

# Johannine and Pauline Themes in the New Testament



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By

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# INTRODUCTION

*“Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and eat with him, and he with me”*  
(Revelation/Apocalypse, 3:20)

The Books of the New Testament by John and Paul are rich in theological insights and central to the formulation of Christian doctrine. The Gospel of John was called “the spiritual Gospel” by Irenaeus, while the Letter to the Romans has been commented on endlessly, and in its controversial interpretation was a contributor to the debates of the Reformation. Both John and Paul provided the ultimate definition of Jesus as the Word of God (John 1) and the active principle of both Creation and salvation (in the Christological Hymns (of Colossians, Philippians and Ephesians)).

This study considers the nature of the Gospel of John, and specifically the key themes arising from Chapter 3 (the nocturnal meeting between Jesus and Nicodemus) and Chapter 4 (the diurnal meeting of Jesus with the Woman of Samaria at Jacob’s Well). These encounters are symbolic of the proclamation of the Good News to the Jews and to the Gentiles. The power of the Spirit at work in the world, the unity of divine revelation, the integrity and fulfilment of the Covenant and the hope of the eschatological completion of the divine plan are explored in the Gospel of the Apostle John and in his the Apocalypse. The Christological Hymns of the Apostle Paul embrace God’s plan before all time, the Creation, the nature and purpose of the Incarnation and the Recapitulation in the fullness of time of all things in Christ. The wholeness of the divine plan is integral to the unity of divine revelation, something that that explored in specific detail in Chapters 9—11 of the Letter to the Romans. Paul considers the central role of the Jewish People in salvation history, and their place in the unfolding of God’s plan.

This study uses both diachronic and synchronic approaches in exploring the endless wealth of the Johannine and Pauline themes and perspectives. It looks to the integrity of the Scriptures and the richness of analogy and allusion in the ancillary literature of both late Old Testament and New

Testament times: the apocryphal books, the Targums and the documents of Qumran.

Central to all aspects of the discussion is the written Word and the Divine Word spoken at Creation, and made incarnate in Jesus Christ (*John 1:14*), a truth revealed in the first verses of the Bible (*Genesis 1:3*), innate to God's saving power in ancient times, crucial to the Messianic promises, and to be perfected in the Marriage Feast of the Lamb (*Revelation 21*).

## The Word

**There may be nothing more Jewish than the idea that “in the beginning was The Word.”**

It is paradoxical that the Word walked among us, both subject to God and worshipped as God. How did the Jewish believers in Jesus' time understand this mysterious Messianic truth? The answer can deepen faith and enable a sharing of that faith with others in a new and profound way. One is in fact asking ‘How does one explain God?’

How could the infinite Creator of the Universe who exists beyond all dimensions of our finite existence walk among His creation, make covenants with mankind, appear to them in clouds and fire, go to battle for them, bless them, chastise them, and redeem them? The ancient Jewish sages pondered the same question and answered: **The Memra.**

*Memra* is an Aramaic term related to the Hebrew word (אמר), pronounced *amair*, which means word, decree, or speech. Sometimes, the Hebrew word (דבר), pronounced *debair*, is used instead of *memra*, which also means ‘word’, as well as matter, thing, and issue. More than just the words of the Creator God (YHWH), *Memra* (and sometimes *Dibber*) convey God's manifold manifestations and expressions in His creation through His Words.

The Jewish People became intimately familiar with the *Memra* as **the Word of the Lord** because they heard about it hundreds of times in the synagogues. When the Israelites returned from their Exile in Babylon in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, most of them no longer spoke Hebrew; they spoke Aramaic. Nevertheless, the Scriptures have always been read in Hebrew even if no one in the greater community could speak it. Something had to be done so that the people would understand God and His Word. The

sages again found an answer. After hearing a priest read a few verses of the Torah scroll in Hebrew, they then heard a translation in Aramaic called a **Targum**, which simply means translation (see Nehemiah 8:8). In those Targums, we find the concept of the *Memra*.

