

# JOHN 11: AUTHOR'S STYLISTIC DEVICES AND CHURCH VOCABULARY

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Prof. W. Wilkens, in his interesting article on Jn 11, has tried to delineate the whole iter behind text formation: he tried to go back to the very context that might have determined the putting together of various elements in the chapter as we now know it.<sup>1</sup> We all know that the various necessities of the Church served as a creative stimulus to compile different literary material in a way that suited the author's intention. Thus we can study the text by trying to discover the various literary units of which it is made up; ultimately our effort could take us back to the ecclesial context wherein the Gospel, or this chapter in particular, might have originated. But then another alternative could be easily offered to the attentive reader who is all intent on the correct understanding of the text; the chapter in its entirety could be made the object of study with the express purpose of coming to what is implicit behind the proper use of language.<sup>2</sup>

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- 1 Cfr. W. WILKINS, "Die Erweckung des Lazarus", *Theologische Zeitschrift*, 15(1959) 22-39: the original account, according to Wilkens, was made up of vv. 1, 3, 17, 33-34, 38-39, 40, 43-44. This material at the author's disposal was further developed by the introduction and addition of various Johannine themes.
  - 2 The Synchronic approach considers the pericope as one literary unit without taking into account the process of text formation: the study of the vocabulary within a larger context (the sentence, paragraphs, dialogues/different scenes) points to the fact that the truth-content of any text is one with its linguistic formulation. B. OLSSON is more than right when he states: "The semantic structure of a text is therefore very closely related to the intention of the author and to the message of the text": cfr. *Structure and Meaning in the Fourth Gospel* (Coniectanea Biblica New Testament Series 6; Sweden 1974) 16.

The two approaches certainly differ from one another but the intention is identical in both attempts: they serve to establish a real link between reader and author, a link that does not ignore the personal dimension of both as they carry out their distinctive roles.

In this short paper, we intend to follow the author's literary techniques, all the literary artifices at the complete service of the author who is presumably capable of communicating his own ideas. The reader could easily come to terms with the author's intention by means of the decodification of the text that is available to him. In the text as it stands within the Gospel, the author's style and personality come to the fore. But then every sacred Writer gives expression to the faith of the community to which he belongs: hence we intend to examine both what is strictly personal and what is embedded within the community's faith-consensus.<sup>3</sup> The sacred text, just as any other literary work, is always the perfect combination of these two basic aspects: indeed Jn 11 is no exception to this. The use of language strictly belongs to the author concerned but then some of the vocabulary reveals John's indebtedness to the religious patrimony of his community. Thus in the section that immediately follows, we study the author's use of contrast, irony, delaying technique, announcement of themes, a widening process in the choice of themes, and finally the use of anti-climax.

## I. AUTHOR'S STYLE:

### a) *The Use of Contrast*

It is a fact that the author has managed to bring up various theological issues within this same chapter but this is indeed only part of the whole truth. By means of the various dialogues and the narrative account of Lazarus' resurrection, he created a system of interrelated truths that are indeed fundamental to Christian belief.<sup>4</sup>

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3 Scholars and linguists always refer to every writer's indebtedness to the cultural heritage of the community to which he belongs: in much the same way, the sacred Writer gives expression to the faith of the community of which he forms an integral part and the text itself is like a mirror where the Church's faith is best reflected.

4 The Semitic mind, one it is so concrete and realistic, engages itself in no flights of speculation; by means of this didactic narrative, the author provides an excellent exposition of the most fundamental aspects of Christian belief. Such themes as life, faith, unity of believers find their full justification and unity in Jesus, the Risen Lord! R. E. BROWN, *The Gospel according to John I-XII*, I (Garden City, New York 1966) 430: "its casual relationship to the death of Jesus is more a question of Johannine pedagogical and theological purpose than of historical reminiscence..." Cfr. also C. H. DODD, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge 1970) 363-368.

