

THE ROLE OF THE HUMAN BODY IN THE LIGHT OF THE FOURTH GOSPEL (Jn 1: 9-14.): AN EXEGETICAL REFLECTION

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Abstract

The prologue of Saint John's gospel affirms the reality of the Incarnation. It would not have been possible for the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity to coexist with us without voluntarily taking on our nature (Phil 2: 6-7) - the human body. He shared the human condition; except sin, and thus sympathize with our infirmities. We are bodily beings, men and women for eternity. In the words, there are truths which man is obliged to accept not because they are graspable but because these truths are required, and man is bound to accept them. These truths are called "mystery." Among these obvious truths, the incarnation occupies a place of honor. By implication, the human body is a mystery that cannot be totally fathomed, but its meaning and role can only be approximated and partially grasped. The mystery of the Incarnation authenticates the important role of the human body. St Anselm asked, "Cur Deus homo"? The answer to this question is not so simple. Is it necessary or even inevitable that Jesus should take the human body? Some Roman Catholic Church Theologians argues that; Jesus shared in our humanity so that we may share in His divinity. What is the role of the body such that Jesus also needed it? Reflecting on this problem posed by the Gospel of John; "Jn 1:9-14" is our entrance gate. The human body is sacred. By its Hebrew, Greek and Latin definitions, it is intertwined with the human person. My body is me. In other words, any abuse on the body is an abuse on the human person. In a similar vein, anything that undermines the integrity of the human body also underplays the dignity of the human person. The human body is not something to be used and abused as an object that has no value nor spiritual significance. Therefore, the thrust of this reflection is to identify, through exegetical methods, the role of the human body and the underlying issues in our text vis-à-vis the human body. The reflection is organized into four sections.

Keywords: Fourth Gospel, John, Human Body, Exegetical

Introduction

The incarnation is a divine act through which the Son of God took on a human body. At the appropriate time, Jesus came into the world to share the human condition, except sin, and thus sympathize with our infirmities. The Gospels each give a different aspect of the one face of the One who is the Word made flesh¹. Nevertheless, it does not always fit easily into the gospel of John without a tone, vocabulary and slow progression of thought that may confuse the reader. But no one leaves as he entered it, for he will have discovered the One who came from the Father, the Word who became flesh. The term "flesh"² in Jn 1:14 arouses the reader's curiosity and puts him in a situation of research and willingness to understand the concept, in order to avoid any ambiguity, confusion and erroneous approach.

What is the value and the role of the body for God to need it too? This is the problematic of our study. The incarnation is the foundation of our research. This article seeks to take up this problem and try to explore it in greater depth. To do this, the fourth Gospel (Jn 1:9-14) will be our gateway. The aim of this research is to identify, through exegetical methods, the role of the body and the issues underlying this concept. We divide our reflection into three sections. In the first section, we present the text analyzed. The second section deal with literary analysis. Finally, the third section focuses on theological reflection and implications around the theme of the body.

It is difficult to exhaust such a subject, given its complexity and breadth. Thereafter will notice that our work has limitations. The first is of the order of personal gaps, others are related to bibliography which we want to limit, respecting the number of pages required. The field of investigation therefore remains open to deepening and innovation by other researchers.

Presentation of Periscope

To present the periscope, we will first justify the boundaries of the periscope upstream and downstream. Then, we will present the text in not in its Greek original version but the English version.

Delimitation

Terminus a quo

As we can see, vv. 6-8 are devoted to a witness to the Light: the character of John the Baptist, who came to bear witness to the Light, which is not himself, the Light. The

¹PUCOUTA, P. (2011). *When the God's Word Visits Africa. Plural reading of the Bible*. Paris: Karthala.p. 15.

² Apart from the quotations, we put in quotation marks the words we want to highlight.

disappearance of John the Baptist in v. 9 marks the beginning of another sequence. Thematically, in v. 9, the appearance of "the" for the first time, at the beginning of a verse, situates the reader in the theme of the light which was "Logos" and which is separated by the vv. 6-8. Moreover, it is no longer a question of the testimony of John the Baptist, but of the Word "Logos" himself, who is the Light that came into the world.

In vv. 6-8, the author uses much more the aorist and the imperfect. These verbal tenses are part of the narrative. This gives us the impression that the vv. 6-8 constitute a narrative. However, from v. 9, these verbal tenses disappeared and we enter a new literary genre: poetry. In the same vein, it can be said that in v. 9, the hymn of the "Logos" which is interrupted by vv. 6-8 begins again. However, some exegetes prefer to attach v. 9 to the previous section and place the beginning of the hymn to v. 10. The opinion taken here is that it is more reasonable to place v. 9 in our periscope than in the previous periscope concerning John the Baptist.³

On the linguistic front, in v. 9, one observation is necessary. "Aletheia" is one of the most used words in John's gospel. At the threshold of the periscope, this word appears for the first time as an adjective. This gives a new meaning to the Light that appears in the vv. 4-8. It is then that in v. 9, that the Light is qualified as "true". The use of this qualifier is not accidental. It aims to show that this Word is not any light; he is the authentic Light. This shift in meaning signals the beginning of a new textual unity. The logical, stylistic, poetic and thematic aspects allow us to consider v. 9 as *the Terminus a quo* of our periscope.