### **In the Beginning Was the *Memra* (the Word)**

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth,” says Genesis 1:1. However, in the translations of this verse into Aramaic, the Jewish People learned that God had a vital helper:

“From the beginning with wisdom the *Memra* [Word] of the Lord created and perfected the heavens and the earth ... And the *Memra* of the LORD said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light by His *Memra*. (*Genesis 1:1–3; Targum Neofiti*)

In this Targum, **the Word or *Memra* is doing, being, and acting as God** and yet we see that he is also with God, a distinct essence apart from Him. In fact, the *Memra* is the one who rested after all his work:

“On the seventh day, the *Memra* of the LORD completed his work which he had created, and there was Sabbath.” (*Genesis 2:3; Targum Neofiti*)

The Apostle John seized upon this concept and used this very Jewish understanding of the *Memra* (Word of the LORD) to introduce the Messiah Yeshua [Jesus], who is God and yet a distinct essence apart from God. John writes:

“In the beginning was the **Word**, and the **Word** was with God, and the **Word** was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.” (*John 1:1–3*)

John is telling Jewish readers that Jesus as the Word of God (the *Memra*) is responsible for bringing forth life from the very beginning of the world. But John reveals even deeper truths about this Word using the Jewish understanding of light.

### **The *Memra* (Word) Is Life and Light**

“In Him was life, and that life was the light of men.” (*John 1:4*)

In the Hebrew poem called “The Four Nights,” the Targums relate that on the First Night of creation, when darkness spread over the surface of the deep, **“the Memra of the LORD shone and gave light”** (*fragmentary Targums P and V*). In other words, the Word of the LORD not only created light, it *is* Light itself. This poem was part of the Passover liturgy among many of the Jews living in and around Jerusalem at the time, so when John refers to the Word as light, he is reminding them that the **Light of this Word is so powerful, not even the darkness of space could overcome it.**

As we follow the theme of Light into the book of Exodus, we see the *Memra* (Word of the LORD) lighting up the night for the Israelites in a pillar of fire, leading them to safety. At the same time, the *Memra* (Word of the LORD) also remained in the cloud, keeping, preserving them even in darkness (*Exodus 13:21–22, 14:19–20, 23–25*). In a form the Israelites could finally see and understand, the darkness (Egyptians) could not overcome the light (Israelites and the Word of the LORD).

The Jewish People could finally see how Light and God’s salvation from darkness were inseparable. As they moved through the Wilderness into the Promised Land, through the rise of the Kings, the rebuke of Prophets, and the Exile of Israel, darkness seemed to loom over the earth for the Jewish People once more. At this moment of deep oppression under the authority of the foreign Babylonian power, the Light of God’s salvation again entered the finite world through the inspiration of the Prophets; this time, in a form we could talk to, walk with, and learn from.

“For to us a Child is born, to us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon His Shoulder, and His Name shall be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” (*Isaiah 9:6*)

### **The *Memra* (Word) Lived Among Us**

“The Word became flesh and lived among us.” (*John 1:14*)

Later Israel not only lived under the earthly darkness of Roman rule, they lived in spiritual darkness of their own sins. To save them from that spiritual oppression, “the true light that gives light to everyone” came into the world, freely offering it to anyone who accepted it.

“My light will shine for you just a little longer,” Jesus said. “Walk in the Light while you can, so the darkness will not overtake you (*John 12:35*;



see also *John* 8:12, 12:46). But sadly, even when the Light walked among them, too many “loved darkness instead of light” (*John* 1:11, 3:19), a theme explored by Paul in *Romans* 9–11).

Still, Jesus pleads and calls, “Believe in the Light, so that you may become Children of Light” (*John* 12:36). Children of Light do not stumble and fall on the dark path through the woods of anger, jealousy, deceit, greed, gossip, and all those deeds that lead us away from entering God's Kingdom (*1 Corinthians* 6:9, *Galatians* 5:20-22). Children of Light walk upright, on the path that is brightly lit by the Word of God Himself. That path leads straight into Our Father's house (*John* 14:1-7).

Jesus “came to His own creation” seeking sinners who would repent and enter the Light of God's Kingdom with Him. “Yet His own people did not receive Him” (*John* 1:11).

