

A Provisional and Symbolic Rereading of John 11 in light
of the Church's Mission in Solidarity with the Poor:
A Reaffirmation of the Preferential Option for the Poor

By

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in Solidarity with the Poor:

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Abstract

In this Master's dissertation, I would like to explore a symbolic reading of John 11 (The raising of Lazarus) from the perspective of the church's mission to bring about the liberation of the poor. I believe that as one does so, one might discover that in the Gospel writer's original intention, the figure of Lazarus may never have been intended as a literal historical person, but rather as a symbolic representation of the poor, the marginalized and the oppressed. Such a reading of John 11 might throw new light on the Fourth Gospel's understanding of Jesus and his mission. In doing so, I believe that John 11 might become a foundational text to guide and motivate committed Christian mission in favour of the poor.

Key words and phrases

Compassion, Friendship, John's Gospel (Fourth Gospel), John's Gospel and the Synoptics, Lazarus, Life, Liberation, Mission, Pilgrimage of Pain and Hope, Preferential Option for the Poor, Symbolism in John's Gospel

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Introduction

i. Introduction to the topic

Despite close to two and a half centuries of biblical scholarship, there is still a very dominant emphasis within the Christian tradition of reading the Bible as literal history. In many ways, this has often undermined the ability to wrestle with the original intention of scripture.

One passage that has been undermined in such a way is John chapter 11, namely the raising of Lazarus. This dissertation will suggest that by reading this story as literal history, Christians have been in danger of robbing this passage (and perhaps the whole of John's Gospel) of its original intention, that is, of symbolically representing a central dimension of Jesus' mission as friendship with the poor, and the liberation of the poor.

Spong gives an insightful perspective when he asserts that John's Gospel itself was a reaction against literalism in the early church (Spong 1991: 186ff), a perspective that we will pick up later in chapter 2.

It might well be ironic therefore that the story of the Raising of Lazarus in John 11 has succumbed to the very tendency of literalising that John himself was trying to counteract in other parts of his Gospel. Spong thus makes a key statement when he writes that, "One must...wonder...whether the Johannine narrative about the raising of Lazarus (John 11:43) was anything more than this author's meditation on the

parable of Lazarus and the rich man that Luke alone of the Synoptic Gospels records (Luke 16:20ff)” (Spong 1991:187, cf. Barrett 1978:389 and Crossan 1994:93-95).

Support for this hypothesis can be found in a number of parallels between John 11 and Luke 16:19-31, which a number of scholars have commented on, but have shied away from acknowledging a formal connection between them (see chapter 4).

If Spong were correct in this analysis of John chapter 11’s connection with Luke 16:19-31, as I believe he is, then this would have a profound effect on our understanding of John’s Christology, and the understanding of Jesus’ mission in John’s Gospel.

Despite Spong’s connection between John 11 and Luke 16:19-31, it seems that he himself has not made the further connections and implications of such a reading in light of the church’s mission to stand in solidarity with the poor of this world, and working towards their liberation. If one were to extrapolate the connection that Spong has made between Luke 16:19-31 and John 11, then in John’s Gospel, the figure of Lazarus becomes a key representative (or symbolic figure) for the poor and the marginalized of the world. John 11 thus becomes a symbolic story describing a central dimension of Jesus’ mission in the world, namely friendship with, and liberation of the poor.

ii. Value of this study

I believe that this study will have value in at least five ways:

1) It will throw new light on John's Gospel as a whole, and on John's understanding of Jesus and the mission of Jesus.

John's Gospel has often been referred to as the 'spiritual' Gospel (see Barclay 1975:10; Borg 2001:202). Such a characterization of John's Gospel has often fed into a dualistic tendency within Christianity of separating life into that which is spiritual and that which is profane. As a result of this tendency Christianity has often been robbed of its ability to engage with the issues of this world. It has often robbed and undermined the church's ability to engage with politics of oppression and issues of poverty because it has been said that the spiritual message of Jesus should not be mixed with politics.

If a case can be made for reading of John 11, in which Lazarus stands as a representative figure for those who are poor and oppressed, then it will help to rescue John's Gospel from some of the very dualistic Gnostic tendencies which he himself was trying to guard against (cf. Barclay 1975:12-14).

In doing so, such a reading of John's Gospel would bring the Fourth Gospel's understanding of Jesus much more into line with the Synoptic tradition and particularly in terms of Luke's Gospel with its emphasis on Jesus' concern for and ministry to the marginalized and the poor (see Bosch 1991:84ff).

Indeed, while Luke's Gospel has a particularly explicit emphasis on Jesus' ministry to the poor and marginalized, it is a theme that is traceable also in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark. In fact Myers (1988) in his book "Binding the Strong Man", reveals a picture of Jesus in Mark's Gospel profoundly engaged with the social,

economic and political domination of his own day, not just as an aside, but as a central element of his mission.

If Jesus' ministry to the poor and marginalized is such a dominant theme in the Synoptic Gospels, it might seem very strange that John's Gospel seems to overlook this essential dimension to Jesus' life and ministry. One might even be led to conclude that John is describing a different Jesus from that of the Synoptic Gospels in terms of his relation to the poor and the oppressed. Clearly, with a reading of John 11 in which Lazarus stands as a symbolic figure for those who are poor and oppressed, this apparent glaring omission in John's Gospel is no longer a glaring omission, but rather a central part of John's own Gospel.

John Marsh in fact writes that John 11 is the *crux interpretationis* of the whole of John's Gospel (1968:415). When read in its context within the text itself, the Raising of Lazarus is indeed central to the entire narrative. In the Fourth Gospel, the very crucifixion of Jesus is said to have been precipitated by the raising of Lazarus.

What an odd thing it is that John believes that Jesus was crucified due to the raising of Lazarus, and yet the Synoptic Gospels never mention the name of Lazarus as an historical figure. Are we reading about a different crucifixion, or is Lazarus more than an historical person, but rather a symbolic figure of the poor and marginalized of Jesus' own day? If, according to this hypothesis, a central dimension of the ministry and mission of Jesus was the liberation of the poor from places of oppression and marginalization ("raising Lazarus from death"), then his crucifixion within the context of John's Gospel begins to make much more sense.

If indeed the Raising of Lazarus were symbolic of Jesus' concern to release the poor from their places of oppression, then the ministry and mission of Jesus would have been a direct challenge to the political status quo. The "raising of Lazarus" thus becomes both a threat and an offence to the established political order. Crucifixion, as a means of execution, was also the chosen means of the Roman government to dispose of political revolutionaries. The contention that Jesus was crucified for "raising Lazarus from the dead" thus may give further weight to the suggestion that Lazarus stands for the poor and marginalized of this world, and that a central dimension of Jesus' ministry was the forming of a new community in which the poor and marginalized were liberated and set free (cf. Wright 1999).

Therefore, there is the hope that this study will in some way give a new perspective on John's Gospel as a whole and on John's understanding of Jesus and the mission of Jesus.

2) Secondly, such a reading of John 11 (and John's Gospel as a whole) would help to elevate the place of the poor within the entire New Testament.

In the field of New Testament Studies, it is commonplace to view Luke's Gospel as especially concerned with the poor and oppressed (cf. Bosch 1991:84ff). Often this very emphasis on Luke as the "Gospel of the poor" carries the implication that the other New Testament writers do not share this concern. Thus Matthew's Gospel is the Gospel for the Jews (Barclay 1975:5), and Paul is concerned about justification by faith, and not this-worldly matters. Luke's focus might be seen as 'nice' but not overly significant in view of his traditional association with the supposedly more 'spiritual' Pauline mission. The typical reliance of liberation theology on the Exodus

narrative rather than on New Testament sources like Luke tends to strengthen this judgement.

A new reading of John 11 as suggested in the hypothesis above might encourage us to see that perhaps Luke is more broadly representative of a crucial element in the mission and ministry of Jesus, as it was understood in the earliest church.

3) Thirdly such a study would challenge us as Christians to rediscover a Christian spirituality that would take a commitment to the poor seriously. If we continue to describe John's Gospel as a 'spiritual' Gospel, then it challenges us to see that a truly Johannine spirituality and mission includes the poor as a central (not peripheral) element.