It is precisely through this unification of themes that the reader is introduced to the complexity of a page that, only at first sight, is striking for its simplicity. The author emphasizes the belief that Jesus is still present as "Life" for the one who believes in Him and yet we are told that Jesus' salvific presence among His believers is the outcome of His glorification.<sup>5</sup> It is then against this setting that Lazarus' raising becomes both the cause and the good exemplification of the effect of Jesus' death and resurrection.<sup>6</sup>

The reader of this chapter notices that the author has developed his lines of thought by creating contrast between two distinct figures and their relative interests. In verse 4, which is the very interpretative key to the chapter as a whole, Lazarus' safety coincides with the themes of *God's glory* and *Jesus' glorification* but then the use of contrast between Jesus and Lazarus is quite outstanding at least during the dialogues. During the first dialogue (vv. 7-16), the use of the place-name "Judea" fully depicts the existing contrast between Jesus' self-security and Lazarus' state of ill-health. It is through the use of this literary artifice that the author defines what it means to be with Jesus, to be His follower. The disciple has to remain in Jesus' company even if this might entail one's own death (v.16); this too is rather antithetical to Jesus' promise of life to all those who decide to remain with Him (vv.8-9).

The author avails himself of this technique also in the Jesus-Martha dialogue (vv.21-27) even if this time the effect is somewhat different. The

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- 5 BROWN, *Gospel*, 430: "... Jesus the incarnate Word gives light and life to men in his ministry as signs of the eternal life that he gives through enlightenment gained from his teaching". Cfr. also R. SCHNACKENBURG, *Il Vangelo di Giovanni II* (Paideia 1977) 659-668, but esp. 667: "Giovanni è assolutamente cosciente che soltanto dopo quell'ora della glorificazione Gesu' acquista il potere di donare agli uomini la vita eterna (cfr. 7,39)". J.P. MARTIN in his article "History and Eschatology in The Lazarus Narrative John II,1-44", *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 17(1964) 332-343, but esp.341f: "It is because of the Resurrection of Jesus that the raising of Lazarus was remembered as a sign speaking to the need of the early Church, and a sign of the promise of the Last Day".
- 6 The fact that the raising account and Lazarus, as a type of the christian believer, have such a double perspective could be well explained by following Martin's intuitive suggestions. "The history of Jesus as promise is fulfilled in the history of the Church. But since John never regards the work of Christ as complete before the Parousia, the History of the Church is itself promise of the ultimate fulfilment in Parousia, Resurrection and Judgement": cfr. "History and Eschatology", 333.

contrast is created by means of the sudden shift from Martha's Lazarus-centred discourse to Jesus' self-manifestation in v.25: Martha's concluding confession (v.27) shown to what extent the author managed to achieve its goal through such a literary device. Ultimately Lazarus' episode is rather subservient to the basic theme of Jesus' meaningful presence within the present stage of salvation history.<sup>7</sup> The author is also underlining the "proprium and distinctivum" of the Christian faith as against the tenets of the Jewish Credo as announced by Martha (cfr. vv. 22-24). This technique occurs once again during the Jesus-Mary encounter especially when the Jews think that the second sister is on her way to the grave (v.31). The very contrary is true: she is on her way towards Jesus, the One who had just defined Himself as "*resurrection and life*" (v.25). The literary device serves to emphasize Jesus' presence in terms of "life" immediately before the actual performance of the miracle. Still the contrast creates a certain link between the scenes/encounters of the two sisters with Jesus.<sup>8</sup>

But we still think that this is also true of the two final scenes in Jn 11. The prayer, before Lazarus' raising (vv. 41-42), proves that the sign is meant to draw the audience's attention away from Lazarus onto Jesus Himself: He is to be recognised as "the One sent by the Father" and hence to be accepted in faith.<sup>9</sup> In the last scene, during the Council session (vv.47-51), we notice both the complete absence of Lazarus' name and the existence of two conflicting interests, that of Jesus and His own nation. Jesus' own death is proposed as the only guarantee for the nation's security. Reflection on Caiaphas' statement has led the author to give an accurate definition of the meaning of Jesus' death through the employment of such an effective contrast.

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7 MARTIN, "History and Eschatology", 342: "...the raising of Lazarus is utterly meaningless apart from the Resurrection of Jesus".

8 We are under the impression that, during Jesus' dialogues with His disciples, Martha and Mary, the usual Johannine themes of light and life, come to the fore. There is an evident sequence: light (vv. 9-10) — life (vv. 25-26) — light (equivalent expression, v.37). This sequence takes us back to the respective coupling of both terms in the prologue (1,4) with the only difference that in Jn 11 these stand out against the occurrence of Lazarus' death.