### **The Word is the Door to Salvation (“Behold, I stand at the door and knock” (*Apoc* 3:20)**

The One who saves people out of eternal darkness into the light of eternal life has always been the *Memra*—the Word. In the Targums, God established His covenant between Abraham and the *Memra* (*Genesis* 9:12–15, *Targums Onkelos and Palestine*). And Abraham believed in the name of the *Memra* (Word of the LORD), and the LORD counted it to Him as righteousness (*Genesis* 15:6, *Targum Neofiti*).

This Divine Power of the *Memra* to save us from the eternal darkness of sin is not a new concept for the Hebrew People. This Targum says the *Memra* would be thought of as a deity:

“My *Memra* [Word] shall be unto you for a **redeeming deity**, and you shall be unto My Name a holy people.” (*Targum Yer. to Lev.* xxii. 12).

If there is still any doubt as to who this redeemer deity is, one Targum written 200–600 years after Jesus gives us a striking clue:

“When the **Word of the LORD** shall be revealed to redeem his people, he shall say to all the nations, ‘See now that **I am he who is and was, and I am he who will be in the future ...**’ and he, by his *Memra*, will make **atonement for the sins of his land and of his people**.’” (*Deuteronomy* 32:39, 43; *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*)

Throughout the Gospel of John, Jesus gives more than clues about His identity as the saving Word that would atone for the sins of the people. He tells us that **He is the Way, the Truth, the Life, the Gate, the Door, the Shepherd, the Light** (*John 8:12; 10:9; 10:11; 14:6*). Using the name of the Ineffable One, he proclaims that He is the One who is and was and will be—"Before Abraham was, **I AM**" (*John 8:58*) (cf. *Revelation 21:6*, the Alpha and the Omega).

"As long as I am in the world, I am the Light of the world," Jesus said, as He brought forth light to a blind man (*John 9*). Jesus offers His healing light to the Jewish People and to all the world so that they can see Him for who He really is—the **long-awaited Messiah, their atonement, their redeemer.**

We are called to continue the work that John and Paul so valiantly began and share the identity of the Light, the Word, the *Memra* that was with God and is God for all people for all time.

*"How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who announces peace and brings good news of happiness, who announce salvation, and say to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'"*  
(Isaiah 52:7)

# I. JOHANNINE PERSPECTIVES

## Part 1. Reading the Gospel of John

### Outline

#### Chapter 1: Introductory Questions

1. The Fourth Gospel as Theological Narrative
2. The Division of the Fourth Gospel
3. Place, Date and Authorship of the Fourth Gospel
4. The Liturgical-Cultural Background of the Gospel of John
5. Gnosticism and the Fourth Gospel
6. Identity in the Fourth Gospel
7. Ecclesiology of the Fourth Gospel
8. The Johannine Church

#### Chapter 2: Jesus and Nicodemus

1. Exegesis of John 3
2. General Division of Chapter 3
3. The Central and Essential Themes
  - 1) The Gospel of John is not a Gnostic Work
  - 2) The Role of the Holy Spirit in Judaism and its Eschatological Function
  - 3) The Question of the Opposition between Flesh and Spirit
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4. The Johannine Church
5. Thematic Exposition

### Chapter 3: The Mission in Samaria

1. Introduction: The Samaritan Woman (Water)  
Excursus: The Geography and Origins of the Fourth Gospel
2. Preparation of the Scene
3. The Well of Jacob
4. The Fourth Gospel presents a New Economy and Covenant from God  
Excursus on the Jews  
Excursus on the Father

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## Chapter 1: Introductory Questions

The living unity of the Johannine Church was built around the Christ of Faith, the Christ of the kerygma of the nascent church.

The Historical Jesus was expressed in the language and literature of the Johannine community.

In approaching John's Gospel, one must first consider the question of the relationship between the 'historical' Jesus and the Christ we are presented with in this text.

1. The first step is to look at the language used in the Gospel. Language has its birth and foundation in history, and, in order to understand a particular use of language, it is necessary to grasp its original historical context, or historical situation, its *sinonica*. The intimate relation between language and its historical situation must always be realized, especially in Scripture with its consistent use of rich symbols: for example, Jesus is called the Good Shepherd and the Bread of Life. What does the author mean by these names? One must try to discover this meaning.