It is a fascinating thing that in early Christian art, Lazarus has been depicted at the gates of heaven, (see www.jstor.org/view/09510788/ap020364/02a00050/0). Such a tradition within early Christian art suggests that a truly Christian spirituality acknowledges that "the final judgement" and "entry into heaven" rests on the question of our own relationship with the poor of this world. This is not very different from the parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25.

Such a general rediscovery of the place of the poor in a genuinely Christian spirituality and mission is perhaps one of the most pressing needs of the church in the world today. It is no economic secret that the gap between rich and poor in the world today is widening every year (see Infoplease 2006; cf. Strobe 2007) Klaus Nürnberger suggests that if current economic trends continue, not only will we face a humanitarian disaster, but also an ecological crisis (Nürnberger 1998:14-15).

Part of my personal interest in this topic is that liberation theology remains a crucial theological challenge to me on a personal level. Since the early 1990's when South Africa was going through the first phases of political transition, as well as in my undergraduate theological studies, the issue of Christian integrity in a context of political and economic injustice has been one that I have struggled with in a very personal way.

As I suggested earlier, I believe that issues of wealth and poverty remain critical issues for the world today, and for South Africa. Liberation from apartheid may have been an important milestone in South Africa, but it certainly was not the end of an ongoing struggle to bring about economic justice within our land.

A truly "New South Africa" did not come with a new constitution and a democratically elected government. Rather, I believe it will only come as we come to wrestle with the vast discrepancies that exist between the rich and the poor. If we do not do this, whatever victories may have been won will surely be lost, as the wealth of this country continues to be amassed by an increasingly small minority.

A study of this nature might in some small way help the church not to lose sight of these crucial issues, issues that in fact lie at the very heart of our Christian faith.

4) Fourthly, I would hope that in some way this study might 'rescue' the Bible from overly academic and overly spiritual interpretations that render the Bible ineffective in addressing the real issues of life and of this world (cf. West 1991:48ff).

I believe that the Bible has wonderful resources within it that can give us direction and motivation for tackling the issues of life and living. Having a good academic grounding in the Bible is essential in reading and interpreting the biblical texts, and yet academic theology doesn't always translate itself or address itself towards the practical struggles of this world.

I would hope that this study might demonstrate a genuine grounding in the academic and scholarly study of the biblical text, while at the same time making the biblical text relevant in connecting with the issues of this world. Without this academic theology runs the danger of becoming meaningless word games.

With the above 'marriage' between biblical scholarship and the issues of this world, it is also hoped that this study might in some way 'rescue' the Bible from overly spiritualised interpretations of scripture that also end up being irrelevant to the church's mission in this world.

5) Fifthly I hope that a study of this nature might help me to more deeply struggle with issues of wealth and poverty within my own ministry as a minister / pastor seeking to minister in a relevant way within the South African context.

From 2002 to 2004, I spent three years ministering in Duduza, a small township on the South East Rand that has high levels of unemployment and poverty. Since 2005, I have been stationed at a wealthy church in Edenvale. Somehow I would like to explore ways in which wealthy congregation members can fulfil the mission of Jesus as friendship with the poor and his mission in raising the poor from their places of economic death.

iii. Underlying methodology: praxis model of theology

Having written already that this topic grows out of a personal experience of reflecting on the life of Jesus in the historical, political and economic context of post- and pre-apartheid South Africa, it could be said that this topic grows out of the praxis model of doing theology.

In terms of the praxis model of doing theology, theology is not meant to be a cerebral, academic activity that is removed from life. Rather theology and theological reflection is one part of a dynamic process or cycle, beginning with committed action in the world, leading to reflection which in turn leads back to a re-commitment to intelligent action in the world on behalf of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The reflection spoken of above can be divided into two dimensions: 1) Analysis of one's original action within its context, and 2) Rereading and interpreting Scripture and tradition in light of one's insertion and action in the world (see Bevans 1992:70).

This three-step methodology in doing theology may be set out as follows:

- 1) Committed action
- 2) Reflection-
 - a) Analysis of action and situation or context
 - b) Rereading the Bible and tradition
- 3) Committed and intelligent action (praxis)

As such, this three-step theology forms the basis of all contextual theologies including liberation theology, black theology and feminist theology.

It is a methodology that first grew out of the EATWOT conferences of 1976 and 1981 (see Torres and Fabella 1978 and 1983; cf. Bosch 1991:432ff). At these conferences a deep dissatisfaction was expressed at the way in which western academic theology had been done, arising from the belief that such theologies were alienating in that they did not provide answers to the evils of systemic injustice such as sexism, racism, capitalism and colonialism (see Torres and Fabella 1978 and 1983; EATWOT 1976:178-179 and 192-193; cf. Bosch 1991:432-433). They believed that first world theologies were academic, speculative and individualistic (Torres and Fabella 1983; cf. Bosch 1991:273), using the Bible to legitimise oppression and oppressive ideologies, whilst at the same time treating other worldviews with disdain and disrespect (Torres and Fabella 1983; cf. Bosch 1991:435). In addition, criticism was made of such theology being far too concerned with 'orthodoxy', that is, correct theory or understanding of God as opposed to 'orthopraxis', that is, correct action (see EATWOT 1976: 178). Gutierrez writes that for centuries the church devoted its time to formulating truths while doing almost nothing to better the world (Gutierrez 1974:10). Such theology was accused of hiding its true ideological commitments behind phrases such as 'revealed truth' that was said to be contained in the Bible.

In contrast to this, the EATWOT theologians spoke of the need for a theology of the Third World to be relevant to this historical situation and context (Bosch 1991:425). At the meeting in 1976, while restating their commitment to Christ, the theologians who were present began to speak of a new way of doing theology. They began to speak of an 'epistemological break' from traditional western academic theologies whereby commitment should be the first act of theology (Bosch 1991:423ff; EATWOT 1976:178-179). They spoke of the fact that theology is not neutral, but that all theology is committed (EATWOT 1976:192-193; Torres and Fabella 1978 and 1983). In other

words, all theology puts forward a certain conception of reality (ideology) and all theology supports the interests of a particular group of people, most often the interests of those who are writing the theology. The delegates of the 1976 EATWOT conference thus proposed that the time had come to theologise from the perspective of an active commitment with the poor and oppressed, no longer accepting the theologies of North America and Europe uncritically (see EATWOT 1976: 178; 192; Torres and Fabella 1978 and 1983).

iv. Importance of context

The praxis methodology for doing theology, as suggested above, places a strong emphasis on context and social analysis. It recognizes openly that all theology grows out of a specific context, meaning that all theology at some level is context bound. The importance of context is found in that it is context that determines the kind of questions people ask about themselves, about life, and about God (see Maimela 1990:178). When reading the Bible, praxis methodology recognises that one brings oneself to the text, with all one's life experiences and assumptions. Such assumptions and life experiences, which are always context, bound influences the way one interacts with the text, and therefore the way in which one interprets the text.

v. Praxis methodology and social analysis

A key element in all praxis theologies is that of social analysis. Vidales (1975:41-42) writes that the social sciences offer theologians diagnostic tools in revealing underlying causes and highlighting structural and social processes and dynamisms,

indicating how systems tend to function. Vidales writes that because no science is neutral, liberation theology (a form of praxis theology) tends to “...opt for those analyses and diagnoses that are more closely in line with the goal of discerning and achieving a social order in which human beings can live as true adults, as ‘new persons’ after the model of Jesus Christ...” (Vidales 1975:42). Thus, liberation theologians believed that, without adequate understanding of society and the true nature oppression through the tools of social analysis, theologians are unable to interpret the will of God for our societies and our times (see Del Valle 1975).

vi. Praxis theology as inherently mission oriented

Based on the above explanation of the praxis methodology, it should be clear that all theological reflection based on such a methodology would be inherently mission orientated. Praxis theology is ultimately concerned about immersion into a “process of transformation and construction of a new world” (Appiah-Kubi and Torres 1979:5).

vii. Praxis methodology and this master’s thesis

In many ways, this Master’s thesis grows out of a process and a journey that contains and expresses much of the methodology outlined above.