9 It is important to insist on the theme of faith; it is spelled large throughout the whole chapter and it expresses Jesus' intention (cfr. vv. 15. 26. 40. 42) behind the performance of this miracle. Also the author (v.45) and the Jewish Council speak in terms of faith (v.48: cfr the second part of this paper). The object of this faith is well brought out in Martha's confession (v.27) and in Jesus' prayer (v.42).

Before we pass on to speak in terms of irony, we say a word on the two sisters themselves. Very often commentators spoke of Martha and Mary as if they were engaged in some sort of a contrast: a close look at the text itself shows that the terms of comparison lie elsewhere.<sup>10</sup> More than between the two sisters themselves, the author draws a certain contrast between Jesus' self-revelatory word and the sign itself.<sup>11</sup> Verse 40 goes a long way to explain the necessity of existing faith as a prerequisite for the correct interpretation of this particular sign. Perhaps one might say that this chapter anticipates the concluding statement in Jn 20,31 where faith is the personal response to the Word proclaimed by Jesus and His Church.

### b) *The use of Irony*

Once rhetoricians of the past classically defined irony as "tropus per contraria quod conatur extendens" and once it is so frequent in John's Gospel, we now consider its occurrence within ch.11 quite in line with what we have said above.<sup>12</sup> By means of irony, the reader is led to go in one direction whereas the author wants to stress the truth that lies at the very opposite end: in a way, irony is intimately associated with the theme of contrast and much of what we have to say is but the follow-up of the previous section.

The first consideration that should be brought up is the fact of Jesus' deliberate delay (v.6) immediately after the affirmation of His love towards the three family members in v.5. Jesus expresses His love through the fact of His absence when we know for sure that the very opposite is true and that is what the author is after. The Johannine Jesus is prompt to act in favour of those who have some physical need, still the response is always the outcome of Jesus' free deliberation.

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- 10 Those who speak of existing contrast between Martha and Mary, do so in the light of Lk 10,38-42. John has given an important role to both: there is no contrast between Martha's confession and Mary's anointing episode. Cfr. SCHNACKENBURG, *Vangelo*, 547, and BROWN, *Gospel*, 433.
- 11 Both words and signs are employed to reveal Jesus' person: they both serve to call new adherents-in-faith. In Jn 11, the author attaches greater importance to Jesus' words: the sign itself becomes the concrete realization of the Lord's self-revelatory statement in v.25. The author seems to say that one has to accept Jesus' word (or the Church) for its worth, for what it means without necessarily subjecting it to the test of signs. Cfr. BROWN, *Gospel*, 525-531. T.E. POLLARD, "The Raising of Lazarus (Jn.XI)", *Studia Evangelica* VI(1973) 434-443.
- 12 Cfr. E. COLEIRO, *Introduction to Latin Style and Rhetoric* (Malta 1958) 54; D.W. WEAD, *Literary Devices in John's Gospel* (Basel 1970) 54-55.

Another case of the double-edged irony occurs when Jesus requests all disciples to walk while it is still broad daylight. The disciples' preoccupation gives way to Jesus' advice which is in turn the inspiration of Thomas' statement in v.16. The disciple has nothing to worry about provided He remains in Jesus' company/presence: on the contrary, the disciple knows that his lot cannot be different from that of his Master. In this case too, irony has been used to stress the importance of Jesus' presence: ironically enough "*to walk in the light of His presence*" does not spare the disciple from having to face the same destiny even if that is the only condition that guarantees maximum security.

Martha's opening statement (v.21) points to the very opposite fact namely that "life" is possible where (and when) Jesus is present. The twice-repeated statement (cfr. vv. 21 and 31) draws our attention to the fact of Jesus' delay which, according to the sisters' lament, should be recognised as the remote cause of Lazarus' death. And yet, without understanding the full implication of their statement, the sisters anticipate the basic thesis and point-of-arrival of this chapter as a whole.<sup>13</sup> Jesus proves that His presence is indeed life-procuring through this sign that concludes this Gospel's "Semeia section".<sup>14</sup> Besides its anticipatory nature, this figure of speech facilitates the gradual unfolding of the narrative account. Through the use of irony, the author draws the reader's attention to what is central and basic in his line of thought, while he excludes what is secondary and less important.