2. In considering fact and literary work (which deals with fact), we can see that, in the literary work, the fact is substantially present. However, beyond the rudimentary presentation of fact in literature, there is also interpretation and ascription of significance to fact through the author and the redactor. Given facts are not only reported in literature, but are also interpreted and explained.

3. An image as the representative of a sensory experience and the use of a particular image is intrinsically motivated. There is a definite relationship between chosen image and the event described by the image. An image is the same as a symbol where there is a homogeneity between that which gives or intends meaning—the *signifier* (*significans*) and that which is intended or meant—the *signified* (*significatus*). Therefore we see that concrete facts can be expressed by meaning-giving images or symbols, these being intimately bound to the *significatus*, which is comprehended and intended.

John operates very predominantly on two levels: the literal-concrete, and the literal-semiotic-symbolic. Just as consciousness functions on various levels (sensorial, imaginative, linguistic, literary), so too does language operate at various levels of meaning, manifesting and revealing stages of

development. There is depth to language beyond the immediate significance.

So Christ is the *significante* while the Father is the *significato*. Christ is the sign of the Father while the Father is the signified one. Christ is the sign of the Father, the proto-symbol of the Father (Jn 14:6-7).

The symbol of Christ as the Good Shepherd requires us to go back to the Old Testament and Midrash sources since John wrote from the background, and there were very definite 'pre-existent' meanings connected with the notion of the 'Good Shepherd' (e.g. Ps 23, Ezk 34:17-31).

John 3:14-15 speaks of how "...Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up..." Here is a very clear instance of the use of linguistic expressions which had a very definite meaning before their Gospel usage, and consequently the need to discover the previous meaning of the symbol. Images are always concretely based on the event they flow from, and return to that event in their meaning.

Thus, a concrete event is expressed by an image or symbol which reveals the significance or meaning of the concrete event.

4. Various aspects of symbols can be studied. Polysemy (the possession of various meanings) is related to irony. In this figure of speech, words can convey or express a meaning which is directly opposite to the literally intended meaning. As a result, the symbol can become ambiguous. Thus, the symbol of the Good Shepherd (Jn 10) includes diverse meanings.

In the history of exegesis, two levels of meaning are generally ascribed to symbols: the literal-concrete and the intentional-significant, with a tight bond between them. By remaining only on the concrete level, the Pharisees demonstrate the 'blindness' which Jesus constantly criticizes, where the deeper meaning of His words and actions is missed. The Gospels, especially that of John, are not intended primarily as *ipsissima verba* or strict biographical accounts of Jesus, but rather are statements upon Jesus and his works made out of the early Church's reflections upon them. John is much more figurative and symbolic in the language he uses to speak of Jesus than the Synoptics, and poses a special task of interpretation.

5. Regarding the sense or meaning of a symbol, the symbol opens us to the sense of confronting the equivocity (different meanings being possible) of Being, and permits us to order the events in an historical design. John has a redactional design in that his theology of the Passion is oriented towards

the glory of the Father. John 12:32 (“When I am lifted up I will draw all men to myself”) presents this technical design of glory in suffering crucifixion, as does the account of the Passion in John 17.

Chapters 2 (The Wedding at Cana, the Cleansing of the Temple) and 7 (The Living Water) are built around designed images, for demonstrating a redactional purpose constructed by the Evangelist. The theme of John’s Gospel is that the Kingdom of God is open to us NOW, not only at some other future time.

Symbols can be used to explain a religious experience in which one gets a hint at approaching the transcendent. They are related to the dynamic of spiritual growth in that a truly religious person is more able to understand symbols in their two aspects in personally experiencing (affectively) and knowing (cognitively) God. The religious person is more intimate in their acquaintance with God, and therefore more capable of understanding expositions of God’s self-revelation.

Para 8 of *Dei Verbum* speaks of the relativism of dogma when it states: “This tradition, which comes from the Apostles, develops in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit. There is a growth of understanding of the realities and the words which have been handed down. This happens through the contemplation and study made by believers, who treasure these things in their hearts (Lk 2:19, 51) through the intimate understanding so spiritual things they experience, and the preaching of those who have received through Episcopal succession the sure gift of truth.”