This thesis is written out of the context of post-apartheid South Africa. Even from the perspective of a cursory social analysis, South Africa remains a country deeply divided along economic lines. South Africa, it has been said, ranks amongst the worst

when it comes to the gap between the rich and the poor (see Infoplease 2006). Many in the media and government have begun to speak of the 'first economy' and the 'second economy', designations that reveals the vast distinction between rich and poor in South Africa today (cf, Benton 2005). It would have to be admitted that while change has indeed taken place within South Africa, the plight of the poorest in South Africa has not changed substantially. While Gauteng Provincial Premier Sam Shilowa could be heard in the national news saying that South Africa has begun to turn a corner in reducing poverty in South Africa (SAfm April 2005), there would be many ordinary South Africans who might dispute such an analysis, for they themselves have not begun to benefit from this 'turning of a corner'. In fact there would be others in South Africa who would say that no such corner has been turned, but rather, the problem of poverty continues to deepen (see Alternate Information and Development Centre: 29 Jan. 07). The April-June 2005 countrywide protests against poor service delivery, stand as testimony to these problems and realities.

The need for a prophetic voice in solidarity with the poor thus remains as strong in 2007 as it did in the early 1990's before the new political dispensation was officially inaugurated in South Africa, especially in the light of ongoing complaints of high levels of corruption in government.

The experience of living in South Africa and ministering in a township for the four years (1999: Pimville, Soweto; 2002 to 2004: Duduza, South-East Rand) has also shaped and influenced my theology in profound ways. In both of these stations, as a minister I was placed in congregations where a large percentage of members were unemployed, and thus living in very difficult economic circumstances.

These experiences, together with the influence of my studies in black and liberation theology, have led me to read the gospels in a particular way. It has certainly challenged me to see things in the gospels that I might otherwise not have seen before.

One such example has been that it has challenged me to look at a possible rereading of John chapter 11, to see the Raising of Lazarus not simply as a prefiguring of the resurrection of Jesus, but rather as an allegory or symbol of Jesus' own mission amongst the poor.

viii. A Proposed Way Forward

I propose the following structure in dealing with the dissertation at hand.

- **Chapter One:**

Chapter one will briefly set the stage for viewing John's Gospel as a missionary document.

This thesis is written under the conviction that the Bible forms the springboard and the 'resource' book for giving direction and meaning to the church's mission. Academic study of the biblical texts cannot remain the preserve of only the discipline of biblical studies, but rather, if it is to bear fruit, needs to be studied also in conjunction with the church's call to be in mission.

In this dissertation, essentially I will be seeking to use biblical scholarship in the service of the mission of the church, hence the importance of clarifying and establishing John's Gospel as a missionary document.

- **Chapter Two:**

Chapter two will seek to demonstrate the pervasive symbolic nature of John's Gospel. Part of the argument in this dissertation is that Lazarus in John 11 is meant to be regarded not as a literal and historical figure, but rather as a symbolic and representative figure, taken from the Lukan parable of Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16:19-31), and reworked into a symbolic narrative in John 11. If this view is to be justifiable, then the symbolic nature of John's Gospel as a whole needs to be established.

- **Chapter Three:**

Chapter three will go on to explore the phrase 'God's preferential option for the poor', firstly in its historical context and secondly in relation to the ministry of Jesus.

This dissertation is built on the premise that Jesus' life and ministry had strong socio-political commitments in the direction of the poor and marginalized. If there is no case for seeing Jesus' socio-political commitment in solidarity with the poor, then there would be no justification for seeing Lazarus as a symbolic representative of the poor within the mission and ministry of Jesus.

- **Chapter Four:**

Having made a case for Jesus' solidarity with and mission amongst the poor of his day, based primarily on an analysis of the Synoptic tradition, chapter four will go on to argue that John's Gospel has a very strong connection with the Synoptic tradition.

This will help the wider argument of this dissertation in two ways:

- i) Firstly it will help to argue that the writer of John's Gospel was aware of the socio-political commitments of the 'Synoptic Jesus' as a central dimension to Jesus' mission and ministry, and that therefore we should expect to find some reference to it in John's Gospel.
- ii) Secondly it will help to provide a basis for asserting that John 11 is John's 'meditation' and reworking of the parable of Lazarus and the rich man in Luke 16:19-31.

By doing so, I hope to provide a case for seeing 'John's Lazarus' as a representation of 'Luke's Lazarus' and thus a symbolic representative of the poor in Jesus' mission and ministry.

- **Chapter Five:**

Having established that John's Gospel is a missionary document, that it is pervasively symbolic in nature; that Jesus' ministry had at its centre a commitment to and a solidarity with the poor; that John's Gospel is deeply rooted in the Synoptic tradition (justifying the view that John 11 is indeed a reworking of the Luke 16:19-31), it will be

possible to affirm the view stated in the abstract and introduction that John 11, that the raising of Lazarus is meant to be read as a symbolic narrative in which Lazarus becomes a symbolic representative of the poor, the marginalized and the oppressed.

At the same time, I would propose a provisional and symbolic rereading of John 11 as metaphor for the mission of the church. As a symbolic narrative, the story of the raising of Lazarus contains a number of key themes that can enrich our understanding of the mission of Jesus, as well as enrich our own sense of mission as the church today.

Missiological themes that will be explored based on the proposed symbolic rereading of John chapter 11 include:

- 1) Mission and the priority of the poor
- 2) Mission as friendship
- 3) Compassion: the heart of mission
- 4) Mission as bringing forth life

In doing so, I would hope that the image of the raising of Lazarus might provide a fresh biblical image for reaffirming the church's preferential option for the poor, based on the life and ministry of the historical Jesus.

- **Postscript: Revisiting the underlying methodology**

I will seek to propose the concept of the "Pilgrimage of Pain and Hope" as a tool for entering the hermeneutical circle and enabling ordinary Christians to begin to engage

with the church's mission of solidarity with the poor as inspired by a rereading of John 11, the raising of Lazarus.

- **Appendix: An exegesis of John 11**

An exegesis of John 11 has been included as an appendix to the thesis. At certain points, parts of the exegesis will be included in the rereading of John 11 as a metaphor for mission and at other times, the reader will be referred to the exegesis for a fuller explanation. The exegesis has been included as an appendix in order to preserve the flow of the argument in the thesis itself.

1. John's Gospel as a missionary document

1.1 The Bible and the New Testament as missionary documents

“Mission is the mother of all Theology” (Kähler 1971:90 quoted in Bosch 1991:16).

The above quote from Kähler comes to us as an incisive reminder that theology began as an accompanying manifestation of Christian mission, rather than a luxury of the world dominating church (Kähler 1971:189-190 referred to in Bosch 1991:16). This quote however is not simply true for theology in general, or even for what is often called ‘systematic theology’, but particularly true for the production and purpose of the entire New Testament. The writings of the New Testament are strictly speaking *missionary documents*. Bosch puts it succinctly when he writes:

“The New Testament writers were not scholars who had the leisure to research the evidence before they put pen to paper. They wrote in the context of an ‘emergency situation’ of a church which, because of its missionary encounter with the world was forced to theologise” (Bosch 1991:16).

Mission in the early stages of the church's life was central and fundamental to the very life of the church; it was not simply a function of the church or a side activity for the very committed (Bosch 1991:16). It is for this reason that it is important to remember that the New Testament documents were in a sense ‘missionary tracts’ of a kind.

1.2 Biblical scholarship in service of the mission of the church

Gaining a good academic grounding in New Testament studies is of vital importance for anyone who seeks to truly understand the New Testament. In this respect, biblical and New Testament scholarship, in what is close to two and a half centuries of scholarship, has been of utmost importance for the serious biblical scholar. Without the contribution of historical-criticism we would probably still be stuck with naïve views of the Bible and the New Testament. These disciplines have challenged Christians and the church to come to a more honest and mature reading of the Bible.

One of the dangers however of much of New Testament scholarship is the danger of forgetting that those who wrote the New Testaments documents wrote in response to the 'shock waves' of the life, teachings and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth who challenged all they had ever known about God and God's activity amongst human beings. They wrote, not in the academy, removed from every day life, but rather out of a belief that God was doing something new in the world through Jesus of Nazareth, whom they called 'Messiah'. They were writing with a purpose: to express their own convictions about Jesus Christ within the context in which they wrote; to encourage other believers in their faith in Jesus Christ; to encourage believers to engage with the world as those who were under the lordship of Jesus Christ. To quote Bosch again:

“The Gospels in particular are to be viewed not as writings produced by an historical impulse but as expressions of an ardent faith, written with the

purpose of commending Jesus Christ to the Mediterranean world” (Bosch 1991:16).