Terminus adquem

The first notion that allows us to mark the border of our periscope is logical. V.14, which places us at the heart of the mystery of the incarnation of the Word, ends, without any logical continuation to the following verse. And even v.14 is the very last to mention the term "Word." From this verse, therefore, the term "word" disappears. The descent of the "Logos" into the world, which begins in v.9, ends with its landing at v.14. The evangelist momentarily suspends his development on the witness of John in v.15, to resume the praise of the Word in v.16. This disagreement establishes a break between v.14 and v.15.

In the same vein, in v.15, we see the change of character. The author of the fourth gospel in v.15 no longer emphasizes the incarnation of the Word, but the testimony of John. This introduces a new character on stage "John". Moreover, at the literary level we note the

³Mchugh, J. F.(2009).*The International Critical Commentary John 1-4*. New York: T&T Clark International. P.28.

reappearance of the noun "Aletheia" in the genitive "aletheias" in v.⁴ 14, which appeared for the first time in v. 9, as an adjective "alethes". The reader of vs. 9-14 notes an ascending tone from v.9 to v. 14, but this does not continue into v.15.

In v. 15, the author quotes John's words for the first time⁵. This puts an end to the relationship that was to have been established between v. 14 and v.15. Just like the vv. 6-8, the author uses from v.15 the aorist and the imperfect, these verbal tenses that are used for narrative. This gives us the impression that from v.15, he changes literary genre: we pass from narrative to poem. These elements allow us to put a stop point of our periscope in v. 14.

The Text in English (John 1 :1-14)⁶

V.9. The Word was the real light that gives light to everyone; he was coming into the world.

V.10. He was in the world that had come into being through him, and the world did not recognize him.

V.11. He came to his own and his own people did not accept him.

V.12. But to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to those who believed in his name

V.13. who were born not from human stock or human desire or human will but from God himself.

V.14. The Word became flesh, he lived among us, and we saw his glory, the glory that he has from the Father as only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth."

Literature Analysis

In the previous section, we have presented the text. It is now appropriate to do literary analysis. To do this, we will study the context, the cultural background, the literary genre, the style and the semantic analysis.

Background

It is a question of establishing the link that the text maintains with the whole of the fourth gospel. Even if the text constitutes in itself a world, it has relations with distant and nearby texts⁷. The contextual study of Jn 1:9-14 makes it possible to emphasize this link.

⁴The deductive method allows us to deduce logically from v.1 to v. 4 that the Word is at the same time Life and Light. From our periscope, we find that the author attributes aletheia to the Light and to the Word.

⁵Jn 1, 30.

⁶New Jerusalem Bible

Distant Context

A careful reading of our pericope reveals that it contains the terms most used in the fourth gospel. In Jn 1:9, there is the noun "light" which is a term dear to the author. In Jn 8:12, Jesus affirms that he is the light of the world. Here we have an analeptic and proleptic relationship between Jn 1:9 and Jn 8:12 about light. Then he confirms this reality again in Jn 9:5. From the concept of "light", the thematic link that exists between our text and the whole of the fourth gospel becomes obvious.

Moreover, in Jn 1:9 "coming in the world" is a term that shows that the Word who dwells in God has overcome all division, broken all barriers, and has come into the world by making, through the mystery of the incarnation, the decisive step towards the human person. We find this reality in Jn 3:19; 6:14; 9:39; 11:27 and 18:37. Stylistically, the relationship between Jn 1:9 and Jn 8:12 concerning "the light– world" shows that the Word is the divine light that illuminates every man, without exclusion. Since the creation of the human being until the end of history, the Word is the light that is offered in the intimate part of every human being as a saving presence.

Donatien Mollat affirms that: "Faith is at the center of the fourth gospel; it is there the 'work of God', substituted for the 'works' of the Jews".⁸ Jesus calls to faith. There is also the term "faith" in our text. For example, in John 1:12, we have " ... to those who believe in his name", and we find this same reality in Jn 20:31: "... that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that you believe that you may have life in his name." In the book of signs, through the text we have chosen, Jesus penetrates the world and coexists with humanity. The Word in v. 14 becomes, by his incarnation, visible to our eyes. In the encounter between Jesus and the first disciples the gaze plays an important role. In Jn 1:29, John already "saw" Jesus coming to him. Words that appeal to vision are widely used in the book of signs.⁹ Let us list some Johannine verses that support this statement: "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29), "come and you shall see" (Jn 1:39), "... no one can see the Kingdom of God ..." (Jn 3:3), "come and see a man who has told me all that I have done ..." (Jn 4:29), "... he only does what he sees the father doing ..." (Jn 5:19), etc. This fact shows the intrinsic link between our text and the book of signs (Jn 1:19-12, 50).

The author of the fourth gospel, the glory of the Elder, in Jn 1:14 is something interior perceptible only to the man of faith (v. 12). He was given to contemplate his glory: it that

⁷"Every text is by definition relational. Not only because it holds several elements in the same discursive fabric, but also because it is at the crossroads of writing and reading." Elengabeka, E. (2009), *The Exploitation of the Scriptures. Intertextuality in the Pastoral Epistles*. Oxford: Peter Lang. p. 23.