In the same way, the meanings of symbols come to be understood. Symbols such as ‘the Good Shepherd’ are global and embracing, because the two aspects of the cognitive-knowing and affective-experiencing work together in the Gospel. There is a real historical fact related to the symbol, and thought begins with the concrete and develops towards the more imaginative and ideal.

#### **Note:**

*A theologoumenon* is a **theological statement or concept that lacks absolute doctrinal authority**. It is commonly defined as “a theological assertion or statement not derived from divine revelation”, or “a theological statement or concept in the area of individual opinion rather than of authoritative doctrine”.

A *hapax legomenon* is a **word or an expression that occurs only once within a context**: either in the written record of an entire language, in the works of an author, or in a single text. The term is sometimes incorrectly used to describe a word that occurs in just one of an author's works but more than once in that particular work. Hapax legomenon is a transliteration of Greek ἅπαξ λεγόμενον, meaning "being said once".

### Study of the Terminology of John's Gospel

What are the various key words, symbols or images used by John?

The verb "to see": *horao, theorein, theasomai, blepein*

The substantive "what we have seen": *ho eorakamen*

The person of Jesus stands at the centre of the meaning and usage of "to see" in John. He is the authentic epiphany of the Father.

In the concrete, Jesus makes reference to the truly sensible experience of seeing the Father in and through himself. E. Käsemann referred to a tendency towards Docetism in the Fourth Gospel in this regard. Passages which illustrate the truth of a sensible, concrete experience of seeing Jesus include: Jn 2:13; 5:20; 7:26; 10:24-28; 18:20; 11:47-48; 12:19.

The publicity of seeing Jesus is also stressed by John. Jesus is to be seen by all men. Jerusalem and the Temple are symbolic of the public nature of Jesus' message, but the height of His visibility comes when he is lifted up on the Cross. His death is the central public event of His time on earth. Some passages relevant to this notion of public visibility are: Jn 3:14; 8:28; 12:32; 19:34-35, 37; 20: 18, 25-28.

In analyzing the Johannine meaning of "to see", one passes from the sensory to the cognitive level, which determines the meaning of what is seen, to the level of faith. The relation between seeing and believing, between the passage from the sensory to the cognitive level, which make faith upon the event of seeing possible, is exemplified in: Jn 1:29, 32-34; 5:34; 9:41; 15:24; 19:34-37; 20: 8.

The example of "seeing" in 1 Jn 1:1-3 overcomes in the language itself the relationship between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith. Language is not used to get at some content, but rather the language used and the content dealt with are identified. Consider the analogous situation of



music: the individual tones, though only a small part of the total musical 'message', are essentially musical and complete within themselves.

"The act of sight ... transcends what is on the surface, the temporal and the historical, and penetrates to the mystery of the figure ... of the historical Jesus, who is the epiphany of the eternal divine Logos".<sup>1</sup>

"John uses the term seeing ... only in contexts which deal with the Jesus of history ... the act of seeing cannot be understood in a purely intellectual or spiritual sense but remains inseparably connected with real physical sight such as is reserved to eyewitnesses".<sup>2</sup>

**The object of sight in John** is the glory, *the doxa*, of the Son, "His glory, glory as the only Son of the Father" (Jn 1:14). This glory shows itself concretely in what Jesus does, for example, the miracle at Cana (Jn 2:11).

The Hebrew word from which the Greek *doxa* is derived, means "to be heavy"; the 'heavy actions' of the Father are seen in and through Jesus. In the historical actions of Jesus, his divine glory is disclosed (to sight), his concrete actions being an epiphany of his identity as Logos and Son of the Father. Because the Son received his glory from the Father, in a revelation of the Son's glory, the Father is also seen.

"Whoever looks on me is seeing Him who sent me" (Jn 12:46).

"Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn 14:9).

**Seeing in the Church** can be found in Jn 2:22; 12:16; 14:20-24; 20:29.

"The situation of the believing community is not, for John, the same as that of eye-witnesses who actually see; but the faith of the community has its historical origins in the believing sight of the eye-witnesses".<sup>3</sup>

"The testifying and announcing take place now, on the era of the Church; the 'seeing' was an action in the past. What is attested and proclaimed in the era of the Church is 'what' the eye-witnesses 'saw'".<sup>4</sup>

This seeing of the glory of Christ continues in the living and active tradition of the Church. It grows, develops, and is explained in the Church. All of the Church's life transmits this glory. An apocalyptic element is also involved in that we are moving towards full vision.