In many ways, the Gospels stand as examples of the kind of methodology spoken of in the introduction of this dissertation, for they were written by church leaders and pastors who were engaged with the needs and struggles of their communities. They were theologians who reflected on these needs and struggles and wrote documents that were intended to address these needs and motivate their communities to new levels of committed action in the world as followers of Jesus Christ, who they believed to be risen and active in the life of the world and their own communities (cf. Arias 1992:12).

Thus the New Testament was written in a missionary situation, to bolster, to clarify and to guide the church’s sense of mission and purpose in the world. To get caught up in the literary techniques, the structure, the historical background, and all manner of other academic pursuits, without being reminded of the missionary nature of these documents is to miss the point. To engage in academic biblical scholarship without asking how these documents can inform and shape the church’s response to the world *today*, is ultimately to engage in a meaningless exercise. If biblical scholarship is to be true to the origins of the New Testament, then it *always needs to be used in the service of the mission of the church*.

Arias writes that “the problem has been that New Testament scholarship and the practice of mission and evangelism have more often than not ignored each other” (Arias 1992:12). This situation is a great shame, for biblical scholarship as suggested

above, has the ability to renew and clarify mission practice. Mission that fails to mediate the findings of biblical scholarship has the danger of being misinformed and irresponsible (Arias 1992:12). On the other hand, theology and biblical scholarship, without a sense of commitment to engagement with the world is dead in the same way as it has been said that faith without works is dead (James 2:26). While there might be merit to studying the biblical texts as part of a study of antiquity, if we are to remain true to the original spirit in which they were written, we should see that the purpose of theology and New Testament studies is to help clarify the church's mission and purpose in the world.

As it has also been suggested, the opposite is also true, namely that the practice and renewal of mission can help to bring new perspectives to our understanding of scripture and to biblical scholarship itself (Arias 1992:12). Arias (1992:13) thus believes that “the renewal of theology and hermeneutics in our days has come precisely from the new readings (or ‘rereadings’) out of new contexts, new perspectives, new experiences and new questions.”

It is my contention therefore that John's Gospel was not written simply as an academic exercise for the sake of scholars sitting in the classroom, debating the use of structure, his use of recurring themes, and his own particular use of the Greek language. Neither was John's Gospel written purely as an exercise in mystical contemplation, designed for those who would withdraw from the world to encounter God in some kind of detached mystical experience, although it may have value from a contemplative and mystical perspective (cf. Hargreaves 1979:79ff and Ravindra 2004). John wrote for committed and engaged Christians. In the phrase from John 20:21: “As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you”, he was clearly writing with the purpose

of inspiring Christians to renewed action in the world, following the example of Jesus Christ.

Thus while this dissertation will be drawing on the work of biblical scholarship, it is done in the service of the church's mission and as a springboard for committed action in solidarity with the poor of the world, those whom I believe John would call Jesus' friends (John 11:11). It is my hope, therefore, that in some way this thesis might itself be a contribution to our understanding of the Bible, as well as the church's mission. It is written under the deep conviction that biblical scholarship and mission belong together, and that the church's mission in different contexts does indeed have the ability to open up new readings or 'rereadings' of passages like John 11.

1.3 John's Gospel as a missionary document

“John is called the mystic, the theologian, the seer, the friend of Jesus; he does not stand in our minds as a representative of mission. Here is a perhaps too neglected aspect of Johannine work” (Legrand 1988:131).

What has been written above in terms of the New Testament as a whole, is equally true and applicable to John's Gospel itself. John's Gospel too was not written in an academic vacuum but within the context of a community in mission. The stated objective of John's Gospel itself was to enable people to believe in and entrust themselves to Jesus: “But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God” (John 20:31).

Most Johannine scholars would be quick to point out that the Greek contained in that verse indicates an ongoing and a deepening of belief. Thus a better translation of that verse might look something like: “These things have been written that you might continue to deepen your belief in Jesus”, or “...that you might believe in Jesus on an ongoing basis” (cf. Suggit 1993:17 and 32; Johnson 1986:472).

While John’s Gospel may have been written for those who were already insiders within the church, it was by no means meant to be simply an introspective exercise, but rather as a work that was designed to send the believers back out into the world in mission and service. This is brought out even more sharply when at the climax of John’s Gospel, the risen Christ stands amongst the disciples while they are behind closed doors, and commissions them with the words, “As the Father sent me, I am sending you” (John 20:21).

The verse quoted above has sometimes been referred to as the ‘great commission’ of John’s Gospel (Arias 1992:78-79) with the implication that it stands as John’s equivalent of Matthew 28:16-20, which undoubtedly has been one of the most used texts in the motivation of the church’s mission. John’s Gospel is a missionary text (Arias 1992:15).

In some ways, this might be considered to be quite a novel thought, or perhaps even as a new insight by some. Moody-Smith (1985:496-499) for example, in introducing the Gospel of John in *Harpers Bible Dictionary*, draws attention to the distinctiveness of John’s Gospel, the language and style, influences, authorship and date, but fails to explore John’s sense of missionary purpose or intention, despite the fact that ‘send’

and 'sent' are used as repeated words throughout the Gospel (Winn 1981:17). In this regard Winn writes:

“A significant aspect of John the theologian’s theological method is the repeated use of certain key words. He repeats ordinary words in such a fashion that they bear extraordinary theological freight. Such words include light, darkness, spirit, flesh, life, love, glory, witness, judgement, truth, Father, Son, world, work, sign, disciple, know, believe. It has not so often been noticed that there is a third great verb along with ‘know’ and ‘believe’, the verb ‘send, sent, sent’. This is the great missionary verb...” (Winn 1981:17 cf. Arias 1992:82).

Arias writes that while “the Gospel of John has been a mine and a weapon in the missionary and evangelistic tasks of the church from post-apostolic times to the present... on the other hand, in the academic realm, the missionary dimension of the Fourth Gospel has typically been relegated to the margins” (Arias 1992:78). Arias continues: “More recently, however, it has become a subject of ongoing discussion among scholars, particularly in relation to the hypothesis that John is not a missionary Gospel but an ‘in-house’ product, mostly polemic and sectarian, from an isolated Christian community quite uninterested in mission to the outside world” (Arias 1992:78).

Johnson thus in describing the purpose of John’s Gospel believes that the whole tenor of John’s Gospel suggests less a document for proselytism than one of propaganda for the converted (Johnson 1986:472). In words that echo some of the observations that Arias makes, Johnson writes:

“One of the most perceptive observations on the literary structuring of John suggests that the very movement of the story corresponds to the perceptions of a community that defined itself by opposition to unbelievers, and that the complex coding of the narrative prohibits understanding by those who are not already within the symbolic system of the community” (Johnson 1986:472).

The failure of Johnson however is to miss the point that Winn makes above, that even though the Gospel of John itself is probably aimed at those who are already believers, the whole purpose is to confirm and strengthen their faith in order to send them back out into the world as the Father sent Jesus (John 20:21). Thus, like Winn, Arias believes that the whole Gospel of John is about sending and being sent (Arias 1992:82). God sends Jesus into the world out of love for the world, to save the world, not to judge the world (John 3:16-17). Jesus promises the gift (sending) of the Holy Spirit (John 14:15, 18). Jesus sends the disciples back into the world: “As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world” (John 17:18). As Arias goes on to point out, “in John, mission is related to the world seven times (3:17; 16:33; 17:3-4; 8-9; 21, 23, 25) and each time *apostellein* [‘send’] is the verb that is used” (Arias 1992:82).

While on the one hand, as pointed out by Arias, academic scholars do not always emphasize the missionary purpose of John, on the other hand, others have tended to view it as a product of deep meditation and contemplation on the life of Jesus, which has led people like Clement of Alexandria’s view of John’s Gospel as a ‘spiritual Gospel’ (Moody-Smith 1985:499), such that the Gospel itself might have been intended as a mystical reflection on Jesus’ life, meant for those who would withdraw from the world to find God in a place of detached contemplation (cf. Hargreaves

1979:79ff and Ravindra 2004). In this regard it is interesting that John's Gospel was a favourite amongst Gnostic Christians (see Pagels 2003:116) and that in fact, the first commentary on John's Gospel was written by Heracleon, one of the leading Gnostic thinkers of his day (Pagels 2003:117). While there may be some who have begun to question traditional evaluations of Gnosticism (see Freke and Gandy 2002), most mainline evaluations of Gnosticism would classify it as world denying rather than world affirming, as seeking to escape from the world, rather than engaging with the world (González 1984:58ff).

