are also apparent in the gospel traditions, as well as in narratives of a more folkloric nature such as *the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles* and some of the martyrologies. The *eschatological (apocalyptic) discourse* is to be seen as an ensemble of expectations of a catastrophic end-time action of God to bring salvation and judgment as well as renewal of the world. The foundational presupposition is that God will act in a decisive way soon to destroy the evil in the world and to preserve the righteous (see Van den Heever & Scheffler 2001:245-6; Robbins 1996:357-9).

The Fourth Evangelist, in his rhetorical construction of the event, reverts to other kinds of discourse in the story as will be shown below. The main goal of the wisdom discourse is to encourage "good" and to discourage "evil", insofar as the author's rhetoric construct, in John 9, seems to address to the disciples at the end of the first century, the wisdom by which they have to live in the troubled world. When the Jewish authorities referred themselves to Moses, it is astonishing to see them forget that Moses, their master, taught them that behaviour, that is, it was good to believe in Moses and in Jesus of whom Moses wrote. According to John 5.46, they did not believe in Moses and then they failed to believe in Jesus. They failed to do the work of God, which is "to believe in him whom he has sent" (John 6.29). The healed blind man is an example of an appeal to the disciples to be enabled by the faith, instructed by it on how to live and how to act in a troubled world. To believe, in John's outlook, is wisdom, since the eye of enlightened faith enables the believer to find out which actions are good and which are evil and therefore should be avoided. This wisdom enabled the formerly blind man to offend the religious leaders in spite of their power and their threat of expulsion from the synagogue. To believe in Jesus, in that view, is an act, which enables the believer to orientate the eyes of faith towards him whose faith in God, his Father, enabled him to fight the Jewish leaders and the ideology of the Roman Empire. The wisdom, for the blind man, enabled by a penetrating eye of belief, in the context of persecution of the Christians, is to strive to look critically at the Jews, comfortable in their unbelief in Jesus because they were focussed on Moses' revelation.

Another way in which the two forms of discourse (miracle and wisdom discourses) are interwoven in John 9.24-41 is shown through the structure of the text that Robbins calls "opening-middle-closing inner texture." This is found in miracle discourse, one of the foundational discourses for Christianity. It should be noted that miracles were an important testimony of God's divine presence (Rebecca Messerli, quoted by Van den Heever & Van

Heerden 2001:143). The Gospel of John refers to the miracles, understood as “signs,”<sup>13</sup> since they are “convincing proofs” through which the glory of Jesus as Messiah and Son of God is revealed as a spur to belief. Nicol (1972:2) is right when he points out that:

The theological problem of the Fourth Gospel is as acute as the question of its origin. For the western mind, there is an almost unbearable tension between history and theology in the Gospel. On the one hand, John seems to be describing sensible, realistic fact; on the other hand, the main contents of the Gospel seem to be a highly developed interpretation of the life of Jesus. How can John maintain that he writes about the historical Jesus while in many respects he actually seems to be presenting the later theology of the Church concerning the exalted Christ? (...) the *semeia* provide a useful key because the total “tension” of the Gospel is reflected in them with even more intensity. On the one hand, John seems to stress the historicity of these miraculous events, and on the other hand, he interprets them as symbols for the work of the exalted Christ in such a way that it may seem as if their historicity is unimportant to him.

In this sense, the miracles, which form one of the greatest problems in the interpretation of the Gospel, have to be regarded as “manifestations of divinity.” That is why, in John’s rhetorical construct Jesus is portrayed “like a god manifesting himself on earth; he is no true man” (Nicol 1972:2). John’s method of interpreting the earthly Jesus is to see the whole earthly life of Jesus as a “*sêmeion*,” because in John 12.37 and 20.30 he summarises it as “performing signs.”

The miracles of Jesus are not to be seen as wonders (*terata*), as “visible and marvellous happenings” of John 2.23<sup>14</sup> and 6.2, 14,<sup>15</sup> ineffective in bringing about the full Christian faith

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<sup>13</sup> As Schnackenburg (1980:515-8) points out, in his excursus, the term “sign” is a theological term deliberately chosen by the evangelist. It occurs 17 times in John and its particular sense appears even in the final comment of John 20.30-31 “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.” The signs, as asserted by the evangelist, are important works of Jesus, performed in the sight of his disciples, and which, by their very nature, should lead to faith in “Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God.” The writer mentions seven miracles: the miracle of the transformation of water into wine at Cana, the miracle of the healing at a distance, the healing at the pool of Bethesda, the multiplication of the loaves, the walking on the waters, the cure of the man born blind and the raising of Lazarus. The miracles are explicitly designated as “signs” (John 2.11; 4.54; 6.14 and 26; 9.16) and 11.47; 2.48); with the exception of the cure at Bethesda which is not termed a sign but is treated as an important *ergon* (7.21; cfr 5.20, 36). There is, at least, one place, in John 4, 48 “*ean me sêmeia kai terata idete, ou me pisteusete*” = ‘unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe’, where the term “signs” (*sêmeia*) is used with “wonders” (*terata*). In John, the miracles of Jesus are not to be taken as “a spectacular marvel” (Schnackenburg 1980:517), a kind of “heavenly sign.” The Jesus of John refuses to bend towards such an interpretation and from that perspective these signs are, in the fullest and deepest sense, wholly the work of Jesus, and are indissolubly linked to his work of revelation under his Father’s mandate, and can only be accepted and understood in faith.

<sup>14</sup> “When he was in Jerusalem during the Passover festival, many believed in his name because they saw the signs that he was doing.”

when the signs are perceived only externally or requested as sensations as was the case of the wonders that Jesus refers to in John 4.48 (see Schnackenburg 1980:519), but the signs (*semeia*) which can show the true believer the glory of Christ as he publicly works on earth. The “works” are markedly “Messianic” while the “signs” are completely orientated to Christology even if the two can never be disjoined in John. The Christological significance is the most important element of the Johannine “signs,” as Schnackenburg (1980:524) contends:

The “signs” are closely linked to the work of Jesus on earth and their main purpose is to bring out the revelation of Jesus’ glory which is actually taking place, which is the glory of the only-begotten son of the Father in the time of his incarnation (1.14) (...) The signs are not meant to throw light on the historical process through which Jesus passed as Saviour, but simply to awaken faith in Jesus’ being “the Christ, the Son of God” (20.30f). They manifest the significance of the person of Jesus as such for salvation. The Christological outlook is the viewpoint from which to read John 9.24-41. I shall demonstrate how, in recounting the healing of the man born blind, the writer, in a persuasive manner, leads him to a faith in Jesus the Son of Man, this being the climax of the story. The object interpretation of John will look at the authorship and circumstances of redaction of the Gospel of John.

### **1.224 Authorship, dating, location and context of writing the Gospel of John**

#### *1.2241 Authorship*

The quest for the identity of the author of the Fourth Gospel has had a profound effect on its interpretation. Maurice Jones quoted by Hengel (1990:2) considers that quest as the “most fascinating problem of NT criticism, and (...) incomparably the most important of them all.” The Gospel of John is considered to have been written anonymously. Some other New Testament writings, such as Paul’s letters, explicitly mention their authors, but the authorship of the Fourth Gospel is not clear.

By reading John 19.35 and 21.24, many scholars, of whom Bultmann (1971:11) is one, hold that the author must be an eyewitness of the life of Jesus identified with the enigmatic figure of the Beloved Disciple mentioned in John 13.23; 19.26f; 20.2-10 and in the redactional appendix in John 21.20-23. Many commentators refer to the author as “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” They cite John 21.24, which reads as follows: “this is the disciple who bears witness about these

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<sup>15</sup> “A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick” (6.2) ...”when the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, ‘This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world’ (v. 14).

things and who wrote these things, and we know that his witness is true.” Beasley-Murray (1989:4) makes two observations about the text quoted above:

- i) The name of the disciple is not stated, nor is it given anywhere else in the Gospel;
- ii) The natural inference from the assertion is that the writer is speaking of “the disciple whom Jesus loved” as someone other than himself, exactly as in John 19,35 it is said: “The man who saw this has borne witness to it – and his witness is authentic, and he knows that he tells the truth – that you, too, may believe.” In light of both passages, the disciple is cited as an independent witness whose testimony is authentic. The position of that disciple is somehow enigmatic. The Beloved Disciple was “close to the breast of Jesus” or “in the bosom of Jesus.” The expression “in the bosom of” has a counterpart in the Prologue where God is referred to as the “God no one has ever seen.” The author adds: “The only Son, by nature God, who is ever close to the Father’s heart, has brought knowledge of him” (1, 18). Henceforth, the expression “in the bosom of” can signify “in closest intimacy with the Father.” Beasley-Murray explains “As Jesus was and is in closest fellowship with the Father, and therefore has been able to reveal God as none other before or since him, so the disciple whom Jesus loved was in closest intimacy with Jesus and has been able to reveal the truth he brought as no other person could” (1989:5-6).

The intimate relationship between Father and Son makes it possible for the Son to make the Father known. Likewise, the intimate relationship between Jesus and the Beloved Disciple makes it possible for him to be a true witness for Jesus.

The Beloved Disciple, who, in connection with internal evidence, is generally regarded as the Gospel’s author, had the privilege of being exceptionally close to Jesus, and exceptionally well-acquainted with Jesus’ thinking. Furthermore, as the authority behind the Johannine tradition, in a broad sense the author of the community’s tradition, he “was enabled by the Spirit not only to grasp what he heard and saw but to pass on to the churches that understanding of Jesus. It is probably that the Lord gave to the Beloved Disciple another disciple of like mind, similarly illuminated by the Spirit, who was led to set down in writing for all subsequent generations the knowledge of him which is life eternal” (Beasley-Murray 1989:7). The redactor or narrator is not to be seen as the author who stands behind him and the tradition written down.

Another disciple referred to in John 18.15-6 and who is to be viewed as the author of the Gospel was known to the high priest. That is why it would not be a surprise to find “priestly” concerns in the Gospel – namely, the complex of Temple life – the temple itself considered as “the place of the presence of God, and its associated festivals, priestly rituals and sacrifices” (Neirynek quoted by Beasley-Murray 1989:15). The Gospel of John is to be viewed as the result of a long process of composition in which can be found a distinct tradition received from the Beloved Disciple, the work of the evangelist, and the revisions of the redactor (Culpepper 1998:40-1). Unlike the assertion of tradition that the Beloved Disciple was the Apostle John, modern interpreters come to contend that: “The Beloved Disciple was instead an otherwise unknown teacher and theologian whose legacy has been passed on in the Fourth Gospel. The Gospel reflects not only his theological and literary genius but also the history of the community in which it was shaped ...” (Culpepper 1998:41).

Bultmann (1971:10) argues that the Gospel itself makes no claim to have been written by an eyewitness, and his writing has to be situated in relation to time and space.

#### *1.2242 Dating and location*

It has been demonstrated by scholars that John’s Gospel must have been written after the death of the Emperor Domitian, after 98 CE. According to Irenaeus, the Johannine corpus must have been edited not much earlier than shortly after 100 CE (Hengel 1990:25). In the year of 100 CE, the apostle would have been about a hundred years old (Beasley-Murray 1989:6), which suggests that the writing cannot be attributed to him. As Brown (2003:207) notes that the general opinion fixes 100-110 as the latest plausible date for the written composition of John.

Yet some arguments date the Gospel to the early first century (Brown 1978:81-86) or second century (1978:83-86):

- The first and classic argument to support this very late date for John was the development of the theology of the text. Comfortable with the so-called Hegelian “thesis-antithesis-synthesis”, Baur surprisingly put the Synoptics, Paul’s Epistles and John into this framework of thesis, antithesis and synthesis. Such a view cannot succeed since it is generally admitted that the Pauline writings antedate the Synoptics. In spite of this, most



scholars still think of the Gospel of John as the latest of the four, but the theory of theological development cannot support it. Two examples may be brought out, namely the Johannine sacramentalism, as it is in 6.51-58, is too developed to have been formulated in the first century; the origin of that sacramental thought had to come from the Church. Another example of the argument was the disputable claim of the common authorship of the Gospel itself and the epistles of John. That is why, Brown points out, “there is nothing in the theology of John that would clearly rule out final composition in the first century” (2003:207).

- The second argument used to demonstrate the necessity of dating John in the late second century is the fact that there is no evidence of the use of John before 150. Against this argument, Braun asserted that Ignatius of Antioch (110 CE) must have known the Johannine tradition in spite of not knowing the Gospel in its final form of composition. It is not possible to establish whether Clement of Rome 96 CE used the Fourth Gospel;
- The third argument is the evident affection for this Gospel among second century Gnostic circles. The holders of that opinion consider Gnosticism to be dependent on the Fourth Gospel;
- The argument according to which the Gospel circulated in Egypt in the period 140-200 has had little support;
- Those who argue in favour of the early date of the Fourth Gospel uphold that the traditions that underlie the synoptic Gospels are to be situated in the period of 40-60; these very traditions are behind the Fourth Gospel. Henceforth the Synoptic gospels were written in the period 75-85 and the Gospel of John was written almost during the same period.

The argument of John’s dependence on the Synoptic Gospels is no longer supportable and a later dating is favoured inasmuch as Matthew and Luke are dated in the 80s CE. As in John, a correct tradition of Palestinian places, situations and customs are unavoidable, and it is plausible that the tradition present in the Gospel of John took shape before the destruction of the temple in 70, or at least, shortly after 70. The fact that the Gospel refers to excommunication from the synagogue (the formal excommunication at Jamnia belongs to the period 80-90) also demonstrates that it was not written before 70. It should be noted that the Gospel composition cannot be pushed much beyond 100 but has to be situated between 90 and 110.

As to the localisation of the Fourth Gospel, apart from Ephesus, the internal evidence favours Alexandria and Antioch or Syria. Ephesus remains the primary contender (Brown 1978:103-4) as the place where John was composed. The anti-synagogue motif in the Gospel makes sense in the Ephesus region, for Revelation 2.9 and 3.9 attest anti-synagogue polemics in this area of Asia Minor.

#### *1.2243 Context and circumstances of writing*

The circumstances that led to the writing of the Gospel are also of interest to interpreters, since all written texts are “texts in context” (Smith 1982:xiii). Modern scholars (see Brodie (1993:10-14)) have offered that the following five views be considered when situating the Gospel in context:

- ❖ The conflict that existed within the synagogue between Christians and “Jews” influenced the writing of the text. In John 9, an atmosphere of division emerges in which Christians are threatened with excommunication (see Martyn 1979, Meeks 1972, Schnackenburg quoted by Brodie (1993:10)). The division is obvious from the fact that John mentions three occasions of excommunication (John 9.22; 12.42; 16.2) that may be seen as a serious threat for Jewish Christians and which divided them in two groups – those who did not have the courage to confess their faith and those who overcame their fear of the Jews and acknowledged that they followed Jesus (Joseph of Arimathea in John 19.38 and the blind man in John 9). That is why Allen, quoted by Brown (1978: LXXII), argues that “excommunication is the strongest theme in John 9.” In his narrative, the blind man is shown as a hero who comes to believe in Jesus even at the cost of his expulsion from the synagogue. Through him, John invites the Jewish Christians in the Diaspora synagogues to follow his example.
- ❖ At a time when antagonism between Jews and Samaritans prevailed, the Gospel, explains Brodie, is interested in Samaria and in reflecting Samaritan elements.
- ❖ The Gospel may be viewed as an anti-docetic polemic, since several texts emphasise the reality of Christ’s humanity. There are, for instance, the references to the Word becoming flesh (John 1.14); and the flow of blood and water in John 19.34-35. Brodie

asserts that John wrote his Gospel to counter the mistaken view that Christ was not fully human.

- ❖ Some scholars regard the Gospel as appealing to all Christians (Jewish and Gentile). They contend that the gospel was written not so much to counter some specific view or group, as to appeal positively to Christians of all kinds. That is, John's appeal was not to believing Jews alone, but also to believing Gentiles (Barrett 1978). Brown has underlined texts (1978: lxxiii-lxxix) which seem to indicate that John's appeal was not to believing Jews alone but also to believing Gentiles. The main purpose of the evangelist was to root the believer deeper in his faith, to "continuing to have faith that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God." It is indisputable that the Gospel of John is addressed to both believing Jews and Gentiles. From such a view, the portrayal of Jesus as Messiah is addressed to Jewish believers whereas, for Schnackenburg quoted by Brown (1978:lxxvii), with whom I am inclined to agree, the appeal to believe that Jesus is the Son of God is addressed to a Gentile religious background where the gods had sons. That appeal to all Christians, in the understanding of Onuki quoted by Brodie (1993:11), causes the Gospel to refer to three levels – the life of Jesus, the recent life of the Johannine community and the life of the community in the future. According to Martyn (1979:40), the Christian community experienced rejection by the world, especially by Jews, and the Gospel is an effort to absorb this painful history and set it in a meaningful context, and to move beyond it. The evangelist, particularly in chapters 15 to 17, and in the story of the commissioning of the disciples (John 20:19-23), shows that through the Spirit, Jesus gives believers a renewable mandate to go forth into the world (Brodie 1993:11-12).
- ❖ The Gospel is an apologetic against sectarians, particularly the adherents of John the Baptist. When the Fourth Evangelist wrote his gospel, a group of Baptist sectarians existed. They were followers of John the Baptist who, instead of acknowledging the pre-eminence of Jesus, insisted on giving undue importance to their own master (Brown 1978:lxvii) calling him Messiah and not Jesus. According to Baldensberger, quoted by Brodie (1993:12), the Prologue, which is to be taken as the key of the gospel, strives to contrast John the Baptist to Jesus putting the former in his place. John is depicted as embodying the tradition of the ancient prophets; he is a positive witness, someone who cheers when Jesus enters. The difference between the two is the difference between prophecy and its fulfilment. In other texts, John is depicted as not being the light, but a

witness; not the Messiah, but a voice like that of Isaiah; not the bridegroom, but the bridegroom's friend. The role of John the Baptist is not less important; he was sent by God (John 1.6) to reveal Jesus to Israel (1.31; 3.29) and was one of the major witnesses to Jesus to be ranked alongside the Scriptures and the miracles (5.31-40).

In order to establish the context in which the Fourth Gospel was written, we have to be aware of the relationship, in the early church, between a concern for tradition, and effective involvement in contemporary issues (Martyn 1979:19). According to him, none of the New Testament writers ever merely repeats the tradition: "Everyone hears it in his own present and that means in his own way: everyone shapes it, bends it, makes selections from among its riches, [and] even adds to it."

The Fourth Gospel leads the reader to listen both to tradition and to a new and unique interpretation of that tradition. It differs in many ways from the Synoptic Gospels. The author's accounts of the preaching of John the Baptist, for instance, and of Jesus' baptism, the calling of the disciples, the miracles of healing, of sharp words of conflict, the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the cleansing of the temple, the last supper, the betrayal, the trial, the crucifixion, and resurrection diverge sharply from those of the Synoptic Evangelists. So do the stories of the three miracles of healing – the army officer's son in Capernaum (4.46-54), the lame man at Bethesda in Jerusalem (John 5.1-9), and the blind beggar near the temple (John 9.1-7). All three of these incidents have traditional counterparts in the Synoptic Gospels, but in the Fourth Gospel, they are modified - reworked in "John's interests and experiences" (Martyn 1979: 21).

Many recent scholars come to focus on the interests of the evangelists that "primarily" are not historical but much rather theological, kerygmatic, catechetical and didactic (see Schnackenburg 1980:20). The Gospel of John strives to interpret the events of Jesus and the Church with the eyes of faith with a little interest in the historical. Schnackenburg expresses (1980:21) throughout his impressive commentary the following view: "John may have used a foundation of good historical and topographical knowledge on which to develop a profounder theological vision of the 'history' of Jesus, which uses the eyes of faith to go to the roots, as it were, of the historical events and external things and strives to reveal the secret divine thoughts which they enshrine."

As indicated above, the Christian community experienced rejection by the world, especially by

Jews. He sets out to represent once again Jesus, as Risen Lord, ministering the threatened church, encouraging the believers to stay closely bonded to his name, to mutually encourage and support each other in this time of persecution – from Jewish authorities and Roman imperial power – and finally, to accept and to live in the light of Jesus' assurances that he has final sovereignty over the world.

### **SUMMARY**

In this chapter, we noticed that John 9.24-41, the passage which attracted my attention, concentrates upon the issue of “to know” or “not to know”, a concentration that goes beyond a purely linguistic device and must rather be perceived as theological. The writer's entire rhetorical construct has a purpose, which is to show how the traditions around Moses obstruct the Jews from accepting and believing in Jesus, whom the Christians claimed is the Messiah. Jews of the synagogue and Christians of the Johannine community were divided into two opposing groups.

The best understanding of that can be reached by a proper use of a socio-rhetorical approach, by dealing with inner texture (in using the words themselves as bearers of significance); by referring to repetitive texture (since the more a term is used the more significant it is); by referring to progressive texture (in considering the sequences of words and phrases throughout the unit); by applying this methodology to the story of the blind man (v. 24 – 34), we discover that he passes from a vague knowledge to deepened insight in Jesus; by dealing with opening-middle-closing texture, and the emphatic terms “we know/we do not know”, which occur seven times and are “sense-bearers.” Against the Jewish evidence that Jesus is not from God, the blind man opposes another certainty grounded on his first experience of sight. The structure of John 9.35 – 41 reveals the meaning of the miraculous sign which comes to be interpreted as an eschatological act, since Jesus, through whom God's revelation is shared, becomes the judge of people like the Jewish leaders who did not acknowledge him.

The sensory-aesthetic texture demonstrates that the healing of the blind man constitutes another kind of discourse, which comes to the fore in God's revelation. John, in the construction of the story, seems to have asserted that the manifestation of divinity goes through Jesus' works, as is the case for his words.

Apart from that, we attempted to situate John 9.24-41 in its literary and historical context in order

to comprehend that all these issues and those surrounding authorship are helpful to a meaningful and objective interpretation of the text.

## CHAPTER 2

### DETAILED EXEGESIS OF JOHN 9.24-41

#### 2.1 John 9.24-41 in the narrative setting of the Gospel

Many scholars, including Menken (1985:189-90), stress that, in order to meaningfully interpret John 9, one must link chapter 9 with the two preceding chapters 7 and 8, and to the next, namely, John 10<sup>16</sup>. Lindars (1972:337) grouped John 9, 1 – 10.42 under the same theme: “Jesus enlightens men to know that he and the Father are one.” Lindars contends that the theme of the light of the world (8.12) is taken up and developed in the story of the blind man, which occupies the whole of chapter 9, which is seen as one of “the most brilliant compositions in the New Testament” (1972:338), for the internal construction of the story shows consummate artistry inasmuch as it is so closely knit. The evangelist, before narrating the story, is careful to have Jesus point out the meaning of the sign as an instance of light coming into darkness. The blind man is drawn from darkness to light, not only physically, as is the case for blindness in the synoptic tradition, but also spiritually. The writer’s artistic skills are seen in the way that “the story starts in verse 1 with a blind man who will gain his sight and it ends in verse 41 with the Pharisees who have become spiritually blind” (Brown 1966:377). The blind man emerges from the narrative as the one of the most attractive figures of the Gospels. For Moloney (1976:145), the whole of chapter 8 considered the identity of Jesus as a consequence of his having claimed to be the light of the world (see 8.12 and at the same time vv. 19, 25, 27, 33, 48, 53, 58). This theme is continued into chapter 9, where Jesus himself claims to be the light of the world (9.5) and gives a man sight as a symbolic proof of that fact. The question of Jesus’s identity is a main concern throughout the entire chapter 9 (see 9, 10-12, 16, 17, 24, 29, 33, 35-37). Even throughout chapters 8-9, the Jews or Pharisees ask the same questions about Jesus’s identity

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<sup>16</sup> The question of the unity of John 9 and 10 has been a major one in Johannine studies. While the *paroimia* of John 10.1-5, and parts of the following interpretation, may once have existed independently in some form, in Tumbower’s view (1992:94), they have been woven by an editor into a framework, which is closely tied to John 9. The “they” of 10.6 could simply be the Pharisees referred to in 9.40-41. When the Jews asked themselves “... can a demon open the eyes of the blind” (John 10.21), this is a reference to Jesus’ healing of “the blind”, and then to John 9. Dodd (1953:356), who convincingly argued to the unity of John 9 and 10, pointed out that the *paroimia* and its explication form a plausible continuation of the blind man story with the “Amen, Amen” of 10.1 serving to mark the abrupt transition between dialogue and monologue, much like John 3.11; 5.19 or 12.24. The rapport between both chapters is well-established, and therefore indisputable.

but fail to understand. The condemnation of the Jewish leaders, in chapter 10, alongside the proclamation of Jesus as the Good Shepherd (10, 11) is not something new and unprepared for, but very closely linked with the preceding chapter. John 9.39-41<sup>17</sup> is to be situated at the cross-roads of John 9 and 10, being the conclusion of chapter 9 and thus the introduction of chapter 10.

The conversation that tells of the final revelation of the identity of Jesus given in chapter 10 (see also Van Tilborg 1996:220) links the healing of the blind man to John 10. While there is general agreement among exegetes that the story ends with 9.41, Van Tilborg believes that the story continues its way into chapter 10. John 9 starts with the description of the miracle performed by Jesus followed by the conversation between him and his disciples about the man's illness (vv. 1-7). This conversation is followed by a dialogue between the healed man and his neighbours (vv. 8-12), and an examination of the healed man by the Pharisees, which is interrupted by an interrogation of his parents. At the end of the interrogation, the man is cast out (9.13-34). The second meeting of Jesus and the healed man, who confesses his faith in Jesus as the Son of man, will end with a dialogue between Jesus and the Pharisees focused on judgement (vv. 35-41). Since the "endings are not endings at all but simply introduce topics and events that provide resources for a new beginning", as Robbins points out (1996b:19), the story of John 9 does not end in v.41 but continues in chapter 10. The conflict between Jesus and the Jewish authorities, which started through chap 7-8, is recorded and comes to an in John 9.1 up to 10.39. It is widely agreed that chapters 9 and 10 must be considered together (see Dodd 1953:354-356.362; Brown 1966:305-40; Hobbs 1968:160; Lindars 1972:337; Moloney 1976:144; Menken 1985:189-90; Tilborg 1993:229). All of these authors demonstrate that the story is bound not only to John 7-8 but continues until John 10.21 or 10.39. Such an argument is stressed in Moloney's understanding (1976:144) as follows:

Before any analysis of the meaning of Jn 9, one must decide on the role of the chapter within the wider context of Jn.8-10. Is this encounter with the light, conclusion to the bitter polemic of ch. 8, where Jesus was questioned because of his claim to be the light of the world (8, 12-13) or is it a preparation for ch. 10, in which the Pharisees, who should have been the shepherds of Israel, are condemned as thieves and robbers who have come to destroy (see 10,7-10 and Ezek. 34).

It is from this viewpoint that vv. 39-41 are seen to be linked at the same time with John 9, and,

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<sup>17</sup> In the following conversation between Jesus and the Pharisees (John 9, 40-10, 18), argues Van Tilborg (1993:229), this leadership of and in Israel is discussed. In this exciting text, the relation between Jesus



according to Hobbs (1968:160), this interwoven relationship continues 10.21. In spite of the controversy which surrounds the connection between chapters 7 and 8 and 9, the element that binds those chapters, albeit with different emphases, is that the miracle occurred on a Sabbath day (v. 14). Only the story of the adulteress (7.53, 8.1-11) is not taken into account in that structure. The link established between these four chapters is indisputable, in Brown's view, inasmuch as the discourse of Jesus at the Tabernacles, divided into three scenes, has an aftermath which may be found in John 9-10.21. John 9 is, therefore, the development of the issue at stake in John 7-8, while 10.1-21 is, in this sense, the development-conclusion, as I demonstrated above. Moreover, between chapters 5 and 10, the evangelist leads readers through a series of Jewish feasts: Sabbath (chap. 5), Passover (chap. 6), Tabernacles (chaps 7, 8, 9, 10:21) and Dedication (10.22-42). All of these Jewish feasts, according to Coloe (2001:115), are, in John, interpreted in the light of the Gospel's Christological claim, that Jesus is the new Temple of God's dwelling. John 7 and 8 examine the feasts of Sabbath and Tabernacles where "the Temple and its rituals play a critical role in the Gospel narrative's revelation of Jesus's identity" (Coloe 2001:115-6). The chapters 7, 8 and 9 are centred on the Christological debate concerning the identity of Jesus. It should be remembered that John 7 and 8 take place within the Temple, during the feast of Tabernacles, and that the participants that the writer inserts in the story ask the right question, "who are you?", and yet, they think they know where he has come from – Galilee (7.27, 41, 52). Yet their judgment is based on human standards (see 8.15; 9.16). "The Jews" claim to know who Jesus is and where he is from (7.25-29, 41, 52; 9.24-31), and from that may be understood the theological concentration of "to know" or "not to know" through which the writer rhetorically shows Jesus challenging such a knowledge, stressing that he is from God or he has been sent by the Father (7.14-20). Jesus reveals himself to be "Living water" (7.38), "the Light of the World" (8.12 and 9.5), "I am the gate..." (10.7-9, 11) and "the Good shepherd" (10.14). The four chapters are oriented towards a Christological debate and the writer strives to bring out the truth of Jesus's identity about which "the Jews" are mistaken. The reference to sin in John 7.21, 24, 34 paralleled with John 9.2-3, 41 implies that for the evangelist, the disciples have to be careful in continuing in Jesus's words (7.31-32; 10.3, 4, 16), like the blind man who is shown throughout John 9 progressing in Jesus's knowledge. There is an ethical imperative upon Jesus's discipleship. While the Pharisees, threatened to die in their sin of unbelieving (7.21, 24 and 9.41), even though they claim to be descendants of Abraham (7.33) and disciples of Moses (9.28), the greatness of both figures

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and the healed man no longer plays a role. That comes back only at the end of the story in the description of the reactions of the Judeans to the discourse of Jesus (10, 19-21).

seems to have been questioned in three linked chapters (7.22-24; 8.39, 52-58 and 9.30-34) since Jesus has come, not in his own name, but for the sake of the Father who sent him (7.16-18, 28-29; 8.18-20, 42f; 9.4).

Bultmann establishes the same link and titles in John 7-10, “the Revealer’s struggle with the world” (1971:285-391). However, he went further and placed together John 9.1-41; 8.12; 12.44-50; 8.21-29; 12.34-36; 10.19-21 under the topic “the light of the world.” For Bultmann (1971:329), the new section is introduced by a healing story (9.1-7), followed by a conversation about the miracle, or rather the miracle-worker, between the healed man and the Jewish authorities (v. v. 8-34), and between the healed man and Jesus himself (v. 35-38). Both conversations pave the way to introduce the discourse of Jesus in 9.39 – 10.21.