The bystanders' comment in v.37 constitutes another case of irony: Jesus, who cured the man born-blind, is now willing to do more than is expected of Him. Jesus' intervention in favour of His dead friend by far surpasses all expectations and is indeed the most eloquent manifestation of His love for Lazarus.<sup>15</sup>

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13 The underlying thesis points to the fact that Jesus is present and that His presence is the cause of life in the believer. The sisters' introductory statements point to this fact by referring to the very opposite: death is present where Jesus is absent (lack of faith). It is important to notice the parallelism between Lazarus' death because of Jesus' initial delay and Jesus' condemnation in His absence during the Council scene (vv.47-53).

14 Cfr. BROWN, *Gospel*, 429-430; but esp. pp. cxxxviii-cxxxix.

15 Lazarus' identity is best explained in vv.3.5.11: there is a certain relationship between Lazarus and Jesus and it is in this sense that "he is to be understood as a believer in the Johannine sense of the term": MARTIN, "History and Eschatology", 336. Cfr. also BROWN, *Gospel*, 436. Thus one could affirm that the use of this literary device achieves different effects according to the various contexts concerned. But then the fact that the Council condemns Jesus to death because of His life-giving sign brings to the reader's attention the full force of this ironical situation. Jesus gives up His own life to guarantee a spiritual form of life to the one who believes in Him.

Caiaphas' statement (vv.50-52) is given such a comprehensive interpretation that it becomes the best explanation of Jesus' death. The irony lies in the fact that this all-embracing definition of the Paschal mystery's end-result is to be found on Caiaphas' lips, himself the chief representative figure of the Jewish religion. Hence ironically enough, Caiaphas' politically-oriented consideration, once it was given a universal interpretation, becomes the authoritative confirmation of the Church's activity by the time of this Gospel's final redaction. Through the use of this figure of speech, the author is indirectly defining the universalistic nature of the Church, the New Israel that has turned its attention to the salvation of both Jew and Gentile.

### *c) Delaying Technique*

Through this technique, the author draws a remarkable difference between Jesus' presence and absence.<sup>16</sup> Jesus is away from the scene of His dying friend, He chooses to delay for a couple of days and when He decides to make His way towards Judea, He Himself becomes the term of reference for both sisters. Thus while death takes hold of poor Lazarus because of Jesus' delay, the fact of the gradual approach, besides bringing all into His presence, provides the occasion for Jesus to reveal Himself for what He is. This means that there is a certain contrast between Jesus and Lazarus in that they constitute two terms of opposite reference: it is within this intervening distance that Jesus speaks of Himself as "light" and "life". And it is only after His self-revelation that Jesus finally arrives at the place of Lazarus' burial.

Still we now examine the verses that speak of the sign: the moment of Lazarus' raising is preceded by various elements that purposely delay the moment of Jesus' intervention. There is Jesus' initial command (v.39), Martha's remark (v.39) with the respective answer, Jesus' prayer to the Father (vv.41-42) and finally the Master's word of order and its execution on the part of Lazarus (vv.43-44). The use of such a technique points to the truth that the reversal of the situation is due to Jesus' life-giving presence. There is no doubt as to Lazarus' state, but then the giving of life is the prerogative of the One sent by God. Jesus' change of location from the Transjordan area to the place of Lazarus' burial is characterized by these various delays that serve an evident Christological purpose, the manifestation of Jesus in two distinct places, away from and at Lazarus' tomb.

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16 *Cfr. note 13 above: Lazarus and Jesus constitute two distinct poles. Jesus is absent but then He makes His way thereby inviting all to come into His presence; it is within this intervening space/time that He manifests Himself by word and sign.*

d) *Announcement of themes*

The text is so structured that various suggestions are taken up and developed at a later stage within the same chapter.<sup>17</sup> There is, for example, an obvious link between the first of Jesus' dialogues (vv. 7-16) and the final section of Jn 11. The Jewish Council session is the sequel to the miracle itself but it also justifies the disciples' preoccupation as expressed in v.8: indeed Jesus' condemnation by the Jewish official body is but the realization of what was just hinted at by the disciples. And yet this is not the only example, others follow to show the unity of the various elements of which this chapter is composed.