Having said this, it does need to be acknowledged that mysticism and contemplation do not necessarily mean non-engagement with the world. In fact, some of the greatest Christian mystics (and indeed mystics of other faith traditions), have also been deeply engaged with ideals of social engagement and transformation. Catherine of Sienna (Latourette 1975:643ff), St Francis of Assisi (Latourette 1975:429-433), Pope Gregory the Great (Latourette 1975:337ff) and even Mother Teresa have found the experience of contemplation the very source of their engagement with the world. Mother Teresa's reflection on silence is quite telling in this regard when she writes:

“The fruit of silence is prayer,
The fruit of prayer is faith
The fruit of faith is love
The fruit of love is service
The fruit of service is peace” (in Rice 1994:58).

The implication of this is that out of the silence of contemplation ultimately flows love and service to the world. Having said this, there have also existed forms of

Christian spirituality that have been so heavenly minded that they have been of no earthly good. The 'Quietist' movement may be identified as one such movement where being 'spiritual' has become withdrawal from the world without a re-engagement with the world at a deeper place (González 1985:169-171).

Quietist withdrawal would have been far from the author's original intention. One of the overriding themes of John's Gospel is that of the 'incarnation', that is, God's very engagement with the world in and through the life of Jesus: "The Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us" (John 1:14) (See Arias 1992:86ff). While at times, the author of John's Gospel has an ambiguous attitude to 'the world' (see John 1:10 "He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognise him") (cf. Arias 1992:82), he clearly express his belief that in Jesus Christ, God's whole intention was to save the world: "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). These are not the words of a Gospel intended for withdrawal from the world, but rather engagement with the world, as Jesus himself was engaged with the world as the 'Word Incarnate'.

The danger of missing the missionary point of the Fourth Gospel is however very real. John's Gospel does have the tendency to make use of rather abstract metaphysical categories in describing Jesus. In fact Johnson believes that at times Jesus himself becomes more of a symbolic figure than necessarily an historical figure (Johnson 1986:475-476). As John exalts Jesus to a cosmic status as the 'Eternal Word' that existed from the very beginning, it would seem that 'John's Jesus' is less and less connected with the historical Jesus (cf. Borg 2001:204). This has been pointed out

again and again by scholars of the historical Jesus who state that few if any words of John's Jesus can be traced back directly to the historical Jesus (cf. Spong 1991:206.)

Despite the central theme of incarnation, the abstract metaphysical words and metaphors that are used in reference to Jesus thus have the tendency to detach Jesus from the sense of the historical, and hence the 'earthiness' of the Synoptic descriptions of Jesus. But unless John is referring to a very different Jesus to the Synoptic Gospels, the aims and objectives of the life and mission of the so-called 'Synoptic Jesus' and the 'historical Jesus' must still be detectable in John's Gospel. These would have to include Jesus' commitment to the liberation of the poor from their places of oppression, and from the socio-political structures of his day.

I therefore believe that for those who have eyes to see, the socio-political mission and agenda of the 'historical Jesus' is still visible, albeit in the form of symbolic narratives like John 11, the raising of Lazarus. Indeed, I believe that as we begin to reread the story of Lazarus through the eyes of liberation theology, we will discover a key that unlocks John's Gospel, placing it in a firmer relationship with the 'Jesus' of the Synoptic Gospels and the socio-political dimension to the mission of Jesus as witnessed to by the other three Gospels.

Affirming the missionary nature of John's Gospel encourages us consider the way in which John 11 contributes to John's missionary intention, enabling us to ask the question whether the missionary intention behind the story of Lazarus might have been to motivate its hearers to a new or renewed commitment of solidarity and friendship with the poor after the model of Jesus.

2. Symbolism in John's Gospel

It is deeply unfortunate that despite close to two and a half centuries of serious biblical scholarship, there is still an ingrained tendency to interpret the Bible in an over literalistic manner. Untrained lay people, not only in fundamentalist circles, but also within the so-called mainline churches, most often do this. What is even sadder is that it is not just lay people who do this, but often clergy themselves, who having been trained in biblical scholarship have not been trained how to communicate biblical scholarship to their congregation members in a way that enriches and deepens faith rather than undermining it.

This chapter will seek to outline the ways in which most scholars regard John's Gospel as a deliberately symbolic book, despite the fact that it is written in the form of 'realistic narrative' (cf. Myers 1988:29 and Marsh 1968:52).

In terms of reading John's Gospel as a symbolic narrative, Spong writes that in some ways it would seem that John's Gospel itself was a reaction and a polemic against literalism in the early church (Spong 1991:186ff; cf. Morton and McLeman 1980). Spong writes: "...The Fourth Gospel seemed to delight in poking fun at those who would literalize Jesus' words" (1991:187). Spong also points out that Jesus' conversations with various characters in John's Gospel, demonstrates a repeated misunderstanding and literalizing of what Jesus was saying (Spong 1991:187). This is seen in Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus where Nicodemus wants to take the statement that a person needs to be "born again" literally (John 3:3; cf. Koester 1995:7). Such a literalising tendency is seen again in the story of Jesus speaking with

the woman at the well, where she too wants to literalise Jesus' words as he offers her living water to drink (John 4). What these kinds of conversations indicate is that the author of John's Gospel was encouraging his own reader to look beneath the literal meaning of Jesus' words and actions, to see the metaphorical or symbolic meaning to which they pointed.

Johnson makes explicit what Spong says implicitly about symbolism in John: "Almost everything in the Fourth Gospel has symbolic value, including names and numbers" (Johnson 1986:477). Individual characters in John's Gospel stand for more than just themselves as they play a deliberately representative function (Johnson 1986:477). Johnson goes so far as to suggest that even Jesus in the Fourth Gospel is more symbolic than literal: Jesus always points beyond himself to the transcendent reality of God and thus Jesus himself needs to be seen as a sign (which in itself is a symbol) (Johnson 1986:475-476).

In *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, Koester (1995) deals in a more systematic way with the kinds of symbolism that one finds in John's Gospel. As one reads through Koester's book as well as other scholars and commentators on John's Gospel, it becomes clear that there are a number of different levels on which symbolism operates in John's Gospel.

i) Symbolic actions

Symbolism is encountered through symbolic actions of Jesus. These might include the cleansing of the temple in John 2, as well as the washing of the disciples' feet in John

13 (see Koester 1995: 10-11). Symbolic action is not unique to John's Gospel, for in fact it forms part of the prophetic tradition of Israel (Wilson 1985:828). An example of this include Hosea marrying a temple prostitute in order to speak of God's faithful love for Israel, despite the fact that Israel runs after other gods like an unfaithful wife running after other men (Hos. 1:2-9) (For other examples: Isa. 7:3; 8:1-4; 20:1-6; Jer. 19:1-15; 27:1-28:17; Ezek. 4:1-8). Symbolic actions like these and the one's in John's Gospel were designed to reinforce and dramatize a teaching or an oracle (Wilson 1985:828).

ii) The miracles or 'signs' of Jesus

Symbolism is also encountered through Jesus' miracles. In fact it is particularly significant that John refers to the miracles of Jesus, not as miracles, but rather as 'signs' (see John 2:11, 4:54) (Marsh 1968:62). The fact that the first two miracles of Jesus in John's Gospel are referred to not as miracles but rather as signs again points to the symbolic nature of the Fourth Gospel. A sign is always something that points beyond itself to something else (cf. Allen 1990:1129). A sign is therefore a certain kind of symbolism that points to a deeper meaning and a deeper significance than that which appears purely on the surface (cf. du Rand 1997:36). Describing the first two miracles of Jesus as signs is an indication that in fact John intended for us to interpret all of Jesus' miracles as signs (Marsh 1968:65), which point beyond the surface meaning of what is happening, and to point to a deeper understanding and meaning. As Suggit puts it, they present opportunities for faith (Suggit 1993:34).

Bultmann (1971) was one of the first Johannine scholars, who posited the theory of a 'signs gospel' or a signs source (du Rand 1997:101, Barret 1978:18). While he himself

did not try to reconstruct the 'signs gospel' or the signs source, he suggested that it was highly probable that such a document actually existed, consisting of a series of miracles, showing Jesus to be a powerful miracle worker (cf. Barrett 1978:19). Others have built on Bultmann's signs source theory and refined it. Notable scholars include Fortna (1970) and Nicol (1972). Other scholars like Barrett (1978) and Brodie (1992) have subsequently dismissed such a hypothesis, but this does not reduce the sense in which John's Gospel is built around miraculous signs that are intended to point beyond themselves to the deeper significance of Jesus' life and ministry (Suggit 1993:34).