In spite of the fact that John 9 skillfully dovetails into the context of the other chapters, the chapter nevertheless forms an independent unit (Schnackenburg 1980b:238). Verse 1 connects directly with Jesus’s departure from the Temple. The theme of Jesus as “the Light” of the world, developed in the healing of the blind man, as is made clear in the explanatory sayings at the beginning (v. 5) and end (v. 39), stands in relation to the word of revelation at John 8.12. And yet, the evangelist’s literary skill, according to Schnackenburg (1980b:239), is visible in the construction of the story. The miracle briefly recounted at the beginning, probably from the *sêmeia* source, is revealed in its character as sign and value as evidence. Contrasting with the preceding and following chapters, the evangelist, throughout the whole narrative, regards the cured man’s faith as having been increased (v. 12, 17, 33, 38) and the attitude of Jesus’s opponents as becoming more and more rigid (v. 16, 18, 24, 28-29) until it is exposed as malice (v. 34) and blindness (v. 40-41), which are, in Jesus’s perception inexcusable unbelief (v. 41). It is particularly in that story that the official Pharisaic Judaism not only argues vigorously against Jesus’s messiahship and divine origin, but also fights the followers of Jesus Christ with external measures – what is not obvious in other stories – defectors come to be excluded from the Jewish religious community and to be subject to social sanctions too (v. 34).

In Schnackenburg’s view, the description of the behaviour of the leaders, who oppress a man prepared to believe, who exercise pressure and terror among the people (v. 22), who are closed to plausible arguments for Jesus’s divine origin (v. 30-34), forms the background to the pastoral discourse in chapter 10 as will be demonstrated below.

Schnackenburg contends that:

Chap 9 shows the evangelist's skill in using a loose "historical" framework to deal with his theological themes and simultaneously to conduct a controversy with contemporary Judaism. The transparency with which the narrative reveals the underlying situation of the evangelist and his community is particularly great in Jn 9. The question of the Messiah is at the centre of the debate between Judaism and Christianity (v. 2). Official Pharisaic Judaism not only argues vigorously against Jesus' Messiahship and divine origin, but also fights the followers of Jesus Christ with external measures. Defectors are excluded from the Jewish religious community, and so become subject to social sanctions too (v. 34) (see Schnackenburg 1980b:238-9).

Schnackenburg rightly contends that John 9 is "a masterpiece of narrative which combines theological and historical strands with dramatic skill" (1980:239). The relevance of this point of view rests upon the fact that John, by recounting the story of the blind man, demonstrates his ability to deal with the historical situation of (the evangelist and) his community which is experiencing the central debate between Judaism and Christianity about Jesus's messiahship. As Schnackenburg contends (1980:238), the evangelist endeavours to use a "loose historical framework" to deal with theology and to conduct the controversy with contemporary Judaism. Having a coherent purpose, despite its links with preceding and subsequent chapters, many scholars, including Schnackenburg and Van Tilborg,<sup>18</sup> view the construction of John 9 in the following way: vv. 1-7 form the introduction; vv. 8-34 are the Middle section, and vv. 35-41 the "theological conclusion"<sup>19</sup>. Martyn structured the text as follows:<sup>20</sup> he considered John 9 as a

<sup>18</sup> The structure of Van Tilborg is as follows:

vv. 1-7: Jesus heals the blind man,

vv. 8-12: neighbours and acquaintances identify the blind man,

vv. 13-17: the blind man and the Pharisees,

vv.18-23: the Judaeans determine, via the parents, the identity of the man formerly blind,

vv.24-34: the Pharisees investigate, for the second time, the identity of Jesus (in Tilborg's structure, this is forgotten),

vv. 35-39: Jesus makes himself known to the healed man, who professes his faith,

vv. 40-41: Jesus gives his judgment in the presence of the healed man and some Pharisees.

<sup>19</sup> See also Panackel who divides the narrative into seven scenes grouped within three main parts as follows:

A. INTRODUCTION (v. 1-7) centered upon the narration of the cure;

B. MIDDLE SECTION (v.8-34) which encompasses four scenes: the cured man and the neighbours (v. 8-12); the cured man and the Pharisees (v. 13-17); the Pharisees and the man's parents (v. 18-23); the Pharisees and the cured man (v. 24-34);

C. THEOLOGICAL CONCLUSION (v. 35-41): Jesus and the cured blind man (v. 35-38); Jesus and the Pharisees (v. 39-41).

<sup>20</sup> vv. 1-7: Jesus, his disciples, and the blind man,

piece created out of the little healing story of verses 1-7 (...) and skilfully transformed by the evangelist, and effectively prepares the reader for the important discourse of chap. 10 (1979:26). John 9, albeit an independent unity, is closely connected with chapters 7-8 and 10, and is an integral part of the entire Gospel.

The healing of blind men are regarded, in the Gospels, as important not so much because they occurred frequently but because in them were recognised the fulfillment of an Old Testament prophecy and are thus the manifestation of the advent of the Messiah (Hoskyns 1947:350). In Isaiah 32, 3-4, for instance, the statement “Then the eyes of those who have sight will not be closed and the ears of those who have hearing will listen. The minds of the rash will have good judgment, and the tongues of stammerers will speak readily and distinctly”, clearly establishes that clarity of vision is one of the characteristics of the Messianic age, sight being understood, so to speak, as the possession of the knowledge of God (Hoskyns 1947:350). Such an understanding of the recovery of sight seems to have strongly influenced the writers of the Gospels. The peculiar significance granted to the healing of the blind is paralleled in the Gospel of Mark 8.22-23<sup>21</sup> and John 9.6-7<sup>22</sup>; since, “in the Gospels, miracles of the healing of the blind man seem never to be recorded merely as acts of physical healing, but as actions that reveal the Messiahship of Jesus and the illumination of those who believe in him and follow him” (Hoskyns 1947:350). That is why Hoskyns points out, that Mark, after emphasising the blindness and ignorance of the disciples (Mark 8.14-21), and before recording Peter’s confession of Christ (v. 27-30), inserts the narrative of the healing of the blind man (v. 22-26). In Mark, the two apparently separate pericopes of the twice-healed blind man and Peter’s confession that Jesus is the Messiah have to be dealt with as one unit. By dealing with the healing of the deaf-mute (Mark 7.31-37) and of the blind man (8.22-25), Mark intended as a midrashic recreation of the vision of Isaiah 29-30 in which God will do “marvelous things with this people” – “the deaf shall hear and the blind shall see” and “those who err in spirit will come to understanding” (Isaiah

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vv. 8-12: the blind man and his neighbors,  
 vv. 13-17: the blind man and the Pharisees,  
 vv. 18-23: the Pharisees and the blind man’s parents,  
 vv. 24-34: the Pharisees and the blind man,  
 vv. 35-38: Jesus and the blind man,  
 vv. 38-41: Jesus and the Pharisees.

<sup>21</sup> “They came to Bethsaida. Some people brought a blind man to him and begged him to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village; and when he had put saliva on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, ‘Can you see anything?’”

<sup>22</sup> “When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes, saying to him, ‘Go, wash in the pool of Siloam’ (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see.”

29.18, 24a).

In both passages, even in Mark 7.33 parallel to 8.23<sup>23</sup>, the constant is that Jesus uses his saliva to cure. And yet, as Eitrem quoted by Marcus points out (1999:473), in Hellenism and Judaism spittle<sup>24</sup> was regarded to be, like every bodily secretion, a vehicle for a supernatural power that could be either beneficent or harmful. It is that supernaturalism recognised in the spittle which leads to the belief according to which Jesus's saliva coming out of his body is charged with his holiness and is destructive to the demonic force that binds the tongue of the mute in light of Mark 7.33-37. In Mark 8.22-26, Jesus seems to have failed to restore the sight of the blind man by firstly performing the healing by spitting in the man's eyes and secondly laying his hands on him, since, after Jesus has laid his hands on him, then the man, who could see people like trees,<sup>25</sup> began to see clearly. The so-called failure of Jesus could be "understood in a parabolic sense" (Painter 1997:123), when inserted in the writer's rhetoric. This story intended to relate the gradual restoration of sight of the blind man to "the progressive understanding" (Lagrange 1911:202) of Jesus's disciples. Those who do not understand who Jesus is (Mark 4.41) because their hearts are hardened (6.52; 8.17), are represented by Peter, to whom the following text refers (Mark 8.27-30) and who already possesses insight into Jesus's identity, even if Jesus appeals to him to move away from popular opinions on him (v. v.27-28) to the truth that has not been revealed to him yet, that Jesus is the Christ (v. 29). However, in the unfolding of the story, in Mark 8.31-38, Peter's insight had to be deepened or (in Painter's words (1997:125)) "enriched by a new perception of Jesus as Son of Man." That is why D. Miller and P. Miller (1923: 212) observe that:

The healing of the blind man is followed by the demonstration that Peter's lack of vision has been only half healed: he distortedly recognizes Jesus as the wrong kind of a messiah comparable to seeing men as trees. Thus the story of the twice-healed blind man is an analogy of Peter's partial sightedness (...). After his patient second effort to heal their blindness, Jesus abandons the

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<sup>23</sup> What is astonishing in both passages is that Jesus took the deaf man aside, in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and led him out of the village. This removal from the crowd, according to Lane (1974:285), was an important action in establishing communication with an individual who had learned to be passive in society, better in order to establish a personal relationship to him.

<sup>24</sup> Spittle or saliva was extremely popular as a folk remedy in antiquity and was even highly regarded by "professional" physicians. The spittle of famous or charismatic personalities was especially prized; Tacitus (*Histories* 4.81) and Suetonius (*Vespasian* 7) tell a story about a blind man who begged the Emperor Vespasian to heal him with his spittle. The idea of its medicinal effectiveness was widespread among Jews, for Hanina sends people in need to his son, 'for he is the first-born, and his saliva heals.' However, rabbis opposed the use of spittle because of its magical associations. The belief surrounding the curative power of spittle was widespread even if it was granted a destructive capacity (see Marcus 1999:473).

<sup>25</sup> This demonstrates that the man was not born blind for he conserved in the imagination certain images to which he could refer (Lagrange 1911:202).

intentional miracle strategy for creating a New Israel and begins to apply to himself the suffering servant model.

Even if Mark and John do not belong to the same theological school, it is obvious that both stories are grounded on a theological concern, inasmuch as the writers intended to show, through the healing of the blind man, not only Jesus's messianic act, but also by means of that public act that he intended to illuminate the disciples's belief, in order to reveal that Jesus is the Son of man. The story of healing, in both Gospels, in order to be interpreted, is related to the ongoing narrative. After this survey, my concern is to bring out of the text's structure the expressions, terms, topics or groups of words that are helpful to an understanding of John 9.24-41.

## 2.2 "The Jews" in John

According to Robinson (1985:89), the Jews are generally "the authorities", who in John 9 alternate with "the Pharisees." From John 9.22, one sees that the "Pharisees"<sup>26</sup> are religious leaders who exercise considerable authority in the synagogues. The evidence of the term "Jews" used to designate the authorities is well-established in the light of Von Wahlde's five reasons (1982:42):

- First, the term "Jews" is used interchangeably with other terms for the authorities within a single passage. In the healing of the man born blind (9.1-41), the term "Pharisees" (9.13, 15, 16) is replaced by "Jews" (9.18, 22), and then the term "Pharisees" is used again (9.40). Clearly, the term is intended to refer to the same group of authorities.
- In John 11.45-52, the authorities are designated as "Pharisees", while in John 18.12-14, the authorities are identified as "Jews."
- A third argument is that persons who are Jews by ethnicity are said to "fear the Jews" in John 7.13; 9.22; 20.19, and in John 5.15 the people are also said to report to "Jews" as people in authority.
- A fourth indication of the identity of the Jews in this sense is found in the fact that they are able to pass a formal edict of excommunication against those who believe in Jesus (9.22).
- A fifth indication of the identity of the Jews is evident in 7.15-20. The crowd of 7.20 are distinguished from the Jews, for the people in the crowd were not aware of the intention

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<sup>26</sup> While in the Synoptic Gospels, the Pharisees are, of course, a group within Judaism, but in John, they sometimes seem to be identical with Judaism and its influential authorities (Charlesworth 1990:80).

of the Jews to kill Jesus.

The Jews are to be seen as “an authoritative body within Judaism” (Martyn 1979:41) who reached a formal decision regarding messianic faith in Jesus. They agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue (John 9.22). However, the word “Jew”, as used in the Gospel of John, is an ambivalent one (Brodie 1993:151). On the one hand, the author uses the Jews as “symbols of unbelief”, to show that the human spirit becomes negative about life and chooses various forms of death. On the other hand, the author acknowledges that “salvation is from the Jews”<sup>27</sup>, and he recounts such episodes as those involving Nathanael, (portrayed by Jesus as an Israelite in whom there is no deceit<sup>28</sup>) and Mary Magdalene<sup>29</sup>, one of the believers to whom Jesus appeared after his resurrection. Jesus himself was a Jew, and it is accepted that the Johannine Christians were Jewish. While the title *Ioudaioi* is given by John to Judaism and its official leaders standing over against Jesus when the conflict between Christians and “Jews” reaches its height because of their willingness to defend the letter of the Law (5.16), to reject Jesus’s authority and messianic status (9.22) and denying their true king, finally denying their own status as the people of God in the light of John 19.14ff (see Barrett 1978:171-2), the word *israél*, even less used throughout the Gospel, seems to be a sense-bearer inasmuch as it stands over against the bad connotation often attached to the term “*ioudaioi*.” The evangelist in alluding to “the true Israel,” listed at the same time some of the Jewish ethnic group that welcomes Jesus by acknowledging him as Messiah.

One should bear in mind that the narrative of John 9 is a reconstruction of the historical context, as Brodie concludes (1993:152):

the evangelist emerges as the leader of an independent group but as a prophetic voice from within the church – a voice critical of the world, critical in another way of the Jews, and critical in yet a further way of the church and its leadership (Peter); but a voice which, even amid so much darkness, never failed to reflect a vision of light and life – for the Jews, and for the world.

For the reconstruction of the history of Jesus and of the Johannine community, the writer tries his best to be critical vis-à-vis the Jewish authorities in order to bring out who the true Israelite is; and the nature of Jesus’s identity beyond the traditional figures of Abraham and Moses within Judaism. The Jews are those who trace their history through Moses and back to Abraham.

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<sup>27</sup> John 4.22

<sup>28</sup> John 1.45-51

From Abraham, to Moses, to David, and to the Jews of the first century, as Painter (1991:23) argues, there was a history of tradition and culture. Those Jews who believed Jesus to be the Messiah understood such a belief to arise from the mainstream of that history, but those who rejected the claim saw it as a break with tradition. Thus, the confession of faith in Jesus as the Messiah set his believers apart from other Jews. While in the Synoptic tradition and in other writings in the New Testament, Peter was remembered as prominent (Eph 2.20; Mt 16.18; 1 Pe 5.1-2), in John, however, such a prominence is questioned since the Johannine group seems to be represented by the Beloved Disciple and seeks to render Peter's prominence as relative.

From John 12.42, they are powerful or influential enough to exercise authority over other Jews, who are called "rulers" or "officials" of the synagogues. That is why Charlesworth (1990:82) reckons that, in view of the fact that both John 9.22 and 12.42 deal with the expulsion from the synagogues, it is likely that "the Jews" in the one case and the "Pharisees" in the other are the same authorities. It is important to notice that both exercise significant power over other Jewish people. "Jews" may be "Pharisees", but should not be identified or confused with the common people, except in the case of John 6.41, 52. In John 12.42, it is stated that the leaders (rulers) who believed in Jesus Christ feared the Pharisees. These leaders would not confess their faith publicly for fear of being put out of the synagogue.

Martyn (1979:61), however, believes this reflects the behaviour of later Pharisees in the city where the author of the Gospel lived – the messengers who delivered the newly formulated Benediction to the Jewish community – or the members of the local Gerousia who enforced this formulation, much to the discomfort of the believing rulers.

Culpepper, as quoted by Charlesworth (1990:41), demonstrates that the Gospel is a product of a group, perhaps a school of well-educated Christians, some of whom had been born Jews. In John's community, those who "believed in Jesus" were being expelled from the synagogues in which they desired to worship and celebrate the high Jewish holidays. It is surprising to find that John is the only evangelist to use the expression "*aposunagôgos*", "to be put out of the synagogue" (John 9.22; 12.42; 16.2), which denotes those Jews who were expelled from the synagogue. According to Charlesworth (1990:50), it seems that the hostile portrayal of the Jews in John was occasioned by a harsh social situation where "Jews were leveling invectives at other Jews." Charlesworth adds: "John emerges out of a historical situation marred, not by non-Jews

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<sup>29</sup> John 20.11-18



versus Jews, but by some Jews fighting with other Jews.” The Johannine intrigue of belief and unbelief is evidence of this phenomenon of “Jews fighting with other Jews.”

This is most likely a portrait of the Jewish community after Jesus’s lifetime, towards the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century. To the time of writing of the Gospel and in its context of writing – all the things to which I refer: Birkat ha-Minim, synagogues, Pharisees, and the Jewish-Christian schism – are anachronisms with regard to the time of Jesus, and only came into being later in the first century, and some even later than that. In the rhetoric of John, it is obvious that he is not talking about Jesus but about events in his own time, and imposes this narrative imagery upon an imagined/constructed Jesus biography.

The Jews who, according to John 9.22, had decided to expel from the synagogue anyone who acknowledged Jesus as the Christ (Messiah) refer “to the action taken under Gamaliel II to re-word the Birkath ha-Minim so as to make it an effective means for detecting Christian heresy” (Martyn 1979:61). According to Martyn, the depiction of the Jews in John 9.22 would seem to be John’s way of referring to the Jamnia Academy after the resurrection, and reflects the Jewish community at the end of the first century. This was a community that had been shaken by the introduction of a newly formulated means of detecting those Jews who wanted to hold a dual allegiance to Moses and to Jesus as Messiah (Martyn 1979:61). In order to separate such Jews from the synagogue, the synagogue leaders employed the Heretic Benediction against the Minim or Heretics. Martyn (1979:58) explains the content of this tradition as follows:

For the apostates let there be no hope  
And let the arrogant government  
Be speedily uprooted in our days  
Let the Nazarenes (Christians) and the Minim (heretics) be destroyed in a moment  
And let them be blotted out of the Book of Life and not be inscribed together with the righteous  
Blessed art thou, O Lord, who humblest the proud!

The “apostates” spoken of were probably Jews who abandoned their faith in favour of the marvels of Hellenistic culture which swept the Orient in the wake of Alexander’s armies.<sup>30</sup> So also, the words “arrogant government,” while appropriate as a Jewish expression for Rome, are

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<sup>30</sup> See 1 Maccabees 1.11-15: “In those days certain renegades came out from Israel and misled many, saying, ‘Let us go and make a covenant with the Gentiles around us, for since we separated from them many disasters have come upon us’. This proposal pleased them, and some of the people eagerly went to the king, who authorized them to observe the ordinances of the Gentiles. So they built a gymnasium in

frequently encountered in the Book of Maccabees as a means of referring to the Seleucid power personified in Antiochus IV “Epiphanes” (see Martyn 1979:58). The Jews adapted the old benediction to a new need, namely, to identify Christian Jews and other heretics as new sources of danger, which they needed to fight. The prayer included the petition that God may cause Christian Jews to be destroyed and excluded from the Book of Life, which was to be under the discipline of excommunication.

In the dual level drama of John 9, the man born blind not only plays the part of a Jew in Jerusalem healed by Jesus of Nazareth in his earthly lifetime, he also represents the Jews known to John who have become members of the separated church as a result of their messianic faith and the effect of the new Benediction (Martyn 1979: 62), and the Jew whose experience of healing inclines him to have faith in Jesus. Examined by the Gerousia, he is excommunicated. The lame man in John 5, on the other hand, remains wholly loyal to the synagogue.

It should be noted that early Jewish-Christian believers did not wholly abandon regular synagogue worship, despite their faith in Jesus as Messiah. It is this double allegiance to Moses and Jesus that led the authorities to conclude that belief in Jesus as the Messiah was, in reality, apostasy. One needs to keep in mind that the Fourth Gospel uses “the Jews” almost as a technical title for the religious authorities, particularly those who are hostile to Jesus (Brown 1978:lxxi). Brown argues that this understanding of this technical term may be substantiated in three ways:

- Firstly, it is quite clear that in many instances the term “the Jews” has nothing to do with ethnic, geographical, or religious differentiation. It would be surprising to see the parents of the blind man, obviously Jews themselves, to fear “the Jews” (see John 9.22). These are only the Pharisees who are investigators.
- Secondly, in some passages, the Gospel speaks interchangeably of “the Jews” and of the chief priest and the Pharisees. In John 18.3, the chief priests and the Pharisees supply the police, while in 18.12 they are the police of “the Jews.” In 8.13 the interrogators are called Pharisees, while in 8.18ff they are called “the Jews.”
- This understanding is borne out by a comparison with the Synoptic Gospels. In John 18.28-31,

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Jerusalem, according to Gentile custom, and removed the marks of circumcision, and abandoned the holy covenant. They joined with the Gentiles and sold themselves to do evil.”

“the Jews” bring Jesus before Pilate, while in Mark 15.1 the Sanhedrin has this task

### 2.3 The use of “*oida*”

Many scholars claim that John 9 provides some of the clearest and most straightforward instances of the objections raised by both Christians and Jews. I think that the writer of John uses the verb “*oida*”, to know, in an elastic manner, in order to bring out the religious conflict between the opposing groups, Jews fighting against other Jews. The pronounced concentration upon how “to know” or “not to know” which alternate in the story drew my attention. The Jewish authorities claim to *know* that the healer is not from God but a sinner (v. 24), and to *know* that God has spoken to Moses, and that they do not *know* where Jesus is from (v. 29). The healed blind man finds it astonishing that the religious leaders do not know where this man, who opened his eyes, comes from (v. 30). Hitting the nail on the head, the formerly blind man asserts: “We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will” (v. 31). Although the concepts of “to know” or “not to know” are used elsewhere<sup>31</sup>, their concentrated usage in verses 24 – 31 seems to be theological. “We know” how the Jewish authorities express their certitude that Jesus is a sinner, something which recalls Nicodemus’s assertion of his knowledge about Jesus in John 3.2.<sup>32</sup> Such an expression carries the weight of official Pharisaic authority. According to them, Jesus is not, and cannot be, from God, because he violates the Sabbath Law and is, therefore, a sinner (v. 16).

The Pharisees attest that they “know (*oida*) that this man is a sinner” (v. 24), which contrasts with the uncertain negative statement of the blind man: “whether he is a sinner or not I do not know. One thing I do know: I was blind but now I see” (v. 25). The emphatic “we” of “the Jews” is a reference to Jewish authority, as it is for Nicodemus, who asserts in John 3.2: “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God...” It is this authority that is matched by the man born blind with his own “I know” of v. 25. The Jews speak “with responsibility and authority of Judaism, and correctly” (Barrett 1978:362). This authority, in Schnackenburg’s view (1980:250-1), appears in the repeated “*oidamen*” of vv. 24 and 29, emphasized by the stressed “*hemeis*” of vv. 24, 28 and 29 and in the appeal to Moses. For the Jews, there is no doubt that Jesus

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<sup>31</sup> The blind man is the first to declare that he “does not know” when he is asked by his neighbours where the healer is (v.12). His parents, interrogated by the Pharisees, declare “we know that this is our son and that he was born blind” (v. 20), but they admit that they “do not know” how it is that now he sees and who opened his eyes (v. 21).

transgressed the Law, ensuring that he is a *“hamartôlos”*. The emphatic “we” of the Pharisees’s confession is contrasted with that of the blind man, and the disbelief of the Pharisees is counter-balanced by the belief of the formerly blind man whose belief grows stronger (Lindars 1972:347).

The first *“oida”* of the Jewish authorities is grounded on “their fine points of theology”, while that of the blind man is grounded in “his experience” (see Hobbs 1968:164). They tried to lead the healed man to conform to their view under the oath “Give glory to God”, which is an Old Testament formula used to stress Yahweh’s unique claim to worship in order to induce people to admit their guilt before God (see Joshua 7.19<sup>33</sup>; 1 Samuel 6.5<sup>34</sup>; Jeremiah 13.16<sup>35</sup>). According to Talmudic literature (bSanhedrin 6.2), a condemned criminal, like Achan, (Joshua 7.19) gives praise by making a confession of sin. For the Pharisees, Jesus, by healing on the Sabbath, was a sinner and thus the blind taking the part of a sinner is making him guilty. The Jews are trying to get the man to withdraw his earlier support for Jesus (v. 17) and turn against him. The formula “give glory to God” was used when a criminal who was thought to be concealing the truth was urged to make a full confession, remembering that the eye of God was upon him, to give honour to God by admitting or speaking the truth. All the authors quoted so far did not discuss the privileged use of *“oida”* in John 9. O’Day (1987:66) points out that the two verbs of knowing in Greek, *ginôskô* and *oida* occur more frequently in the Fourth Gospel than in any other New Testament writing. *Ginôskô* occurs fifty-seven times while *oida* appears in chapter 9 (v. 12, 20, 21a and b, 24, 25, 29, 30b, 31). Even though John, by dealing with “knowing” uses these two verbs, it is striking that in chapter 9 he uses only *“oida”*, never *“ginôskoin”*:

It is even more striking when one realizes that *“oida”* is actually derived from a Greek root for seeing (id-), in chapter 9, the Fourth Evangelist is establishing an intimate connection between sight and knowledge. His use of the verb that is semantically linked to verbs of seeing is not unrelated to his use of words with an innate double meaning in John 3. Thus by the very language that the Fourth evangelist uses in chapter 9 to speak of knowledge and sight. What that connection is will be revealed as the narrative moves to its conclusion (O’Day 1987:66-67).

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<sup>32</sup> John 3.2: “He came to Jesus by night and said to him, ‘Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.’”

<sup>33</sup> “Joshua said to Achan, ‘My son, give glory to the Lord God of Israel and make confession to him. Tell me now what you have done, do not hide it from me.’”

<sup>34</sup> “So you must make images of your tumors and images of your mice that ravage the land, and give glory to the God of Israel; perhaps he will lighten his hand on you and your gods and your land.”

<sup>35</sup> Give glory to the Lord your God before he brings darkness, and before your feet stumble on the mountains at twilight; while you look for light, he turns it into gloom and makes it deep darkness.

This connection between “*ginôskô*”<sup>36</sup> and “*oida*”<sup>37</sup> is well established in the Fourth Gospel. From De la Potterie’s analysis, the verb “*ginôskô*” has to be taken as the process of the acquisition of knowledge through which one can attain a good understanding of Jesus’s deeds and words meanwhile *oida* designates the more human and psychological reality. It is less knowledge in itself than awareness, of possessed certainty. It is either intuition or a conviction of unshakeable faith, and as such, considered integral or absolute (De la Potterie 1959:725).

The analysis made by De la Potterie is very interesting insofar as he went further than his predecessors<sup>38</sup>, who treated “*ginôskô*” and “*oida*” as synonymous. The weakness of his analysis is to indicate the different uses of “*oida*” without adding depth from the text. He is right in pointing out the use of *oida* with *hoti*, with *en* and with the negative *ouk* (see De la Potterie 1959:712). The use of *oida* in John 9 is with *hoti*, and speaks about a thing universally known and admitted by all. This use is found in vv. 20, 24, 29, 31 from which it may be deduced that in the Jewish religious framework it was commonly held that Jesus was a sinner or a law-breaker (v. 24). Moses is proudly held up as an agent of God through whom God spoke to Israel (v. 29). Yet finally, the blind man, as a Jew, proposed to them another religious argument, likewise commonly known, that while God does not listen to sinners, he *does* listen to one who worships him and obeys him (v. 31). There are, in John, other occurrences of “*oida*” along with “*hoti*” (John 3.2; 4.42; 16.30; 21, 24 and 19.10). When “*οἶδα*” is preceded by “*en*”, the blind man is expressing absolute certainty, as it would be if *oida* appeared with its direct complement (6.42) in order to assert a perfect knowledge without any doubt. It is in that sense that *oida* is used in

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<sup>36</sup> De la Potterie (1959:710), talking about the verb *ginôskô* asserts that: “*il signifiait tout d’abord pour les Grecs ‘arriver a connaître’; il n’indiquait donc pas directement la connaissance comme telle, mais plutot la demarche de l’esprit, le progres de la pensee qui font aboutir a la connaissance; cette demarche peut etre une obserbation, un renseignement recu, une experience, un raisonnement.*” That is, in English “First and foremost, it meant for the Greeks “to reach knowledge”; it did not directly indicate the knowledge as such, but rather the thought process, the progress of thought which lead the knowledge to reach its outcome; this process may be an observation, information obtained, an experience, and reasoning.” In this respect, “to know” cannot mean to possess or to acquire the knowledge. To know refers to a progress of thought intending to reach knowledge. In the Fourth Gospel, *ginôskô* keeps that fundamental sense and must be translated by “acknowledge” or “understand.” All the texts to which De la Potterie referred to help to catch a glimpse of the progressive character of the disciples’ knowledge (see John 12.16; 13.12, 28; 14.7a, 9; 8.28; 14, 6, 7, 20; 17.8 and 25) through Jesus’ teaching. In order to reach knowledge, faith is initial insofar as it entertains a relation of anteriority to knowledge (De la Potterie 1959:720 note 1b), as this is clear in John 8.32: “and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” and 6.69: “we have come to believe and know that you are the disciples.” I think De la Potterie is right when he points out that to be a disciple of Jesus has to be taken as an ideal which is to be gradually realized in the deepening of the word of faith; to be a disciple of Jesus implies to penetrate truth.

<sup>37</sup> This verb *oida*, whose root *id-* means to see entertains a character of vision for the verb designates acknowledgement of an intuitive order, a direct understanding by a means of thought that Taylor calls: “acknowledgment by insight or intuition” (see De la Potterie 1959:711).

the negative form – “*ouk oida*” – which bears an absolute character. The blind man finds it difficult to accept the “knowledge” of “the Jews.”

The Pharisees, in v.29, claim that “but for this man, we do not know where he comes from” (*touton de ouk oidamen pothen estin*), ensuring that Jesus’s origin is not to be viewed as divine. It is surprising to see that the blind man’s ignorance moves towards the light, while “the Jews”, in their own knowledge, move toward the darkness. He who was unable to see, through the recovery of his sight, became convinced that “the power of God (...) manifested itself through Jesus in an exceptional degree”(Bruce 1983:216). There was nothing to contradict the reality of such an unparalleled event. It is “the divine”, seen in the miracle performed by Jesus, that he opposed to the solemn “*oidamen*” (the “we know”) of the Jews by using another rabbinic “we know.”