Jesus' prayer, before the actual performance of the sign, has been alluded to by Martha's opening statements (v.22): her passing remark shows that she is fully convinced of Jesus' righteousness but then she does not go beyond that. Although the reader is under the impression that she is asking Jesus to intervene, still what is going to happen goes far beyond her sense of expectation.<sup>18</sup> There is, therefore, an internal link between v.22 and v.41-42 even if the prayer is there to show Jesus' unique relationship to the Father; it is thanks to this relationship (of Jesus with the Father) that life could be bestowed on Lazarus and the respective believer.<sup>19</sup>

Verse 2 could also be considered as an example of the case-in-point even if Mary's role is taken up in Jn 12, 1-11: the first reference speaks of Mary in terms of her characteristic feature, of the action for which she was known within the Johannine community. Maybe she was the better known and the author inserted the reference in v.2 after he had constructed Martha's discourse (vv.21-27) and after he had made up his mind to speak of her anointing episode in the following chapter.<sup>20</sup> It is true that this type of reasoning remains hypothetical and subject to possible objections/criticism: still it is an indis-

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17 This is rather a psychological phenomenon present in all literatures: maybe it helps the development of one's own ideas and this is the more so when the delivery is by oral transmission. A. VANHOYE has thoroughly studied this procedure with respect to the Letter to the Hebrews: *La Structure littéraire de l'épître aux Hébreux* (Desclée de Brouwer; Brugé 1976).

18 Cfr. Jn 2, 3. 5: these verses are parallel to 11,3. 22. But this instance proves that although Jesus' intervention is earnestly solicited, He acts of His own accord. Cfr. also C.H. GIBLIN, "Suggestion, Negative Response, and Positive Action in St. John's portrayal of Jesus", *New Testament Studies*, 26(1980) 197-211, but esp. 208-210.

19 Cfr. M. WILCOX, "The 'prayer' of Jesus in John XI:41b-42", *New Testament Studies*, 24(1977) 128-132. There is a certain link between vv.27 and 42: Jesus' relationship to the Father stands out in both.

20 Of the two sisters, Mary is the better known because of her anointing episode; v.2 could be a later insertion that proves this basic fact. Then the author could speak of Martha and Lazarus against the setting of Mary, the well-known sister. We should not miss the fact that Mary holds the position of primary importance in vv.1. 2. (vv. 28 and 31). v.45. Cfr. BROWN, *Gospel*, 431. 433. 435.



putable fact that the author wanted to insert these three friends of Jesus within the last phase of His earthly life, within their Lord's Paschal mystery.<sup>21</sup>

Before we conclude this sub-section, we would like to draw the attention to Jesus' words in v.40; the verse implies that Jesus must have said something similar in a previous verse of section. It is not all that easy to establish with certainty to what it actually refers. Does it refer to the introductory verse 4 which was not uttered in Martha's presence or to vv. 25-26 where mention is made of the verb "to believe" but where there is no reference whatever to the theme of "God's glory"? We are more inclined to accept the latter probability: in that case, Martha has to remember that her confession of faith in v.27 is the necessary condition for her to understand the full implication of Jesus' last sign.<sup>22</sup>

e) *Widening process in the choice of themes*

The introductory lines of ch. 11 and its concluding scene provide the necessary example of this particular method of approach. The close examination of both sections will bring out all the common elements and the distinctive features of these two paragraphs.

It is interesting to note the structure of the first two lines in ch.11: there is an accumulation of information given according to some scale of importance. By means of a periphrastic construction, the author speaks of Lazarus' state: it is indeed the starting point that urgently calls for Jesus' intervention. It is said that Lazarus comes from "Bethany" the place of Mary and Martha: Martha is Mary's sister but then the point of contact between Lazarus and the sisters is that they all belong to the same place of origin.<sup>23</sup>

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- 21 If Brown's assertion concerning the later insertion of Jn 11 and 12 is correct, then we have to study the meaning of such terms as "friend" and "to love" also against the context of Jn 15, 13, 14, 15. The fact that the three family members are well inserted within Jesus' final phase should be kept in the reader's mind. Cfr. BROWN, *Gospel*, 427; J.N. SANDERS, "Those whom Jesus loved (John XI.5)", *New Testament Studies*, 1(1954-55) 29-41.
- 22 Cfr. SCHNACKENBURG, *Vangelo*, 551 and also V.H. NEUFELD, *The Earliest Christian Confessions* (Grand Rapids, Michigan 1963) 73.
- 23 Cfr. R.T. FORTNA, *The Gospel of Signs* (Cambridge 1970) 76: "Wilkins, following Wellhausen and Hirsch, points out that in this verse there is no suggestion of a family relationship between Lazarus and the two sisters (as in 2, 19, 21, 32, 39) and he holds that such a relationship belongs to the latest stratum of the Gospel. But C.K. BARRETT convincingly denies that Lazarus is necessarily only the neighbour of Martha and Mary in these verses. The relationship seems to be pre-Johannine, and if the wording of 1b is strange in the case of a brother and his sisters, it is perhaps due to the development of the tradition in stages somewhat as follows: - 1) Lazarus alone, 2) Lazarus and the sisters, 3) Lazarus and his sisters".