⁸Mollat, D. (1965). "Faith in the Fourth to the prisoner », *Light and Life*: Paris: Cerf. pp. 91-107.

⁹Jn 1, 29-51.

burst forth in his speeches and works, that which shone especially in the risen R. This shows the intrinsic link between our text and the book of glory (Jn 13:1-20:31).

Nearby Context

The aim here is to show that our pericope has a strong link with the entire prologue upstream and downstream. In the upstream, we find in Jn 1, the conjugation of the verb "am" in the third person singular "was" to the imperfect indicates that in the preceding verse the person referred to was already present. Our pericope holds the link with the previous verses by the presence of a repetition of the formula "was the light" in vv. 4 and 9. These two verses refer to the Word. Then, the use of the verb "am" in v. 14 to the imperfect already indicates the pre-existence of the Word-Light which came from the world and which will incarnate in the v.14. This Word-Light raises the problem of interpretation for the vv.3 and 4 in its relationship with life.

The antithetical parallelism which exists between the v. 3 "Everything was through him and without him nothing was" and the v.10 "He was in the world, and the world was through him, and the world did not recognize him" deserves to be emphasized. The two verses which show the emphasis on the mediation of the Word are part of a stylistic feature of the fourth gospel, namely: repetition.¹⁰ Downstream, the text weaves a family-like relationship with the whole prologue, at the level of certain literary characteristics. We note a repetition of words that refer to the same character, the "Logos": "Only Son" (vv. 14 and 18), "grace and truth" (vv. 14 and 17). This already manifests a thematic link that is woven between the text and the whole emblem of the prologue.

In Jn 1:15, as we have noticed, establishes a break in the progressive contemplation of Jesus the Word who became flesh in v.14. Nevertheless, v.15 has its place after the announcement of the mystery of the incarnation in v.14; the testimony of the Baptist affirms the transcendence of Jesus¹¹. This testimony differs from the previous testimony (that of the precursor), linked to the historical dimension of the vv.6-8. Here, the Christian community expresses its contribution to the mystery of the person of the incarnate Word. In the same vein, the author in v. 14 uses the pronoun "we" twice for the first time. The "we" is also visible in v. 16. In both cases, the following verbs are conjugated in the past tense in the third person plural, to show the effect of the incarnation in men. The "we" here refers to men.

In addition, to the vv. 13 and 14 we note the binary character: "Logos - flesh" (v. 14). This verse alludes to a character who has the same nature as God. He was before the

¹⁰Sevrin, J. M. (2011). *The Jesus of the fourth gospel*. Paris: Desclée. p.29.

¹¹Durand, A. (1938). *Gospel according to St. John*. Paris: Gabriel Beauchesne and sons. p.27.

Baptist, but he is superior to him in his mission and in his nature. It is not until v. 17 that the author gives us the name of this character, "Jesus Christ", which he alluded to in the text. Jesus is not only "the One who comes", the expected Messiah, but he is also the One who is the pre-existing and God.¹² The parallelism that exists in v. 17 "between Jesus and Moses" shows that the Word who became flesh "Jesus Christ" in v. 14 gives love and truth. But on the contrary, Moses gives the law. This affirms the superiority of Jesus over Moses and the excellence of love over the Mosaic Law. Having established the relationship which our text has with nearby and distant texts, it is now appropriate to look at the background of our text.

Cultural background

The question that arises in the study of the prologue, is the following: did the author of the prologue work only on the corpus that has come down to us, or did he also have knowledge of an old and intertestamental tradition independent of the New Testament tradition? We will question Jewish and Greek cultures to highlight their likely influences on the prologue of the fourth gospel.

Jewish culture

The aim here is to see the influence of the vetero-testamentary and inter-testamentary writings on the prologue of the fourth gospel from the terms: beginning, logos, light and darkness. It is likely that the author of the fourth gospel, in writing the prologue, was aware of an older hymn contained in the "Torah", which describes the creation of the world in Gen 1 :1-13. There is a repetition of the formula "in the beginning" (Gen 1:1), in Jn 1:1 "in the beginning". The first verse of the prologue is therefore reminiscent of the first verse of the Hebrew Bible. We also find this word in Sir 19:26: "When in the beginning the Lord created his works ...». We also see the binary rhythm in the text. The opposition between light and darkness (Jn 1:5) thus recalls that first day of creation when God separated light from darkness (Gen 1:4). Between light and darkness, there is necessarily an irreducible antagonism. The purpose of light is to destroy the realm of darkness.

In addition, the author of the prologue takes up the theme of "the word – light" that was present at the creation "putting in parallel Jn 1:1-5 and Gen 1 :1-31" and applying it to the Incarnate Word. It is in this all-new perspective that he will condense, as in a kind of flash, the history of the world, of Israel and of the coming of the Christ¹³. God created the world through the Word. In John 1:8-19, the theme of the Creator Word develops in

¹²Zevini, G. (1995). *Spiritual Commentary on the Gospel of John*. Paris: Averages Paul. p.35.