The issue of the knowledge of God interested “Jews” and Christians and was presented in different terms. That God can be known is not self-evident in the contexts that have shaped the Gospel of John. First among those contexts is the Old Testament, in which one finds narratives of a variety of encounters with the divine, as, for instance, theophanies, such as the burning bush and God’s appearance to Moses on Sinai, and visionary experiences such as those of Isaiah and Ezekiel. That is why in the biblical witness, God is revealed or made known in a variety of ways, including theophanies, visions, intermediary figures such as prophets and angels, and the law (Thompson 2001:99-100). For Philo, for instance, the immaterial Most High God may be known by human beings. He distinguished the unknowable reality of the Most High God and the genuine but distinct manifestations of that God through his Logos (see Thompson 2001:103). That is why, making the distinction between what is to be known and what not in God and by whom, Philo points out that:

God himself is unknowable save as to His *huparxis*, and even such knowledge of Him is only for the few who are perfect. But for those who are still seeking the goal, God is known in and through His Logos. Men should ‘endeavour to see the Self-evident or, if they cannot, at least to see its image, the most sacred Logos’ (...) ‘For the Logos is the God of us imperfect men, but the Primal God is the God of the wise and perfect’ (De Conf. 97 & Leg. All. III.207 quoted by Dodd 1953:68).

Through the Logos, God can be comprehended by human beings, but the Highest God, known also as “the One who is”, cannot be known in his ultimate being. The Most High God cannot be seen or known in any other way than by “a secondary” manifestation or self-revelation. It is

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<sup>38</sup> Barrett 1966: 138; Dodd 1953:152 at note 3; Schnackenburg (1980b:135 at note 4).

certainly in that context that the miracle of the gift of sight should be understood and which the evangelist uses as a means to convey God's revelation in Jesus the Son of Man. Jesus will fill the gap, when he meets the blind man again for that purpose. From this standpoint, it is important to see how and why Jesus's divine origin was disputed.

## 2.4 Jesus-Messiah of unknown origin

Before coming to how Jesus's Messiahship was questioned by the Jewish leaders, one should focus first on Davies's survey (1992:210-11)<sup>39</sup>, since those who were attracted to follow Jesus recognised him as the Messiah in the light of John 1 up to chapter 6. While in the first six chapters the Messiahship of Jesus is indisputable, it is in chap 7, that the Messiahship starts to be openly questioned. At the Feast of Tabernacles, a discussion arose among the people. Some considered Jesus as "a good man", while others said, "No, he is deceiving the crowd" (John 7.12), or "he was leading the people astray." The Messiahship of Jesus was disputed by the authorities who claimed to know where Jesus is from, in contrast to when the Messiah comes, when no one will know where he is from (John 7.27). Quite correctly, they knew that the Messiah would not come from Galilee, but from Bethlehem, the village where David lived (v. v. 41-42). The people of Jerusalem, in 7.27, mistakenly thought that Jesus originally came from Galilee (7.41). Jesus's response was always to insist that he came from above, from the Father, and it is this heavenly origin that "the Jews" do not know (8.14).

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<sup>39</sup> At the end of John 1, whether, the various testimonies taken into account are those of Andrew to Simon Peter (v. 41), Philip to Nathanael (John 1.45), or Nathanael himself (v. 49), it is undoubtedly so that the reader is convinced of Jesus's identity as Messiah chosen by God, endowed with God's Spirit, in fulfillment of the promises found in the law and the prophets (Deuteronomy 17.14-20; Isaiah 9 and 11; Micah 5.2-4). In John 3, the writer returns to the testimony of John. Once again John the Baptist denies that he is the Christ (3.28), but affirms his own function as the one sent before him (3.28) and as the friend of the bridegroom, rejoicing at this voice (3.29). This joy of the friend of the bridegroom recalls the prophecies of Jeremiah 33.11 and Isaiah 61.10: "I will greatly rejoice in the word, my whole being shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels." John's testimony to Jesus as the bridegroom hints at the joy and salvation God bestows through him. In John 4, Jesus himself acknowledges that he is the Messiah (4.25-26). The Samaritan woman, drawing attention to the fact that Jesus knew everything she did, declared to her fellow citizens that he might be the Messiah (4.29). The marital relations (4.17-18) to which Jesus refers could metaphorically refer to the Samaritan religion, since scripture commonly describes fidelity to God in terms of fidelity to a husband (see Hoseah 2.12-20; Jeremiah 2.2-3; 3.1-14). When John 4 introduces the discussion of genuine worship (4.20-24), this leads to Jesus's assertion of his Messiahship. Up to this point, in the Gospel, Jesus's Messiahship had been acknowledged and accepted. But it is in chapter 6 when Jesus asserts that he is the bread of life, giving his flesh for the life of the world (6.52-59), that division occurred among his disciples and many of them turned back and no longer went about with him (see v.66).

According to Brown (1966:374), Jesus's claim to be from God was questioned in contrast to the known relationship between Moses and God. Schnackenburg (1980:251) rightly points out that when the Pharisees attempt to use Moses, "to whom God has spoken", against Jesus, readers are reminded that Jesus has already claimed the same Moses as witness in his support (see John 5.46). For them, Jesus is only an obscure man whose origin is questionable. These faithful "disciples of Moses"<sup>40</sup> and guardians of the Torah face the divine revealer about whom Moses wrote with incomprehension. By confessing their total allegiance to Moses and the Mosaic revelation of God (see Exodus 33.11; Numbers 12.2-8), and rejecting Jesus on the basis of their ignorance of his origin, they were, as Moloney rightly states (1996:126), "locked into adhesion to the former gift of God that came through the mediation of Moses." This demonstrates that "the questions at issue between the Jews and the Christians concerned the origin of Jesus, his home and parentage, and the authority upon which his mission was based" (Hoskyns 1947:357). They did not consider Jesus to be of divine origin, and disbelieved his claim to be the envoy of God the Father, the only begotten Son of God sent by the Father.

The leaders revert confidently to the expression "we know" in vv. 24 and 29, and it is not a matter of simple repetition. As Brodie argues (1993:351), it is a formidable combination of intimidation, authority, tradition and apparent logic, and it is a logic that seems to be impeccable. It is to that logic that the blind man just as logically replies, "we know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will" (v. 31).

For the blind man, it was astonishing to find here that they did not know where the man who opened his eyes came from. It is striking that the writer uses the adjective "*thaumastos*" (v. 30), meaning wonderful, marvellous, in order to refer to God or to a manifestation of God, whose name is wonderful and whose works are wonder (see Exodus 34.10; Joshua 3.5; Judges 13.18, 19). The usage of "*thaumastos*" occurs also in Matthew 21.42; Mark 12.11; 1 Peter 2.9; Revelation 15.1, 3. The context of John 9, argues Brodie (1993:352), goes to the heart of the problem of present manifestations of the divine. For the formerly blind man, the gift of sight is nothing less than a manifestation of the divine, supported all the more by the knowledge that "never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born

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<sup>40</sup> Moses was their teacher. The addition of oral law transmitted in the rabbinic schools was held to stem from Moses, who, they believed, had received it on Sinai, together with the written law. There was a belief according to which "Moses received the law, i.e. the oral law, from Sinai and delivered it to Joshua, and Joshua to the elders, and the elders to the prophets delivered it to the men of the great synagogue" – and so it was transmitted to one generation of teachers after another.



blind” (v. 32). Given his experience, it is marvellous to see the leaders so comfortable in their unbelief in spite of the evidence to the contrary (Morris 1995:437). The miracle is as astonishing as the unbelief of “the Jews.” Unlike the leaders, this man was sensitive to God as manifested in Jesus. It should be remembered that the blind man did not negate Moses, but he was concerned with the incontestable reality of God in the person of Jesus (Brodie 1993:352). Such a perception and manifestation was never known in the time of Moses, and this miracle was an unparalleled event, although the tradition surrounding Moses was not without its miracles. What is the tradition construed around Moses, that so competed with Jesus’s tradition in the Johannine Church?

### **2.5 Moses a “*theios anêr*” (v. 28, 29)**

It is clear that John endeavoured to give a primacy and an authority to Jesus that exceeded that granted to Moses, who was regarded, in Jewish tradition, as a king as well as a prophet. In death, it was believed that he was enthroned in heaven (Holladay 1977:67), where he received the Torah and, with or within it, all truth (Meeks 1967:286). In connection with this belief, Moses was considered as God’s emissary, agent and vice-regent on earth. As “*theios anêr*”, in apologetic Jewish purpose, he was regarded as pre-eminent among Israel’s heroes, and was elevated to the level of supra-human status.

It is likely that such a belief emanated from the Hellenistic world. The Greeks imagined their gods in human form, and believed that they manifested their presence in human conduct. Ancient Greek religion was built on the assumed fundamental difference between humans and gods. Divine power could be manifest in particular, favoured human beings, such as philosophers, poets, seers, healers, sages, doctors and miracle workers (see Klauck 2000 :260-1). Honours paid to them did not include sacrifices, altars, statues, or athletic competitions, inasmuch as they are not assimilated in the ritual that is appropriate to the gods of Mount Olympus.

In Greek culture and religion there was this fundamental difference between the human and divine worlds, but as a result of various developments during the Hellenistic periods cults of divine men and holy men arose. Otherwise the god could be experienced as being present in a human being (as divine men and holy men) by means of their powers. These divine men, in the Hellenistic world, were considered as ligaments connecting the divine and human world ((see

Van den Heever and Scheffler (2001:30)). They mediated between the world of the divine and the world of humans, and were seen as “the mediators.” The pagan holy man, for example, whose social function was to teach philosophy, was considered as an expositor of the divine mysteries (Kirshner 1984:106). Honours were attributed to divine beings because of their exceptional charismatic abilities. Gods could appear suddenly, or in a dream. That is why the so-called epiphanies could take the form of a visible appearance of the god, a sudden awareness of a divine presence mediated by the angels.

In Graeco-Roman society, human agents could mediate divine power. This was so in the case of religious entrepreneurs who were a wide group of people, which included holy men, magicians, seers, visionaries and people who were believed to be able to cast or to protect from the evil eye (Craffert 1999:127). Seers and visionaries were people thought to have the ability to read various signs to foretell the future. The *cult of heroes* stems from the fact that the Greeks imagined human beings as having divine abilities. Heroes were men of an earlier age who performed exceptional deeds in their lifetime, and it was believed that they still possessed some power after their death (Klauck 2000:262). Human beings could be declared “heroes”, after death, and could ascend to become a kind of demigod, in individual cases to the status of a “*daimôn*”, and ultimately to the status of a god.

In light of this view, Moses was nothing other than a Mediator between God and Israel. It was through him that the saving knowledge of God was attained and life might be found (Barrett 1978:270). With such a belief, Moses was exalted as “the center of their religious concerns, as the intermediary, in some sense, between them and God” (Meeks 1967:286). The discussion which rises between the leaders and the formerly blind man, not only leads them to claim to be disciples of Moses (v. 28), but also to emphasise the fact that God had spoken to Moses (v. 29). The expression “disciples of Moses”, according to Barrett (1978:362), was not a regular term for rabbinic scholars. It is used for the Pharisees in a *baraitah* in *Yoma 4a*, where as opposed to the Sadducees, they are called “disciples of Moses.” By using this term, John is bringing out the opposition, already revealed in the Sabbath healing, between Jesus and the law, and why Jesus was considered as a law-breaker. Another later principle of thought to which this term refers may be found in the *Midrash Rabbah* 8.6, grounded on Deuteronomy 30.11-14<sup>41</sup>, where the Jews are

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<sup>41</sup> It was commonly admitted, in Jewish and perhaps also in Christian understanding, that only a God-worshipper (*θεοσεβης*) and the one who does his will, can be sensitive to God or be able to communicate with God.

warned that there is only one Law and Moses revealed it. In conjunction with this, the leaders thought it only right to fight any revealer who claimed to come from heaven, since “there is not going to be another Moses who will come down from heaven with a different law” (Brown 1966:374). This closed discipleship of Moses was seen as contemptible in the light of all the traditions around Moses. By the question “Do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?” (v. 27b), the evangelist reverts to his habitual irony (Hobbs 1968:162; Lindars 1972:348). Barrett (1978:362) used this verse as a means to introduce the subject of true discipleship touched upon in John 8.31: “if you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples” (see Bruce 1983:217). However, the issue of discipleship is more developed in the Farewell discourses.

## **2.6 Hellenistic “*theosebēs*” and the Jewish expression “to do God’s will” (vv31, 32)**

For the man born blind, the experience of recovering his sight was unique and unparalleled in history; that is why it should be viewed as a manifestation of the divine. The blind man who was usually an inarticulate man, unlike the leaders, proceeds to hold forth on being sensitive to the divine by asserting that “we know that God does not listen to sinners...”, (v. 31a), and by doing so, behaves like a scholar, a teacher of teachers. The term *theosebēs* evokes the piety of the Hellenistic world, while the expression “doing his will” stems from the Hebrew religious world and also describes piety (Brown 1966:375). This term cannot be found elsewhere in the New Testament<sup>42</sup>. In the Graeco-Roman world, *theosebēs* may mean, as Trebilco (1991:145) emphasises “a group of pagans who attended the synagogue regularly and adopted some Jewish customs such as Sabbath observance and food laws but who were not circumcised and so were not full members of the Jewish community in the way that proselytes were.”

Therefore, the term refers to the Gentiles who were in relationship with the synagogues as attractive places. “The Jews” gained a significant degree of influence among local pagans, and their practices and beliefs had appeal for them (Trebilco 1991:165-66). There are literary sources mentioning God-worshippers as a well-known group in Rome, Iconium, Thessalonica, Beroea, Corinth, Athens and elsewhere in Asia Minor. In spite of the diversity of Judaism in Asia Minor, and that the term could mean different things in different communities, there was a common practice, which included attendance at the synagogue and observance of certain Jewish customs.

The combination of these two terms (worshippers of God and to do God's will) is significant and very characteristic of John's theology and linguistic workmanship (Barrett 1978:364). It is out of the question that the combination refers to two different groups, namely Gentile and Jewish, as the term is applied to devout Gentiles (Lindars 1972:349) who were members of the synagogues without being proselytes. The use of "*theosebes*" reveals the influence of Jewish communities in the Diaspora. John's concern, in v. 31, I am inclined to think, is to emphasise the contrast between such "a lack of knowledge" as opposed to the evidence of the miracle "with the knowledge of believing Jews" (see Schnackenburg 1978b: 252), according to which God does not listen to sinners. It was commonly held that God only hears those who fear him and do his will. As a matter of fact, in Judaism, miracles were regarded as answers to prayer<sup>43</sup>. Brodie rightly states, referring to that Hellenistic and Jewish belief: "thorough acceptance of God induces God's communication, God's manifestation" (1993:352). The opening of eyes, which were born blind, is not an everyday occurrence of divine manifestation. The blind man begins to think the theological implications through such a miracle. Jesus cannot be a Sabbath breaker and a sinner, he reasons, since God would not listen to such a person, and his extraordinary act of healing would be inconceivable (v. 31-32). By this reasoning, he reaches the conviction that "*ei mê ên houtos para theou, ouk hêdunato poeien ouden*" of v. 33, (if this man were not from God, he could not do anything), and so he is constrained by the logic of his own experience to move to a deeper understanding of Jesus. He moved from a literal understanding to the illumination of Jesus in symbolic meaning (Lee 1994:176-7).

The fact that Jesus is the Light of the World is visibly evident in the unique healing of someone blind from birth. That extraordinary miracle, contends Schnelle (1992:124), legitimates Jesus's divine origin and reveals him as a miracle-worker sent by God (see John 9.7c; 16.33). This miracle, as a "*sêmeion*", manifests "this worldly visibility of Jesus's activity and the reality of his incarnation." In the context of the narrative, such a miracle is not humanly possible. Marrow (1995:156) points out that "a wonder like this is God's alone to perform, and to perform solely through his own chosen agent." The miracle is in itself indisputable evidence that Jesus is a man from God (v. 33). The theoretical expertise of the leaders is not the means to know the divine, but the miracle, understood as a sign, is shown through the narrative to be the means of the divine manifestation. The blind man enabled by his own experience acts as rabbi. The Jewish

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<sup>42</sup> The term that is in 1 Timothy 2.10 is *theosebeia* meaning, "reverence for God."

<sup>43</sup> See Schnackenburg 1980b: 252.

authorities could not tolerate such an affront and declared to him: “You were born entirely in sin, and are you trying to teach us?” and they drove him out. Some scholars do not think that this driving out can mean “from the synagogue”, but simply before them, but this is unlikely because the blind man’s testimony contained a threat of acknowledging especially in the light of John 9.22. The blind man’s parents, and other secret believers, feared that threat, but the blind man, given his intimate experience of the divine, spoke up and therefore had to be expelled from the synagogue.

The adjective *aposunagôgos* is not found in any document other than the Fourth Gospel. The blind man differs from the beggar of John 5 who remained in the synagogue, as did many Jews, even rulers, who somehow managed to conceal their faith, for fear of being expelled from the synagogue. The blind man, like other Christians, openly revealed his commitment and was cast out. Martyn (1979:40) is convinced that some members of the Johannine community came to the church because they were formally excluded from the synagogue.

In accordance with the teaching of John 3.18-19, John 9 will now show what the result is, both for the disciple of the Light, who does welcome him (1.12), and for the children of darkness. According to the Old Testament<sup>44</sup>, the giving of sight to the blind would be a sign of the messianic age. The synoptic Gospels incorporated the view that “the restoring of sight to the blind is a token that the new age has dawned”, but in John, the emphasis is on the authority and character of the one who performs the miracle (Bruce 1983:218). The blind man’s reply is a rabbinical maxim, according to which “every one in whom is the fear of heaven, his words are heard.” And no doubt John has this in mind, especially if, as seems to be the case, the scene in chapter 9 is still set at the feast of Tabernacles. The evangelist tries to emphasise that the blind man’s experience represents fallen humanity that is brought out of full darkness into full enlightenment. It is particularly noticeable that the progressive darkening of the Pharisees, his judges, counterbalances the passage of the beggar (9.8) from religious ignorance (v.12) to complete illumination (v. 38, 39a). For him, a miracle of this magnitude must be recognised as an answer to prayer; and the man who received this answer to his prayer must be no ordinary man. While the Pharisees disclaim all knowledge of him, the man who already concluded that

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<sup>44</sup> Isaiah 35.4-5: “Say to those who are of a fearful heart, “Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God. He will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense. He will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped.” And Isaiah 42.1, 7: “Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights ... to open the eyes that are blind....”

Jesus must be a “prophet” (v. 17), now reiterates his conviction by stating that he must have come “from God.”

## 2.7 The expression “*pisteuein eis*” (v. 35)

John has a preference for certain terms. To be sure, one needs to examine the frequency of “*pisteuein*” which occurs in the Synoptic Gospels 34 times and 98 times in the Gospel of John, whereas the term “*pistis*”, which is more privileged, occurs 243 times in the New Testament. John prefers the verb “*pisteuein eis*”<sup>45</sup> (to believe in), because, according to Brown (1966:512), John does not think of faith as an internal disposition, but as an active commitment. Brown points out (1966:513) that “*pisteuein eis*” bears a sense of an active commitment to a person, and in particular to Jesus. More than trust or confidence in Jesus, such a belief is an acceptance of what Jesus claims to be to the extent that the commitment to Jesus means to dedicate one’s life to him. I am tempted to assert that that kind of belief is a loyalty expressed to the one to whom the believer is committed. The following analysis is helpful to find out the proper meaning of John’s perspective.

The particular nuance of the Johannine concept of believing is seen in the predilection for the preposition “*eis*” after “*pisteuein*”, “to believe in”, whose occurrence is 36 times in John, 3 in 1 John and 8 elsewhere in the New Testament. This construction, “*pisteuein eis*”, seems to be the key expression for Johannine thought, which is defined in terms of an active commitment to a person<sup>46</sup> and, in particular, to Jesus. It involves much more than trust or confidence in Jesus. It is an acceptance of Jesus and of what he claims to be and a dedication of one’s life to him. To “believe into” someone, according to Arichea (1979:207), is “to trust that person fully, to have complete confidence in him, to commit one’s whole life to him.” This commitment involves a willingness to respond to God’s demands as they are presented in and by Jesus (see 1 John 3.23). It is this understanding that is to be kept in mind when interpreting John 9.35 in relation to

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<sup>45</sup> This expression is diversely used as follows: “*pisteuein eis*” with accusative in John 1.12; 2.11, 23; 3.16, 18a, 18b, 36; 4.39; 6.29, 35, 40; 7.5, 31, 38, 39, 48; 8.30; 9.35, 36; 10.42; 11.25, 26a, 45, 48; 12.11, 36, 37, 42, 44 9 (twice), 46; 14.6 (twice), 12; 16.9; 17.20 (total 36 times).

<sup>46</sup> Arichea (1979:206-7) points out that “believe in” (literally “believe into”) is a very common expression in John’s Gospel. Except in two cases (12.44 and 14.1, where the object of belief is God), the object of belief in these expressions is Jesus himself. In three instances (1.12; 2.23; 3.18), one finds the expression “believe in the name”, but it is quite clear from the context that “name” in these verses refers to Jesus himself. Even when the object of belief is the light (1.6; 12.36), the light is connected with the Word, referring to Jesus himself.

9.37, for he who believes in someone “ascribes to the person he believes in the honour due to him as Lord and Master (...) “To acknowledge Jesus as Lord”, “to accept Jesus as God’s promised King” (Arichea 1979:207). A survey<sup>47</sup> of the vocabulary John used, made by Schnackenburg (1980a: 561-2), makes clear that in John “to believe in Jesus” means, above all, to acknowledge his claims for his own person. Faith in Jesus is named merely as the presupposition or condition of the Son’s giving of life to believers, and this faith is the same as that invariably called for elsewhere in the Gospel, the acceptance and acknowledgment of this unique mediator of salvation (Schnackenburg 1980a:561). It is because Jesus, as presented in John 9, is the “divine revealer” in the strict sense that the evangelist moves the presentation of Jesus as a Prophet like Moses to the presentation of Jesus as Son of man. The question “Do you believe in the Son of man?” will occupy us in the following paragraphs.

### **2.8 To believe in “the Son of man” (v. 35-37, 39-41)**

In this final stage of the narrative, Jesus who was absent from the blind man’s examination, comes to fill the void after the authorities have driven out the healed man. When he asks him “Do you believe in the Son of man?” (v. 5), the confession of faith in response to this question “is vital to a correct understanding of the whole chapter, as it forms the climax of the man born blind’s gradual progress to true faith” (Moloney 1976:150). In Moloney’s view, the reader, who is following the journey of the man born blind from darkness to light, realises that he has come to a crisis point, and Jesus is asking him for a commitment to faith (1996:128). In this paragraph, as Lindars contends (1972:349), the reader is enabled to identify the blind man, by his confession of faith, as a true disciple and so is prepared for the final revelation about Jesus in John 10.30. The healed man, who referred to Jesus by a series of titles, “each manifesting a deeper insight into Jesus’ identity” (Crosby 2000:97), has to show his ability to profess his faith publicly. First, he referred to Jesus as “the man called Jesus” (9.11); further challenged in his faith by the

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<sup>47</sup> Schnackenburg did an interesting survey which we are going to take into account: (i) several of the formulae attached to “*pisteuein eis*” show that it is a matter of acknowledging certain claims of Jesus. This is clear when one takes into account *eis to onoma autou* (John 1.12; 2.23), and even more so from *eis to onoma tou monogenous huiou tou theeou* (John 3.18). There is a need to note also *eis on apesteilen ekeinos* of John 6.29, *eis to phôs* of John 6.29, *eis ton huion tou anthrôpou* of John 9.35. (ii) Sometimes a passage, which takes the place of “*pisteuein eis*” shows that it is a matter of acknowledgment of the claims of Jesus. It is further shown through John 7.31; 7.48 compared with v.52; 11.25f compared with the confession of v.27; 10.42 with 41a. (iii) Finally, it sometimes follows from the whole situation that “*pisteuein eis*” means an attitude of acceptance. The faith demanded by Jesus in 6.35d consists of acknowledging him as the bread of life (v. 35b); John 6.40 belongs to the same context for disbelief or unbelief is primarily the denial of the Messiahship of Jesus (see John 6.64 with 41f; 7.5, 26f, 31, 41).

leaders he declared, “he is a prophet” (v. 17). Reviled by “the Jews”, he testified to Jesus as one from God empowered with an astonishing gift of healing (v. 31-33). Driven from the synagogue for being a “martyr” on Jesus’s behalf, the man born blind still does not confess that Jesus is anything beyond a respectful “*kurios*” (see 9.36), despite the fact that Jesus has just defined himself as the “Son of man.”

The miracle performed by Jesus recounted by the evangelist is not an end in itself, but a means to lead souls to faith in Jesus, the Christ and Son of God. The miracle “evokes faith and rejection” (Schnelle 1992:124). This miracle divided the Pharisees into two groups, namely, those who declared that “this man is not from God, for he does not observe the Sabbath”, and those who asked: “how can a man who is a sinner perform such signs” (see v. 16). The evangelist bears in mind the necessity to show the blind man who, through progressive stages, arrives at a recognition of Jesus’s divine origin that culminates in his public confession “I believe, Lord” and his worship of Jesus.

John 9.35 is “the most intriguing of the Johannine Son of Man references, with the direct claim of Jesus for faith in the Son of Man and with the blind man’s subsequent worship of him” (Pryor 2001:345). The Gospel of John is unique among others in its report that Jesus directly asserted that he was both the Messiah and the Son of man. Jesus was thought to be the Mosaic Prophet, but aware of the complexity of the numerous expectations regarding the Prophet and the Messiah. The Johannine Jesus, according to Cullmann (see Rhea 1990:67), knew that he had not come to fulfill the popular, traditional expectations related to either of these figures. It is no accident that, in John 9, and throughout the Gospel, the evangelist records Jesus’s emphatic pronouncement that he is the Son of man. John 9.35 is the only passage in the New Testament where someone is asked to believe in the Son of man. The tendency, however, has been to replace the title “Son of man” by that of “Son of God.” Some scholars opted for either of them.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Lindars’s understanding (1972:350) is motivated by the fact that John is probably saving up “Son of God” for the climax of John 10.38 where Jesus reveals himself: “can you say that the one whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world is blaspheming because I said, ‘I am God’s Son.’” On the other hand, as the two last verses deal with the judgment, the Son of man is an appropriate title to use with the idea of doing the Father’s works in anticipation of future glory. Hoskyns (1947:359) points out that the manuscript evidence suggests that the reading “Son of man” represents the original text since it is found in the Greek codices Sinaiticus, Vaticanus, Bezae, and in the Syriac and Egyptian Sahidic versions (see also Moloney 1976:149). For Hoskyns, the replacement of Son of man by Son of God was motivated by the supernatural or divine nature instead of the human nature of the Christ. For Moloney (1995:439), Son of man is only connected with believing in John 9.35 though 3.14-15 and 12.34ff, but “the Son of God” is used in connection with confessions of faith (1.34, 49; 3.18; 11.27; 20.31). The attestation of “*anthrôpou*” is superior even if the writer moves from the thought of eschatological judgment to which



It is almost universally accepted that “the Son of Man” has to be taken as the original or correct reading. For Davies (1992:193), this is because, on the one hand, it has earlier and more diverse manuscript support, and, on the other hand, it is the more difficult, giving rise to the variant in later manuscripts. The reader is well-informed about the Son of man which occurs 13 times in John (1.51; 3.13-14; 5.27; 6.27, 53, 62; 12.23, 34, 62; 13.31-32). Jesus, the Son of man, is seen as “a figure who makes God known in human history” (Moloney 1996:128). The discussion around the Son of man in John is very extensive and runs the risk of a lack of consensus (see Kerr 2002:157 note 49). The key passage about the Son of man is in John 1.51 and 3.13, which will be analysed in the third chapter. In spite of the fact that Kerr did not establish any relation between Nathanael (John 1.51) and the blind man (9.37), I think the verb “to see” and the title “Son of man”, which occur in both passages, should both be taken into account. Both texts have a strong focus on the Son of man. The blind man, like Nathanael, is a member of the Jewish nation by natural descent. Nathanael is a representative of the New Israel or the New Jacob (Kerr 2002:137), while the former blind man is representative of the new Church, which has broken with Judaism. Kerr (2002:142) is right to contend that Nathanael is a genuine Israelite because, according to the Fourth Gospel, he represents the fulfillment of Israelite religion, namely, faith in Jesus, the one about “whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote” (1.45). Nathanael came to believe when he experienced Jesus’s supernatural knowledge<sup>49</sup>, while the blind man believed as a result of Jesus’s supernatural healing power.

When Jesus asks the man: “Do you believe in the Son of man?” The “you” is emphatically (Lindars 1972:350; Morris 1995:439) for the blind man, unlike his disparagers, and he has to take a stand on his faith. He is challenged to accept that God is made known in the Son of man. The total commitment of faith is shown in his willingness to know who the Son of man is in order

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“Son of man” is connected (5.27) in Jesus, and Son of man as present bringer of life. Whether “the Son of man” is preferred to “the Son of God” is a matter for reflection. It is not improbable that the latter should have been changed into the former. Nowhere else in John is *pisteuein* used with “Son of man.” There is, however, a close parallel to this passage in 12.34ff (see Barrett 1978:364), where the question regarding the lifting up of the Son of man becomes acute and Jesus replies in terms of the light which is in the world for a little while that men may believe, and goes on to quote the passage from Isaiah 6 which is alluded to in vv. 39-41. In these verses, Jesus appears as judge; hence perhaps the otherwise surprising title Son of man.

<sup>49</sup> Such a special knowledge is apparent throughout the Gospel, especially, in John 2.24-5 “But Jesus on his part would not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no one to testify about anyone; for he himself knew what was in everyone.” In the Samaritan woman’s testimony, she is marked by wonder at Jesus’ knowledge: “Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! Could this not be the Messiah?” Other texts to take into account are John 6.6; 9.2; 11.4, 11-14; 13.1, 26-27, 38 and 21.6, 17, 18, 19.

to believe in him (v. 36). For Davies (1992:193), however, the Son of man confession seeks the involvement of the disciples – the man excluded from the synagogue community is drawn into Jesus’s community.

There are two striking elements in the answer that Jesus gives: sight through the verb *horaô*, and hearing, through the verb *laleô*. In the context of giving sight to a man born blind, and one in which Jesus presents himself as “the Light of the world” (9.5), such a choice of words cannot be haphazard. The solemn response of Jesus to the blind man: “you have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he” (v. 37) is to be paralleled with his self-revelation to the Samaritan woman (see John 4.26). The use of the perfect tense “*heôrakas*” in John 9.37 serves to underline that the man born blind is already a believer (Muller 1991:293). He has already seen Jesus as the man from God through the miracle that healed his blindness. That is why he was invited to give an answer to the revelation that Jesus is the Son of man. It is not accidental that the writer used the verb *laleô*, in the mouth of Jesus, which “carries with it the assurance of being the revelation of God” (Moloney 1976:155). Jesus is the one who speaks of what he knows from the Father (3.11, 34; 8.25-26, 38; 12.49-50; 14.10; 16.25) and he speaks with a unique authority (7.17, 18, 26, 46; 18.20). However, there is a problem to be solved between these two passages, namely John 4.26 and 9.37. In the former, Jesus’s self-revelation uses the first person *egô eimi, ho lalon soi* (I am he, the one who is speaking to you), whereas in 9.37 Jesus reverts to the third person, as directly revealing to the blind man. The difference between the two verses, says Muller (1991:293), stems from the fact that “the saying of Jesus is the final revelation which makes it possible for the Samaritan woman to identify the Messiah with Jesus, to recognize that the man speaking with her is the Messiah.” The blind man, however, has already experienced the revelation when he was healed from the blindness; he has seen Jesus. In this sense, when Jesus is identifying himself, in v. 37, as the Son of man who is seen and who is heard, this means that in Jesus, the Son of man, the man born blind is invited to see and hear the revelation of God among men (Schnackenburg 1980b:321).