Jn 2:22; 12:16: These verses show how a deeper 'meaning' or understanding of Christ was realized in the light of Jesus' resurrection. Jn

20:29: In his words to Thomas, Jesus de-emphasizes seeing himself as merely physical, and stresses rather the believing which is related to seeing.

Jn 14:20-21: Here the futurity of seeing in the Church is noted. Through the Church, Jesus will continue to manifest himself.

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## The Fourth Gospel as a Theological Narrative

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## 1. Gospel Genre

**Mark** links the **tradition** about Jesus with the **kerygma** of the Passion and Resurrection. Jesus' is not an ordinary life. It inherently has theological significance. The life of Jesus and the kerygma of the community are unified by Mark, and the meaning of Jesus is contained in this unity.

**Matthew** links the **logia**, the sayings of Jesus, which he emphasizes, with the **kerygma** and with a **genealogy** which places Jesus in the context of the Old Testament and salvation history.

**Luke** emphasizes the event of Christ in the **Church**, in its preaching and total life. The Church's mission is to carry on the work and preaching of Christ, who is the foundation and guiding standard for it.

**John** links Christian discourses to Jesus of Nazareth. In John, we have a clear example of the influence of the Church upon the Gospel writer. Though no certainty can be established about any of John's Gospel as containing the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus, the Jesus of history and his death and resurrection as retained in the kerygma stand at the centre-point of the Gospel. Also, John is writing for the second-generation Church, and

adapts to the cultural situation of the time, especially in the light of Hellenism.

## 1) How John achieves the purpose of his Gospel

a. **Absences.** John commonly lacks certain technical forms found elsewhere on the New Testament.

-*paradidomi*: hand over

-*paradosis*: tradition

-*kerusso*: proclaim

-*kerygma*: what is preached

-*euaggelizomai*: to proclaim the good news

-*euaggelion*: the good news

b. Substitutions. John's use of certain words, in contrast to other authors' choices in similar passages, reveals a definite preference of his. For example, Jn 13:3 uses *edoken*, "gave", in contrast to Matthew 11:27, which uses *paredothei*, "were delivered"

c. Usage. Terms are seen as particularly significant for John include:

-*laleo*: speak

-*didomi*: give

-*martureo*: bear witness

-*didasko*: teach

Verbs meaning to "to receive": *lambano*, *akono*; "to keep": *tereo*, *echo*, *meno*

## 2) Observations on John

The chain of tradition is present, but much more extended in John's theological presuppositions. Tradition: is found in 1 Cor 15:1-3 and in Jn 15:22; 19 35; and in 1 Jn 1:1-3; 3:11; 4:14;

John prolongs or extends the tradition to the Father: *arche* "beginning" in Jn 3:31-32; 8:26, 38, 40. In the Synoptics, Christ is the beginning of salvation, whereas for John it is the Father who is the *arche*. These verses stress the importance of the testimony and witness of God the Father to what was seen and heard in the world. John is concerned with the fullness of the divine mystery; the elements of apocalyptic vision, which are so prominent and the lack of technical terms are linked to this basic concern.

In John's Gospel, the accent shifts from the facts themselves to their meaning, which is always in the person of Jesus. The facts do not describe Jesus in any triumphalistic manner, but always refer to the depth of his person.

*Logos*: in John this indicates the global salvific relationship of Christ to God and to men. It is a functional term.

*Remata*: the sayings of Jesus. These emphasize the dialogue we have with God through Christ, and manifest Christ's love.

*Commandments*: The commandment of love especially points out the relations of co-responsibility and involvement that must link all men to Christ.

John passes from the sensory level to faith in a systematic manner. This is clear in his use of the verb "to see".