¹³Jaubert, A. (1976). *Reading the Gospel according to St. John*, Cahiers Evangile, 17. Paris: Cerf. p.19.

harmony with Is 55:10-11. Apart from the canonic writings mentioned above, let us point to intertestamental writings. The *Odes of Solomon*, Judeo-Christian writing of Sri origin that can be dated to the beginning of the second century. These Odes are particularly interesting for our purpose, because we can discern affinities with the prologue of the fourth gospel¹⁴. The gift of expressing oneself under a poetic mode is natural, susceptible to development by habit and effort. In Jewish culture, some psalmists are aware of being inspired. Ode 12 is specifically dedicated to celebrating the word of God: "He filled me with words of truth that I might express it; as a current [...]. For the mouth of the Lord is the true Word and the door of light. ».¹⁵ It should be noted that this hymn to the "Logos" makes no allusion to Christ and could as well come from an earlier Jewish collection. It is more likely that the author of the prologue borrowed many themes from liturgical and sapiential literature.

In *the Gospel of Thomas 24*, we see the terms light and darkness: "There is light within a man of light, and he enlightens the whole world; If it does not illuminate, it is darkness." We also note the Qumranian texts that God is always presented as the creator of the world and the undisputed master of history. In ¹⁶*Qumran* (1QM 1): "The beginning of the stranglehold of the sons of light will begin against the lot of the sons of darkness..." There is a light-darkness dualism¹⁷ that we notice in the prologue.

Greek culture

Heraclitus of Ephesus (535-475 BC), affirms that a dynamic principle "perpetual change" is the creator of a harmonious unity governing the universe: it is the "logos", "intelligent fire or single and sovereign thought".¹⁸ In Plato's Republic, there is a pattern of prayer of Hermes and his disciple to the invisible God, which shows the special meaning attached to the terms "word" and "light" among the Greeks: "I invoke you, he who dominates over the kingdom of power; he whose Word is born of light, and whose words are immortal, eternal, unalterable; he whose will engenders the life of images, in every place; its nature gives shape to the essence [...] ».¹⁹

The first author who associated the biblical account of creation with the philosophical reflection on a universal "Logos" is Philo of Alexandria. He uses the "Logos"

¹⁴JAUBERT A., *Reading the Gospel according to St. John*, p. 17.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹⁶Kuntzmann, R. and Dubois, J. D. (1987). *Gospel according to Thomas, Gnostic Texts the origins of Christianity*, Cahiers Evangile, supplement to Cahiers Evangile. 58, Paris: Cerf. p.49.

¹⁷Pouilly, J. (1987). *QUMRAN, Gospel Notebooks*, supplement to Cahier Evangile 61, Paris: Cerf. p.65.

¹⁸Russell, B. (1946). *History of Western Philosophy*. London: University Press. p. 15.

¹⁹*La Republic of Plato*, 588b-589b (VI, 5), quoted by KUNTZMANN R. and DUBOIS J. D., *Gospel according to Thomas. Gnostic texts the origins of Christianity*. p. 101.

of God the Creator in words that announce the prologue of the fourth Gospel. Philo recognizes the Word of God as having an almost personal status and attributes to it a number of titles, close to the later Christian theology: "His first born, oldest of the angels".²⁰ It is likely that the author of the prologue used this Jewish and Greek heritage, but applied it to Christ. He gave them a whole new meaning, to show that Jesus is the "alpha" and "omega". It was "Logos" who came to enlighten and guide men while waiting to incarnate in Jesus Christ.

Literary genre and style

After studying the context and background, it is a question here of identifying the literary genre and stylistic characteristics used by the author of the text.

Literary genre

The author uses the poetic genre to convey his message in the text. The operation of the pericope in vv. 9-10 first highlights the poetic aspect of the text. We see, at first glance, the placement of the same words in a successive rhythm. This is a literary technique used in a hymn or poem for harmony, melodic sound and emphasis on certain words. Then, one finds, at vv. 9-10, the use of the words "in the world" at the end of v. 9 and early v. 10. Finally, in vv. 11-12, the same remark can be made around the verb "receive".

Stylistic features

The metaphor used by the author of the fourth gospel is rendered by the use of the word "light." The author makes it clear that he does not refer to natural light, as in Gen 1:3, because in this verse daylight is the foreknowledge of life, not only for human beings, but also for beasts and plants. The author uses the word light in ²¹Jn 1:9 to point out that the light that exists in "Logos", being uncreated, is imperishable in nature. However, the light illuminates every man, through Him and in Him "Logos". Then, the life that comes to men through the action of light must contain within itself the possibility, of sharing eternal life one day. The true light is the light par excellence for all those on earth, dwelling in the darkness "death" and in the shadow of death.²²

There is a tendency in the text to group binomial elements. This manifests itself in several forms. In terms of opposition, we have the following antithetical expressions:

²⁰Quesnel M. and Gruson P. (2004). *The Bible and its Culture. Jesus and the New Testament*, Paris. Desclée. p.445.

²¹Gn 1, 3.

²²Lc 1, 79; Ps 10, 10, 14; La LXX, Is 9, 1; 42, 7.