The verb *horaô* is used in contexts of revelation in John (Moloney 1976:154). In John’s view, it is impossible for anyone to see God, or come to the knowledge of God (see 1.18; 5.37), but Jesus reveals what *he* has seen (1.34; 3.11, 22; 8.38). He speaks of what he has seen with his Father (6.46; 8.38). Those who believe in Jesus, will see (1.50-51; 11.47; 16.16-22), while those who refuse to see are condemned (3.36; 5.37-38; 6.36; 15.24). The supreme revelation of God will take place when they “look upon” the elevated Son of Man (3.13-15; 19.35-37).

Cullmann (Rhea 1990:67) is right when he argues that John has very successfully distinguished between the synoptic picture of the Son of man as one who suffers in the present and is exalted in the future, and the Johannine panorama of pre-existence and eschatological judgment focused on a present moment of the Son of man's glory. While John 5.27-29 develops the theme associated with the Danielic Son of man, including the resurrection of those doing good and the condemnation of those doing evil in the light of Daniel 12.1-2, in John, Jesus is taken as playing the role of eschatological judge (2.35-41). John, believes Lindars (1972:351), is thinking of the future of judgment anticipated in the confrontation with Jesus in his incarnate life. The response creates a division between those who confess their blindness/ignorance<sup>50</sup> and come to the sight and those who claim to see/know<sup>51</sup> and they are judged because of their unbelief in Jesus the Son of man. It is surprising to find out that such a judgment is spoken of in terms of the coming of the light into the world, bringing separation or division (John 3.19-21; 8.12; 9.5, 39-41). In Painter's view (1991:286), the Son of man is the eschatological judge who represents the view of heaven to earth and, as such, he is worshipped by the once blind man (9.38).

In order to comprehend Jesus's reply to the blind man in 9.37 "You have seen him and the one speaking with you is he", one needs to connect this verse to 9.3 when Jesus answered his disciples: "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him" and 9.5 in which Jesus states: "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." Both verses linked together are related also to "light" and "seeing", as Riedl and Hergenroder point out (see Van der Watt 2000:252) that, in seeing the works of the Father, which are the healing deeds of Jesus, the need is to refer to him, and to recognise Jesus, as the Light, and to have the light needed to really "see" and understand the deeds of Jesus.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> The man born blind emphasises his ignorance throughout the narrative: he does not even know whether or not Jesus is a sinner (v. 25); he does not know who the Son of man is (v. 36); he emphasises that he knows one thing only (v. 25) (see Barrett 1978:366).

<sup>51</sup> The Pharisees, in the foregoing dialogue, have claimed to be well-informed spiritual guides (Lindars 1972:352). Their sin remains for they make confident pronouncements about Jesus (v.16, 22). This sin to which Jesus refers is nothing other than "their willful unbelief, an unbelief which persisted in the light of full knowledge" (Hobbs 1968:116). It is this standpoint to which Hoskyns adheres (1947:360) arguing that the sin of the Pharisees is set off against the faith of the man born blind, the unbelieving and arrogant Jews are placed solidly within the sphere of darkness. This leads to a further distinction between blindness that is accompanied by the claim to sight and that is characteristic of the Pharisees, and blindness accompanied by no such claim. They are repetitively used in John 9.24 and 29, the solemn *hemeis oidamen* of the community claiming to see when the light shines, yet they refuse to see it because they regard their own illumination as sufficient (see Barrett 1978:366).

<sup>52</sup> In the Excursus made by Van der Watt (2000:252-3), these following words draw one's attention: "The narrative in chap 9 relates blindness to light. In the programmatic expression in 8.12, Jesus is described

## 2.9 To worship Jesus as Lord (v. 38)

Jesus reveals himself as the Son of man, and to see him and recognise him is perfect sight and enlightenment, in fact, the vision of God (Davey 1947:359) as it is said in John 14.9: "... whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'show us the Father'?" This mention of worship in John 9.38 reminds the reader of the climatic scene in John 20.28 when Thomas cries, "My Lord and my God", who comes to put his trust in the risen, glorified Jesus, the Son of man. While worship seems to be the reserved domain of God, John 9.38 is the unique verse that deals with the worship of Jesus as the Son of man. The author uses the verb "*proskynein*" in John 4.20-24 and 12.20 to describe the worship due to God. This verse posed a problem and came to be considered as an ecclesiastical posterior addition<sup>53</sup> for the purpose of baptism (see Porter 1967:390). Porter says of this disputed passage that it is out of harmony with Johannine theology. He put forth three facts that justify this point of view: the occurrence in 9.38 of the form *ephê*, which is rare in the Gospel of John; the use in 9.38 of *pisteuô*, a form which occurs nowhere else in the Gospel, coupled with the scribal alterations of the text at other places to include this form, and the use of "*proskynein*" with Jesus as object, which occurs only in 9.38 in John and is thus out of harmony with the teaching of the evangelist elsewhere. This argument is disputable insofar as John 9 is one of the texts that deals with the social conflicts between "Jews" and Christians about Jesus as the means of God's revelation. The act of the blind man's worship is to be viewed as an expression of the Church's adoration of the Christ being, so to speak, "the intuitive and impulsive expression of insight and faith" (Hoskyns 1947:359). To worship Jesus is the true worship of God (see 12.44, 45), by which Jewish adoration in the temple, which no longer existed, and all other worship is superseded (4.20-24; 12.20-21). To the

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as the Light of the world. This theme is again taken up in 9.5. Following this the narrative is related about a blind man who is at first physically healed. In 9.35-39, he sees who Jesus really is and is thus healed from his spiritual blindness too. The Pharisees, however, are described as being blind in 9.40-41. Although they can physically see, they fail to recognize the divine identity of Jesus. They claim that they see, but they do not see the true reality. This is a figurative expression where "see" points to the ability to know and recognize the truth, in other words, Jesus, who is the truth. If they knew that they are in need of enlightenment, they would have gone to the light of the world. Now they do not acknowledge their need. The consequence is that they remain blind (guilty) and in darkness. Blindness is therefore an alternative way of expressing the same truth as is expressed by the metaphor that Jesus is the light of the world. In darkness (either because of darkness or blindness) one lacks the ability to really see."

<sup>53</sup> On the plane of textual criticism, the vv. 38 (he said, "Lord, I believe") and 39a (Jesus said) are missing from P75, W, b and also from the Coptic mss (Q). Bernard, as quoted by Lindars (1972:351), writing before the discovery of P75, thought the omission "remarkable", but said it "cannot be original"; but it must now be considered most likely that the words are a liturgical interpolation from the use of this chapter in connection with the baptism according to Porter's arguments (1967:37-9).

time after the destruction of the temple, in the writer's rhetorical construction of the story of the blind man, Jesus is presented as the *locus* of the worship of God, as a palliative to the need of the temple. Towards the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, Jesus Son of man is the new centre of worship, in place of the temple destroyed in 70 CE. One of the primary duties of a client was to praise the patron in public (Malina 1998:173), since public and proper credit was to be given wherever it was due.

*Proskynein* as used by John, literally meaning "to lie flat on the face", describes an ancient Persian royal ritual of honour through which the royal recipient is honoured as if a god. The Greeks abhorred the ritual because they did not believe kings should be given divine honours, although the practice was taken over by the *diadochi* kings (Seleucids, etc.). So, in the context of John, one can easily understand the royal overtones in the verb – Jesus being touted as a royal figure and god in place of other contemporary ones. According to Kerr (2002:162), this verse establishes a link with vv. 39-40, for he who is to be worshipped is also the one who will judge those who do not believe. The Son of man worshipped is, at the same time, the eschatological bringer of salvation and judgment. He dispenses salvation and judgment in the present.

While the worship had to take place in the Temple, the man, surprisingly, is shown worshipping Jesus where he encounters him. The writer, as I stressed elsewhere, strives to demonstrate how, in the Son of Man, a delocalisation of "divine reality" operates away from the temple or other sacred places such as the synagogue, finding a new localisation in the person of Jesus himself. For Jesus, in John's perspective, is presented as an answer to the catastrophe of the fall of the temple of 70 CE. He is "the new Temple", the place of encounter between God and human beings. As holy man, Jesus is a locus of the divine presence, or "the conduit for the transmission of the divine." In Smith's view, the access to the divine can no longer be imagined through the sacred place that, for him, does not exist, but rather through the new centre which is a divine man, a magician, and an entrepreneur without fixed office (see 1977:238). John, in portraying Jesus, is right in showing him as a holy man from above, without fixed address, an entrepreneur from God who mediates the divine. Jesus is depicted as the entrepreneur who does not require a formal place of worship, and who may be worshipped anywhere. Any place is sacred insofar as wherever the holy man is, there is the sacred place, not only in which to encounter the divine, but also to worship the one that represents or mediates the divine.

## SUMMARY

The second chapter deals with the exegetical study that began with the necessity to place John 9.24-41 in the narrative setting of the Gospel. It has demonstrated that John 9, as “the most brilliant composition in the New Testament” is closely linked to the preceding chapters 7 and 8 and the following chapter 10, both dealing with the theme of “Light.” By giving sight to the man born blind, Jesus, as “the Light of the world”, brought him out not only from physical but from spiritual darkness, while the Pharisees’s illumination, in the unfolding of the narrative, paradoxically becomes blindness which leads to judgment.

A literary and theological link has been established between the story of the blind man and other healings of blind men in the Synoptic Gospels. We found out that, in John and in the Synoptic Gospels likewise, the miracles of healing of blind men seem to have been recorded not as acts of physical healings, but as actions that reveal the Messiahship of Jesus and at the same time the illumination of those who believe in him and follow him. That is why the recovery of sight comes to mean, in the New Testament, a possession of knowledge of God. The man born blind of John 9 is shown as possessing such knowledge.

The whole exegetical study through which we have dissected the text to comprehend that “the Jews” were misleading because of their false expertise construed around their claim to “know.” It is in that perspective that the writer employs, in an elastic manner, the verb “to know” or “not to know”, dealing with both Jews and the healed man. The former group is grounded on the fine points of theology construed by Moses that leads them to refuse to acknowledge Jesus as the actual means by which God is revealed. The formerly blind man’s unparalleled experience of the gift of sight cannot be challenged by that Jewish expertise since he is convinced of the power of God manifested through Jesus in an exceptional degree. Such a miracle, for the blind man, even if that is unpleasant for “the Jews”, is a sign that Jesus is the Messiah who is to be known as the Son of Man. The gift of sight is nothing less than a manifestation of the divine, supported all the more by the knowledge that “never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind” (John 9.32). Such an unheard of miracle or unparalleled event leads the man to recognize Jesus as Son of Man, and even Lord.

## CHAPTER 3

### CHRISTOLOGY IN JOHN

This chapter will deal with the Christology formulated in the Gospel of John. Christology appears in the titles associated with Jesus and these titles stem from the historical context of the polemical social interaction. It is not possible to read John 9 without being struck by the writer's reconstruction of contemporary history, and the consequent reflection on the way Jesus was spoken about and of the nature of first century Jewish religion, mythmaking<sup>54</sup> and social formation.<sup>55</sup> The evangelist ingeniously shows how people, living in a context of persecution, came to think critically about the present state of things when thinking about how the past gives significance to the present. By using the socio-cultural texture, we will investigate the text's

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<sup>54</sup> It should be remembered that mythmaking, in McCutcheon's understanding (2000:206), is the preeminent means for creating cognitive and social continuity amidst the discontinuities of life. For Mack and other scholars like Smith, religion is to be seen as a "social construct" belonging to all the people of a certain culture. In its expression, religion encompasses the myths, rituals, symbols, beliefs and patterns of thinking shared by them. By *myths*, people think critically about the present state of a group's life, when re-reading the past. Through myths people define their group and identify themselves in relation to a larger world. *Rituals* are social occasions or events through which the group is structured, i.e. certain activities or events that give significance to the group. Religion, by definition, refers to systems of belief and patterns of ritual that enable individuals to experience contact with a transcendent order of spiritual reality. Religion is not to be regarded primarily as an attempt of human beings to attain the divine, but rather as a human creation on equal footing with the other systems of signs and patterns of practices that humans have invented to structure their societies. The role of religion is to structure the society and to give significance to people living at a specific place at a given time and situated in a given context. In order to understand early Christianity, it is necessary to analyze how its various myths in the light of New Testament texts, have been constituted and for which purpose. Jesus is to be viewed as an agent of the past whose image has been manipulated in a mythic way. Thinking critically about the present state of opposition and persecution of Christian groups, they imagined the way to survive.

The Johannine community was living amidst the discontinuities of life. The author, as representative of the community, reconstructs the history of the Church in manipulating the image of Jesus, an agent of the past and the historical event of the healing of the blind man, in order to attribute certain significance to the drama that the Church is facing. The Gospel, as other Gospels, is a literary work rhetorically constructed in order to resist the rigid hierarchies of Jewish leaders in the Graeco-Roman world.

<sup>55</sup> Social formation, observes Mack (2001:68-70), deals with the human enterprise of seeking to survive within the many tensions or discontinuities of their existence. Religion, for Mack and other scholars like Smith, is to be seen as a "social construct" belonging to all the people of a certain culture, sharing the myths, rituals, symbols, beliefs and patterns of thinking. It is important to recall that by myths people define their group and identify themselves in relation to a larger world; and through rituals which are social occasions or events that give significance to the group. That is why myths and rituals are seen as phenomena of the social and cultural constructs called "religion." And the world projected by religious myth and ritual is imagined as the location of divine agents capable of influencing human life in ways not matched by a human capacity to influence the divine. Mythmaking and social formation are the human enterprise of seeking to survive in the context of crises.

language to see how the evangelist constructed the social and cultural world exhibited to the reader. Before tackling the issue of the titles attributed to Jesus, let us look at how John 9 reflects the world in which it takes place.

### **3.1 John 9.24-41 in the socio-cultural context**

It is not easy to study the Gospel of John without seeing how the text reflects the world in the patterns of communication, and what it reveals about this world. The type of world projected and constructed in this text can be primarily understood through the concept of sin that appears at the beginning (v.2-3) and at the end (v. 41) of the story of John 9. The first-century Mediterranean culture, according to Crosby (2000:88-9), was dominated by the question of “who” or “what” was behind disease. People believed that blindness was caused by some kind of separation from God or by sin (see Genesis 19.11; Deuteronomy 28.28; II Kings 6.18) or by demonic powers. All the Mediterranean contemporaries of Jesus and his followers, in Malina’s view (1998:176), believed in the commonly shared explanations about the origins of sickness, of the body and of the spirit, and the proper way to deal with sickness. It is this culturally defined ideology that reflected the question of Jesus’ disciples, an ideology identifying sickness with sin. Jesus makes a clear break from the prevailing religiously legitimated view. For him, sin is not to be viewed as an ontological reality but, rather, a reality deeply rooted in unbelief. Sin is not natural, but rather it is unbelief displayed in the rejection of the revelation brought by the Son of man to earth. To claim to see or to pretend to be illuminated with the light of the Law, as interpreted by Jewish tradition, grounded on Moses, is the real sin which calls forth judgement. I will refer once again to this issue of sin and judgement at the end of the present work.

The world projected by the text can also be understood in terms of the concepts used in the text, which need to be situated in their own context, namely the Mediterranean world. This text refers to “*explicit data*” (van den Heever 1999:351) in terms of places (synagogue), the names of characters or historical figures (Pharisees, Jewish authorities, the man born blind, Jesus) and historical events (the healing of the blind man and the expulsion from the synagogue which took place, not during Jesus’ lifetime, but after it).

The power to open the eyes of the blind, in the Mediterranean world, was attributed to various deities. It is the case, for instance, of Vespasian, who was not expected to become emperor as he belonged to an undistinguished family and attained his imperial position by an indirect route,



and therefore lacked authority. A certain witness testified to his having worked miracles, including the healing of a blind man and a man with a lame leg, who had appeared together before him from among the people. Both miracles, according to Klauck (2000:308), exalted Vespasian above normal human stature and served to ideologically legitimate him and his power while it was still fragile.<sup>56</sup> It is indispensable to the interpretation of the story of the paralysed man (John 5) and the miracle of the man born blind (John 9), to bear in mind the reputation of Vespasian as a miracle-worker. Jesus is likewise presented as miracle-worker. Jesus' power was not fragile like Vespasian's, but I believe his legitimacy was very much at stake in the Graeco-Roman world of the Johannine Church at the end of the first century, which endeavoured rather successfully to legitimate Jesus in this way.

The theme of Christology is also a means to see how the different titles attributed to Jesus throughout the narrative of John 9 stem from the social and cultural context.

### 3.2 Christology in John

It is commonly held that the New Testament marks new directions in understanding the purpose of God which are rooted in a transformation of the understanding of God. Johannine Christology needs to be viewed as the expression of the transformation that took place in the understanding of God. Painter (1991:234-5) is right to contend that:

Almost everything John says about God is in relation to Jesus, especially focused on the Father-Son relationship. Christology is John's way of speaking of God at those points where the understanding of God is being transformed. The transformation introduces nothing absolutely new so that all the parts of the view can be found already in the Jewish scriptures (...) John's Christology constitutes the new centre for understanding God, the purpose of God, the destiny of the creation and the meaning of faith.

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<sup>56</sup> The same witness is given by Suetonius (see Wendy Cotter 1999:42) in these words: "Vespasian as yet lacked prestige and a certain divinity, so to speak, since he was an unexpected and still new-made emperor; but these also were given him. A man of the people [i.e. in Alexandria] who was blind, and another who was lame, came to him together as he sat on the tribunal, begging for the help for their disorders which Serapis had promised in a dream; for the god declared that Vespasian would restore the eyes, if he would spit upon them, and give strength to the leg, if he would deign to touch it with his heel. Though he had hardly any faith that this could possibly succeed, and therefore shrank even from making the attempt, he was at last prevailed upon by his friends and tried both things in public before a large crowd; and with success."

The Fourth Evangelist concentrates on the identity of Jesus and he tries to show, through Jesus' signs and words, how some came to believe whereas others, especially the Jews, a group antagonistic to Jesus, did not. Christology is without any doubt the main theme of the Fourth Gospel. As it seems clear from John 20.30-31, the central concern of the evangelist is Christology which, therefore, provides the key to the meaning of the entire Gospel. While in John 12.37, the evangelist closes the Book of signs (chap 1 – 12), by alluding to many great signs, which yet caused no faith among the Jews, in John 20.30-31, at the conclusion of the entire Book, the evangelist now speaks of the many signs which Jesus did "in the presence of the disciples" in order to lead his readers to faith. By using the term *sēmeia*, the evangelist referred to the signs in the first twelve chapters of the Book, or does he also include the appearance of the resurrected Jesus? (Schnackenburg 1980c:336; Brown 1966b:1058). Regardless of all the discussion surrounding this question, let us turn to Schnackenburg and Brown, since both agree that the evangelist refers simultaneously to the signs performed during Jesus's lifetime and to his post-resurrection appearances. Schnackenburg observes (1980c:337) that all the signs throughout the Book, including the appearance of the resurrected Jesus, take into account the deeper meaning, that is "the revelatory quality", but, beyond that, the sign of appearance bears an eminent sense, inasmuch as it reveals Jesus as the Exalted one belonging to God's world. That is why the author inserts Thomas who confesses Jesus as "Lord and God." Brown rightly contends (1966b:1059) that the signs performed in Jesus's earthly ministry revealed in an anticipatory manner his glory and his power to give eternal life. The disciples who saw the risen Jesus, including Thomas, reached a deepened sense of Jesus's lifetime by confessing that Jesus is Lord and God. After his resurrection, Jesus is no longer pointing symbolically to his glory but he is being glorified. In Beasley-Murray's understanding, the key to the interpretation of the Gospel of John has to do with faith. The intention and purpose of the evangelist is stated in the conclusion of the Gospel, namely John 20.30-31: "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name."

The issue of "to believe in Jesus as Messiah and Son of God" raises two main points of view. Beasley-Murray (1989:7) interpreted these words in two ways: the Gospel was written, in missionary perspective, to those who have to come to faith in Jesus as the Christ and Son of God, and then come to gain the life of the Kingdom of God; or to those who already believe in Jesus but whose faith has to be deepened. The former group has to get experience with Jesus

as the Christ, while the latter should experience in fuller measure the life of the Kingdom, now, and be assured of possessing its fullness in the coming age.

In Malina's view, reading John 20.20-31, the Gospel was written for the purpose of generating faith (1998:285). However, does that faith need to be taken from the missionary perspective or from the perspective of deepened faith? These two possibilities are created by variant readings in the Greek texts: some manuscripts have the subjunctive present (*piseuete*) meaning "stay in belief" and some manuscripts use the future tense (*piseusetete*) that means "to come to believe in the future."

The theme of whether "to believe" is employed a great deal in the Fourth Gospel, so there is cause to assert that this double perspective is meaningful to an interpretation of this Gospel.<sup>57</sup> As argued by Beasley-Murray (1989:8), "the Gospel has both an evangelistic thrust and a deeply instructive quality. It has the power to awaken faith and to confirm faith, and was surely intended for use in mission to those outside the churches and for building up those inside them." In my opinion, such a view is disputable. An issue that has to be tackled is to see whether the conclusion of the Gospel is concerned with a dual audience, namely Jews and Gentiles. When Jesus is shown as Christ, this speaks to Jews who are expecting a Jewish-Messiah or Davidic-Messiah. When he is portrayed as the Son of God, this speaks to Gentiles, for among them are found the sons of gods in connection with Graeco-Roman ideology.

Beasley-Murray, in my opinion, is wrong when he tries to retain the twofold possibility as this overlooks the important issue of literary criticism.

The best translation of the problematic verse 31 would be: "[The Gospel] was written so that you may *continue to believe* that Jesus is the Messiah (Christ), the Son of God, and so that in

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<sup>57</sup> Two groups dispute the interpretation of both titles in John 20.30-31— messiah and Son of God - as highlighting the existence of two perspectives (see Brown 1972: 1059-1060): (i) those who think of the Gospel as primarily a missionary writing addressed to Jewish non-believers often argue that here "Son of God" is entirely synonymous with "Messiah", and that John is simply trying to show the Jews that Jesus is their promised Messiah; (ii) those who hold that the Gospel is also or even primarily addressed to Gentiles or to already believing Christians tend to give a more profound meaning to "Son of God", treating it either as a separate title from "Messiah" or as a special interpretation of "Messiah." John is stressing not only that Jesus is the (Davidic) Messiah of Jewish expectation, but also the unique Son of God and thus arises precisely by equating Messiah with the Davidic Messiah, as has traditionally been the case. Against that argument, Meeks, as demonstrated above, portrays Jesus as "the prophet King" and has shown persuasively that John reflects some aspects of the expectation of a rather mythical Moses Messiah that lends itself more easily to "divine" categories. I have already demonstrated this above.

believing you *continue to have life* in his name.” That is why Malina and Rohrbaugh (1998:285-6) observe that the selection of signs has been made:

so that members of John’s group may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah – that is, Israel’s Redeemer, the Son of God, the divine Sky Man; further, by such belief they will maintain ‘life in his name’ (...) the Gospel has been written to mediate and maintain life in John’s antisocietal group and to whomever this group might include within its membership.

Since all life derives from God alone, only those who believe in the beloved Son, sent by the Father into the world, can hope to maintain themselves in life by continuing to believe in Jesus, the provider of life<sup>58</sup> on God’s behalf. Faith in Jesus is to be understood in dynamic, and not in static, perspective, with the believer being committed to struggles against the unbelieving world. Jesus’s discipleship needs courage and loyalty and a true believer’s commitment in a troubled world of persecution for those who believe in Jesus in the Graeco-Roman environment where men are imagined to be sons of Gods, and even gods.

The best way to solve this dispute is to consider the overall Gospel picture of Jesus. According to Brown (1966:1060), the Gospel of John demands throughout not only a belief that Jesus is the Messiah predicted by the prophets – anyway, the evangelist has not been satisfied with presenting Jesus as the Messiah in any minimalist sense – but also a belief that Jesus comes forth from the Father as a special representative to the world (see John 11.42; 16.27, 30 and 17.8), that Jesus and the Father share a special presence in one another (John 14.11), and that Jesus bears the divine name (John 8.24; 13.19). Jesus is called either Son of God,<sup>59</sup> or Son

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<sup>58</sup> In John, Jesus comes to bring life. God has life in himself (5.26) and so also does the Son. Jesus is the bread of life (6.48), the living resurrection (11.25), and the words he speaks are life as well (6.63). He has come that his followers might “have life, and have it abundantly” (10.10). The term life, according to Malina & Rohrbaugh (1998:41), appears 47 times in John’s Gospel (6 in Matthew; 3 in Mark; 5 in Luke). In the same Gospel, every incident in John’s Gospel is about life: Jesus changes water, which is inert, to wine (living liquid; look at its effects!); Jesus speaks to Nicodemus about being born and being born again; Jesus uses water in a well to tell a woman about living water (from the realm of God and angels, rain); Jesus tells an official whose son is on the point of death that he will live ; Jesus speaks of bread, bread from the sky, and living bread (living-giving); Jesus restores a blind (death) man’s eyesight (animated light, a synonym for life); Jesus raises dead Lazarus to life; Jesus dies to give life (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998:41). The presence of life is marked by animation, by Spirit (Latina *anima*, and its equivalent in Greek is *pneuma*, meaning “wind”, “breeze”, “spirit.” This is all that true wine has spirit, to be born again is reanimation, living water has spirit in it, bread of life has spirit, animate light, “light of life” is full of spirit and resurrection occurs thanks to spirit. On the cross, Jesus by bowing his head, gives up the Spirit, thus he gives life to “the world.” The purpose of the Gospel is to support those who believe in Jesus so that they “might have life in his name” (John 20.31).

<sup>59</sup> John 1, 34.49; 3, 18; 5, 25; 10, 36; 11, 4.27; 19, 7; 20, 31

only<sup>60</sup>. He refers to himself as the son of his Father. This may be a reference to the title “son of God”, attributed to the emperors<sup>61</sup>, as well as the titles “God”, “Lord” and “Saviour.” The title “Son of God” attributed to Jesus is to be seen as an apologetical polemical title because “he alone has proved in words and deeds that he is from God” (van Tilborg 1996:53). In my view, unlike the Hellenistic “sons of god”, regarded as such since they were connected to divine powers and regarded as “thaumaturgists”, Jesus is the Son of God, not because he bears divine substances but, because of his relationship with God the Father. The “sons of god” of the Hellenistic era held the power to protect the city. Artemis, Zeus’s daughter, was believed to reinforce the city, through her divine qualities (1996:53). The title “the son” refers to “Jesus-as-the-one-sent”, “Jesus-as-the-envoy-of-his father”<sup>62</sup> and implies that the functions of God the Father were transferred to him (1996:28)<sup>63</sup>. Jesus, in this cosmos, is the one who stands up for the interests of the “*oikos*” of his Father. He acts as representative of the *oikos*, since he is the envoy of his Father (van Tilborg 1996:55). In the history of the city of Ephesus, the names of various imperial sons are honoured – sons such as Agrippa, Gaius Caesar, and Tiberius ... (van Tilborg 1996:55). In this context, the emperor-father was seen as God, while his successor was regarded as Son of God.

For Morris (1971:856), with whom I agree, both titles are identical for the expected Messiah (Davidic-Messiah) was not to stand in that very close relationship to the Father as John, throughout the Gospel, depicts the relationship of Jesus with God the Father. John’s conception of messiahship is fuller and richer than that of contemporary Judaism (see John 1.20, 41) when he argues that:

The combination of terms Messiah and Son of God indicates the very highest view of the Person of Jesus, and it must be taken in conjunction with the fact that John has just recorded the confession of Thomas which hails Jesus as ‘My Lord and my God’. There cannot be any doubt that John conceived of Jesus as the very incarnation of God. (see Morris 1971:856-7).

In Morris’s view, it is only because Jesus has such a high dignity that he can be the kind of Saviour that John conceives him to be and then be able to bring human beings (Jews and Gentiles alike) to life through faith in His name. The major thrust of the statement in John 20.31

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<sup>60</sup> John 3, 16.17.35.36; 5, 19 (twice); 20, 21.22.23 (twice).26; 6, 40; 8, 35.36; 14.13; 17, 1 (twice)

<sup>61</sup> Augustus, Caesar, Nero son of god Claudius; Titus son of god Vespasian; Trajan son of god Nerva; Vespasian; Domitian son of God Vespasian - all of them have been attributed the titles “son of God” even Hadrian has been called Grandson of God Nerva (see Van Tilborg 1996:39).

<sup>62</sup> John 3. 16-17

<sup>63</sup> John 3. 33 ; 5. 19-23

is not to lead Jews to faith, something which, for John, vis-à-vis Jesus, is revealed as being wrong. Rather, the evangelist's desire is to deepen the faith of those who are already Christians – and Jews who believed – so that they would appreciate Jesus's unique relation to the Father. Unless Jesus is the true Son of God, according to Brown (1972:1061), he has no divine life to give. Unless he bears God's name, he cannot fulfill toward men the divine function of giving life in his name.

Faith in the Gospel of John, asserts Moody (1984:177-8), is not to be a simple belief in miracles. Jesus's miracles can only be understood as events credited as historical which perform a positive function in the theology of the Fourth Gospel. They are the signs that supply the answer to the question of Jesus's identity: "who is Jesus?" Faith, then, is a form of vision insofar as, when Jesus was on earth, to have faith was to "see His glory – to apprehend and acknowledge the deity through the veil of humanity." Now that he is no longer visible to the bodily eye, faith remains the capacity for seeing His glory. This conception is vital to the evangelist's whole conception of the incarnation. Eternal life is the knowledge or vision of God.

The person of Jesus and his identity occupies the centre of Johannine Christology. Panackel (1988:146) asserts that all the signs encountered in the Gospel are used for that purpose, as is the case of John 9:

The cure of the man born blind is one of the *semeia* worked by Jesus so that "the works of God might be made manifest in him" (v. 3). Every Johannine *semeion* serves to manifest the identity of Jesus. It does not intend to show the pedagogic purpose of God in each suffering, but is totally concerned with the person and mission of the healer, namely, of Jesus. The true centre of interest of John is the revelation of the person of Jesus.