If, as has been suggested by scholars like Dodd (1954) (cf. Johnson 1986: 478ff), John's Gospel is structured around a series of signs (cf. Barrett 1978:12) which are intended as symbolic 'summaries' of John's view of Jesus, (cf. Dodd 1954:383), then it underlines the sense in which John's Gospel is a deliberately symbolic book.

iii) Geographic symbolism

Symbolism is encountered in John in the form of important geographical details. We see this in the sense that Galilee and Samaria are symbolic of those areas in which Jesus finds acceptance whereas Jerusalem, the centre of Jewish faith and national life, is geographically symbolic as the place of Jesus' rejection (du Rand 1997: 35). In contrast to Jerusalem, Samaria and Galilee are in different ways symbolic of those seen to be part of the margins or the rejected within the Jewish national and religious life. In John 1:46 we hear of Nathanael's rather derogatory and condescending attitude towards Nazareth in Galilee, ('Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?'), while in John 4:9 we read of the ancient Jewish prejudice against Samaritans when

the woman at the well questions Jesus' interactions and conversation with her. Later, the question is raised of Jerusalem being the legitimate place of worship as opposed to Mount Gerizim in Samaria (John 4:21ff), thus setting up Jerusalem as the symbolic centre of true faith (John 4:22).

iv) Symbolism in the names of places

As Johnson suggests (1986:477), geographic symbolism can also be seen in the use of place names such as the pool of Siloam in John 9:7 which John himself translates as meaning 'sent'. The fact that John translates this term for us is an indication that John wishes for us to take note of its meaning. It is, like his reference to the miracles of Jesus as 'signs', one of the clear suggestions that John deliberately uses symbolism in his Gospel.

It remains a matter of opinion or debate whether other names in John's Gospel, which are not translated by John, are meant to convey meaning as well. Certainly Barrett's view, following the example of John 9:7, is that unless John has explicitly made the translation himself, that it is not his intention to use the name in an allegorical way (see Barrett 1978:252). But this is not necessarily an indication that John doesn't intend for other names to be regarded symbolically. In only two places does John refer to the miracles of Jesus as 'signs', but this in no way undermines the sense that most scholars have that it was in fact John's intention that the rest of Jesus' miracles to be regarded as 'signs' (cf. Appendix – Bethany – for further discussion).

Thus, while Barrett has his own hypothesis about the name Bethesda in John 5, which in Aramaic means 'house of mercy' (Barrett 1978:252, cf. Smith 1993:85), it is an

intriguing name in the context of the story. The central concern of the story is the issue of Jesus' healing of a man on the Sabbath and the opposition this creates amongst 'the Jews' (John's term to refer to those who hold positions of authority, see Brown 1970:29). It stands as a parallel pericope to the Marcan episodes that deal with the issue of Jesus' healing and saving activity on the Sabbath (see Mark 1:21ff 2:23ff, 3:1ff) where the central issue revolves around mercy, and the lack of mercy shown by the Pharisees and Scribes. In John 5 the attitude of 'the Jews' towards the paralytic is in marked contrast to the attitude of mercy shown by Jesus. The name Bethesda ('house of mercy') seems too appropriate to be a coincidence. (But for an alternative explanation, see Barrett 1978:252).

If it was indeed the intention of John for readers to take cognizance of the symbolic meaning of various names of places (as well as of people), then the meaning of the name 'Bethany' ('house of misery of pain' see Smith 1993:85) would need to be explored, so as to determine whether its meaning in any way enriched the reading of John 11 and made sense within a range of possible legitimate interpretations.

Important in this whole debate about whether names of places (and names of people) are to be interpreted in a symbolic way have very much to do with the question of how the first hearers would have understood the meaning of these words. It is significant therefore, that despite the fact that John's Gospel is written in Greek, it is evident that there is an underlying Semitic influence with what du Rand calls a number of 'Semitisms' (du Rand 1997:19). Thus du Rand writes that "this has led to the fact that some theologians are of the opinion that the Gospel of John was originally written in Aramiac" (du Rand 1997:19). If this is indeed true, then the issue

of the meaning of names would have been a non-issue, in the same way as the African meaning of names are simply taken as given by mother tongue speakers.

Even if John's Gospel was not in fact written originally in Aramaic, du Rand nonetheless believes that the strong Jewish influences on the text give the impression that the first readers and the author were Jewish oriented (du Rand 1997: 47). This in itself points to the possibility that readers might well have been in a position to know and understand the meanings of names and places (cf. Appendix – Bethany – for further discussion).

v) Symbolic use of numbers

Symbolism in John's Gospel is seen in John's symbolic use of numbers (Johnson 1986:477 see John 2:1, 6; 6:13, 70; 21:11). In John 2, the turning of water into wine, the significance of the six water jars has been interpreted by scholars like Marsh and Suggit to refer to John's understanding of the incompleteness in Jewish purity laws and religion, symbolized by the water jars used for ritual cleansing (Suggit 1993:43ff, Marsh 1968:58). As Marsh suggests, six was for the Jew, near, but short of the 'perfect' number seven (Marsh 1968:58).

vi) John's use of metaphors

Symbolism is found in John's use of metaphors throughout the gospel, particularly with reference to Jesus. This comes through in the so-called "I am" sayings such as "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12), "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35), and "I am the good shepherd" (John 10:11). Koester writes that metaphor and symbolism are not

identical but related on a continuum (Koester 1995:6). To speak metaphorically is to speak of one thing in terms of another (Koester 1995:6). This is an inherently symbolic way of speaking. In the use of metaphor, John often uses ordinary down to earth, common objects to speak of divine and transcendent truth, for example, light, bread, vines, shepherds.

vii) Words infused with symbolic Johannine meaning

Some of the repeated words like “glory” and “hour” that John uses in his Gospel carry with them a sense of the symbolic. The word “hour” in John is used symbolically to refer to the death of Jesus, while the word “glory” is used to refer to the power and presence of God, which is most particularly manifested in Jesus’ death (see Koester 1995:11).

viii) Characters

Characters in John’s Gospel are also used in a symbolic way (Johnson 1986:477; du Rand 1997:35; Koester 1995:11-12). In this regard, Koester believes that often the characters in John’s Gospel are used as representative figures to represent either groups of people or to represent and express typical viewpoints of the time (Koester 1995:35). In a similar way, Johnson writes: “Nicodemus stands for all teachers of the Jews, Martha for all believers, Thomas for all doubters” (Johnson 1986:477 cf. Suggit 1993:49).

In exploring the issue of the symbolic nature of the characters in John’s Gospel, it is perhaps necessary to explore the question of whether Lazarus is to be regarded as a symbolic figure, and what justification there might be for this.

Barrett (1978:47-48) suggests that the story of Lazarus is unlikely to be historical, and thus the character of Lazarus in John 11 is unlikely to be an historical figure. Barrett suggests (with particular reference to the raising of Lazarus), that in comparing the structural and historical differences between Mark and John, and particularly the purported reason for Jesus' death, there are irreconcilable differences if both Mark and John are regarded as purely historical documents (Barrett 1978:47, cf. du Rand 1997:125, Marsh 1968:45, 49). It is particularly in terms of the Markan and Johannine reasons for Jesus' death that Barrett identifies historical differences. He writes:

“In Mark 11:18 it is stated that when the chief priests and scribes heard of the cleansing of the temple, they sought how they might destroy Jesus” (Barrett 1978:47).

Barrett goes on to point out that in John's Gospel, the cleansing of the temple occurs right at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, and can therefore have nothing to do with the final plot to kill Jesus (Barrett 1978:47). On the other hand John narrates at length the raising of Lazarus, an incident not mentioned by any of the Synoptists but treated as decisive in the plot to kill Jesus (Barrett 1978:47).

After debating the issue of the differences in 'dating' the cleansing of the temple in relation to the ministry of Jesus, Barrett writes that:

“It seems preferable to accept Mark's dating, but, if this is done, grave doubt is cast upon the historicity of the Lazarus story as it stands in John, and this is

not simply because the narrative is miraculous, but because no room can be found for it in the Marcan narrative” (Barrett 1978:48).