V. 9	True Light	Non-true light
V. 9	world	sky
V. 10	knowledge	ignorance
vv. 11 to 12	Welcomes	rejection
V. 12	C they who believe	C they who do not believe
V. 14	Legacy	chair

These antitheses bring out the prospect of the new birth according to the Spirit and not according to the flesh. It comes from above and from heaven and not from earth and below. It must lead to living not in darkness, but in light²³. The text includes a prosopopeia; a figure of rhetoric which consists in lending movement, action and feelings to inanimate things. We see this fact in vv. 9, 10, and 12: "coming into the world" (v. 9), "the world was through him" (v. 10), "to all who welcomed him, he empowered them to become children of God" (v. 12). The text personifies the Word by giving it human feelings and actions. The "Logos" is an actor in our text. In addition, to emphasize the mediation of the Word, the author uses a style of repeating or repeating words, sentences and ideas in order to emphasize the message. For example, the author repeatedly uses the conjunction "and" (vv. 10, 11, 14) and the preposition "of" (v. 13).

Semantic analyses

To better understand our text, it is important to analyze what we mean by Greek word "sarx", each time we use this noun. In the text and its translation above, the noun 'sarx' translates into English as 'flesh'. Our task is then to establish the relationship between the word "flesh" and that of "body". We read in v. 14 "the Word became flesh ... ». To do this, an overview of the Latin, Hebrew and Greek languages²⁴ are necessary. The Latin language uses two different words for "flesh" and "body". The word "corpus" means the body, the flesh of the body, the individual, the person, the corpse, the whole, the whole. Whereas the word "caro" means flesh as opposed to spirit²⁵.

The Hebrew language, on the other hand, does not distinguish between flesh and body. It is the same word "basar" that designates these two realities. In the Old Testament, for example, the word "flesh" (basar) refers to the living body and, consequently, to the whole human being as a creature of God. So there is nothing pejorative about²⁶ one's conception

²³Poucoute, P. (2005). *And the Word was made Flesh. Reading of the fourth gospel*. Paris: Harmattan. p. 91.

²⁴Bonnet, J. et al. (2003). *50 Words from the Bible, Gospel Notebooks*, 123, Paris: Cerf. p. 13.

²⁵Secham, L. and Chantraine, P. (2000). *The Grand Bailly Latin / French Dictionary*. Paris: Hachette. p. 93.

²⁶Robinson, E. (1987). *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*. London: Oxford. p. 142.

of the flesh, since it was created by God. It should be pointed out here that in Hebrew thought there is no opposition between flesh/body and soul. It will also be interesting to note that in ²⁷its original sense, the Hebrew word that gives the "body" (or flesh) means "to announce good news." Hence the word gospel = "basorah" (from the word basar).²⁸ This good news, corporeal, designates the body of the man and that of the woman. The body is the "good news" because it is the natural sacrament of love and unity between man and woman. Hence the gravity of death, which is the bad news, it tears man apart.

Unlike the Hebrew language, we have "sarx" in Greek which means "flesh" and "soma"²⁹ which means "body". When St. John writes: "the Word became flesh", he tells us that God took a man's body, he became man; highly estimable and adorable body, which Christ will offer as food to his disciples in the Eucharist. In this work, we understand "flesh/body" as: the human person, human nature, man or human being. "My body is me."³⁰ That's why when someone touches any part of my body, I say "who touched me." At this juncture, the text needs to be actualized. In the following section, we will identify the role of the body and the issues implicit in this concept.

Message from the Text

The primordial Word, who was with God, took flesh and dwelt among us³¹. He became the human "person"³². Building on the analyses developed in the previous section, we would now like to consider, more closely, the message of the text: the role and implicit issues related to the human person in the text.

The Role of the Body in the Text (Jn 1: 9-14)

It is about demonstrating that it is with our body that we can express our existence and relate to others, while remaining open to the world outside of us.

²⁷Ps 63.2.

²⁸Reymond, P. (1991). *Bibliqu Dictionary of Hebrew and Aramaices*. Paris: Cerf. p.71.

²⁹Secham, L. and Chantraine P. (2000). *The Grand Bailly Greek / English Dictionary*. Paris: Hachette. p. 120.

³⁰Guilbert, P. (2011). « My Body is Me », *New City. Sharing your faith in a more Fraternal World*, 549. pp. 27-29.

³¹Jn 1, 14.

³²Etymologically speaking, the word "person" comes from the Greek word "prosopon" which means literally "look towards". This implies the relative aspect of the word "person". Bertrand, M. (1975), *The Christian Trinity in History*. Paris: Beauchesne. p. 185. Boethius defines the person as follows: "the person is an individualized substance of rational nature", while the maters define it as follows: "the person is a hypostasis that distinguishes a property that has to do with nobility". In both definitions, person concerns both God and creatures. Solignal, L. (2010). « The People according to Saint Bonaventure », *Journal of Philosophical and Theological Sciences*, 3. pp. 461-473.

Expression of our existence

The body is the expression of the human person³³ and his presence in the world. Indeed, when the author of the fourth gospel says: "and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (v. 14), Jesus' existence among us is possible only from the moment of his incarnation, the moment when he takes on a human body. His continual presence among us today is always through his Eucharistic body. The text does not tell us where the Word took his flesh. But by comparing Jn 1:14 and Lk 1:26-37, we understand that the Word was born of a human person, the Blessed Virgin Mary. This means that without the human person, the incarnation would not be possible or even necessary.