That is why the whole chapter of 9 needs to be understood in the light of this Christological perspective which constitutes its unity and cohesion. It is not a matter of chance that the person of Jesus dominates the entire narrative, even *in absentia* from the scene. Asiedu-Pepurah (2001:184), explaining the function of John 5 and 9.1-10.21, a section considered by him as "juridical controversy"<sup>64</sup>, maintains that the narrator, by reverting to the *rhetoric of persuasion*,

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<sup>64</sup> This section is considered as such, and here I borrow Asiedu-Pepurah's expression to justify that the confrontations between Jesus and "the Jews" are juridical inasmuch as they consist of a "trilateral procedure" consisting of the accuser's role, played by "the Jews", the role of defendant, played by the formerly blind man, and the role of judge, which may fall to the "Jewish leaders" and, paradoxically to Jesus himself, who is at the same time accused and judge.

seeks to communicate his understanding of Jesus to the reader and to guide the reader's response to the Christological claims of the two narratives. For him, the narrative strategy is to persuade the reader about the identity and significance of Jesus. The purpose of the Gospel is, so to speak, of "Christological persuasion" that is intended to lead the reader to faith.

The choice of Christological themes examined in this chapter has been dictated by the necessity to comprehend how, in John 9, Christology is a means of talking about God whom Jesus the Son of man came to reveal. It is not a matter of chance that the evangelist moves from the title "Prophet" to the title of "Son of man." A theological motivation of this work is the necessity to focus on the dialogue between John's church and the synagogue, dealing, according to Martyn (1979:100), with at least three closely interrelated issues:

- Is Jesus the Messiah of Jewish expectation?
- How is one correctly to interpret Jesus's signs?
- What is the relationship between Jesus and Moses?

This work shall try to answer all these important questions when we will speak of John's perception of Jesus's messiahship. Let us deal with the titles ascribed throughout the unfolding of the narrative of John 9.

### 3.21 The light

The term "*phôs*" is a symbolic expression for the absolute or eternally real. In the ancient religious world, "light seems to be a natural symbol for deity" (Dodd 1953:201) as much as, for the naïve observer, the light of the sun is both the cause of life on earth and simultaneously the medium by which we become aware of phenomena. In a philosophical framework, for example, Plato used the sun as a symbol of the Idea of Good, identified with the supreme God (Dodd 1953:201).<sup>65</sup> In the Hellenistic religious world, for instance in Philo's writings and the Hermetica, light is commonly associated with life as a description of the real, or the divine. Therefore, the idea of light as a divine reality was a widespread concept in the ancient world.<sup>66</sup> In order to

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<sup>65</sup> See the influence of Zoroastrianism, with its antithesis of light and darkness, the realms of Ahura-mazda and Angramainyu.

<sup>66</sup> Burkett (1991:161) argues that scholars have suggested numerous, diverse backgrounds as the source of the idea in John. Some tried to situate its origin in non-Jewish location, either in Gnosticism or in Hellenistic religion as exemplified by the Hermetic literature. Others propose a Jewish background, either

adjudicate between these various possibilities, it should be helpful to examine the ideas or motifs that appear in John when Jesus speaks as the Light, in connection with Burkett's groupings,<sup>67</sup> comparing John to Genesis. Burkett rightly demonstrates that John, in his Prologue, based his argument on a "Christological interpretation of the light of Gen. 1.3." Jesus is identifying himself as the primal light of the first day of creation.

The religious language of the Fourth Gospel, and thus the formula of Life and Light, is dependent on a Hermetic conception of God himself or of the experience of communion with God. This conception of God as Life and Light clearly belongs to a religious tradition which is also represented in the Johannine writings: "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all"; "in him was life and the life was the light of men." God is portrayed as life, for he is manifestly the cause of physical life in the world, so we can look to him for light everlasting (Dodd 1953:18). What sustains such a conception is an argument from the unity of life in the universe to the unity of God as Dodd interrogates that: "If all things are alive, and life is one, then God is one." And again, "if all things are alive, both things in heaven and things on earth, and there is one life in them all brought into being by God, and this is God, then all things are brought into being by

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the ceremony associated with the Feast of Tabernacles, the thought-world of Qumran, or Jewish Wisdom thought. Still others find the source of the idea in some particular Old Testament scripture, such as those describing the pillar of fire in the wilderness, one or more of various passages from Isaiah (9.1-2; 42.6; 49.6; 60.1-3), or Gen 1.3. (see Schnackenburg 1980b:189-190). Barrett (John 1978: 337) has a lengthy and important note in which he shows that the background of the saying is complex. He sees it in the ceremonies of the feast of Tabernacles, in pagan religions – notably the Hermetic literature - in Judaism, and in the synoptic gospels. He concludes that: "John stands within the primitive Christian tradition ... Nevertheless, it remains very probable that in the formulation of his statement he was influenced both by Hellenistic religion and by Jewish thought about Wisdom and the Law ... yet for John "the light of the world" describes what is essentially a soteriological function rather than a cosmological status." Macgregor (1953:193) sees in the expression an echo of the Prologue and does not hesitate to reject a reference to the symbolism of Tabernacles (see Brown, pp.343-44; Beasley-Murray, pp.127-8; Lindars, John, p.314).

<sup>67</sup> The ideas or motifs appearing in John have to be paralleled to the text of Genesis 1 (see Burkett 1991:162) as follows:

1. The light comes into the world (1.9; 3.19; 12.46; cf. 9.5).
2. There is a separation of light from darkness (*krisis*, "judgment", lit. "separation"). Those who love the light come to the light, while those who love the darkness separate themselves from the light (3.19-21; 9.39).
3. Whenever the Light is in the world it is day. Day is followed by night when the Light is no longer in the world (9.4-5; 11.9-10).
4. The Light does the work of God during the day, when he is in the world. No work is done at night (9.4-5).

These motifs recall the creation account of Genesis 1. They correspond to the following aspects of that account:

1. When God says, 'Let there be light', light appears in a previously dark world (1.3).
2. God separates the light from the darkness (1.4).
3. Whenever the light is shining, it is day. Day is followed by night, when there is no longer light (1.5). The work of God is done during the day; no work is done at night.



God” (Dodd 1953:18-9).

The portrayal of God as light is influenced by the Hellenistic world, of Zoroastrianism and of Oriental sun worship, and also derives from the influence of Egypt, where life was the attribute of various gods (Dodd 1953:19). When in John Jesus presents himself as the light of the world (John 8.12) and the life of he in whom was the life (John 1.4; 11.25; 14.6), Greek and Oriental influences are also at home in the Fourth Gospel. For the Hermetists, the knowledge of God whose importance is shown above is to be mediated by the cosmos, God being everywhere – in heaven, on earth, in water, in air. It suffices for men to be spectators of the works of God, and then to marvel and to recognise their Maker (Dodd 1953:22). That is why the Hermetists are considered as “pantheists.” The cosmos seems to be the Son of God. Such an idea influenced Christian language in conjunction with these words: “It is to be observed that the idea that man knows God through His son, the cosmos, sometimes finds expression in terms which recall Christian language about the revelation of God in His Son Jesus Christ” (Dodd 1953:22).

The interpretation of the Fourth Gospel requires an exigency, that of understanding the concepts used in light of their true context of thought, so far as it is possible, in order to avoid a subjective interpretation. The Fourth Evangelist wrote against a certain background of ideas with which the author could assume his readers to be familiar. The Christian church has been strongly influenced by the varied and cosmopolitan society of a great Hellenistic city such as Ephesus. The common view, according to Brown (2004:132), which exists between both John and the Hermetica stems from the fact that they represent a similar religious milieu and their usage of terms such as “light”, “life”, “word” shows their dependence of the terminology resulting from the combination of Oriental speculation on Wisdom with Greek abstract thought. Johannine thought is neither speculative nor abstract, for Jesus is presented as a historical figure. The necessity to reconstruct such a background is needed for a proper understanding of the Gospel in order to bring out the evangelist’s message.

However, the conception which strongly influenced the Fourth Gospel is the conception of the divine as “Light and Life.” God is conceived in the Hermetic tradition, not as a visible reality, but rather as the eternal reality of which visible light is the “copy” (Dodd 1953:36). Jesus is presented, in Johannine language, as the true light (*to phôs to alêthinos*). In John’s view, the eternal life (*zôê aiônios*), the life of God, may be accessible to men here and now and it consists in “knowledge” of God. This is not a metaphysical knowledge, nor direct super-sensuous vision

of the absolute, nor yet mystical ecstasy or “enthusiasm”, but rather communion with God, or “dwelling in God, mediated by the historical manifestation of Jesus, the Logos” (see Dodd 1953:201). It is in his person that the archetypal light was manifested. He is the Light in which human beings can see light and he is *alêtheia*, truth revealed by God to the world.

It should be noted that the idea associated with Jesus’s identity as the Light is the equivalence of “light” and “life” (1.4; 8.12). Both depend on two passages from Psalms. The first is Psalms 36.9, “For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light.” In Burkett’s understanding (1991:163), the parallelism between “life” and “light” implies that they refer to the same reality: within God is a fountain of life or light that is the source of humanity’s light. It is that idea that is expressed in John 1.4 where Christ is viewed as being or containing the life of light of God. The second passage is Psalms 56.13: “For you have delivered my soul from death, and my feet from falling, so that I may walk before God in the light of life.” This verse, which contains the expression “light of life”, also contains the words to “walk in the light”, recalling another passage, John 8.12: “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.” The relationship, which exists between John and the Qumran thought, can be found in the dualism characteristic of both. In Qumran literature, Brown (2004:140) observes, “A prince and an angel created by God are locked in struggle to dominate humankind until the time of divine intervention. They are the prince of lights (also called the spirit of truth and the Holy Spirit) and the angel of darkness (the spirit of perversion). In John’s thought Jesus has come into the world as the light to overcome the darkness (John 1.4 – 5.9), and all must choose between light and darkness (3.19-21).” However, there are also some differences.

In John, the symbolism of light and truth differs from that of the Qumran literature. In Johannine thought, the centre is the persona of Jesus while in the Qumran thought it is the Law. In John’s theology, Jesus is the personal light which has come into the world while in Qumran, it is not the case, for the prince of lights and the spirit of Truth are titles for the same angelic being (Brown 2004:141). For John, the Light and the Spirit of truth are two distinct agents of salvation. John’s Jesus, as an agent of salvation, is identified not only as the light of the world (John 8.12) but also as the truth (John 14:6) with the idea that the “Spirit of truth”, as another agent of salvation, has the task of reminding his disciples of the words of Jesus and to lead them into all truth (John 14.26; 16.13).

The symbolic term of light, in John, whose importance does not need to be demonstrated is

evident from the outset of the Gospel. In the Prologue, the Logos is identified with the light of revelation that shines in the darkness (see John 1.5, 10). Darkness is virtually identified with the world (the human adversaries of the Logos) and this identification is what establishes the basic symbolic pattern of the Gospel (Ashton 1991:209). While in John 8.12 Jesus claims to be the “light of the world”, John 9 goes on to develop the theme of “Jesus the Light of the world.” According to Panackel (1988:146), unlike John 8.12 and 12.46 where Jesus utters a similar self-affirmation, in John 9 the utterance in v.5 is explicitly developed as the main theme of the chapter. Barrett (1978:357) points out that “even more clearly than 8.12 and 12.46 ‘light’ in 9.5 is not a metaphysical definition of the person of Jesus but a description of his effect upon the cosmos to judge and to save it.” Dodd (1953:358) goes beyond the theme “the coming of light” to find its effect in judgment, which separates men into sons of light and sons of darkness; Jesus the light is the judge through revelation.

It may be concluded with Burkett (1991:164) that the passages in John which speak of Jesus as “the Light”, express the idea that Jesus contains or is the divine light of God in connection with the Old Testament. This light is the source of life for humanity in light of Psalms 36.9; 56.13 and also 27.1. Equating him with the light, which came into the world on the first day of creation (Genesis 1.3), Jesus is portrayed as the Light-Word. When he comes into the world, it is to do the works of God, primarily to give human beings the light of life. This survey of the background is needed for a good understanding of John 9, where Jesus’s depiction as “the Light of the world” (9.5) climaxes with his use of the title “the Son of Man” (9.35). The references to Jesus as “the Light of the world” in John 8.12 and 9.4, as argues Koester (2003:108), are an echo of Isaiah 42.6-7 but also of I Enoch 48.4, 10; and 2 Baruch 70.10, making the opening of a blind man’s eyes a sign that Jesus was God’s messianic servant.

In Isaiah 42.6-7, it is asserted that Israel has been called to be “a covenant for the peoples and a light to the nations, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison...” Verse 6 echoes the words addressed to Cyrus in 42.2 and to Israel in 41.10. Verse 6, according to Mackenzie (1968:9), “makes much more explicit the universal scope of the mission of the servant.” The servant, who mediates between Yahweh and peoples, as light, hides the mystery of this servant. The term servant, within second Isaiah, as notes Childs (2001:325), does not occur for the first time in 42.1 but is introduced in 41.8 along with a variety of familiar attributes. Israel/Jacob is designated as servant, the elect one, and offspring of Abraham, even friend. As God’s elect in whom he delights and on whom his spirit resides, he will bring forth justice to the nations who

await his teaching (Childs 2001:324). So, either the term “Servant” is a title granted to Israel or a reference to a historical persona whose mission is to open the eyes of the blind man and to free captives from prison, i.e. from the ignorance of God and service of false gods. Christ indeed opens the eyes physically blind; but both that miracle and the releasing from prison found their real fulfillment in the spiritual sector (Coffman 1990:400). This passage of Israel foresaw Jesus fulfilling this prophecy by healing blindness. Jesus’s healing activity is characterised as fulfilling Isaiah’s prophecy. The Messiah fulfills the office of the servant in caring for the weak and fragile. Yet, conversely, it is Isaiah’s portrayal that interprets Jesus’s healing as bringing justice to victory and giving the Gentiles a hope (Childs 2001:327). That is why Jesus, as Light, is able to mediate the knowledge of God that is eternal life.

### 3.22 Prophet

John’s use of “the Prophet” and “the king (of Israel, of the Jews)” needs to be grounded in John 1.21 where the title “the prophet” alternates with the title “the Christ” *“ho christos.”* In John 7.40-3, some people hail Jesus as “the prophet” and others declare that he is “the Christ.” In spite of the fact that he comes from Galilee, and not from Bethlehem, Jesus’s earthly descent is of secondary importance if not irrelevant for he has come from God and speaks, and acts in the name of God (John 7.16 – 18.27-29). The question to which the former blind man responds “he is a prophet” (9,17b), remains a question about Jesus’s identity.

In John 6.14-15, the people present at the multiplication of the loaves regard this as a “sign” and conclude from that that Jesus is the prophet and want to make him the king by force. The bread of life discourse of John 6 is intended to clarify the false and inadequate messianic expectations which come to the fore in the recognition of Jesus as the Prophet. When people see the signs, they conclude that Jesus is “the Prophet” who is to come to Israel and from such a view, they would forcibly make him king of Israel. Malina & Rohrbaugh (1998:126) point out that “kings are not simply a political equivalent of a ‘president’ with rights of hereditary succession. Rather, kings have total control of and responsibility for their subjects; they are expected to provide them with fertility, peace, and abundance.” By supplying them with bread, people are very aware that such a man is to be viewed not only a Prophet but also a King who was expected to come; thus Jesus was taken as a Prophet-King. When John portrays Jesus as Mosaic-Prophet-Messiah, he

refers to Deuteronomy 18.15-22, the foundational text for Messiah-Prophet expectations<sup>68</sup>. It is not a matter of chance that we see Jesus portrayed in John as “God’s agent”<sup>69</sup>, a designated leader who is “doing his work, who speaks only what he has seen and heard from the Father who sent him” (Anderson 1996:175). Jesus, as God’s agent, is the one through whom God may be seen. Therefore, the agency Christology of John is inextricable from the Prophet-like-Moses motifs based on Deuteronomy 18.17f. The Johannine language, in this context, is a “patronage language” (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998:118) and it is astonishingly common in the Gospel of John. Jesus is depicted as a Prophet-like-Moses because he has been “sent” by God the Father, and so could perform miracles. In Malina & Rohrbaugh’s view (1998:118), Jesus as “sent” by God is a feature of Johannine anti-language, since the word “send” belongs to the vocabulary of patronage. Jesus, “the sent messenger” acts as an intermediary between God the heavenly patron<sup>70</sup> while he is viewed as a broker<sup>71</sup>. Jesus’s ability to perform signs, and even, observes Malina (1996:152) “his healing ability, his success at exorcism and his teaching renown not like the scribes all point to access to first-order resources, to the heavenly Patron, as the acknowledgment of the crowds indicates.”

The people’s reaction, on the one hand, shows that they acknowledge themselves as clients<sup>72</sup> of the heavenly patron, the provider of bread. On the other hand, their reaction is motivated by

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<sup>68</sup> The “Prophet coming into the world” motif is an explicit reference to the Moses typology implied as such in John 5.19-47; behind this motif is Deuteronomy 18.15-22 in which it is asserted that the Lord-God will raise up a prophet like Moses from among their brothers, and the children of Israel are called to listen attentively to, or to listen to him (verse 15). Jesus’ reception among the brothers in accordance with this Johannine theme (John 1.11; 7.3, 5; 20,17) and those who believed in him by hearing his words (see John 3.29; 4.42; 5.24, 25, 28, 37; 6.45; 8.47; 9.27; 10.3, 8, 16, 27; 12.47; 18.37) are responding to God who promised to send a prophet like Moses, into whose mouth he will put his words (Deuteronomy 18.17-20) and who likely sent Jesus. It is those messianic motifs that are characteristic in John’s Christology (see Anderson’s understanding 1996:174, 175).

<sup>69</sup> Wendy Cotter (1999:47), talking about ancient heroes from the Jewish Scriptures, considered Moses, among others, as the advocate of people for they do not see God but they do see Moses, designated as leader of these people, better playing the role of God’s agent.

<sup>70</sup> Patrons, according to Malina & Rohrbaugh (1998:118) are powerful individuals who control resources and are expected to use their position to hand out favours to inferiors based on “friendship”, personal knowledge and favouritism. Benefactor-patrons were expected to generously support city, village, or client. The Roman emperor related to major public officials inasmuch as cities related to towns and towns to villages in the same way. Throughout New Testament writings, God is seen as the ultimate patron.

<sup>71</sup> Brokers, according to Malina & Rohrbaugh (1998:118), mediate between patrons above and clients below. First-order resources like land, jobs, goods, funds, power, are all controlled by patrons. Second-order resources like strategic contact with or brokers who mediate the goods and services a patron has to offer will control access to the patron. Holy men or prophets could also act as brokers. This is clearly a role in which John casts Jesus “You are from below, I am from above” (John 8.23). And he also makes clear that the Patron (God, Father) has given his resources to the Son and has placed all things in his hands” (3.35).

divine signs and wonders performed by Jesus and which are “legitimizers of a prophet’s divine commission” (Anderson 1996: 176). And yet, in John’s understanding, Jesus’s signs, as well as the fulfillment of his words, serve the function of confirming the divine origin of his mission and the eventual kingship of popular conception. All four evangelists present Jesus as wanting to distance himself from the contemporary Zealots and revolutionaries. Anderson (1996:179) is right by underscoring that:

The Johannine version of Jesus’ fleeing into the hills to escape the crowds in John 6.15 may even be more accurate historically than the more pietistic Marcan version (Mk 6.46), where he does so in order to pray. Politically, Jesus may have wanted to distance himself from the likes of Judas the Galilean, and other Mosaic or Davidic pretenders to kingship. As the “One sent from Yahweh”, in keeping with the Prophet-like-Moses tradition, the Johannine Jesus is portrayed as restoring the spokesman Moses, and his successors. Therefore, not only is the Prophet-like-Moses motif understandable as a central way in which Jesus’ ministry would have been interpreted messianically by Galilean and Samaritan audiences, but it may also represent the early Christological posture of the evangelist and is also at least partially responsible for the evangelist’s ambivalence toward the signs and the lack of any Davidic allusions within John’s Christology.

It is to be remembered that the multiplication of food, as might be the case in John 6, is a miracle that belongs to the God of the Jews. In that tradition, four heroes – Moses, Elijah, Elisha and the god-hero Jesus – are credited with such a miracle, according to Wendy Cotter (1999:133); all these are prophets and heroes serving God as revealed by Jewish tradition (1999:166). The miracle of multiplication of bread<sup>73</sup> is thus in dialogue with Jewish tradition, and it is the meaning of that miracle that John tries to find in the very tradition.

It is this misunderstanding that has led many scholars, De Jonge included, to contend that “the prophet is the prophet like Moses announced in Deuteronomy 18.15-22 and expected to come in the last days. Anyone who interprets Jesus’ words and actions along the lines of Moses’ signs’, particularly his giving of manna, ‘the bread from heaven’ (6.31), does not really understand who

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<sup>72</sup> Clients are those dependent on the largesse of patrons or brokers to survive well in their society. They owe loyalty and public acknowledgment of honor in return (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998:119).

<sup>73</sup> The word “bread” meant both bread and food in general. Bread constituted one-half of the calorie intakes in much of the ancient Mediterranean region. Wheat was considered much superior to barley; hence, barley bread was the staple for the taste, and indigestibility left it the staple of the poor in Roman times (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998:127). Both the Old Testament (1 Kings 17. 8-16) and the Mishnah authors (Ket 5.8) assume that wheat is less sensitive to soil salinity. Therefore, it became the major crop in arid parts of the Mediterranean world. The husband who provided an estranged wife with barley bread was required to provide her twice the ration of wheat. Sorghum was less common than either wheat or barley and likewise considered an inferior product. Bread could be taken to the village baker in the morning while in the cities and towns, bread could be purchased, so those who could afford it avoided the difficult labour of daily milling.

Jesus is. He himself is the bread from heaven, given by his Father “(2000:218).

In Jesus’s confrontation with Pilate (see John 18.33 – 19.11), it is clear that Jesus’s kingship is not an earthly kingship, for his sole purpose in coming into the world, is to testify to the truth. Jesus the king is a witness to the truth, God’s supreme and final envoy (see De Jonge 2000:219), but, when Jesus refers to his kingdom, which is not of this world and adds that if he were an earthly king, his followers would have fought for him, there undoubtedly is an implicit reference to revolutionary messianic movements. Around the time of Jesus, within Jewish popular movements, could be found some “charismatic kings” who attracted peasants committed in the struggles against social-economically difficult conditions. Those Jewish peasants could abandon their homes to follow a prophet into the wilderness, or to rise in rebellion against either Jewish or Roman overlords when the signal was given by the charismatic “king” (Horsley & Hanson 1985:50).

The Romans executed Jesus on the charge of being “king of the Jews” (see Mark 15.26). Pilate, to whom Jesus was handed over as a criminal by “the Jews” was at the same time perceived by Pilate himself as a “king of the Jews” (John 18.28-37). Pilate, as Horsley and Hanson observe (1985:88), was not the only Roman official in Palestine to deal with a popular Jewish leader who was viewed as king of the Jews since before and after Jesus of Nazareth. There were several popular Jewish leaders who, in the words of Josephus, “laid claim to the kingdom”, “donned the diadem” or “were proclaimed king” by their followers. Among them, may be cited, for instance, Judas<sup>74</sup>, Simon<sup>75</sup> and lastly Athronges<sup>76</sup>. As it is obviously shown, these popular messianic movements and the royal pretenders at their head have shared some characteristics:

- First, they are centred on a charismatic king whose usage of a diadem, e.g. by both

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<sup>74</sup> Judas was the son of the brigand-chief Ezechias, who had been a man of great power. He was captured by Herod only with great difficulty, after he had organised at Sephoris in Galilee a large number of desperate men and raided the palace. Taking all the weapons that were stored there, he armed all of his followers and made off with all the goods that had been seized there. He caused fear in everyone by plundering those he encountered in his craving for greater power and in his zealous pursuit of royal rank. He did not expect to acquire this prize by being virtuous, but by the advantage of his superior strength. (see *Ant* 17.271-72 as quoted by Horsley & Hanson 1985:112).

<sup>75</sup> He was a servant of King Herod, but otherwise an imposing man in both size and bodily strength, and he was confident of distinguishing himself. Spurred on by chaotic social conditions, he dared to don the diadem. When he had organised some men, he was also proclaimed king by them in their fanaticism, and he thought himself more worthy of this than anyone else. He set fire to numerous other royal residences in many parts of the country and destroyed them, after allowing his followers to take the confiscated goods (see *Ant* 17.273-76 as quoted by Horsley & Hanson 1985:112).

Simon and Athronges, by the Hellenistic period, had become an effective synonym for kingship.

- Second, the people were not looking to the “distinguished” families for leadership. The royal pretenders in all three of these movements were men of humble origin (Horsley and Hanson 1985:114-115).

The principal goal of these movements was to overthrow Herodian and Roman domination and to restore the traditional ideals of a free and egalitarian society. The popular leaders recognised as kings by their followers led armed revolts, in the line of the long Israelite-Jewish tradition of popular anointed kingship, against the Romans and even their upper-class Jewish collaborators. Jesus’s refusal to be viewed as a king of that kind may be found in his reply to Pilate in John 18-19, where he presents himself as King of another world and not an earthly king such as those mentioned above. Jesus, by insisting that his kingship is not “of this world”, observe Malina & Rohrbaugh (1998:257), demonstrates that his kingship is not of Israelite origin. Jesus’s reply to Pilate is full of meaning for the Johannine group, for Jesus was born and came “into the world” – in the dominant society – to bear truthful witness. Therefore, people who are “of the truth”, believers, hear and understand what he means (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998:257). The Jewish unwillingness to believe in him excludes them from the group for whom he is the king, coming “into the world” dominated by “the Jews” and Pilate, the representative of Roman power.

In order to avoid the difficulties surrounding the concept of Jesus as Prophet and king, the Fourth Evangelist presents Jesus as Son of man who descended from heaven and the Son sent by the Father into the world (see John 3.11, 31-32). The term “Son of man” in the Gospel serves both as a prophetic designation and as a messianic title. The evangelist, by using it interchangeably, refers to Jesus’s messianic role and his prophetic character (Rhea 1990:55). In John 6, there is absolutely no evidence that the term functions as an apocalyptic title by the emphasis on the present reality of Jesus’s revelation and the eternal life. In Jesus, the ultimate revelation of God is made manifest. Jesus does not hesitate to solemnly declare that it was not Moses who gave them the manna, but rather his Father who gives them the true bread from heaven (John 6.32b). Rhea (1990:56) claims that Jesus is not only another prophet like Ezekiel and Moses. As the incarnate Logos, he is also the eternal Son who has come down from

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<sup>76</sup> He was a man whose eminence derived neither from the reknown of his forefathers, nor from the superiority of his character, nor the extent of his means. He was an obscure shepherd, yet remarkable for



heaven, sent by the Father and, as Son of man, he is the very incarnation of the true bread from heaven; he is the true prophet. By referring to Jesus as “true bread” and “true Prophet”, this language is nothing other than a metaphoric language. However, as observes Van den Heever (1992:96), “almost all the metaphorical expressions contain qualifiers of some sort (true light, true wine, good shepherd, true way, true prophet) bearing polemical sounds for the author interacts polemically with his readers’ understanding of their life-orientation.”

In the Ephesian context in which the Gospel was written, the cult of Artemis was central to the existence of the city, her name meaning someone who makes well or healthy. She was associated with the healing shrine in Ephesus, and as a healing god she frequently appears as Artemis Soteira. That is why the Fourth evangelist, in Van den Heever’s terms (1992:99), “metaphorically juxtaposed these images on Jesus of Nazareth, turning it into a story of decision, of life and death, of nothing less than a total re-orientation of life.” The metaphors are used in communicative view in order to interact with the religious and ideological context of Ephesus in the polemical perspective.

### 3.23 Man from God

According to Morris (1989:49), John regards Jesus as possessed of a knowledge that is more than human. This knowledge is derived from his close communion with the Father in light of John 8.28, 38; 14.10. Jesus was man but also, and at the same time, God. The Fourth Evangelist successfully and clearly placed, side by side, the real deity and the humanity of Jesus<sup>77</sup>. John provides a distinctive Christology with these two poles of the deity and humanity of Jesus, portraying him as the Logos who belongs at the same time to “the sphere of the divine” and to “the sphere of the human” (Pollard, as quoted by Panackel 2000:25).

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his stature and strength.

<sup>77</sup> One needs to consider the many declarations of John about Jesus. The two-sided figure of Jesus, divine and human, is a Johannine characteristic (see Panackel 1988:24). Robinson (1985:145) emphasises this double reality by asserting that “the Johannine Jesus while unquestionably a man in the fullest sense of both words ... was veridical also of another entire world of being.” There is no way to separate one from the other, or diluting an aspect in stressing the other as Docetists did emphasising the divine dimension of Jesus. Hans Urs von Balthasar, as quoted by Panackel (1988:25) describes the person of Jesus as follows: “He is the unity of eternal Son and temporal man, the indivisible God-man; man, insofar as he appears in the man Jesus ... we do not here have two images alongside each other, as in a diptych consisting of two complementary halves – faith (especially Johannine faith) is able to see both aspects as a unity – God’s *kenosis* in the Synoptics and the Pauline *doxa* of the Risen One.”

Jesus is from God (see John 1.1, 2; 6.62; 17.5). Presented as such, the Johannine Jesus does not follow the apocalyptic scheme, where the revelation is a communication of divine secrets, transmitted through celestial visions (De la Potterie, quoted by Panackel 1988:37), but he has a historical being, Jesus of Nazareth, as the “theological place” of the presence of God among men. Jesus’s flesh is the temple of God’s presence through which He can be known. Jesus is the place in history where men should believe.

### **3.24 Messiah (Christ)**

It is right that end time is an apocalyptic category. So, does the evangelist seek to present Jesus as Messiah following the prophetic perspective? It is useful to handle this issue gently in order to see what John’s messianic scheme is. We have already demonstrated that John’s conception of messiahship is fuller and richer than that of contemporary Judaism. That is why the signs that Jesus, as mediator, has performed are to be examined. A link needs to be established between “signs” and “messiahship.”