Thus, if Lazarus in John 11 cannot be regarded as a historical person, then the only alternative that one has is to regard Lazarus rather as a symbolic character and a representative figure of some kind or another (cf. Koester 1995:35).

ix) Typology

Symbolism is also evident in John’s typological use of the Old Testament. Typology is a form of symbolism. Marsh defines it as “the doctrine that things in the Christian dispensation are symbolised or prefigured by things in the Old Testament, as the sacrifice and the Eucharist by the sacrifice of the Paschal Lamb” (Marsh 1968:56). Thus John invites his readers to read his Gospel in the light of Old Testament stories, inviting the reader to pick up the parallels and to transfer meaning from the one to the other (see Marsh 1968:57). In other words, John uses well-known images and stories from the Old Testament to clarify what is going on in his own telling of the Jesus story (Marsh 1968:57, cf. Suggit 1993:9). Such typology assumes that the reader is familiar with the Jewish tradition of the Old Testament.

The feeding of the five thousand (John 6:1ff) stands as one such example of typology where John wishes the reader to see the feeding of the five thousand in the light of the feeding of the Israelites in their desert wanderings (Numbers 11:4ff). The fact that John makes explicit reference to Moses and the manna in the desert (John 6:31f) in the discourse that follows the feeding of the five thousand (John 6:25ff), reveals John’s explicit intention for typological connections to be made.

The interpretation of Johannine symbolism

How can we be sure of what meaning John intended his readers to find in interpreting the symbolism he uses? It is a good question that deserves some closing remarks. In this regard, Suggit is very helpful in discussing the nature of the symbolism that John uses as well as the limits to such symbolism.

On the one hand, Suggit (1993:4) makes the distinction between steno symbols and tensive symbols. Steno symbols are those symbols that have a single definite meaning, such as a roadmap, or a red traffic light which mean “stop” and nothing else (Suggit 1993:4). On the other hand, tensive symbols are those that need to be interpreted and given meaning by the observer or the reader (Suggit 1993:4). Thus Suggit suggests that every work of art, pictorial or literary, could be considered to be a tensive symbol, “teasing the observer or reader to understand the meaning it conveys’ (Suggit 1993:4).

In a broad sense, Suggit (1993:5f) suggests that all four Gospels might be considered to consist of tensive symbols. He suggests they are like dramas “whose purpose is to draw the reader or hearer to be closely involved in the story which they unfold” (Suggit 1993:5). Thus resembling poetry or literature, Suggit believes that the meaning is not “fixed once and for all, but has continually to be discovered or rediscovered by the reader or the hearer, who needs to share at least some of the attitudes of the evangelist” (Suggit 1993:5).

How then do we approach the symbolism of John's Gospel? Are there limits to the interpretation of John's symbolism? These questions raise the further question: 'Where does meaning reside?' (Suggit 1993:164). Does the meaning of a text, or symbolism within a text reside in the original meaning of the author? In this regard, Suggit writes:

"Certainly, the discovery of the author's intended meaning – if we can ever be sure of it – helps to locate the text in a historical context, just as the knowledge of the historical context helps us to arrive at the author's meaning. But the meaning of a literary text is by no means exhausted when we have discovered what the author actually meant.

Any great literary text – a description which certainly applies to the Bible – has the power to challenge its readers in ways which its authors may never have contemplated. It is this feature which gives the text the possibility of diverse meanings (cf. Nineham 1978:267). As a consequence the meaning of a literary text can never be definitively analyzed or fully exhausted. The meaning of a literary text, as opposed... to a legal text, lies not simply in the words themselves, but in the relationship established between the reader and the text. This is particularly true of a religious text which serves to confirm or to challenge the beliefs, attitudes and practices of the community whose text it is. The text indeed provides parameters to prevent bizarre interpretations, but each reader gives meaning to the text by the response made to it" (Suggit 1993:164-165).

Suggit goes on to quote Malatetsa (1977:177) who writes:

“The only adequate way for a Christian to ‘read’ the text of John – or of any biblical text – is to see it *both* in its historical-critical sense *and* in the sense given by the theology and contemplation of tradition, the liturgical prayer life of the church... and the resonance of the text in the life of the people of God at any given period” (in Suggit 1993:165).

An important phrase that Suggit highlights in the above quote is – “the resonance of the text in the life of the people of God at any given period” – which in many ways forms the basis for much of the contextual theology that has arisen in recent decades, as well as the rereading of familiar passages of scripture from marginalised groups throughout the world (cf. Suggit 1993:165).

This discussion from Suggit thus suggests that in interpreting the symbols of John’s Gospel, one must indeed seek, with the tools of the historical-critical method, to uncover as far as is possible, the original intention of the author. This is not always an exact science though. Suggit’s discussion on where meaning resides, is thus a helpful one, for it reveals that the meaning that a reader brings to the text also has validity in so far as it recognizes some of the basic parameters set by the text itself, and secondly as it shows respect for the general tradition from which the text has come.

Extrapolating on the above discussion by Suggit and on the criteria suggested in the quote by Malatesta, in interpreting the symbols and signs in John’s Gospel, one therefore needs to ask some general questions of the interpretation. Does it resonate with the general tenor of the Gospel of John as a whole? Does it resonate with the

general 'shape' and content of the life and ministry of Jesus, as we have received it in our broad tradition and with the general framework of the Jesus story in the four Gospels? Is it plausible that the author may have intended it to be read and understood in that way? Does it ring true with our worshipping experience? Does it resonate in the lives and the context in which the readers live?

Conclusion

While the specifics on quite how to interpret the symbolism of John's Gospel may remain an issue that each interpreter of John's Gospel will need to argue for him or herself, there is a general and clear scholarly consensus that John's Gospel is indeed symbolic. (In fact, as Barrett points out, 1982:65, all language is symbolic, which makes it a quite indisputable fact that John's Gospel too is symbolic.) Ultimately it is a question of in what way John's Gospel is symbolic and how that symbolism should be interpreted. As we have seen, there thus needs to be a certain amount of scope to allow for differences of interpretation, while at the same time falling within the parameters of what might constitute a reasonable or plausible interpretation.

Most scholars, however, would probably not dispute with du Rand (who draws on the vast corpus of Johannine scholarship) when he writes that John freely uses symbols and symbolism throughout his Gospel, and that this is a salient feature of John's Gospel as a whole (du Rand 1997:35). In many ways Johnson, in his 'biblical compendium', *Writings of the New Testament* (1986), is thus also expressing a general scholarly consensus when he writes that almost everything in the Fourth Gospel has

a symbolic value, including names, numbers, and individual persons (Johnson 1986:477).

Establishing a general consensus that John's Gospel is symbolic in nature is important in establishing a basis on which to proceed in the underlying aim of this dissertation, for it provides legitimacy to the approach of deliberately rereading the raising of Lazarus as a symbolic story, rather than simply as literal historical fact. There may well be some who believe that the story of Lazarus did in fact happen historically (cf. Ross 1962:724-725), and yet at the same time believe that woven through the historical narrative, the author of John has given it a symbolic meaning (cf. Sloyan 1991:8). In the end it would be futile to argue this too much. For the purposes of this dissertation, it would be enough to express the fact that, whether or not the stories in John's Gospel were historically and literally true, the intention of John was for these stories to be symbolic as well, although it is my contention that John 11 is not historical (see appendix). As suggested earlier in this chapter, the fact that John himself refers to the first two miracles as 'signs' (John 2:11, 4:54), is an immediate suggestion that they point beyond themselves to a deeper meaning. In other words, they are symbolic.

In the following chapter we will explore the nature of Jesus' ministry amongst the poor to provide some platform for suggesting that Jesus' ministry amongst the poor *should* form part of the general 'parameters of interpretation' in understanding and interpreting John 11, with the possibility of seeing Lazarus as a symbolic representative of the poor.

3. God's preferential option for the poor in historical context and in the ministry of Jesus

The title of this thesis, suggests that a rereading of John 11 seeing Lazarus as the symbolic representative of the poor in John's Gospel would be a restatement of what has been called 'God's preferential option for the poor'. In this chapter we will examine the case for a political Jesus and in doing so will attempt to outline an argument for seeing 'God's preferential option for the poor' in the mission and ministry of Jesus. Before doing so it is perhaps important as a preliminary exercise to re-examine the concept of God's preferential option for the poor.