Moreover, the phrase "dwelt among us" would have no meaning if there is no existence of the human being in the world. All this underlines the inalienable role of man in the history of the universe. In this statement in v. 12 "but to those who did accept him he gave power to become children...", we immediately note that this verse alludes to the gift of the "Logos" to man and not to other creatures in the universe. This already gives us an idea of what the text means in v. 13 by "who were born not from human stock or human desire or human will but from God himself". Man does not become a child of God through carnal procreation,³⁴ but through the effective begetting of God³⁵, alluding to the virgin birth of the Word. In any case, the body remains the means to maintain contact with the universe. This is the means by which the physical presence is affirmed. It is therefore the first sign of presence in the visible world.

Men and women are human persons. If someone has hit us, we will probably ask, "Why did you hit me?" We don't say, "Why did you hit my body?" Our way of speaking testifies to the fact that we are aware of being corporeal beings. We know that touching our body is touching our person. That is why crimes such as assault, rape, physical abuse, suicide etc., are crimes against the person and not just violations of property. Thus, the body is not an attribute of the person, something that the person possesses. He is the person himself. From the beginning of creation, the human person has always been able to distinguish and confirm his existence through his body.³⁶ Then body is an integral part of the person and should therefore not be treated as detached from the whole person. We shall see in what follows, that the body is the means by which two persons enter into a relationship, union and communion with each other.

³³Chundelikkat, A. (2009). *Theology of the Body in John Paul II*. Mumbai: Saint Paul. p. 9.

³⁴"Canal" here has not one pejorative meaning, but simply means the natural desire of the human person.

³⁵Leon-Dufour, X. (1988). *Reading of the Gospel according to John*, I. Paris:Seuil. p. 108.

³⁶Gn 1, 23.

Relation d'amour

It is the insatiable desire of the heart of the human person to see others with love³⁷. The incarnation of Jesus is the beginning of light for men "He was the true light that enlightens every man ... (v. 9). It is an act by which God has communicated his soul to men, which goes as far as the gift of self³⁸. By becoming flesh, the Word showed the creativity of the human person to love God and others. The relationship between God and man and man is a sign that the human person is created to be the gift for God and for others. By affirming the value of the human person, the communion of persons is accepted as a gift, and by means of reciprocity. It must be emphasized that in this communion of love, reason, affection and freedom play a role. The incarnation of the Word is therefore the free, reasonable and effective act of God.

The human being flourishes in relation to others. In Gen 2:18-25, man proclaims a hymn almost to have seen a creature like him. This means that man was not thriving among other creatures. Otherness is a source of development for the human person. God's self-sufficiency seems to have passed from the creation of man³⁹, the history of man is found only in relation to God and others. According to Jn 1:9-14, love is at the origin, heart and end of God's work in Jesus Christ. At the outset is the astonishing act of love which impelled⁴⁰ the Father to give men his Only Son and to transfer upon them the love before the creation of the world.

As for Jesus, in being a man, love sums up his whole earthly life. Jesus came, spoke, acted, and died only out of love for men, "his own" (Jn 1:9-14; 13, 1; 3, 16-17). Despite the refusal on the part of men to accept this love of God in the person of the Word (Jn 1:10), Jesus goes so far as to give his life out of love for men. Jesus experiences in his human nature the reality of the unique love with which the Father loved him before the creation of the world (Jn 17:24). Jesus is the object of the Father's love and the Father loved us in him. Thus, is given to the human person, in the person of the Word made flesh, not only the revelation of God's love for the person, but also the concrete possibility of responding to it with love. "If God was your father, you will love me, for it is from God that I have come out".⁴¹ In v.13, love towards God, which is the reflection of God's love for his own, is, in short, nothing other than faith in Jesus Christ (v. 12). It is not only linked to faith, but also to the very act of faith, which is to love one's neighbour. Faith always involves

³⁷LEON-DUFOUR X., *Reading the Gospel according to John*, p.78.

³⁸Miakuzhyil, G. (2008). *Initiation to the Gospel of Life. A guide to John's Gospel*. Mumbai: Saint Paul. pp.172-175.

³⁹Jn 1, 31.

⁴⁰MOLLAT D., *St. John Spiritual Master*, Paris, Beauchesne, 1976, p. 121.

⁴¹Jn 8,42.

this love.⁴² It is the new commandment promulgated by Jesus. The practice of this universal love will be the sign to which all will recognize the community of his disciples, or even say that all will meet as human beings.⁴³

The Body as a Means of Openness to each other

"God is not solitary being,"⁴⁴ said Jean Noël Besançon. He is only relationship; hence His openness. This is not essentially limited to the Son and the Spirit who share with Him the same glory and the same Lordship. In Jn 1:14 we see that God is also open to his creation, to men who are created in his image. He becomes their partner. The incarnation, in our text, consists in the relationship that God wanted to establish with man through the revelation of his intimate life, his name, his being, his love, through the mediation of his Son. God is a God who reveals Himself. Self-revelation is implicit in the text in v. 14. This verse, affirmed: "and he camped among us, and we saw his glory", by the verb "to see", already shows the ⁴⁵ self-revelation and the opening of the incarnate Word to the world "to men". To "see" it here means that the person of the Word is perceived with the bodily eyes of every man (Jn 1:32-34).⁴⁶ For the author of our text, "seeing" leads to faith "love" and it is love that makes the person of Jesus to open and make himself known to men. In the text, faith and knowledge are complementary; they are closely linked, yet they are not identical. Finally, we note in vv. 10-12 that self-revelation, openness to the other leads to knowledge, and it is with knowledge that faith must find its perfection.⁴⁷