Bethany calls to mind two important factors: it lies within the vicinity of Jerusalem (v.18), the place of the Jewish authority and hence of Jesus' enemies, and it points to the fact that Lazarus' episode has been inserted within the family of the two well-known sisters. The author has given historical credibility by thus approaching Lazarus' raising to the sisters' family.<sup>24</sup>

Verse 2 speaks of Mary, the first of the two sisters mentioned in the previous statement, and her episode of the anointing; this anticipation introduces the information that she is Lazarus' sister. Thus, by inference, Lazarus is the brother of both sisters whereas Mary remains the term of reference for both Martha (v.1) and Lazarus (v.2). The concluding remark concerns the obvious insistence on Lazarus' state of health<sup>25</sup>; still Jesus' statement in v.4 is not excluding physical death but is a rather veiled reference to the sign and its aftermath.

Caiaphas' statement in vv.49-50 provides a somewhat different example of the same literary device. The high priest is interested in safeguarding the security of the nation and temple but then it is clear that the author is rereading (reinterpreting) Caiaphas' saying in the light of the wider meaning given to Jesus' death and resurrection. As we have said above and as we will say in the second part of this paper, this widening process constitutes an approval of the Church's missionary activity by Caiaphas himself.

Perhaps one could also say that the very opposite takes place in Jesus' dialogue with His disciples (vv.7-16). Jesus invites all to follow Him on His way to Judea but then it is said that He is going to arouse Lazarus from the slumber of death (v.11).<sup>26</sup> Lazarus becomes the specific goal of Jesus' determination as expressed in v.7. Thus Jesus is interested in His friend: there is an evident

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24 We believe that the sisters' mention (vv.1-2), the fact that Bethany is only a short distance away from Jerusalem and the description of the tomb itself point at the fact of an existing tradition; besides we cannot prescind from the author's attempt in creating historical verisimilitude as the framework for what he has to say! Such an information shed enough light on the personality of the author and his audience. Cfr. SCHNACKENBURG, *Vangelo*, 572.

25 Neither Lazarus' sickness nor his death is being personified and the sickness should be understood in a physical sense. In all these signs the physical intervention becomes the symbolic representation of what Jesus gives on the higher spiritual level. Still one has to say that, although spiritual life is being represented by the giving of physical life, there is a certain inter-relationship between the two realities.

26 We usually refer to this device as the "tapering approach to a definite theme", and hence the very opposite of "the widening process". Within the "Judea-Lazarus theme", the author has brought in two basic topics: Jesus' death risk and the disciple's duty to remain in Jesus' company.

parallelism between Lazarus' raising and the disciples' faith as an expression of Jesus' intention behind the performance of this sign.<sup>27</sup> The author helps us arrive at his particular points of reference through the use of this device: in spite of all the information given, the author wants to underline certain facts of interest that form part of his fundamental tenets.

#### f) *The use of anti-climax*

The last literary device, object of our study, is the use of anti-climax. As the name implies, normally it draws the reader's attention because of its sudden turn in direction: the Council scene seems to be the case. Jesus reveals Himself through the sign which becomes the point of arrival of this pericope: the reader is told that, once some of the Jews bring word to the Jewish authorities, the Council condemns Jesus because of His many signs. Jesus is, therefore, condemned because He raised Lazarus from the dead and yet it is through the mystery of His death and resurrection that life is given to the believer. The use of the anti-climax points at this fundamental aspect of Christian belief; it serves to draw a certain analogy between Lazarus and the christian who receive the gift of life through Jesus.<sup>28</sup>

## II CHURCH VOCABULARY

In this section, we take up all the vocabulary and the respective belief that is at the author's disposal: through the study and use of the word, one discovers the importance of the underlying doctrine.