*Narrative*: Narrative theology is a complicated mode of theological expression which can relate the historical data and the context of faith experience within which this data is found.<sup>5</sup>

Narrative is indispensable for **theology dealing with suffering**, since conceptual terminology and expression are not capable of expressing the full reality and mystery involved. Karl Barth saw *suffering as an experience of man*. Karl Rahner sees in suffering *the unity of the Trinity being made manifest in history* with a God who reveals himself.

**Narrative theology deals with such events and situations as suffering, death and liberation.** It is conjectural by nature, since it not only reports historical data, but also illuminates and explains their data. In scientific and critical history and theology, an accurate report of facts is esteemed because the meaning and value of the facts rest upon the actuality. In such critical study, the one reporting the facts remains just that, reporting the facts. However, in narrative theology, the narrator plays a vital role in his interpretation and teaching, which accompany his reporting.

Unlike a computer which merely retrieves data from its memory banks for current presentation, study and objective utilization, the remembrance and memory of narrative theology is affected by its material and in 'interested' subject and presentation.

**History becomes the presentation of tradition**, revelatory and living in nature, which is in the process of being accepted and actualized by contemporary community. Truth is living and effective as transmitted by narration. In hearing the traditions of Jesus and the Church narrated, the hearers are moved to action. This hearing elicits a response of faith, belief and imitation.

**Narrative history is the record of liberating facts and events** which invites us to a new political-theological freedom. The discourses in John's Gospel have this effect.

*Dei Verbum* Ch. 11 comments on the capacity of the human mind for narrative, and how this mode of tradition guarantees the accuracy of the transmission of revelation, even in the post-narrative, scientific age.

**Midrash** is an example of narrative theology. It is a reflection on, and an application of, Scripture in the light of God's action and the given situations of His people. The Hebrew *darash* denotes the creative searching and investigation for more meaning than the bare facts provide. It is not an attempt to falsify or ignore the historical reality, but tries diligently to address itself to the contemporary situation.

Christology ought to be narrative in the sense that it confronts man with concrete realities and signs that demand decisive action on his part. In this demand, such a theology and memories drawn into the present become 'dangerous'.<sup>6</sup>

- 1) If the category of narrative is lost or outlived in theology as pre-critical, then real or original experiences of faith may come to lack objectivity and become silenced and all linguistic expressions of faith may therefore be seen as categorical objectivization or as changing symbols of what cannot be said. In this way, the experience of faith will become vague and its content will be preserved only in ritual and dogmatic language, without the narrative form showing any power to exchange experience.
- 2) **Theology is above all concerned with direct experience** expressed in narrative language.
- 3) If reason is closed to **the narrative exchange of experiences** of what is new, and completely breaks off that exchange for the sake of its own critical nature and its own autonomy, it will inevitably

exhaust itself in reconstructions and became no more than a technique.

- 4) Narrative theology has as its ‘essential’ characteristic **the communication of an experience** and close involvement of the narrator and the listener in the experience narrated.
- 5) **All stories [the means of narration] have some hidden moral instruction**, a new rule of life, based upon the teller’s and the listener’s experience.
- 6) A purely **argumentative theology** which conceals its (narratively known) origin and does not make this present again in narrative memory, inevitably leads to those many modifications in reasoning which result in the extinction of the identifiable content of Christian salvation.
- 7) The **relation between argument and narration** is a “question of acknowledging the relative value of rational argument, the primary function of which is to protect the narrative memory of salvation in a scientific world, to allow it to be at stake and to prepare the way for renewal of this narrative, without which the experience of salvation is lost.”

### 3) Dangerous Memories

“They illuminate for a few moments and with a harsh steady light the questionable nature of the things that we have apparently come to terms with, and show up the banality of our supposed realism. They break through the canon of all that is taken as self-evident, and unmask as deception the certainty of those ‘whose hour is always there’ (Jn. 7:6). They seem to subvert our structures of plausibility. Such memories are like incalculable visitants from the past. They are memories that we have to take into account, memories, as it were, with future content. Remembrance of the past can allow dangerous insights to emerge and society as it is established would seem to fear the subversive contents of this memory”.<sup>7</sup>

An event such as the death and resurrection of Christ has both an historical basis and a future, eschatological dimension. We face the paradox and dialectical tension of God having become incarnate in history at a specific time and place, this event having saving and liberating consequences for the future.