Man is called to openness. The Gospel refutes any solipsistic interpretation of the person. To say 'self' is not to say 'me', a selfish, individualistic conception which threatens to withdraw into oneself. The human person is never an individual creation, he is, in essence, openness and relationship with others⁴⁸. The human person is always connected to others and to others within the framework of a society and its institutions. The otherness is constitutive of the human person. Openness to others always passes through the mediation of love. "He dwelt among us ..." (v. 14), this living together is only possible on the basis of openness to others; what is concretely structured by the existence of the community of human persons. This openness leads to the recognition of all human

⁴²Schlier H. (1968)., *To Believe, to know, to love, in the Gospel of saint Jean*, Lectio divina 44. Paris: Cerf. pp. 336-338.

⁴³Jn 15, 9.

⁴⁴Besançon J. N. (1999). *God is not Solitary. The Trinity in the Life of Christians*. Paris: Desclée de Brouwer. p. 5.

⁴⁵Gregorian A. (1967). *See Jésus and the Father in Him according to gospel of saint Jean* Rome Universitatis Gregorian. p. 14.

⁴⁶Liebermann F. (1987). *Comment from saint Jean*. Paris: Nouvelle cité. p. 57.

⁴⁷Origen, (1992). *Comment on saint Jean*. Paris: Cerf. p. 35.

⁴⁸*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Libreria Publishing Vatican, 2004, p. 67.

persons despite their race, culture, origin, religious affiliation and ideology, which are all constituent elements of their personality. This recognition of the other makes us responsible for him. It is by recognizing the other that we assume responsibility towards others. This responsibility gives rise to this paradox of a responsibility for which I am not responsible, a responsibility which occurs even before the exercise of my freedom. Openness then becomes the mode of being turned towards the other. The life of others teaches me and commands me at the same time as he solicits me from the bosom of his humility. The face of others, an impregnable otherness, irreducible to the laws of sameness, dominates and challenges the self, calls into question its happy spontaneity, its selfishness and its self-sufficiency.

Contrary to this recognition which must guide the human being; our text reproaches men for not opening themselves to the Word. The world has not recognized the presence of the Word by whom it was "made" (v. 10). In v. 11, it is written: "His own did not welcome him". The text insistently notes and deploys the ignorance of the mystery of Jesus on the part of many of his contemporaries. It shows the sign of closure and blindness of the world to revelation in Christ (v. 10). This is a sign that the human person may not accept the love that God has offered us in the person of Jesus by remaining closed up on himself. One must open oneself so that one can be illuminated by the true Light (v. 9).

The response to divine revelation in Christ presupposes an attitude of openness and active receptivity. Men will be able to receive and assimilate it only by developing their entire faculties of acceptance towards Jesus, his word, his miracles, his witness and his truth. It should be emphasized that the Greek verb used by the text "lambano" does not only mean "to receive", which would be a purely passive attitude, but "to welcome".⁴⁹

Some Issues Related to the Human Body in the Text

Having placed particular emphasis on the specific role of the person, starting from the etymology "prosopon", we now want to show the theological and ecological issues underlying this conception of the human person in the text.

The theological issue

Through the incarnation the divine person becomes the human person, as⁵⁰ in God's cohabiting with men (v. 14). In this way, the human person receives from God an incomparable and inalienable dignity. Through His incarnation, Jesus Christ, God made

⁴⁹Pottery. (1971). « Christ as a figure of Revelation According to St. John », *Students missinalia*, 44, 1971, pp. 34- 45.

⁵⁰ Implied here two natures of Jesus-Christ. This at the same time defends the humanity and divinity of Jesus Christ. It contradicts the tendency to attribute to Jesus a mere human appearance (Docetism) or the tendency to reduce Jesus' humanity to a pretense (Gnosticism).

flesh, takes on the human condition. He united himself to every person, elevating the condition of the human person to its highest dignity, an inalienable dignity. In the text, we already find in (v. 9; v.14), the universality of "Logos". This shows that salvation is universal and integral. It concerns the human person in each of his dimensions: personal and social, spiritual and corporeal, historical and transcendent. Jesus himself came to save us, to free the human person from evil⁵¹ by making him "child of God" (v. 12). The same v. 12 shows that the salvation that God offers to his children requires their free response and adherence "to those who did accept him, he has given power...". This is what faith consists of, by which the human person entrusts himself entirely and freely to God⁵².

Indeed, society can only be realized if the transcendent dignity and the integrity of the human character is respected. This dignity requires all human persons to work for the development and development of all. No one is free to do what he wants with his body or the body of others. It is a life that does not come from human components, blood, flesh or the⁵³ will of man, but from God Himself (v. 13).⁵⁴ It is therefore not acceptable to use the body abusively for any purpose.⁵⁵ Human beings cannot be used for economic, social or political purposes. No authority whatsoever is free to impose these ends in the name of presumed progress of the civilian community as a whole or other individuals, present or in the future⁵⁶. It is obvious that the dignity of the human person goes beyond all kinds of political, economic, social and spiritual needs which do not value it. The mismanagement of ecology, to some extent, can jeopardize the integrity of the body and dignity of the human person.