The Messiah, properly speaking, is a man anointed by God and sent by him at the end of time to assist him in establishing his kingly rule. In the New Testament, according to Ashton (1991:255), the Messiah first appears as the ideal successor to King David; the idealised Messiah was bound to some extent to be associated with very human hopes for the restoration of the kingdom of Judah. According to him, Jesus was not conceived as a purely religious figure with a purely religious function. In the light of John 7, the debate that took place between the Jewish leaders and the Church demonstrates that the Messiahship was disputed. There is some evidence that in Jewish circles there existed a belief that the Messiah was hidden and that his identity had to be revealed before he could become known (*1 Enoch* 62.7; *2 Esdras* 12.32; *2 Baruch* 29.3; 39.7; Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 8.3; 49.1; 110.1)<sup>78</sup>. In John 7.27, for instance, the Jews said: “When the Messiah comes, no one knows whence He is.” This represents a doctrine which is well attested in Jewish sources. As Dodd points out (1953:89), in Jewish understanding the divine intervention may take place suddenly at any time, and the Messiah must be available for the role he is to play, and available as a grown man, ready to take up rule over Israel insofar as the Messiah, from his birth to the time of his appearance, is present in the unknown world, like Rome or “the North”, as various Rabbis believed, while others held that he had been caught up to Paradise for the time being. Most of the evidence for this theory of the hidden Messiah can be

found, at least, in 4 Ezra 13.52 in which the Messiah is symbolised by the figure of a man arising out of the sea. “Just as one can neither seek out nor know what is in the deep of the sea, even so can no one upon earth see My Son ... but in the time of his day.” “The Jews” were comfortable in the doctrine according to which the Messiah has already come into the world but is still concealed in some unknown place until the day appointed by God for his appearance. Thus, in John 7.27 “the Fourth Evangelist is giving expression to a belief held by Jews in his time” (Dodd 1953:89) since Jesus is a man of well-known and unpromising origin, a Galilean, he cannot be the Messiah at all. Yet, Jesus asserts that he comes, not from Rome or the north, or from any unknown place of concealment, but, rather, directly from God himself (v. 28).

The identity of Jesus of Nazareth, as formulated in John’s Gospel, in the light of the titles granted to him, could lead one to perceive Jesus as “the unique agent of God’s activity” (Nickelsburg 2003:89). Such an understanding of Jesus could result from the appropriation of Jewish heritage in which some agents were believed to mediate God’s activity. These agents of divine activity may firstly be either human beings or figures from the heavenly realm (2003:91-97) like the king who, considered as “anointed” or simply “messiah”, was seen as the executor of Yahweh’s rule over Israel and over the nations. The priests are viewed as intermediaries between God and Israel. They mediated God’s forgiveness and blessing through the cult, and interceded for the people. However, in postexilic Judaism, as Nickelsburg points out (2003:94), the high priest assumed greater prominence. The prophet Zechariah, like Haggai, expected that Zerubbabel would serve as king, and he referred to Zerubbabel and Joshua the high priest as God’s two anointed ones (Zech 4.14). That is why the high priest will eventually be perceived as playing a political role when Davidic dynasty was not restored. This post-exilic speculation went far in stressing the expectation of two future anointed heads of Israel, attested, for instance, in the Christian version of the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, even in the Qumran texts, which refer to “the anointed one(s) of Aaron and Israel” (1QS 9.11; CD 20.1), i.e. a Priestly Messiah and Messiah-King. The prophets or revealer figures of the Hebrew Bible were understood to be divine agents *par excellence*. Inasmuch as prophecy was thought to have ceased during the Persian period with Malachi, it was commonly believed that prophecy and the spirit of God would return only at the “*eschaton*.” In the Graeco-Roman period, within the Wisdom tradition, Ben Sira the “scribe” claims to be an inspired interpreter of the Torah and the prophetic tradition (Sir 24.32-34; 39.1-11). In the corpus of Pseudepigraphic apocalypses, which stand in the wisdom tradition, *1 Enoch*, for instance, makes clear a variety of claims of revelation

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<sup>78</sup> See Talbert (1992:82).

as follows: “[this writing] presents itself as the written deposit of special revelation that Enoch received in antiquity by means of dream visions and angelically interpreted journeys to heaven and through the cosmos” (Nickelsburg 2003:123). In taking account of the time of writing of the *Books of Enoch*, Collins (1999:134) is right to contend that these are “pseudonymous since they are ascribed to an antediluvian patriarch who cannot possibly have been their actual author”<sup>79</sup>. In that perspective, Enoch is worthily the authority on heavenly mysteries, since he had been taken up to heaven before the flood (Genesis 5.24). Accordingly, as Collins observes (1999:141) he was pre-eminently qualified to disclose the mysteries of the heavenly world. In Jewish tradition, Solomon was viewed as the authority for wisdom teaching; and Moses for matters pertaining to the law.

In Jewish tradition, secondly, the agents of divine activity could be transcendent agents, for instance holy watchers, as attendants and agents of the Heavenly King. Among the myriads of holy ones, they form the heavenly entourage (see Deuteronomy 33.2; *1 Enoch* 14.22; Daniel 7.10). To understand the nature and role of these heavenly beings (*1 Enoch* 12-16), according to Nickelsburg (2003:98-9), the elaborate description of Enoch’s heavenly ascent and prophetic commissioning offers a good starting point. God is seen as the heavenly king, enthroned in a palace, which is the heavenly temple, surrounded by myriad courtiers, e.g. the “holy ones” praising “the Great Holy One.” As mediators, they receive and relay petitions from the sovereign’s subjects and they serve as messengers. Those who may be cited (see for details Nickelsburg 2003:99-103) are, respectively, the four or seven watchers<sup>80</sup>; witnesses, scribes, intercessors<sup>81</sup>; executors of God’s judgment<sup>82</sup>; general of the army<sup>83</sup>; God’s high priest<sup>84</sup>;

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<sup>79</sup> This kind of pseudonymity was a literary fashion ascribing writing to an author who, at the time of writing, could not be alive. The so-called “author” is, so to speak, an authoritative figure behind the writing and who is viewed as founder of the tradition. That is why Collins (1999:135) states that pseudonymity is a trademark of Jewish apocalypses. Other pseudonymous authors include Daniel, Moses, Ezra, Baruch, and Abraham. The visions of Daniel are pseudonymous, just like those of Enoch - even though Daniel is supposed to have lived during the Babylonian Exile, and it is likely that this name was derived from ancient myth. The pseudonymity is not to be found only in Jewish texts but also in New Testament writings as, for instance, the Pastoral Epistles ascribed to Paul, writings reflecting the context of the third Christian Generation.

<sup>80</sup> The four correspond to the four living beings in Ezek 1.5-14; in *1 Enoch* 10, the four are named Sariel, Raphael, Gabriel and Michael. To complete the list, three others are included namely Uriel, Re’uel, and Remiel. This group of seven is known also in the book of Tobit (see 12.15).

<sup>81</sup> These figures are seen as serving a heavenly patron. The holy watchers carefully observe human actions and write them in heavenly books, which will serve as evidence at the great judgment. The heavenly witnesses intercede when human wickedness increases and the wicked prosper in their unjust oppression of the righteous. All this activity is an expansion of the biblical notion that God sees human actions (Gen 6.5; cf *1 En* 9.1) hears the plea of the righteous (Gen 4.10) and acts accordingly.

<sup>82</sup> In *1 Enoch* 10, God sends the four holy ones to enact on earth the judgment they had advocated in heaven. Their role is to protect the righteous, to consign the rebellious watchers to the places of

Melchizedek<sup>85</sup>; Raphael – God’s healer<sup>86</sup>; messengers and interpreters<sup>87</sup>; facilitators of Righteousness<sup>88</sup>; Guardians and Governors of the cosmos<sup>89</sup> and finally God’s Vice-regent – “One like a Son of Man”<sup>90</sup>. All of these mediators in God’s activity culminate in two major transcendent figures, Wisdom and the Enochic Son of man named either the Chosen One or Righteous One. I have already referred to Wisdom as a female figure in the heavenly court, an active agent at creation but also the sustainer and upholder of the universe, in Nickelsburg’s terms. I demonstrated above that Jesus as God’s wisdom, portrayed as Logos, in John’s understanding, is a historical figure to reveal the knowledge of God to men. Jesus Son of man is also referred to Daniel 7 where the heavenly figure appears and is enthroned only after the court has judged and destroyed the fourth kingdom (Nickelsburg 2003:105). This Enochic Son of man, as Nickelsburg continues, is the transcendent figure who dominates the narrative in *1 Enoch* 37 – 71 and represents the most remarkable of all Jewish syntheses of speculation about the agents of

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punishment, and restore the earth as a place of blessing for the righteous. In Daniel 12.1, Michael, as Israel’s patron, will defend the righteous at the coming judgment.

<sup>83</sup> God’s judgment is frequently construed in terms of warfare. In *1 Enoch* 10.8, Gabriel, the bearer of God’s power and in Dan 10.13, 21, Michael, the great chieftain, general, prince, both lead the heavenly armies against the prince of Greece, the heavenly patron of Antiochus Epiphanes.

<sup>84</sup> The holy ones in *1 Enoch* serve as priests in the heavenly sanctuary, although their precise priestly functions differ; that is why Michael is assigned the priestly responsibility to “cleanse” the earth of impurity and defilement.

<sup>85</sup> He is seen as a heavenly being who serves as chieftain of the heavenly armies in Genesis 14, which identifies him as the mysterious king and priest.

<sup>86</sup> This figure often named Raphael is, in *1 Enoch* 10.4-5, the one to heal the earth of the plague and in the Book of Parables, he is “in charge of all the diseases and all the wounds of humanity.” Preeminently, through his healing activity, he is the agent of God’s salvation (deliverance from Asmdaesus) and God’s judgment (the reward of the righteous).

<sup>87</sup> Following the old biblical tradition, some texts ascribe the role of heavenly messenger to certain individuals. In *1 Enoch* 10.1-3 Sariel, much like an eschatological prophet, is sent to Noah to warn him of the coming judgment. In Dan 8.16 and 9.21-27, Gabriel is the interpreter of Daniel’s vision and Jeremiah’s prophecy. In the journeys of Enoch (*1 Enoch* 21 – 32), various holy ones accompany Enoch and explicate what he sees.

<sup>88</sup> The role of heavenly beings as revealers and facilitators of righteousness is developed in the Jewish two-ways literature, where “the prince of Light”, “God’s “Angel of Truth”, in light of Qumran literature, leads the children of light on the right path and struggles with the Angel of Darkness, the Spirit of falsehood (1QS 3- 4).

<sup>89</sup> The account of the second cosmic journey of Enoch (*1 Enoch* 21 – 32) illustrates beautifully the multiple functions of the holy watchers. While they are elsewhere described as heavenly witnesses and intercessors and as executors of God’s judgment, they are here portrayed as the overseers of various places of eschatological significance.

<sup>90</sup> In Dan 7, God and the court of holy ones pronounce and execute judgment on the last of the four empires and its final king. When that judgment is concluded, a heavenly being, described as “one like a son of man” arrives in the heavenly court and is given “dominion, glory, and kingship” over all the nations on earth. The demonic forces of chaos embodied in the Gentile kingdoms that have dominated Israel have been judged and destroyed; a heavenly being has been enthroned, and this enthronement promises that Israel (the people of the holy ones of the Most High) will dominate the nations.

divine activity<sup>91</sup>. Summarising this survey of Jewish texts about the agents of God's activity, we can conclude with Nickelsburg (2003:108) as follows:

Judaism in the Graeco-Roman period greatly expanded the notion that God operates through agents and emphasised especially the roles played by transcendent agents. The tradition is marked by duplication (various agents serving the same function), combination (one agent playing several roles), and the attribution of traditionally human functions to divine figures. While Davidic ideology is alive and well in this period, it is simplistic and wrong to reduce Jewish speculation in this period to "messianism", much less David messianism. In addition to an anointed king, speculation about an anointed priest and an anointed prophet and traditions associated with the Davidic king were interpreted with reference to the heavenly anointed Chosen One/Son of Man, as well as the suffering and vindicated righteous spokesman of God.

Some others grounded the Messiahship on signs. In John 7.31, certain Jews are inclined to accept Jesus as Messiah on the grounds that He has performed many signs, saying: "...even the Messiah could not be expected to perform more." In Jewish understanding, the Messiah would be equipped with miraculous powers, as the prophets were believed to have corroborated their message with miracles (Dodd 1953:90).

By dealing with the "signs", this term that has been privileged in John's theology, I have turned to Dodd's breakdown of the Gospel of John into the "Book of Signs" (John 1 – 12), and the "Book of Passion" (John 13 – 21). In Dodd's reading of John 12.37-50, he does not consider this as an epilogue to the discourse of John 12.23-36, but to the whole Book of Signs, since the evangelist's comment indicates that the story of the ministry of Jesus set forth as a series of "*sêmeia*" or significant actions, is a story of man's refusal of divine life and light (1953:379). A connection should be made between the signs and discourses, inasmuch as Jesus's public work, in John, consists of words always following "signs", as serving to explain what they mean (the sign of changing water into wine of John 2.1-12 followed by the discourse of Jesus in the temple of 2.13-25, the story of Jesus and Nicodemus (3.1-21), the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman (4.1-42) and the second miracle of Jesus healing an official's son (4.43-54); the sign of the healing of a paralysed man of 5.1-18 followed by the discourse about the authority of the Son and witnesses to Jesus of vv. 19-47; the miracle of multiplication of bread (6.1-15) and the miracle of Jesus walking on the water (6.16-21) followed by the discourse upon Jesus the Bread of life of vv. 22-59; the sign of the healing of a man born blind of 9.1-12 followed by the investigation of the healing by "the Jews" (v. v.13-34) and the conclusion which speaks of the "spiritual blindness" of the Pharisees (v. 35-41); the sign of Lazarus's resurrection of vv. 17-

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<sup>91</sup> To get much more details about the four streams of tradition which influenced the portrayal of this figure

44, followed by the plot against Jesus showing Jewish unbelief in opposition to the evidence of the sign (v. 45-57). Thus the two expressions (discourses and signs) for Jesus's activity as revealer are closely connected and reciprocally related (Schnackenburg 1980:17). The signs are there to show the "glory" of Jesus, and are also the works through which testimony is given to his mission from the Father. That is why Schnackenburg (1980:19) comes to admit that John 20.30 is the conclusion of a "semeia-source" used by the evangelist, who selected, from many other miracles, those which are written in the Book. When he ended his Gospel with these words, he claimed them to be incorporated in such a way that they embodied the value of testimony. This means that he understood them as real events, still capable of arousing faith in Jesus the Messiah and Son of God, through the testimony of tradition and the preaching based on it. Unlike the Synoptic Gospels which situate the "revelation discourses" detached from history, on one hand, and the symbolic "signs" used to explain them, on the other, in John, both are interwoven.

There is the synoptic statement – which is probably historic – that the Jews demanded from Jesus a sign from heaven, to prove his messianic claims. Such historical incidents are recounted with irony in John 2.18 and 6.30-31, where Jesus is challenged to perform a sign testifying to his authority or his celestial origin. In both passages, Brown argues (1966:517), the context leaves no doubt as to the type of sign they demand - a preternatural event to accredit Jesus's mission (2.18), a "sign from heaven" (6.30), and hence a spectacular marvel. Jesus, on both occasions, replies ironically, and John makes clear the further irony that, while the messianic "signs" the people expect are miracles, they fail to recognise the miracles of Jesus as those very signs (Dodd 1953:91). The evangelist conforms to the Synoptic tradition which also contains such demands for a sign (Mark 8.11f; Matthew 12.38; 16.1; Luke 11.16, 29). In the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus's refusal to give such a "sign" from heaven stems from the fact that the men who demand the "sign" belong to "this generation", a "wicked and unfaithful generation."

Jesus's ironic reply in John stems from the fact that "the Johannine 'signs' in the full and deepest sense are wholly the work of Jesus, indissolubly linked to his work of revelation under his Father's mandate, and can be accepted and understood in faith" (Brown 1966:517-8). In all cases, it is only through faith that the men could understand the meaning of Jesus's activity. However, the Johannine concept of "sign" goes far beyond the (Messianic) significance attached to the Synoptic miracles, as points out Brown (1966:522), in these terms:

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see Nickelsburg (2003:104 – 105).

The “signs” are not “forms” or figurative processes which have a symbolic value and can thus summon up a profounder picture; they are not “things and events in this world” which “derive what reality they possess from the eternal ideas they embody.” The revelation of the “glory” of God points in another direction. The miracle of the loaves in particular, with the revelation discourse which follows, shows that the evangelist is firmly rooted in biblical and Messianic thought, as do the other miracles. The Johannine “signs” are akin to the miracles of the Exodus, as presented in the book of Wisdom (though this can hardly have been the immediate model for the miracles in John) (...) the eschatological envoy of God does not yet bring the cosmic glory, but he gives glimpses of it in his “signs”, as is clear from the miracle at Cana, at the cure of the blind man, which portrays Jesus as the “light of the world” (9.5) and at the raising of Lazarus, which is of itself a future eschatological event but which is already given reality by Jesus in the “sign.” (...) the Christological perspective of the evangelist makes it something completely new. Some idea of his concentration on Christology may be gathered from the fact that in 12.41 it is the glory of Jesus which Isaiah saw, when he had the vision of Yahweh on his lofty throne in heaven (Is 6.1). And in the light of the Son of Man logion of 1.51, the assertion of 2.11 becomes even more intelligible: the Son of Man on earth is the place of God’s presence and action; God’s eschatological action is realized in him.

That Christological concentration justifies Jesus’s reply to the demand of Jewish unbelievers to perform a miracle, and brings the focus back to his person. In John 2.19, Jesus by challenging the Jewish leaders to “destroy this Temple and in three days I will raise it again”, according to the commentary of the evangelist, such destruction and rebuilding was fulfilled in Jesus’s own person by the resurrection of his body (2.21). It is in such perspective that John 6.32-33 should be understood, when Jesus said “Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

In John 6 the answer of Jesus is made still clearer since he is revealed in his words and “signs” as the true sign from heaven given by God, the “bread of life” which came down from heaven, surpassing from every point of view the manna given by Moses (6.32-35). The bread he gives to men displays the giver himself as the bread of life come down from heaven. All the great miracles designated as “signs” focus the attention entirely on their worker and manifest the majesty and saving power bestowed upon him as Brown (1966:523, 524) says:

The “signs” are indissolubly linked with the person of Christ, whose work as revealer on earth necessarily leads to this “exaltation” and “glorification” and reaches its goal in the salvific action of the exalted Lord (...) The “signs” are not meant to throw light on the historical process through which Jesus passed as Saviour, but simply to awaken faith in Jesus’ being “the Christ, the Son of God” (20.30f). They manifest the significance of the person of Jesus as such for salvation. They are limited to the time of Jesus’ earthly activity to draw attention to the unique revelation brought once and for all by the Saviour, the Son of God incarnate, and to throw light on its eschatological significance.



It is in this sense that one ought to understand why the evangelist strives to link the “signs” to the words of Jesus, since a historical event could be developed in order to demonstrate, through it, the significance of Jesus’s act to the Church’s fights and conflicts. In John’s understanding, a sign is not, in essence, a miraculous but a significant act – one which, for the Seeing Eye and the understanding mind, symbolizes eternal realities.

What researchers have focused on are the extraordinary deeds, designated “*sêmeia*”, which accompanied Jesus’s words. By using the word “*sêmeia*”, the narrator of the story links Jesus’s deeds with those of the prophets of Israel. Through the connotation of “understanding”, there is a link between these deeds and Jesus’s words. By calling Jesus’s deeds “*sêmeia*”, the narrator brings them into the ambit of Jesus’s teaching activity.

The miracle, in John’s outlook, is commonly viewed as a sign which reveals Jesus as the envoy of God, rather than simply the Son of God. Toussaint (2001:45) is correct when he states that:

The word ‘*semeion*’ looks at a miracle as proof of a point or as a means of teaching something. The crucial thing is not the miracle, as genuine and important as it is, but the lesson to be learned from the miracle. The fact that John uses only ‘*semeion*’ in his Gospel to refer to Christ’s miracles does not detract from the purpose of the miracles to teach something about the Lord Jesus-Christ. In fact it enhances this truth.

John’s ingenious choice of the word “*sêmeion*” to designate the miracles performed by Jesus, tries to show that “there is a truth behind the miracle, a truth greater than the miracle itself” (Toussaint 2001:50). Beyond the visible miracle stands Jesus the Son, who reveals the Father. These deeds are to be understood as signs of Jesus’s origin (van Tilborg 1996:118). They confirm what Jesus says about himself. He is seen as a “genuine miracle-worker” according to Greek understanding, whose “doctrine, as for the case of Paul, is supported by the miraculous charisma” (1966:133). In Ephesus, the word “*sêmeion*” was not often used to describe the miracles performed by the gods. There is an exception, however: a mission was once sent to Apollo in Delphi, and they erected an image in honour of Dionysus, on which appeared the word “*sêmeion*.” Thus, the “*sêmeion*” character of Jesus’s miracles in the Johannine Gospel is not entirely unique in the Ephesus context.

In this context, Paul is described as someone with magical powers<sup>92</sup>. When people place the handkerchiefs or aprons which have been in touch with his body on the sick, the sickness leaves them and the evil spirits depart. Paul receives a power which belongs to Jesus (in the Gospel) and to Peter (Acts 5.15 concerning the healing power of Peter's shadow). It is this, notes Wendy Cotter (1999:126), that supports the contention that this story "is meant to show the superiority of Paul's heavenly authorization to that of the Jewish religious leaders. The demons demonstrate their superhuman power and violent disposition, which serves to emphasize the magnitude of Paul's exorcisms in Jesus name." This event and that of the seven sons of the high priest, Skeuas (see Acts 19.13-20), demonstrate that in Ephesus the doctrine is supported by the miraculous charisma of Paul which ties the demons to Jesus and his person. It prevents other people from acting as exorcists (van Tilborg 1996:133). The magic books become dangerous and superfluous.<sup>93</sup> Apollonius of Tyana is also seen as a miracle-worker by performing miracles during his stay in Ephesus. He predicts a plague for Ephesus, a prediction against which he must defend himself in his Roman trial where he is accused of being someone with evil magical powers.<sup>94</sup>

Another indicator of Messiahship in the Jewish tradition is that the Messiah was to be born, not in Galilee, but at David's village of Bethlehem (John 7.42). The Messiah was thought of as a second David, and, in accordance with that belief, it would be natural to assume that he would

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<sup>92</sup> Acts 19.11-12: "God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that when the handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were brought to the sick, their diseases left them, and the evil spirits came out of them."

<sup>93</sup> See Arnold 1989, quoted by Van Tilborg (1996:133-4), a book which studies the relationship between the "magical" Ephesus and the letter to the Ephesians. The author is convinced of the magnitude of the presence of magical ideas and practices in Ephesus in the first century. In examining the central ideas from Ephesians and the Johannine text, it becomes clear that there is a relationship between the letter to Ephesus and the Gospel of John:

- The figure of "Lord of the cosmos" as anti-power in John 12.31; 14.30; 16.11 and Eph 2.2.
- The transition from the time-scheme (the past in opposition to the here and now) to the spatial scheme (above in opposition to below): "rise up" against "go down" Eph 4.8-10; "heavenly things": John 3.12; Ep 1.3, 20; 2.6; 3.10; 6.12.
- The darkness of former life and the light now: John 1.5; 6.17; 8.12; 12.35, 46 and Ep 5.8.11; 6.12.
- the transition from the powers as transition from death to life and participation in the resurrection: John 5.24; 11.26; Ep 2.4-10;
- Jesus who speaks about "the temple of his body" which will be pulled down and will be rebuilt in John 2.21 and the metaphor of "the head and the body which needs to be built up" in Ep 1.22, 23; 4.15-16; 5.23.

It is possible that the letter to the Ephesians is the first attempt in Christian theology to combine the thoughts of Paul and John. If John has been read in Ephesus, sooner or later one will run into the problem of the long and intensive presence of Paul in Ephesus and into the question of how the quite different theologies of Paul and John have reacted to one another.

be like David in the place of his birth as well as in other respects. While Matthew and Luke wrote in an apologetic vein and situated Jesus's birth in Bethlehem, the Fourth Evangelist does not rest his argument for the Messiahship of Jesus upon either his descent from David, or his birth in Bethlehem. Jesus, for him, is not the Messiah of Jewish expectation, but a more august figure (Dodd 1953:91). That is, Jesus's origin is mysterious since he comes from another world and he works signs in a more profound sense than anything the Jews expected to see and while his death seems to be his end, it becomes in fact the climax and seal of his manifestation as the eternal saviour of the world.

Another significant text is John 12.34: "We have heard out of the Torah that the Messiah abides for ever." In accordance with Isaiah 9.6, the king who is to come will rule "for ever." Consequently, for the Jews, Jesus's own allusion to his approaching death signifies that he cannot be the Messiah. The Messiah is not to die but to rule "for ever," and hence the Jews must view the death of Jesus as a logical and fatal disqualification from messiahship (Dodd 1953:92).

That is why in the Fourth Gospel the origin of the Messiah has such a deep significance for it could refer to the kingly, Davidic Messiah. However, Jesus's signs bear witness to a Messiahship of another nature. John's text is the only Gospel which shows Jesus performing all three of the Mosaic signs mentioned in *Qohelet Rabba*: he feeds the multitude<sup>95</sup>, he quenches thirst<sup>96</sup> and he rides on the donkey<sup>97</sup> (Martyn 1979:111). All these references show that Jesus is the Mosaic Prophet-Messiah in accordance with the figure promised by the Lord God according to Deuteronomy 18.15, 18, a figure different from the Davidic Messiah who was not expected to perform miracles. It should be noted that although "the first and third of these signs were traditional in Christian circles very early" (Martyn 1979:111 note 168), only the feeding of the multitude as a parallel to the miracle of the manna miracle witnesses transparently to Jesus as the Mosaic Prophet.

Dodd (1953:89), however, argues that in the dramatic situation portrayed by John, the Jews are arguing that Jesus cannot be the Messiah because he must appear from some unknown, far and mysterious quarter, and yet, Jesus is a man of well-known and unpromising origin, a Galilean. Jesus is made to admit that the Jews know his origin, but with an irony characteristic of this

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<sup>94</sup> *Vita Apoll* 4.4; 8.7, 9.

<sup>95</sup> John 6.1-14.

<sup>96</sup> John 7.37; see also 4.13.

<sup>97</sup> John 2.14.

Gospel, it is hinted to the reader that Jesus's true origin is even more mysterious and august than that of the hidden Messiah of Jewish expectation (Dodd 1953:89). He comes not from Rome or the north, or from any unknown place of concealment, but, according to John 7.28, directly from God himself: "Then Jesus cried out as he was teaching in the temple, 'you know me, and you know where I am from. I have not come on my own. But the one who sent me is true, and you do not know him.'" Thus, Jesus is a man of both well-known and unpromising origin, and a Galilean of mysterious origin. Dodd (1953:89-92) cites three significant texts from John's Gospel. These texts allude to traditional views of the Messiah. To summarise:

- the Jews expected their Messiah to be a descendant of David;
- he would appear from no one knew where;
- he would work signs, reign as king, and he would abide forever.

The Fourth Evangelist refers to these traditional beliefs in order to clarify his own views.

The title "Messiah" occupies an important place in the totality of John's thought. One surprise is that John is the only New Testament author who employs the title itself. From John 5, 7 and 9 it is clear that the issue of Jesus's messiahship stands at the centre of the synagogue-church discussion. John took care to write about it in a way, which reflects actual intercourse between Jews and Jewish Christians (Martyn 1979:91-2). His concern was to tell the reader, Jewish or non-Jewish, that Jesus is the Messiah, but arising out of another significance of his messiahship.

Jewish sources tell of the expectation among Jews that a figure like Moses<sup>98</sup> would come – one in whose mouth God would put his words so that he might tell them everything God commanded.<sup>99</sup> He would show miraculous signs, and would be able to give an answer to a difficult question.<sup>100</sup> He would be a prophet like Moses, a definite eschatological figure, distinct from the Messiah (Martyn 1979:107).

In the Qumran literature, the men of that community were to be instructed until the "coming of a prophet and the Messiahs of Aaron and Israel." Various eschatological figures are mentioned: a Jacob's star or the Messiah of Israel; a Redeemer like Moses, expected by the Samaritans – a Moses come back to life, called Taheb (Martyn 1979:108); and the Priestly Messiah or the

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<sup>98</sup> Deut 18.15

<sup>99</sup> Deut 18.18

Messiah of Aaron. Moses was considered as “a type either of the Messiah or of some other eschatological figure” (Martyn 1979:106). Many texts bear witness to the widespread hope that existed in first century Jewish thought that a figure like Moses, a prophet and redeemer, would appear. In John’s view, the Messiah is presented as the Son of Man.

### 3.25 Son of Man

The term “Son of man”, in pre-Christian Judaism, was used as a messianic title. In Daniel 7.13, for instance, the figure who is “like a human being” (*ho huios tou anthrōpou*), is expressly identified with “the people of the saints of the Most High”, with the true and final People of God to whom ultimate dominion is promised. In the *Ethiopic Book of Enoch* 46.1-3, the apocalyptic description of Daniel 7 is imitated in a figure that appears, identified as the “Elect One”, also called Messiah (see Dodd 1953:241-2). When, at the outset of the Gospel of John the Son of man is referred to, the pair of verbs “*anabanein/katabainein*,” “ascend/descend” calls attention to this view. Jesus makes a promise to Nathanael in John 1.51: “And he said to him, ‘very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.’” This, according to Meeks (1986:174-5), depends on a *midrash* on Genesis 28.12: “And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it” in which “ascending and descending” angels are merely a “symbol” of the union of the celestial and terrestrial worlds. The Jewish text *The Ladder of Jacob* 1.7 states: “And while I was still looking at it, behold, angels of God ascended and descended on it. And God was standing above its highest face, and he called to me from there, saying, ‘Jacob, Jacob!’ And I said, ‘Here I am, Lord!’” On the theological plane, this Jewish text emphasizes that God is Lord of the world, and he authoritatively stands atop the world (Charlesworth 1985:405) from where he can send angels, celestial beings that ascend and descend, and so link together earth and heaven by such a movement. The Fourth Evangelist, by recalling Jacob’s dream is, I believe, moving from Jewish belief in the angels’ role and all the traditions related to Jacob about God’s revelation to stress that Jesus, the Son of Man is the only one in whom God reveals himself to human beings. In this respect, the revelation that has been given to the patriarchs, like Jacob, is not definite. Jesus is the one John speaks of, after Easter, the one who descended and ascended, and can reveal true knowledge of God to men

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<sup>100</sup> Ps 74.9

It is noticeable that the prophecy of John 1.51, in its context, does two important things:

- I) It introduces the title “Son of Man”, completing, so to speak, other series of titles referred to in John 1.29-41 (Windisch, as quoted by Meeks 1986:175).
- II) It introduces the pattern of ascending and descending, a pattern that will play an important role in John. Meeks notes that the pairing of the verbs “ascend-descend” appears in John 3.13: “No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of man.” The words “ascending” and “descending” stress the exclusive properties of the Son of man (Meeks 1986:175).

The promise of the vision of “great things” is made in John 1.51 to Nathanael, portrayed as “the real Israel”. However, Nicodemus, the “teacher of Israel”, is told that he cannot or will not see certain superior things. The dialogue, which took place between Jesus and Nicodemus in John 3, seems to focus on the theme of Jesus as the “Prophet like Moses”, reflecting the struggles between Christians and Jews in a later period and not in Jesus’s lifetime.