The term "*koimēsis*" designates Lazarus' death; he is asleep (vv.11-12) and Jesus has to "*arouse*" His friend from the slumber of death. One could easily see the relationship between "real death" and "sleep" and could also argue in favour of the euphemistic use of such terminology in all cultures.<sup>29</sup> Still following the general context of this chapter, one arrives at the conclusion that the term "sleep" has to do with the doctrine of an after-life. Life goes on in spite of the

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27 Cfr. note 9 above; Jesus' determination has two goals: i) to raise Lazarus from death (v.11) and ii) and to solicit His disciples' faith. Jesus' prayer (vv.41-42) manifests His intention in favour of all disciples, Lazarus' family and all bystanders but then the object of faith is indeed more than explicit.

28 We have already said that Lazarus is a representative figure but now we draw the reader's attention to the sign in favour of Lazarus and to the theme of Jesus' condemnation on behalf of the whole community.

29 Cfr. R. BULTMANN, *Thanatos, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, III (Grand Rapids, Michigan 1965) 14, no 60; (This dictionary is henceforth referred to by sigla *ThDNT* also H. BALZ, *Hypnos*, *ThDNT* VIII (1972) 548. 553-554. J.H. BERNARD, *Gospel according to St. John* II (ICC, Edinburgh. 1976) 378-379.

reality of physical death: it is against this fact that spiritual life is everlasting and perpetual. It is through the giving of spiritual life that Jesus intervenes within a Johannine realised eschatology.<sup>30</sup> This consideration introduces our reflection on Jesus' explanation right after the pronouncement of the "I am" formula in v.25.

In the Jesus-Martha discourse (vv.21-27), the author opposes the doctrine of a "praesentia salutis" to the belief in a resurrection relegated to some future time according to the Jewish Credo. In verses 25b and 26, there is the official teaching of the Christian community: spiritual life is indeed the effect of one's faith in Jesus. Both one's relationship to Jesus through faith and one's spiritual life go on forever without being subject to the change of physical death. Thus physical death remains and sad lot for all believers but then it is only a change in the modality of one's existence.

Also Martha's confession reveals Jesus' real identity, shows that he is to be identified according to the canons of Jewish expectation and the formulation of faith within a Christian setting. The perfect tense of the verb "to believe" denotes her actual belonging to the christian community: she expresses her faith in Jesus as a member of the christian group of believers.<sup>31</sup> Jesus' self-revelation and all Church teaching become a constant invitation to one's increase-in-faith.

The vocabulary of the Church comes to the fore in a special way in the Council scene: the Council regrets the fact that Jesus is doing many signs and that, as a result, many are going to believe in Him. Scholars normally speak in terms of the redactor's intervention; it is very difficult to think of the Council's accusation as if it were formulated in such terms. It is rather the author who is reformulating the Council's words in the theological language of the Johannine community of faith.<sup>32</sup> The sign, as much as elsewhere in John's Gospel, serves to define the rich personality of Jesus; the fact that people come to Jesus and that He manifests Himself through signs points to the Church's constant effort in presenting Him with the express intention of gaining a greater number of adherents to the faith. It is against this basic truth that the Council's use of "semëia" (v.48) makes sense.<sup>33</sup>

30 Cfr. the excursus on the theme of *realized eschatology* in SCHNACKENBURG, *Vangelo*, 699-717.

31 SCHNACKENBURG, *Vangelo*, 552; and also BROWN, *Gospel*, 433: "the same titles used in early Christian professions of faith".

32 John's Gospel reinterprets Jesus' events and teaching in the light of the community's theology and spiritual needs but this does not mean that the writer invents freely what he has to say! Cfr. J.L. MARTYN, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (New York 1968)

33 We are indebted to BROWN's considerations in *Gospel*, 442-444: SCHNACKENBURG, *Vangelo*, 590: "in questo brano traspare chiaramente la tendenza teologica dell'evangelista ed anche lo stile è assolutamente giovanneo". We are not denying this; we are only saying that these themes were handed over to him by his community.