The Ecological issue

Ecological reflection is essentially concerned with the relationship which the human person has with his environment⁵⁷. The relationship of the human person with ecology is a constituent element of human identity. God willed man to be the steward of all creatures⁵⁸. V. 10 indicates that the "Logos" is at the origin of the world. In v.11, we also note that human persons are included in the property of the "Logos".⁵⁹ These textual

⁵¹By evil here we mean everything fighting against the integrity of the human body. JEAN-PAUL II. (2005). *Memory and identity*. Paris: Flammarion. p. 30.

⁵²1 Jn 4, 10 ; Concile Oecumenique Vatican II, Constitution Pastorale *Gaudium and Sweight*, 22.

⁵³The flesh here means in the text sexual desire, to the opposition of the conception virginal of the Logos. MCHUGH J. F., *The International Critical Commentary John 1*, p. 47.

⁵⁴KIEFFER R., *The Symbolic World of saint Jean*, Lectio Divina 137, Paris, Cerf, 1989, pp. 36- 43.

⁵⁵Jn 2, 21 ; 1 Co 12, 27 ; 1 Co 6, 18-20 ; Ph 1, 20.

⁵⁶*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Bookshop Publishing Vatican, 2004, p. 69.

⁵⁷Elengabeka, E. (2011). « God, man and the world in Gn 1, 28 », *Annals of the Saint Cyprian Theological School*, 28. pp. 41-54.

⁵⁸Gn 1, 26-30.

⁵⁹Thomas, A. (1998). *Commentary on the Gospel of saint Jean*. Paris: Cerf. pp. 82-83.

realities already show that everything comes from and through the "Logos". Indeed, no one has the right to abuse ecology.

Since the human person has been given the task of subduing the earth and all that it contains, his activity must improve his condition. This obliges us to maintain ecology for the well-being of all. Man must not forget that his capacity to transform the world through his work is not an opportunity to destroy it through the arbitrary use of ecology. We do not destroy what we have not created or what we cannot do. Ecology shows the omnipotence of God, who is at the origin of all things even though the ⁶⁰human person, must act responsibly towards the environment.

The text attests in v. 14 to the presence of the author of all things among his work. Therefore, the human person must put himself in the school of the Word to learn to create. The word "creation" does not have the same meaning when it refers to what God does and what we do. God creates from nothing, but the human person always assembles something, to take from what exists, to produce other elements. God's creation and man-made creation should not be juxtaposed, because they are not of the same order. The imperfection of the human being (v. 13) is manifested in what he produces. That's why he can make or break ecology. All this shows us that every human activity deserves to be corrected, in the light of God who is the perfect Creator, for the well-being of human beings⁶¹. Indeed, all kinds of manipulation and destruction of the ecological sphere should be stopped, insofar as they have retroactive effects on the well-being of the human person.

Conclusion

At the end of our exegetical study which has focused on the conception of the body in the fourth Gospel (Jn 1:9-14), the main ideas that follow from it are as follows: In the person of the Word, God comes to meet man (1:9). He manifested himself in the world through his only Begotten Son (1:14). His plan of love is to make men participate in this love through their faith in his Son. To this end, John 1:9-14 gave us, in the pericope, the elements so that we believe that Jesus is God and Man and that he dwelt among us. In fact, Jesus raised the integrity of the human body and the dignity of the human person.

Working on a biblical text like ours requires direct contact with the text. The content of the first section of this research is the presentation of the text by justifying its boundaries upstream and downstream. The literary analysis, the subject of the second section, allowed us to discover the context in which the evangelist John wrote the pericope, its Old

⁶⁰Jn 1, 3.

⁶¹Samson, G. K. (2011). « Environmental Crisis. A Challenge to the Church in Africa », *African Ecclesial Review*, 2, pp. 308-330.

Testament and intertestamentary links. This makes us understand the choice and meaning of the Johnnie vocabulary. The third section, on the other hand, helps to grasp the theological message and the issues of the text around the theme concerning the body. We have shown that the body "or flesh", in our text, is equivalent to the whole human person. By his incarnation, Jesus, the Eternal Word, took flesh and dwelt among us, so that we might become, thanks to him, children of God. Par his body he affirmed his existence in our midst. As a result, it has given weight to the integrity of the human body and dignity of the human person⁶². This reality commits us to work for human life and dignity. God, through the Incarnate Word, created everything.

Man is thus invited not to engage in the arbitrary abuse of the body by abuse of ecology⁶³. He is called to maintain the whole creature. He can produce things, provided they do not substitute for the human person. Nor does the person have the right to use his body or that of others for any purpose. He is the only creature in the image of God, called to love and to be loved. This love is not limited to the love of oneself and others, but continues in the love of God through Jesus Christ.

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⁶²Breton, D. (1995). « Anthropological aspects of organ harvesting », *Light and Life*, 225. Paris: Lyon. pp. 22-35.

⁶³Samson, G. K., « Environmental Crisis. A Challenge to the Church in Africa », pp. 312-324.

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