According to McGrath (2001:160), the polemic is addressed against the ascent of figures, in particular Moses, viewed as ascending to heaven to bring back revelation. John 3.13 polemically asserts that: “No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of man.” Jesus, the Son of man, is presented as contrasting with those figures that ascended to heaven to receive a revelation. Unlike them, the Son of man ascended as exclusive revealer of heavenly things (see McGrath 2001:161). In the light of the structure of this text, considering also its context, it is clear that the Fourth Evangelist argues that no one has ever ascended to heaven to bring back revelation, neither Moses, nor Enoch nor any others, only the one who came down from heaven, the Son of man, brought the heavenly knowledge (McGrath 2001:166). As argued Martyn (1979:135), John ingeniously moves away from the portrayal of Jesus as Prophet like Moses, to the Son of Man.

By using the verb-pair “descent-ascent” for Jesus the Son of man, John seems to mean that Jesus is the warrant for the esoteric revelation which he brings. Only he can speak about “heavenly things”, for he descended from heaven – and no one else has ascended. This exclusivity of the revelation brought by the Son of man, according to Odeberg, as quoted by Meeks (1986:176), needs to be viewed as opposing the claims of other Gnostic revealers that they had descended, and the claims of prophets or seers that they had received revelations by means of “heavenly journeys”, as for example in the apocalyptic or in the *merkabah* speculation,

or in the traditions of the theophanies to Moses and the patriarchs. The Fourth evangelist disputes any claim of receiving, from heavenly journeys, any divine revelations.

John's rhetorical construct has to do with the medium of revelation for, as argues, Collins (1999:157), the heavenly journey was considered, at the time of crisis, as the standard medium of apocalyptic revelation. The supernatural revelation brought by intermediary agents was grounded in the worldview that "human affairs are determined to a great degree by supernatural agents; and the belief that human life is subject to divine judgment, culminating in reward or punishment after death" (Collins 1999:157). That is why, as I discussed above, Enoch was seen as qualified to disclose the mysteries of the heavenly world, in his journey to heaven, and Moses just as much enabled to bring back the revelation from the Mountain through which he went up in heaven. The visions of the hero Daniel, a pseudonymous figure,<sup>101</sup> just like Enoch (Collins 1999:141), were regarded as able to disclose wisdom about living in the troubled world of the Hellenistic context.

If John is saying that only Jesus is the mediator of divine knowledge, it is because only he "has been there." John's perception is to be taken as polemic against other putative divine mediators.

This statement, as Meeks points out, clarifies the ambiguous meaning of the previous two Amen-sayings, in these words: "For the unusual formulation 'to see the kingdom of God' in v.3 can only refer to 'heavenly-journey' tradition. The more traditional-sounding saying of v.5, asserting that only one born of water and spirit can enter the kingdom, is thus re-interpreted to refer to an ascent to heaven, while v.13 shows that "*anōthen*" has to mean 'from above' and that 'the one born from above/from the spirit' can only be the Son of Man, Jesus." It is in this context that John 3.31-36 must be understood. In this text, Jesus, who comes from above, is above all, even above John the Baptist. The Gospel is an apologetic against sectarians, particularly the adherents of John the Baptist. When the Fourth Evangelist wrote his Gospel, a group of baptist sectarians existed. They were followers of John the Baptist who, instead of acknowledging the pre-eminence of Jesus, insisted on giving undue importance to their own master (Brown 1978: lxxvii), calling him Messiah and not Jesus. According to Baldensberger, quoted by Brodie (1993:12), the Prologue, which is to be taken as the key of the Gospel, contrasts John the Baptist with Jesus and to put the former in his proper place. John is depicted as embodying the

tradition of the ancient prophets; he is a positive witness, someone who cheers when Jesus enters. The difference between the two is the difference between the prophecy and its fulfillment. In other texts, John is depicted as not being the light, but as a witness; not as the Messiah, but a voice like that of Isaiah; not the bridegroom, but the bridegroom's friend. The role of John the Baptist is not less important; he was sent by God (John 1.6) to reveal Jesus to Israel (1.31; 3.29) and was one of the major witnesses to Jesus to be ranked alongside the Scriptures and the miracles (5.31-40).

Baldensperger, as quoted by Brown (2003:153), considers the Prologue as the key to the understanding of John but also to dealing with the difference between John the Baptist and Jesus. He suggests that one of the purposes of the Gospel is to refute the claims of the sectarians of John the Baptist who exalted their master at the expense of Jesus. Thus there is in the Gospel the possible polemic against followers of the Baptist in Ephesus. Acts 18.24 – 19.7 speaks of Apollos and a group of about twelve disciples at Ephesus. Those believers who had been baptised only with John's baptism and did not know of the Holy Spirit were probably disciples of the Baptist, and they had maintained their identity and circulated in the Greek world (see Brown 2003:151). Brown does not hesitate to go further by arguing that those followers may have been primitive disciples of Jesus who had been baptised (in John's style) with water during Jesus's ministry (John 3.23) before the Spirit was given (7.39) inasmuch as they show no opposition toward accepting full Christian initiation from Paul (2003:153-4).

Other polemical references may to be found in John 1.8-9, which states that Jesus was the Light and not John the Baptist who is to be taken as witness to the Light. In John 1.30, it is stated that Jesus is greater than the Baptist. In John 1.20 and 3.28, referring to both, the writer stresses that John the Baptist is not the Messiah by inserting these words into the Baptist's mouth. In John 10.41, John the Baptist is presented as never performing miracles and yet his witness about Jesus is true. There is a denial in John 4.2 that Jesus himself baptised probably in order to refute any claim that Jesus was a baptiser on the same level as the Baptist (see 3.22, 26).

The greatness of Jesus went further. The Gospel stresses that Jesus is the Son of man who has come from above (*anôthen*), he is the only one "to communicate supraterritorial knowledge" (Meeks 1986:179); and this indicates his own superiority to any other revealer, even Moses,

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<sup>101</sup> Legendary myths were construed around Daniel though he has supposed to have lived during the Babylonian Exile. Daniel and Enoch are depicted as wise men rather than prophets (von Rad quoted by Collins: 146).



Enoch, the patriarchs like Jacob and others. In John 6, the narrator also refers to the “bread from heaven.” While Nicodemus came to Jesus because he saw the signs, the crowd that Jesus spoke to in chap 6, failed to see the signs. They asked: “What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing?” (v. 30.) The irony to which the narrator reverts in claiming that the ancestors of the Jews ate the manna given by Moses as bread from heaven (see v.31), enables him to signify that the bread of heaven is not the bread that Moses gave them, but rather the true bread which comes down from heaven and that the Father gives them (v. 32.)

The pattern, “descent and ascent”, in Meeks’ view (1986:184), is “the cipher for Jesus’s unique self-knowledge as well as for his foreignness to the men of this world.” It becomes not only the key to his identity and identification, but the primary content of his esoteric knowledge which distinguishes him from the men who belong to “this world”, Moses and other religious figures of the past. When the people and the Pharisees claim to “know where he is from” (7.45-52), this is a choice example of the evangelist’s irony to signify that the Jews did not know that Jesus is from God. When again “the Jews” claim to know that God spoke to Moses, and they do not know where this man [Jesus] is from (9.29), this objection is coupled with an expression of the view that Jesus is a sinner and therefore cannot be from or be spoken to by God.

According to McGrath (2001:183-4), “the point is that, whereas Moses’ credentials are indisputable, the Jewish authorities regard Jesus as a lawbreaker, and take this as definitive evidence against his claim to reveal God and speak authoritatively on God’s behalf.” The narrator, I think, is concerned with the strangeness of the knowledge of Jesus that can only be explained through the revelation of Jesus as Son of man. The story of the man born blind culminates in his recognition that Jesus is the Son of man worthy of worship (see John 9.36-8). It is his tenacious insistence that Jesus has come “from God” that leads the Pharisees to put him out of the synagogue. And then Jesus meets him, asking him: “Do you believe in the Son of man?” (v. 36.) We have already shown that the Son of man was a human being in whom God was revealed. Koester (2003:109) suggests that, at least in retrospect, the sign of healing a man born blind points to the divine aspect of Jesus. It was a blasphemy, for the Jews, to ascribe the traits of deity to a man and to worship him (see John 8.59; 10.33). However, the formerly blind man, by worshipping Jesus, shows that he is aware that he is in the presence of a deity. Jesus, as Son of man, is not to be viewed as “one more deity in the pantheon but a figure with a distinctive and exclusive role” (Koester 2003:109). That is why the coming of the Son of man into

the world is seen to bring judgment to the world in light of John 9.39: “I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.” The failure to acknowledge Jesus as the Son of man, and the unbelief it represents leads inescapably to judgment. To the confession of Jesus as Son of Man by the healed man, is linked another title ascribed to Jesus, “Lord.”

### 3.26 Lord (God)

In Thomas’s confession (John 20.26-29), at the end of the Gospel, the God-title is linked to the titles “Lord” or “*kyrios*”, in Latin “*dominus*”. *Kyrios* is a designation of God. Throughout the Johannine text, the use of this title reflects the socio-political context of Ephesus with regard to the title of “Lord” granted to Jesus and could characterise “the culture of the time in which authority figures were seen as “*kyriai*” – the lord of the house who rules the “*oikos*” (van Tilborg 1996:31). It is commonly admitted that the Gospel of John was written in a context where Domitian was called “*dominus et deus*”, “lord” and “god.” The title “*kyrios*”, “lord”, Van den Heever (1999:321) notes, occurs in this “political” sense and its use escalates throughout the first century. Granting this title to Jesus, he recognises his divine character, and this is a polemical view. By using this title, John stands behind his Church in opposition to every emperor who calls himself Lord, for, theologically, Jesus, after his death and resurrection, is the “*kyrios*” over life and death.

Jesus’s resurrection is linked to the event of his death. John 18-19 recounts the story of Jesus’s trial, according to Van Tilborg (1998:213-5), through which Jesus is condemned to death by Pilate at the instigation of the high priests, is also a story of an enthronement in which Jesus is made a king by the soldiers (19.1-3), by Pilate himself (18.33-41), as the epiphany of Jesus for the people (19.4-7)<sup>102</sup> and the outcome of the story is to show Jesus proclaimed king (19.13-16). That is why Jesus’s death and crucifixion are described as enthronement and glorification. In Van Tilborg’s words (1998:215), Jesus “goes to his death as king, a glorification which will lead to the glorification of his father.” Jesus is showed to be divine, after dying as king to the extent that the whole point of the dialogues and depiction in the passion narrative in John 18–19 could be paralleled with the apotheosis of the Roman emperors, especially well-described is that of Julius Caesar. At his funeral pyre two signs mark him as divine: the appearance of a comet in

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<sup>102</sup> As commonly held, Jesus’s solemn exit, in John 19.4-7, is not a scene of humiliation and accusation rather he appears here that this man is the Son of God who manifests himself.

the sky, and the sight of his soul ascending to heaven in the form of an eagle.

It should be reminded that “apotheosis” or “deification”, which took place after death, was not, in the strict sense, a creation of new gods, but rather the official acknowledgment of the divine quality which is already present and has manifested itself in mighty acts of deliverance. The cultic veneration of Alexander as a god existed in a number of Greek cities in Asia Minor. Honours paid to him are to be seen as an expression of gratitude for what he had done; that is why he was included within the framework of the cult of benefactors. Alexander is seen as the precursor of the Hellenistic-Roman cult of emperors.

When talking about Julius Caesar, it is important to make a distinction between “divinisation” and “deification”<sup>103</sup> (Klauck 2000:290). In his lifetime, Caesar was divinised and after his death, he was deified. An inscription from Ephesus depicted Julius Caesar as god who appeared visibly, and as a universal saviour of the life of human beings.<sup>104</sup> Caesar received this sacral elevation and he became an idealised figure behind Alexander the Great, following the model of the dynastic cults or rulers, not because he himself was the driving force. Caesar was considered “*Divus Julius*”; nevertheless, his divinisation is to be seen as posthumous, an event that took place after death. The divinisation or the apotheosis was due only to the worthy and not to the unworthy emperors.

It is Octavian, his great-nephew and adopted son, elevated afterwards to a level of “son of god” who testified to having seen that Caesar “arises to heaven as a god and is venerated in temples.” In mythical narrative, it was Venus, Caesar’s divine mother, who snatched the soul out of the murdered body of the son and brought it to the heavenly stars (see Klauck (2000:294). The “consecration” of a deceased emperor required a witness of his ascension to heaven<sup>105</sup> and

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<sup>103</sup> *Divinisation* is to be understood as the attribution of a great many cultic honours while *deification* is an elevation to a position among the civic gods in keeping with sacred law.

<sup>104</sup> Archaeological data confirms the divinisation and deification of Julius Caesar (an inscription from Ephesus in 49 BCE and another inscription from Demetrias in Thessaly acknowledge him as imperator and god before or after his death.) Klauck (2000:290) indicates that the cities in Asia and the communities and the country districts (honour) Gaius Julius, son of Gaius, Caesar, *Pontifex Maximus*, *Imperator* and consul for the second time, descendant of Ares and Aphrodite, the god who appeared visibly [*theos epiphanes*] and universal saviour of the life of human beings. The historian Appian attests that “every holder of the imperial office, unless he has been a tyrant or a blameworthy man, is paid divine honours by the Romans after his death, although these same people once upon a time could not even endure to give them the title ‘kings’ during their life time” (see Klauck 2000:294).

<sup>105</sup> The act of consecration required a witness to arise in the assembled Senate and to swear that he had seen the soul of the Emperor ascend to heaven from the pyre, for example in the flight of an eagle up to

a belief in astrological immortality<sup>106</sup>. Thomas's confession of Jesus as "*kurios*" and "God" occurred only after Jesus's death and resurrection (John 20.2, 13, 18, 20, 25; 21.7, 12) and is evidence of social interaction between the Johannine community and the Graeco-Roman world where the ceremony of "apotheosis" was carried out for human beings acknowledged as divine after death. The title "*kurios*" is only used after Jesus's death and resurrection as it was practiced in the emperor's "apotheosis."

### SUMMARY

This chapter deals with Christology and the issues surrounding the conflict in John. Christology seems important for it constitutes in John's view a new centre for understanding God. Jesus's identity occupies the centre of the Gospel for that purpose. The choice of the Christological issues, in this dissertation, has been dictated by the fact that in John 9 the man born blind progresses in his knowledge of Jesus; since he moves from acknowledging Jesus as "Prophet" to the deepened discovery that he is the "Son of Man," whom he will come to worship, as was so often done for benefactors in the Graeco-Roman world.

If John, in his presentation of Jesus, moves from "the Prophet like Moses" to "the Son of Man", it is because - unlike other figures, including Moses, who are believed to ascend to heaven to receive a revelation - Jesus, for the evangelist, is the Son of man who ascended as "exclusive revealer" of heavenly things. The evangelist endeavours to highlight that no one has ever ascended to heaven to bring back revelation, not Moses [who was regarded as a king as well as a prophet, and as being enthroned in heaven, where he received the Torah (Exodus 19.3 - 20.21 ; 34.2-9)], nor Enoch [who was viewed as being exalted in order to bring back to earth the heavenly mysteries, as he had been taken up to heaven before the flood (Gen 5.24)] not Jacob [who dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, whose top reached to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it (Genesis 28.12)], nor any others. Only the one who came down from heaven, the Son of Man, brought the heavenly knowledge. The exclusivity of the revelation brought by the Son of man needs to be viewed in opposition to the claims of other Gnostic revealers as Enoch, Moses, Isaiah, Baruch (Schnackenburg 1980b:551) that they too had descended, and the claims of prophets or seers that they had received

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heaven out of the flames, which included the members of the imperial family - wives, siblings and children of the emperor (Klauck 2000:293).

<sup>106</sup> In the case of Caesar, Suetonius relates that during the first athletic competition which Augustus held in his honour, a comet arose at the eleventh hour and lit up the sky for seven days; people believed that 'this was the soul of Caesar, who had been taken up into heaven' (see Klauck 2000:293)

revelations by means of “heavenly journeys” in relation to the traditions of the theophanies to Moses and the patriarchs.

In reading the Fourth Gospel, Jesus is seemingly presented as the Mosaic Prophet-Messiah, but, conscious of the difficulties surrounding the concept of Jesus as a Prophet like Moses, the evangelist presents Jesus as the Son of man who descended from heaven, for, in such a view, the Son of man serves both as a prophetic designation and as a messianic title. The Johannine Son of man does not follow the apocalyptic scheme, where the revelation is a communication of divine secrets transmitted through celestial visions, but he is as historical being the “theological place” of the presence of God among men. He is the temple of God’s presence, through which He can be known. In order to understand this properly, it is important to link the presentation of the person of Jesus as “temple” to John 2–4. The position of the present section in relation to the Gospel as a whole should be noted. According to Barrett (1978:196), John 2.13 - 4.54 forms a whole in which we see Jesus first as the fulfillment of all that the Temple represented; next as the fulfillment of apocalyptic and Pharisaic Judaism (3.1-21) and of what the Baptist foretold (3.22-36); and then, in relation to heretical Judaism (4.1-42) and to the Gentile world (4.43-54). For Busse quoted by Van der Watt (2000:106), the temple is the locality of God’s special presence where he is to be served. It is not a matter of chance that, in the light of John 2.13 – 25, Jesus progresses from the Jerusalem temple to “this temple”, i.e. “the temple of his body.” As Barrett (1978:201) states, the human body of Jesus was the place where a unique manifestation of God took place and consequently became the only true Temple, the only centre of worship in light of John 4.20-4. John shares with the Qumran sect an opposition to the Jerusalem Temple but Braun rightly points out that whereas the sect was concerned with ritual purity John’s concern was with spiritual worship.

In Coloe’s reading of the Fourth Gospel, the Temple functions as a symbol, for, in the Prologue, and in chapter 2, the reader is given two metaphors that identify Jesus in term of Israel’s cultic system, namely Tabernacle and Temple (2001:6). For Coloe, the Gospel has created a narrative world in which the Temple and Jesus are intrinsically linked. Although of the significance of the Temple cannot be taken for granted, in this unique passage, the imagination of the Johannine community has to be situated in its historical and religious context. The Johannine community, states Coloe (2001:6), in the midst of a Torah-centred Jewish community, needed to reinterpret the meaning of the Temple’s destruction, transferring it to the person of Jesus.

John presents Jesus as “Messiah” but following another perspective. By emphasising the present reality of Jesus’s revelation, there is evidence that the term does not function as an apocalyptic title. Jesus cannot be viewed as an apocalyptic figure, but as the Son of man on earth, who came to mediate and communicate the knowledge of God. Jesus is not to be seen as the Messiah of Jewish expectation, but a more august figure from a more mysterious and illustrious origin, unknown by “the Jews” who, however, claim to know where Jesus is from. From John 5, 7 and 9, it is not surprising that the issue of Jesus’s messiahship stands at the centre of the synagogue-church discussion.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONFLICT AND DISCIPLESHIP IN JOHN 9: THE SACRED TEXTURE ANALYSIS

This last chapter will focus upon the Jewish-Christian conflict that took place during the formative period of early Christianity and at the time John's Gospel was written. The evidence of conflict between Moses and Jesus towards the end of the first century does not need to be demonstrated as it appears clearly in the debate that runs through John 9. When talking about the discipleship of Moses and of Jesus, it is essential to understand the significance of the Sabbath during which Jesus healed the man born blind. We will end this study by considering the ethical imperative for the disciples of Jesus in the Johannine Church of the first century. In accordance with the socio-rhetorical approach, the aim of the reading here is to examine, by the sacred texture, how John 9 speaks of God or about the domain of religious life, and about discipleship in the Jewish and Christian views.

#### 4.1 The Sabbath issue

In discussing the Sabbath-related conflicts in John, we need to take into account John 5 and 9 which both concentrate on this issue. John 5 provides important clues, since it is in this chapter that the Sabbath first emerges as an issue: "At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk. Now that day was a Sabbath" (John 5.9). The conflict emerges in John 5 within a specific legal and institutional context, which evolves into a Sabbath juridical controversy between Jesus and the "Jews." His Sabbath activity led to the accusation that he had committed an illegal act, and he was threatened with a sanction (Asiedu-Pepurah 2001:43). It is not the man who breaks the Sabbath by carrying his bed (5.9-10) that interests the narrator, but rather the charge against Jesus: "Therefore the Jews started persecuting Jesus, because he was doing such things on the Sabbath." The reason given by the narrator for these repeated accusations is that *tauta epoiei en sabbatô* (v. 6). By using the imperfect tense (*epoiei* in John 5.16 and *eluen* in 5.18), the narrator suggests that Jesus habitually broke the Sabbath (Painter 1991:184), so there probably were other instances of Sabbath violations by Jesus which the narrator did not deem it necessary to indicate (Asiedu-Pepurah 2001:75). He mentions only that it was a consistent attitude of Jesus toward the Sabbath law.

The story of the healing of the blind man follows this pattern for once his sight has been

restored, the narrator informs the reader: "Now it was the Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes" (John 9.14). The narrator also reveals the decision that anyone who should confess Jesus as the Christ must be cast out of the synagogue (John 9.22). Jesus as "wonder worker" is seen to be opposing Moses and the Law. According to Painter (2000:236), in both stories it is the Sabbath controversy that is stressed in the dialogues that follow. Other scholars assert that the Sabbath issue was added to the narrative at a later stage. Asiedu-Peprah (2001:35), like Painter, disagrees. He emphatically asserts that John 9.1-10.21 represents the development and the conclusion of the Johannine Sabbath controversy introduced in John 5. He and other writers are convinced that the theme of the Sabbath observance was always part of the original composition of the present narrative. The Sabbath motif determines, in both stories, the interpretation of Jesus's healing activity. Brown (1966:210), interpreting John 5, observes that "one almost needs the Sabbath motif to give this story significance."

It is only in John 9.1-10.21, according to Asiedu-Peprah (2001:47), that the reader encounters once more the Sabbath motif as the reason for the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees. Jesus's Sabbath activity causes some of the Pharisees to accuse him of Sabbath violation and false Christological claims by claiming that: "This man is not from God, for he does not observe the Sabbath" (9.16).

In the unfolding of both stories, the narrator points out that Jesus does not break the Sabbath by working that day, because "God works on the Sabbath without breaking his own Sabbath law since his activities as life-giver and judge can not be interrupted" (Asiedu-Peprah 2001:187, commenting on John 5.17a and 9.3-4). On this basis, Jesus states that he has the same prerogative to work uninterruptedly on the Sabbath. By quoting Jesus's words, the narrator did not intend to defend Jesus against the charge of Sabbath-breaking; rather, his concern was to place Jesus and his Sabbath action on the same level as God (Painter 1991:184). The Sabbath controversy provided the opportunity, for the evangelist, to assert Jesus's unity with the Father. Asiedu-Peprah (2001:187) rightly argues that Jesus continues to play a vital role in God's ongoing creative act in human history and all Jesus's actions need to be integrated into the actions of the Father himself. This continuing of holy work on the Sabbath is a means by which John suggests that the creation is not yet complete for Jesus is concerned with making the man whole, as he should be, and thus complete the creation (Painter 2000:236-7). John notes in John 1.17: "The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus



Christ.” The separation made between Jesus, who brings grace and truth, and Moses, with whom the law is associated, is a distinction that signals the hermeneutical controversy between John and other forms of Judaism where the law provides the key to an understanding of God (Painter 2000:237).

There is a thematic motif that recurs throughout John around the question “who he is?” and “who are you?” Particularly, as demonstrates Van den Heever, in his extensive study (2002), the polemics in chapters 4 to 11 raise various issues, which encompass the following two questions: who represents the true Jewish/Israelite tradition? And are the Jews really free? All those polemics against “the Jews” are to be understood in conjunction with the anti-imperial ideology. That is why, the Samaritans, by recognising Jesus as “Saviour of the world”, yet another imperial title, were buying into the ideology of Jesus as anti-emperor in contrast to “the Jews” who are happy to be “friends of Caesar” (van den Heever 2002:323). The Johannine polemics against “the Jews”, according to Van den Heever (2002:324), occupy a substantial section of the first part of the Gospel. In John 5.1-17, Jesus encounters opposition from “the Jews” for the healing which takes place on the Sabbath; however, the ensuing discussion, in John 5.18-47 is centred on Jesus’s appropriation of divinity for himself and again his claim to be in filial intimacy with God the Father. The narrated scenes of 7.10-31 in which Jesus teaches the crowds and their conflicting opinions about him and 7.45 – 8.58 in which the unbelief of the Jewish leaders is shown all serve to make themes of “the unwillingness and inability of the Jewish leaders to see God in action in Jesus’ actions” (van den Heever 2002:324). The Johannine references to the Jewish scriptures and tradition (John 5.36-40), and to Moses (5.46, 47) would have lead the Jews to realise not only that Jesus is God incarnate but also to recognise that Jesus represents the true essence of Jewish tradition. That is why, as Van den Heever (2002:325) contends, “Jesus is, in John’s perspective, the one speaking on God’s behalf and occupies the position of summation of Israelite/Jewish religious tradition and scriptures as they are understood by contemporary early Judaism.”

For John, the Christological identity of Jesus, which the narrator strives to emphasize, is a new locus for understanding God. Accordingly, the narratives of the Sabbath conflict are to be understood as “simply a reflection of the Johannine Christian’s effort to convince their opponents of the truthfulness of their claims about Jesus within the context of the post-70 period” (Asiedu-Pepurah 2001:227). The Fourth Evangelist endeavours to persuade his audience that Jesus is the Christ and to disillusion “the Jews” who continue proudly to stand by Moses.

## 4.2 Moses and Jesus

This section deals with the relationship between Jesus and Moses, and concentrates on the revelation brought by each as a point of controversy in the Christian Church-Synagogue debates. The issue is to see how the Fourth Evangelist reacts to it in his formulation of the Christology. From a reading of John 1.17, it is clear that Jesus is contrasted with Moses. The law was given through Moses while grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. John presents Jesus as “the embodiment, as the appearance in human history, of that which ‘the Jews’ claimed was to be found in the Torah, namely Wisdom and light” (McGrath 2001:153-4). John knew the Jewish tradition according to which Wisdom, identified with Torah, was the instrument of creation (see Proverbs 8.22; *Wisdom* 6.12-11.1), and reworks that tradition by presenting Jesus in the language of *Wisdom*, the Word of creation. By identifying Jesus as the human being through whom the word became flesh, John endeavours to give a priority of place and authority to Jesus beyond that granted to Moses. The incarnation of the Logos, God’s word, Wisdom and Glory became flesh in Jesus (see McGrath 2001:155). For John, the one whom Moses revealed has now appeared on the scene as a human being.

We have already underlined that Moses was regarded as a king as well as a prophet (see Kealy 1997:733). It was believed that he was enthroned in heaven where he received the Torah (Exodus 19.3 – 20.21; 34.2-9) and, with or within it, all truth (Meeks 1967:286). In connection with this belief, Moses was considered as God’s emissary, agent or vice-regent on earth. It is from this point of view that Moses, in Jewish traditions, has been exalted as “the center of their religious concerns, as the intermediary, in some sense, between them and God” (Meeks 1967:286). When Moses ascended the mountain, it was an ascent to heaven to receive the Torah. Enoch is also viewed as being exalted and thus is worthy of the authority on heavenly mysteries, since he had been taken up to heaven before the flood (Genesis 5.24). Accordingly, as observes Collins (1999:141) he was preeminently qualified to disclose the mysteries of the heavenly world.

The dialogue, which took place between Jesus and Nicodemus in John 3, focuses on the theme of Jesus as the “Prophet like Moses.” It reflects the struggles between Christians and Jews in a later period and not yet in Jesus’s lifetime. According to McGrath (2001:160), the polemic is addressed against the ascent of figures, in particular Moses, who was viewed as ascending to

heaven to bring back revelation. John 3.13 polemically asserts that “No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of man.” Such a perception of things is, to say the least, polemical insofar as Jesus, the Son of man, is presented in contrast to those figures that ascended to heaven to receive a revelation. Unlike them, the Son of man ascended as exclusive revealer of heavenly things.

The Fourth Evangelist points out that no one has ever ascended to heaven to bring back revelation, not Moses, not Enoch, nor any others. Only the one, who came down from heaven, the Son of man, brought the heavenly knowledge (McGrath 2001:166). As Martyn argues (1979:135), John ingeniously moves from the portrayal of Jesus as “Prophet like Moses” to Jesus as the “Son of Man.” In John’s presentation, Jesus is placed in an original Christological setting. In John 3.1-13; 6.1ff; 7.22ff and 9.1ff, Jesus is identified as the Mosaic Prophet-Messiah which, in Midrashic tradition, would lead to Jesus being identified as the Son of Man. In his analysis of John 3, Martyn (1979:131) asserts that John refers to the tradition, but, by modifying it, he interprets it anew. When he identifies Jesus as a Mosaic Prophet, he does not invent or create this identity *ex nihilo*. It should be noted, however, that the unexpected movement from Moses to the Son of Man is to be taken as John’s own creation, and this leads Martyn (see 1979:129-135) to conclude that John’s Christology takes two major steps which we can summarise as follows:

- i) In the first place, he creates from the “*einmalig*” tradition about Jesus of Nazareth a two-level drama which shows Jesus to be present in the activity of the Christian witness. In John’s outlook, Jesus’s story is connected to the figures of Christian witness in the Johannine community towards the end of the first century. While Luke deals with Jesus’s life in his Gospel and the post-resurrection history of the Church is narrated in his second volume, namely Acts, John, on the contrary, deals both with Jesus’s earthly lifetime and that of the Church, and integrates them into a single volume. Jesus is viewed as acting the part of the Jewish-Christian preacher who is subjected to arrest and trial as a beguiler. Jesus engages in the debates which John’s Church is having with the Jewish community about his own identity as the Mosaic Messiah.
- ii) Secondly, while John demonstrates an interest in the figure of the Mosaic Messiah, he insists that Jesus makes his presence unmistakably clear, not as the Mosaic Messiah, but as the Son of Man on earth.

As Son of Man, Jesus, from “above”, descends to “below.” He is present on the earth as a Mediator between the realm “above” and that of “below.” In McGrath’s understanding (2001:171):

John draws the conclusion that Jesus’ revelation was not based on an ascent to heaven, but on the descent of one who has pre-existed in heaven. John goes so far as to claim that no one had in fact ascended to heaven in order to bring back knowledge of heavenly things, except for the one whose revelation was based not on the ascent of a human being into heaven, but on the descent of one who pre-existed in heaven to tell of what he was and experienced there.

In the light of the coming of Jesus, the Mosaic Law which is regarded as the source of life, can no longer be considered as such as, in John’s view, the Law is not playing a decisive role. In other words, far from being life-giver in and of itself, the Law bears witness to Jesus who, as the unique Son of the Father, is the giver of eternal life (see John 5.24, 39-40). Asiedu-Peprah (2001:225) is right when he contends that “the Johannine Christians would have sought to convince their contemporaries that not only do the great symbols and institutions of Judaism (Temple, Mosaic Law, etc) find their fulfillment in Jesus, but also that it is only in him that one can receive life both in the present and in the future.” Jesus is not viewed, in John, as an apocalyptic figure, but as the Son of man on earth, come to mediate and communicate the knowledge of God. That is why the signs that Jesus, as mediator, has performed are to be examined as a conduit to faith.