But then also the beneficiaries of Jesus' death and resurrection are well described in the final scene of ch.11: one has to examine the exact meaning of such words as "*ethnos*" (vv. 48. 50. 51. 52)<sup>34</sup> It seems to refer to the Jewish people as a "nation"; but this is only the starting point once other words of a similar meaning occur in this same section. In v.50 both "*ethnos*" and "*laos*" are used and it is obvious that more than a stylistic difference is implied.<sup>35</sup> Scholars have always maintained that "*laos*" refers to the liturgical assembly of all believers; if that is the case, there still remains the question whether this assembly is made up of both Jew and Gentile or whether it is made up of Jews alone. Still such a difference shows the author's use of this vocabulary that expresses the concrete reality of John's community.

We believe that the expression "*ta tekna tou theou ta diaskorpismena*" (v.52) refers not only to the believing Jews of the diaspora but to all believers both Jew and Gentile.<sup>36</sup> This expression then becomes a further elucidation of the term *ethnos* and it shows that the unifying factor is no longer based on ethnic reality but on the fact of faith in the one Lord. Hence the underlying community is rather heterogeneous and is being indirectly opposed to the monolithic reality of Israel. The fact that Caiaphas' words are being interpreted in the light of the existing reality might have served a double purpose: it could be the confirmation of the Church's activity at a time of some internal conflict.<sup>37</sup> The high priest's dictum could have exercised an appeasing, healthy influence; the Church is now

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34 Cfr. K.L. SCHMIDT, "*Ethnos*", *ThDNT*, II (1964) 369-372: "It is curious that the Fourth Gospel does not use "*ethnē*" for Gentiles. The explanation is that in this Gospel the Jews in their obduracy are.....to be addressed as "*ethnē*" (p. 371).

35 H. STRATHMANN, *Laos*, *ThDNT*, IV (1967) 52-57; cfr. also BERNARD, *Gospel*, 405.

36 Cfr. Jn 1,12; it seems an obvious reference to Jer 31,8-11. Cfr. BROWN, *Gospel*, 442: "Verse 52 expands the scope of the prophecy to include the Gentiles as well". Cfr. also C.H. DODD, "The Prophecy of Caiaphas (John XI, 47-53)", *Neotestamentica et Patristica* (E.J. BRILL, Laden 1962) 134-143.

37 Cfr. R.E. BROWN, *La Comunità del discepolo prediletto* (Assisi 1982) 61-65. In Jn 9 there is an evident contrast between the Church and the synagogue whereas in ch.11 there may be a certain conflict within the Church itself especially among Christians of a different provenance. Perhaps we ought to envisage Martha's sudden shift from her Jewish Credo against such an affirmation!

open to all people who come to Jesus in faith and it is to this reality that Caiaphas gives full expression through His saying.

Also the very “*apothnēskō*” with the preposition “*huper*” is indeed a theological formulation that brings out the meaning of Jesus’ death.<sup>38</sup>

We end this paper by saying that the biblical author’s starting point was the profound reflection on the meaning of Jesus’ death and resurrection and the reality of the Church. By means of the narrative account of Lazarus’ raising and Caiaphas’ statement the author expressed the idea that Jesus gives “life” “by laying down” His own<sup>39</sup>; this life is available to the one who approaches Him in faith and that the Church is the union of all its members with Jesus who is still present in its midst. The conclusion of this text draws a certain analogy between what happens to the individual (Lazarus) and to the group (*children of God—the Church*). The various literary devices go a long way to explain the personal ability in his personal approach to what was the doctrinal heritage of his community and the primitive Church.

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38 Cfr. BERNARD, *Gospel*, 406. Cfr. also J. JEREMIAS, *New Testament Theology* (London 1975) 276-298. The author who uses this important formula twice (vv.51-52) sees the Church’s reality, the unity of all its members, in a strict relationship with the mystery of Jesus’ death and exaltation on the Cross. Jesus not only dies to spare His nation (and temple) but to realize the mystery of the Church’s unity. All this theology has been reread into Caiaphas’ saying; the author had this profound intuition but the doctrinal aspect (meaning of the Church and its close union with the Paschal mystery) was already part of the Church’s theology. We still think that there was some necessity that might have prompted and called for such an interpretation of the statement of Israel’s chief representative figure.

39 Throughout the whole chapter we notice that the themes of life depends on faith; faith itself establishes a strict relationship with Jesus, the risen Lord! But then the unity of all believers among themselves and with Jesus constitutes the best definition of the Church in the Johannine Writings: cfr BROWN, *Gospel*, 443.