### **4.3 Faith – signs and discipleship in John’s outlook**

In the Fourth Gospel, the narrator deliberately uses the word “sign” rather than miracle. In the synoptic Gospels, according to Marrow (1995:32), faith was needed before miracles could be performed. In John, however, it is the miracle that begets faith (John 2.11.23; 4.48; 6.30; 7.31). Hence John’s predilection for the word “sign” rather than “miracle”, it points not so much to the action itself or to the beneficiary as such, (as in Mt 17.20), but to the identity of he who performs the miracle (Marrow 1995:32). In that perspective, Jesus is represented as “freely employing miracles as proofs of his divine authority.” The synoptic Gospels do not describe the miracles of Jesus as “signs” but rather use the ordinary Greek term for miracle, namely “*dynamis*” (Beasley-Murray 1989:45). Miracles are seen as acts of power and in John’s understanding the miracles of Jesus are simply the “signs”

When, for instance, in John 2.23-24, the narrator uses the word “believe” to refer to both Jesus and the people at the same time, he seems to be playing a word-game. As Macgregor (1953:66) points out, the verb “believe” is a flexible one throughout the Gospel, whether it is used absolutely or with a preposition. In the Gospel of John, the substantive “faith” is not used anywhere. Instead, the verb “to believe” is abundantly employed, having five occurrences. All the passages where the verb “to believe” occurs in John go to show that there is a relation between faith and vision. According to Dodd (1953:185-6), there is, in the first place, a form of vision, of simple physical vision, which may exist without faith. Many contemporaries of Jesus saw him in this sense. There is another vision accompanied by faith, which leads to vision in a deeper sense.

The writer prefers the verb “believe” to the noun “faith”, which he avoids probably because of his own purpose. The verb he chooses to use means “to believe”, “to trust”, and “to commit.” Hobbs (1968:74) differentiated two meanings: an intellectual acceptance of facts, and a wilful trust and commitment based on facts. The first is an “intellectual or superficial belief” from which Jesus distances himself; but the second is a wilful commitment to Jesus as the Son of God that the writer seems to have privileged. To believe is to be drawn to Jesus recognising the divine character of his life and the divine authority behind his actions and his words. All the miracles, as symbolic signs, performed by Jesus culminate in the event of resurrection<sup>107</sup> through which he is seen to be glorified. So what relation can be established between faith and signs? The first passage to bring this out is John 20.27-29, in the light of which Thomas’s faith is genuine and was accepted by Jesus. But Jesus’s reply, in light of verse 29, makes it clear that there is a special blessedness ascribed to a faith which does not require visible proofs to arouse it (Hodges 1991:142). Another revealing text is Jesus’s remark addressed to a royal official whose son lay ill in Capernaum. The official begged him to come down and heal his son and Jesus said, “Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe” (John 4. 46b-48). It should be noted that in the background of Jesus’s words was his recent experience with the Samaritans (John 4.1-42) where many believed in him without signs on the basis of his word alone, as they testified themselves: “And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, “It

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<sup>107</sup> Barrett (1978:65) comfortable, like others, in the thought according to which the event of the resurrection of Jesus is to be seen as the climax of all symbolic signs recorded throughout the Gospel, considers that event as “the supreme ‘*semeion*’.” However, we have to agree with Brown that, in the “hour” of his return to his Father, Jesus is no longer pointing symbolically to his glory but he is actually being glorified. It is through that supreme sign that Jews and Gentiles are invited to hold that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Saviour of the world” (verses 41-42). They believed through the words of Jesus alone. The royal official required evidence. When he realised that his son had recovered at the hour when Jesus had said to him “your son will live”, he also believed, along with his whole household (John 4.52-53). I agree with Hodges (1991:142) that:

No case can be constructed from the Gospel of John that a faith resting on signs is ineffectual or unregenerating. On the contrary, the signs function as aids to faith and are interwoven into the narrative for that very purpose. On the other hand, it is equally plain that those who exercise faith apart from actually seeing these signs are deserving of special commendation and it would hardly be surprising if such persons were more prepared for further illumination than those to whom faith came only in response to visible miracles.

Thomas is to be taken, towards the end of the Gospel, as the final example in John’s Gospel of the person requiring visible experience to arouse faith in the name of Jesus. The Samaritans are an example of faith based on Jesus’s words alone. Yet the Galileans who, in John 4.45, welcome Jesus, since they have seen all that he has done in Jerusalem at the festival, are acceptable to him.

The last example to be mentioned is of Nicodemus who, impressed by the signs, furtively approached Jesus by night (John 3). In the conversation, which took place between Jesus and Nicodemus, he is invited to believe in God’s Son and to receive eternal life as Jesus would ask anybody else. It seems that Nicodemus was a disciple “in secret” like Joseph of Arimathea, who is depicted as “a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews” (John 19.39). Both are associated with the burial of Jesus in John 19.38-42. It seems that the writer, towards the end of his writing wants to make it clear the kind of faith which is acceptable and not in John’s outlook. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, in Hodges’s understanding, illustrate the class John refers to in John 12.42-43 as believing rulers who, during the Lord’s earthly life at least, suppressed any testimony to their faith (1991:150) for fear of the Pharisees who had agreed to put out of the synagogue anyone who believed in Jesus. Given that the story of Nicodemus is structurally bound to John 2.23-25, we can conclude that the kind of faith unacceptable to Jesus is not the faith based on signs, otherwise Thomas’s faith could not be accepted but the faith of those who, having no courage to face opposition and persecution, do not dare to confess their commitment of faith in the name of Jesus. The Gospel of John clearly states that it was especially at Jerusalem that the Jewish leadership exerted strong pressures

against any open allegiance to Jesus. In John 7.13 the evangelist reports that “no one would speak about him for fear of the Jews” and in 9.22, the parents of the blind man did not dare assert boldly who opened their son’s eyes because the Pharisees “agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue.” It seems legitimate to conclude that the new believers of John 2.23, being in Jerusalem, were tempted – like Nicodemus – to make little or nothing by way of a public expression of their faith. Jesus, as he “himself knew what was in everyone” (verse 25), did not entrust himself to them. Within the framework of the Johannine presentation, the kind of faith unaccepted by Jesus is not the faith based on signs, but the faith of those who, having no courage to face opposition and persecution – be it from Jewish leaders or from Roman Imperial ideology – do not dare to confess their commitment of faith in the name of Jesus. In John’s presentation of “faith/to believe”, those who believe have to confront opposition, the belief in itself being a way of life while those who, including “disciples in secret” are not to be seen as believers; they are not different from “the Jews”, for both seek to safeguard their advantages by remaining members of the synagogues.

The difference between these two types of belief, as it is here explained, creates an exegetical problem especially when the issue of “belief” is placed in relation to modern Western thinking about religion. The English term “belief” etymologically<sup>108</sup> defined on the philosophical plane and in European religious traditions is understood in relation to another term to which it stands in relationship, namely the term “knowledge.” With respect for this, the term belief is understood as follows (Lopez 1998:22):

Belief has often been portrayed as a mental state of assent to a proposition already contained in the mind, although the nature of this assent has been much debated (...) belief is often portrayed as weaker than knowledge, since one may believe something that is either factually true or false, whereas knowledge only knows what is true.

That is, the believer runs the risk of believing in something that may or may not be true. In believing what is true, one can be led to knowledge. Such an understanding of “belief/believe” leads scholars of religion to establish the causal relation between “belief” and “knowledge”, inasmuch as “belief” is a preliminary stage of knowledge that under proper circumstances can

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<sup>108</sup> The term “belief”, according to Needham quoted by Lopez (1998:22), can be traced back to the Old High German *gilouben*, meaning to hold dear, cherish, trust in. The Germanic *laub* is related to the Indo-European *leubh-*, meaning love or desire. Hence, the English *‘libidi-nous*”, “love”, “believe”; the Latin *lubet* (he is pleased by); the Italian *libito* (will, desire); the German *lieb* (dear), *lieben* (to love), *loben* (to praise),

evolve into knowledge (Lopez 1998:23). By attending to what Smith, quoted by Lopez (1998:23) says, “to believe (*credere*) is to believe in what is true; if its object is not true, it cannot be faith (*fides*)”, one may understand how the evidence of what is believed plays an important role in analyzing the behaviour of the believers. One may, for instance, refer to the Dominican Martyrologies in which the story of Peter the so-called martyr is encountered, who fought against the Cathars,<sup>109</sup> his parents included. These believed that there are two gods, a good god of spirit and an evil god of matter (see Lopez 1998:24), a belief to which Peter opposed “I believe in God” related to this Apostles’s creed “I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth.” Peter became the first martyr of the Dominicans and the patron saint of the Inquisition which was practiced by the Catholic Church, claiming to fight against heresy. In spite of the Church’s powerful attempts to obscure the circumstances of this death, curiously, Peter, who believes in one God, is martyred by the Cathars, who believe in two. That is, Lopez observes (1998:26), “his *credo* is written in blood, on the ground, in a specific time, and in a specific place.” In my view, the evidence of the object and the sense of the belief is to be viewed in the “loyalty” of the believer. Malina and Rohrbaugh are not wrong, when they portray the believers as “clients” while God, in whom they believe, is their “patron” to whom they owe in return total loyalty and public acknowledgment of honour (1998:119). In this respect, it is easy to argue that the understanding of belief/believe (*pistis/pisteuein*) still prevalent in commentaries could become an outdated understanding of the faith as saving knowledge. In Certeau’s understanding quoted by Lopez (1998:28), there is an interaction between God and the believer which is to be otherwise perceived, in these words “the believer, in a position of inferiority in relation to the object of belief (...), gives something away in the hope of getting something back, not now, but sometime in the future. “The ‘believer’ abandons a present advantage or some of its claims, to give credit to the receiver.” Such a contract led Peter to die for his belief hoping to be delivered into the eternal presence of God. In a world where identity is determined by social interaction (superior/inferior, patron/client), *pistis/pisteuein* are probably to be taken in a socially interactive sense as “loyalty”, and a term that evokes discipleship.

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*glauben* (to believe). From the multivalence of the root, it seems that belief itself implies to believe what one knows to be untrue and not to believe what one knows to be true.

<sup>109</sup> The Cathars, as a dissident group in Catholicism in the thirteenth century, held that the material world, including the body, is the creation of the evil god. They rejected involvement with the world, abstaining from marriage and food that resulted from procreation (meat, eggs, dairy, and dairy products). In spite of this kind of belief, they considered themselves as Christians, rejecting, at the same time, the doctrines of the virgin birth, physical resurrection, and sacraments. And the practice of severe ascetism, which was entailed in their doctrine was not demanded of all but was limited to a select group of virtuosi known as the “*perfect*” (Lopez 1998:25). In this respect, the Cathars were simply an esoteric group.



Peter played a leading role in the inquisition in northern Italy, and zealously attacked the faith of his family and persecuted those who professed it. This mission led to the imprisonment and the confiscation of the property of many Cathars (see Lopez 1998:26). His confession of faith and the risk he ran of persecution make him comparable to the man born blind in John 9, who, in the way of faith, stands alone, likewise without his parents, who fear to affront “the Jews” in order to keep their present advantageous membership of the Synagogue. The formerly blind man zealously attacks the faith of the synagogue’s leaders, abandoning the present advantage in order to give credit to Jesus, revealed to him as the Son of Man. The formerly blind man may be compared to Peter the martyr on the ethical plane as well in relation to their loyalty, inasmuch as his belief in Jesus led the Jewish leaders to exclude him, and other Christians, from the Synagogues. The faith of both is not to be seen as saving knowledge but rather a belief that evolved in knowledge,<sup>110</sup> a faith that is committed to publicly confessing itself, and ready to run the risk of persecution, even death. Such a commitment is total loyalty to God. It may be argued that, in John’s view, all the signs to which the Gospel refers are intended to generate belief in order to better “maintain life” with a loyal commitment to Jesus Christ as Son of God in the troubled world.

Jesus asks the healed man if he believes “into” the Son of Man. The idea of believing “into” Jesus, in John’s anti-language, according to Malina (1998:173), implies loyalty of a high order. In other words, Jesus is asking the healed man whether he is prepared to be “a part of his anti-society.” In Malina’s view, the expression “believing into”, is a characteristic Johannine idiom, which implies trust rather than simple intellectual assent; it recalls the collectivist character of relationships in ancient Mediterranean societies, where collectivist persons become embedded in one another (1998:130). The unity or loyalty, which ought to characterise the believer, was this kind of long-term solidarity with Jesus in the deepest relationships. When Jesus announced that he was the Son of man, the response of the man born blind was to worship him, for he was aware that he was in the presence of the deity. In Jewish tradition, it was “unconscionable to ascribe the traits of deity to a man and to worship him” (Koester 2003:109). Therefore, by worshipping Jesus, the formerly blind man acknowledges the divinity of Jesus and this event took place outside the synagogue. Such a practice recalls the fact that, in the Mediterranean

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<sup>110</sup> John’s rhetoric demonstrates that the blind man progresses in his knowledge of Jesus, as I already sufficiently dealt with. In that perspective, it is not surprising to see Jesus who, towards the end of the narrative, meets once again the formerly blind man in order to deepen his faith, establishing, so to speak a link between the miracle of recovering sight and the very word of Jesus.

world, the patron was called lord by the client and by the gesture of “worship”, and he offers a traditional gesture associated with patronage, that is, the gesture of falling down before a person and kissing the hem of his garment, his feet, or the ground on which he walks. This posture was a means for the clients to ask favours of a patron (Malina 1998:174).

While the worship had to take place in the Temple, the man, surprisingly, is shown worshipping Jesus where he encounters him. The writer, as I have stressed earlier, strives to demonstrate how, in the Son of Man, a “delocalisation” of “divine reality” operates, away from the temple or other sacred places such as the synagogue, and finds a new localisation in Jesus himself. Jesus, in John’s perspective, is the answer to the catastrophe of the fall of the temple of 70 CE. He is “the new Temple” that replaces the Temple of Jerusalem, already destroyed, and Jesus becomes the site of the encounter between God and human beings. Henceforth, only in Jesus is access to the divine made possible and not any longer via a sacred place in and of itself. Jesus is depicted as the entrepreneur who does not require a formal place of worship, and who may be worshipped anywhere. Any place is sacred insofar as wherever the holy man is, there is the sacred place, not only in which to encounter the divine, but also to worship the one who represents or mediates him. In interpreting the story of the man born blind in John 9, we have to bear in mind the fact that, although he was a beneficiary of the gift of sight, he came to faith in Jesus, yet this kind of faith needed to be fulfilled by meeting Jesus once again and hearing his words. While he had already confessed his faith in Jesus as a Prophet, a man from God, he needed to know that Jesus was not to be seen merely as a Prophet like Moses, but rather to be acknowledged as the Son of Man. Then, he believed in (*pisteuein eis*) the Son of man. The sign of healed sight and the words of Jesus are connected, and lead the healed man born blind to faith. His faith became true faith, in John’s view, as he faced the opposition of Jewish leaders, and ran the risk of expulsion from the synagogue.

Coming to faith in Jesus, in John’s Gospel, needs to be seen as a “change in social location” for to believe is to move from the world, particularly the world of Judaism mediated by the synagogue, and to join the Johannine community (Meeks 1986:193). It means “a removal from the world”, and transferral to a community, which has “totalistic and exclusive claims” (Meeks 1986:194). That is to say that the Johannine community constitutes a counter-cultural group or at least establishes some ambivalent relationship between it and the larger society. What is meant by a “counter-cultural group”? In my view, this ambivalent world comprised the pagan Graeco-Roman world and the religious world of the Jews and those secret believers who

remained in the synagogue even though they secretly acknowledged Jesus as Christ. The Johannine community, conscious of its alienation from the larger society, was concerned to develop its own Christological claims which, naturally, they projected into the story of Jesus of Nazareth.

Meek's understanding of the Johannine community and the Jewish synagogues as well, tied them to a kind of sectarian group in terms of their exclusivity. Though such an exclusivity could be contested, in certain measure, as Wilson (1996:1) and Kloppenborg (1996:16-7) point out, by considering that all the associations of the Graeco-Roman world (synagogues, households, schools of philosophy, collegiums, guilds, mystery cults, etc.) were "voluntary associations."<sup>111</sup> Many associations were organized in a manner that both reflected and reinforced the existing social order, for example family or household cults (Wilson 1996:2). Kloppenborg reinforces such an idea by asserting that "voluntary associations represented a cultural institution integral to Hellenistic and Roman society where they played a significant role in mediating various kinds of social exchange" (1996:16). In Harland's view (2003:179), moreover, "Christianity did not live in a vacuum, isolated from the rest of the Graeco-Roman society; rather, once established in the polis of Roman Empire, the Christian group "belongs inevitably, as a social phenomenon, to the Hellenistic republics", since thinking and behaviour reflect the social institutions of these states. Despite all the similarities shared by these groups or associations, there were some differences – in ideology, organization, membership, and purpose – among them (Wilson 1996:9), and these groups can usefully be considered together as part of a broad social phenomenon. It seems most appropriate, according to Kloppenborg (1996:26), to distinguish voluntary associations on the basis of their respective membership bases rather than on the basis of their ostensible functions. For him, three groups could be distinguished:

- Those associated with a household;
- Those formed around a common trade (and civic locale), and
- Those formed around the cult of a deity.

The associations based on a household, Wilson observes (1996:14), were simply an expression of family life and not a substitute for it. People were grouped in association when "they share things in common – devotion to a deity, a trade or skill, a similar background, or even just a love

of eating and drinking in good company” (Wilson 1996:14). In this respect, the Jewish Synagogues and Christian movements – and to some extent philosophical schools – made exclusive demands on the loyalty of their members; and exclusivity, in my opinion, which must not be perceived in relation to broad society since they functioned as all other associations, but in relation to their exclusivity which is founded in the loyalty to the deity,<sup>112</sup> the patron of the association, to whom they adhere.

While a sect has to be considered as a “deviant” group, to use Wilson’s term, primarily characterised by tension with society, the typical Diaspora Jewish group and Christian community whose members were in “interaction with society” or “outsiders” (Harland 2003:190), are in some respects not to be viewed as sectarian groups but rather as “minority cultural groups with a distinctive cultural complex (a specific configuration of various social and cultural factors, traits, values, and practices)”, resulting, according to Harland (2003:195-6), from a Jewish world view and way of life. Both Jews and Christians lived apart as minority cultural groups because of their unusual monotheism, that is, devotion to one god to the exclusion of others, in a predominantly polytheistic society. In my opinion, it is only in that perspective that one may understand the “exclusivity” of the Christian community that Meeks seems to have overemphasized by considering both Jewish and Christian groups as “exclusive and totalistic” in such a way that they were isolated from the Graeco-Roman environment, asserting, so to speak, their uniqueness and incomparability to other groups (see Harland 2003:182-3). As Harland points rightly out (2003:198), “monotheism was a key distinguishing factor in the case of Christian (and Jewish) cultural groups.” Both Christian and Jewish groups have undeniably participated in civic life, even if as Trebilco observes (1991:187) “the dominant tendency of Diaspora Jewry was to live as loyal subjects of their gentile masters and participate in the culture and society as fully as possible within the constraints of their religious tradition.”

The Jewish participation in civic life, as Harland comments (2003:201-10) possessed three main features that may be summarised as follows:

- participating within the central socio-cultural institutions of the polis, for Jews could

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<sup>111</sup> According to Wilson (1996:1), the distinction between voluntary and involuntary associations cannot be too rigid insofar as membership in a synagogue, family cult, or trade guild was not, for different reasons, more or less obligatory.

also participate in the activities of the gymnasium, in forming age-group associations or joining those that already existed;

- secondly, some Jewish groups actively participated within civic networks of benefaction in a manner comparable to other associations, which could also involve interaction with the principal institutions. At Sardis, for example, the civic institutions provided the Jewish group with a place to meet. This synagogue illustrates well the ways in which a Jewish group could, quite literally, find a place for itself within the polis. As an institution common to many cities in Asia Minor, the bath-gymnasium was a place of education and athletics, as well as a place to gather, socialize, honour gods, exercise, and, of course, bathe.
- Thirdly, the Jews were involved or connected with other subgroups. Jews, for instance, are associated with such groups as physicians, shippers and artisans.

It is obvious that the Jewish and Christian groups were at home in the Graeco-Roman world since these groups lived and developed within similar civic settings. We may conclude with Harland (2003:212) that it is not surprising that such congregations and synagogues were, like the local devotees of Zeus or Dionysos or the guild or purple-dyers, relatively small, unofficial groups that assembled regularly to socialise, share communal meals, and honour both their earthly and their divine benefactors. In this respect, the Johannine community like other Christian groups could be taken as “atheists” because they insisted that only their god and no one else’s deserved recognition or honour in the polytheistic world. Their distinctiveness is reinforced by their worldview resulting from their monotheism which implies another way of life. To believe in Jesus as Son of God, in the Johannine community, is to see the deity revealed in Jesus; a view implicating another way of life in a troubled ideological world. The issue of such a world view divided Jews and Christians. For the sake of monotheism, Jews persecuted Christians, even killed them and Roman ideology considered them as “atheists.” Christians, moreover, envisioned the deity as present in Jesus the Son of Man.

#### **4.4 Sin and judgment in John 9**

The issue of sin and judgment cannot be seen as less important in the unfolding of the story of the healing of the man born blind. In my view, the story seems to have been framed to clarify this

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<sup>112</sup> The link between patrons and associations could have a political dimension, as when members were called out to support their patron for political office (the Isis cult at Pompeii; Isodorus in Alexandria, for

issue. At the beginning of the narrative, the disciples express this concern: “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind?” Jesus answered: “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him” (v. 2-3). In the middle of the narrative, Jesus is depicted as a sinner – he is not from God – for not observing the Sabbath (see vv. 16, 24). At the end, the issue reappears: “Jesus said to them, ‘If you were blind, you would not have sinned. But now that you say, ‘We see’, your sin remains” (v. 41). The question of the disciples, whom the evangelist frequently introduces into the narrative, argues Painter (1991:268), provides the opportunity for the use of the key sayings of Jesus in 9.4-5: “We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” At the same time, this raises the problem, in a Jewish context, of the relation between sin and sickness. Although Jesus did not deny the connection established as such, he asserted that the blindness of the man was to serve the purpose of God, linking the themes of sight and blindness with the symbols light and darkness in relation to John 11.9-10. The same link is established between physical and spiritual blindness.

The concern to know “who sinned” may be seen, in Van Doren’s view (1981:791), as “a Pythagorean idea of the *Metempsychosis*, or transmigration of souls” held by some Jews. The dogma established a link between sin and suffering. From the Old Testament, the rabbis deduced that the punishment for sins of parents is visited on their children (Lenski 1942:675; Carson 1991:361). Old Testament references to punishment of children for the sin of their parents (Exodus 20.5; 34.7; Numbers 14.18; Deuteronomy 5.9; Jeremy 31.29-30; Ezekiel 28.2; Tobit 3.3-4) were probably grounded on a foundational story of Jacob and Esau (see Genesis 25.22) which shows that it was held that a child could sin in the mother’s womb, an alternative emphasising the pre-existence of soul “which made its entry into Judaism from Hellenism” (Schnackenburg 1980b:241). To the time of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, there was an opposition in the idea according to which children have to pay for the sins of their parents. The question of the disciples of Jesus is grounded on the rabbinical view, according to which there is no death without sin and no suffering without guilt (see Ps 89.33). The questioners and those who stand behind Jesus’s interlocutors, show that early Christian disciples are oppressed by a problem about which they did not know enough or about which they did not find a satisfactory answer. In my opinion, Jesus did not view sin as an ontological reality but, rather, a reality deeply rooted in unbelief. Sin is not natural, but rather it is the unbelief displayed in those who reject the

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instance) [see Wilson 1996:2]

revelation brought by the Son of man to earth.

Jesus the Son of Man is the true light shining in the world so that those who are conscious of being blind (who do not see) may see when they believe in the Son of Man. And those who claim to see, though unwilling to believe, may become blind and thus judged. When John reports that the healed man was sought by Jesus so that he might “believe in the Son of Man” (v. 35), and not remain blind like the sighted Pharisees (v. 40-41), it is possible that, for John’s group, part of their “therapy involved sharing in attachment to Jesus with the rest of the group” (Malina 1998:176). To claim to see, or to pretend to be illuminated with the light of the Law, as interpreted by the Jewish tradition grounded upon Moses, is the true sin, which calls forth judgment.

### SUMMARY

This chapter deals with the conflict at the time that John’s Gospel was written, between the followers of Moses and of Jesus. This last chapter, I would like to stress, concentrates on the revelation brought by either Moses or Jesus, in order to show how the Christian Church-Synagogue controversy that took place towards the end of the first century, led to a polemical perception of Jesus. The Sabbath controversy provided the opportunity for the evangelist to assert, in John 9, the unity of Jesus with the Father, whose prerogative it is to work uninterruptedly on the Sabbath, is incontestable. These Sabbath conflicts are to be viewed as “simply a reflection of the Johannine Christians’ effort to convince their opponents of the truthfulness of their claims about Jesus within the context of the post-70 period” (Asiedu-Peprah 2001:227). By doing so, the evangelist endeavours to persuade his audience that Jesus is the Christ and to disillusion “the Jews” who proudly stand by Moses.

Moses was considered as God’s emissary, agent or vice-regent on earth. It is from this point of view that Moses, in Jewish tradition, has been exalted as “the center of their religious concerns, as the intermediary, in some sense, between them and God” (Meeks 1967:286). The ascent to the mountain was an ascent to heaven to receive the *Torah*. When Jesus is presented as a “Prophet like Moses”, there is reference to the tradition, but the evangelist has modified it anew. The unexpected movement from Moses to the Son of Man is to be taken as John’s own creation. As Son of man, Jesus, from “above”, descends “below”; he is present on the earth as a Mediator between the realm “above” and the realm “below.” In this sense, Jesus’s revelation was not

based on an ascent to heaven, as it was for the august figures of the Jewish past, but on the descent of one who pre-existed in heaven since “no one had in fact ascended to heaven in order to bring back knowledge of heavenly things, except for the one whose revelation was based not on the ascent of a human being into heaven, but on the descent of one who pre-existed in heaven to tell of what he was and experienced there” (McGrath 2001:171). Bearing that in mind, Jesus, in spite of the fact that he healed on the Sabbath, was not a sinner, but rather a “man from God”, whose origin enabled him to judge “the Jews” who accused him of being a sinner. Neither the man born blind, nor his parents sinned.



## FINAL CONCLUDING REMARKS

This study aimed to investigate, by using the socio-rhetorical approach and literature from Jewish and Christian circles and the Mediterranean world, how the Jewish-Christian conflict that took place during the formative period of early Christianity, and contemporary to the writing of John was shaped around three main questions to which we endeavoured to give answers as follows:

Who is the revealer of God, Moses or Jesus? It should be noted that John's Gospel endeavours to give priority of place and authority to Jesus – and, respectfully, not to Moses – even though Moses's worth was grounded upon the Law given to him as wisdom to communicate to people of God. Jesus further is God's wisdom which is revealed in history in his persona. John's presentation of Jesus is polemical since it is not enough to ascend into heaven – as it was held for the heavenly revealers like Enoch – to bring back revelation. Jesus is the only one who descended as exclusive revealer of heavenly things. As Son of Man, he contrasts with Moses, Enoch and others. In order to manage this, in John's presentation, Jesus is placed in an original Christological setting inasmuch as he moves from the portrayal of Jesus as "Prophet like Moses" to Jesus as "the Son of Man." It is because Jesus is the Son of Man coming from above to below, present on earth, so that he might mediate between heavenly and terrestrial realities and thus the only one able to communicate the true knowledge of God. Beyond Moses, Jesus is shown as the legitimate supplanter of Moses, for, according to Kealey (1997:733), he has "a position almost of equality with

- God", for John's answer is that it is not "Moses, but Jesus [who] is the equal of God and the supreme revelation." As Son of Man on earth, Jesus can no longer be viewed as an apocalyptic figure in relation to Jewish expectation.
- To the question of who is the heretic? Neither Moses nor Jesus is a heretic. It is incontestable that Moses received from God the Law which, in the light of Jesus's coming, is no longer to be regarded as the source of life. The Law is no longer to be regarded as playing a decisive role. The Law, asserts John in polemical view, bears witness to Jesus, the One having a unique relationship with God, the Father, and he is the only one able to reveal God to the world. Though Jesus was accused of leading people astray, into worshipping a god alongside God himself, Jesus is the true Son of

God in contrast to the sons of gods of the Hellenistic world.

- Who do Moses and Jesus represent – the Synagogues and Church? While in Jewish traditions various eschatological figures were expected (Jacob's star or the Messiah of Israel, a Redeemer like Moses called "Taheb" and the Priestly Messiah or Messiah of Aaron, briefly a figure like Moses, a Prophet and Redeemer), John challenges such expectations with regard to the titles ascribed to Jesus (Light, Prophet, Man from God, Messiah, Son of Man), in presenting Jesus not only as the "Mosaic Prophet" when the signs he performed are taken into account, but also as the "Mosaic Prophet-Messiah", thus the Son of Man who came to reveal heavenly knowledge.

How therefore to know the manifestation of God in the light of John 9.24-42?

The whole exegetical study through which we have dissected the text leads one to comprehend that "the Jews" are mistaken because of their expertise is falsely construed around what they "know." Unfortunately the "Jewish leaders," because of the fine points of their theology, refuse to acknowledge Jesus as the actual means by which God reveals himself. That is why it is striking to see the writer employing, in an elastic manner, the verb "to know" or "not to know", in dealing with both the Jews and the healed man. In contrast with "the Jews", the formerly blind man, because of the unparalleled experience of recovering his sight, an experience that Jewish expertise cannot challenge, is depicted as a man convinced of the power of God manifested through Jesus in an exceptional degree. Such a miracle, for the blind man, even if it is unpleasant for "the Jews", is a sign that Jesus is the Messiah, to be known as the Son of Man. The gift of sight is nothing less than a manifestation of the divine, supported all the more by the knowledge that "never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind" (John 9.32). Such an unheard of miracle or unparalleled event leads the man to recognise Jesus as Son of Man, even Lord. John, in constructing the story of the blind man rhetorically, seems to assert that the manifestation of divinity goes through Jesus's works, as in the case of his words.

John 9.1-41 is not only "a carefully constructed story" but also "a dramatic embodiment of the clash between comfort and risk" (O'Day 1987:53-55). That is why it can lead one to conclude that the "Pharisees" reject the opportunity given to them by the healing of the blind man to move from "what they know" to "how they know." While the formerly blind man takes a risk with the divine by confessing not what he knows but how he knows the manifestation of God to him, the expert "Pharisees" are seen fighting to maintain their known world and to prevent its disruption.

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