3.1 Re-examining the notion of God's preferential option for the poor

Lamoureux suggests that the option for the poor has become 'the most controversial religious term since the Reformers' cry, 'Salvation through faith alone (Lamoureux 1996:261). In some ways a the phrase 'God's preferential option for the poor' might be seen to be a deliberately controversial and provocative statement to shake us out of our places of comfort and self-satisfaction in a world of exploitation and extreme poverty. It is a phrase that invites us to think again; to rethink our relationship with the poor, to rethink God's relationship with the poor; to rethink our ability to lives comfortably while others live in discomfort. The phrase 'God's preferential option for the poor' is one which for liberation theologians speaks of the call of God to stand up for the humanity and the dignity of the marginalized of society as people made in God's image and deserving a 'place in the sun' (see the title of Witvliets 1985 book).

3.1.1 Brief historical Back-ground

In order to understand the phrase ‘God’s preferential option for the poor’ it is important to understand briefly the historical context in which the phrase found currency.

As La Lamoureux suggests in her abstract, a bias towards the poor has in some ways always existed in the life of the church (Lamoureux 1996:261) and one might add, even further back in the life of Israel. Indeed, it may have been Israel’s own experience of having experienced liberation from a place of slavery and bondage in Egypt that under girds the theological tradition that flows from there (cf. Ratzinger 1984:iv.3), through the life of Jesus and perhaps finds new impetus and new focus in the life of Jesus and down the centuries through the life of the Church in such figures as Francis of Assisi, Dorothy Day (Lamoureux 1996:261).

Indeed, as Gutierrez asserts that as one reads it, one discovers that “the entire Bible, beginning with the story of Cain and Abel, mirrors God’s predilection for the weak and the abused of history” (Gutierrez 1988:xxvii). In a similar way Arias (1980: introduction) writes that when one reads the Bible ‘through the eyes of the poor’ or with the poor as a priority, one discovers an abiding theme of concern for the poor and the dispossessed running through the Bible as a golden thread.

Bosch (1991:435) introduces the phrase ‘God’s preferential option for the poor’ by noting that the rise of capitalism meant that over the past two centuries led to

increasing numbers of Christians who amassed large amounts of wealth from the capitalist system. The tendency was thus to interpret the sayings of Jesus referring to the poor in more and more spiritual terms such that the materially rich could also be regarded as 'poor', and thus could still hold onto the biblical promises for the poor (Bosch 1991:435).

Bosch (1991:433) writes however that the rise of Nazism in the 1930's began to bring about a clearer understanding in the minds of many theologians of how 'demonic forces' could be seen to be at work in societal structures. It thus unveiled the reality of structural evil, laying it bare, and thus bringing about a shift in people's understanding of the need to oppose unjust regimes and work for justice in society (Bosch 1991:443).

The phrase 'God's preferential option for the poor' was first coined in Latin America in the context of the exploitation of the poor through relationships of dominance and dependence within Latin America itself as well as externally through North American multinational company's, which controlled much of the production in Latin America (Maimela 1990:182). Thus economic relationships between Latin American and North American countries worked heavily in the favour of the North American dominant classes (Maimela 1990:182). The roots of these economic imbalances and oppression in Latin America stemmed back to the conquering and colonising of the region by Spain in the 15th and 16th centuries leading to the reproduction of patterns of class dominance in Europe and Spain, setting in place the structures of racial domination and economic oppression (Maimela 1990:182). The ruling class consisted of those of European descent while under them were the *mestizos* (those of mixed European and

American descent) while at the bottom of society were the native American population (Maimela 1990:182).

The result of such systemic structures of domination, dependence and exploitation gave rise to a situation by the mid 1970's whereby two thirds of Latin America were undernourished, three quarters of the population were illiterate and half of the population suffered from diseases of various kinds, the majority of the population were landless while a small percentage of people owned two thirds of the land, production was largely controlled by foreign companies thus benefiting industrialised countries, unemployment, alcoholism and infant mortality were rife, while the lower oppressed classes were kept in place by the institutional violence of military dictatorships through torture and violence (Maimela 1990:183).

In a situation where rich Christians had spiritualised the message of the Bible, liberation theologians thus sought to rescue the word 'poor' in a way that no longer allowed Christian talk of salvation to float off into abstract spiritual categories that no longer takes cognisance of the destructive and oppressive contexts in which people live. The poor that liberation theologians began to speak of thus became primarily the literally poor who suffer economic, social and political marginalization (cf. Bosch 1991:435, 436). The reason for this primary focus on those who are literally poor is obvious, for it grew out of the stark economic context of the oppression and exploitation.

The phrase 'God's preferential option for the poor' thus became a phrase that sought to re-assert the biblical predilection for the weak and the vulnerable, the poor and the

marginalized as people who deserved dignity as people made in the image of God (Gutierrez 1988:xxvii).

The phrase 'God's preferential option for the poor' is secondly a phrase that deeply challenges the modern western theological paradigm, which has been aimed primarily at the non-believer. In contrast, Witvliet writes that the phrase 'God's preferential option for the poor' points to a theology aimed not primarily at the non-believers, but at the 'non-persons' of society, that is, those whose humanity is trampled on daily by the unjust structures of society (Witvliet 1985:26).

3.1.2 Criticisms of "God's preferential option for the poor"

As was stated earlier, Lamoureux suggests that the option for the poor has become 'the most controversial religious term since the Reformers' cry, 'Salvation through faith alone (Lamoureux 1996:261). Lamoureux provides a helpful critical analysis of some of the fundamental criticisms levelled against the notion of 'God's preferential option for the poor', identifying four main criticisms of the notion of the Church's preferential option for the poor.

- 1) The first criticism she raises asks how one balances the tension between the universal love of God, and God's special or preferential love or concern for a particular group (the poor) (Lamoureux 1996:261).

It is interesting that even the phrasing of this question reveals a potential bias. By referring to the poor as 'a particular group' it creates the impression that the poor are

in fact in the minority. It creates the impression that liberation theologians are calling for special concern for one (small) segment of society, whereas in the description of Latin American poverty given above (and across the rest of the world), it is clearly quite the opposite. It is the wealthy and the powerful who are actually in the minority. In speaking of God's *special* love for the poor, we are identifying God's special love for the largest portion of the world's population.

A second response to this first criticism is that, by not taking the side of the poor, one is in effect taking the side of the rich. In this regard Tutu writes that "there is no neutrality in a situation of injustice and oppression. If you say you are neutral, you are a liar, for you have already taken sides with the powerful" (Tutu 1997:9). Not taking sides is thus taking sides. Ultimately 'God's preferential option for the poor' is not about opting for the poor simply because they are poor, rather it is standing on the side of those who are being treated unjustly, thus, opting for justice and fairness. The only way to do that is to show a general bias in favour of those who are treated unfairly, not because they are good in and of themselves, but because justice is on their side (cf. Bosch 1991:443).

- 2) Secondly, Lamoureux identifies that critics challenge claims made for the absolute normativity of the hermeneutical privilege. Do the poor really have access to the truth in a more profound way than those who are wealthy? (Lamoureux 1996:262)

It is not so much a question of whether the poor have access to the truth on all issues, but that they do have a decisive perspective to offer on the issue of justice,

and the dignity of their own humanity. The wealthy might have truth to share in other areas of life, but on the issue of justice and the right for every human being to live with dignity and to have access to resources that enable a life lived with dignity, the poor hold a decisive key. The poor have a first hand experience of the truth of poverty, injustice and exploitation that the rich will never possess. If the truth about injustice is to be wrestled with, then the voice of the poor has to take priority.

3) Thirdly, Lamoureux identifies the criticism that the preferential option for the poor is that it is too often connected with revolutionary praxis and violence (Lamoureux 1996:262). This was one of Ratzinger's greatest concerns about the direction some liberation theologians had begun to take when he issued *Instruction on Certain Aspects of "Theology of Liberation"* (Ratzinger 1984:II.2-3; VIII.6). In this regard, Ratzinger writes:

“For the Marxist, the truth is a truth of class: there is no truth but the truth in the struggle of the revolutionary class. The fundamental law of history, which is the law of class struggle, implies that society is founded on violence” (Ratzinger 1984:VIII.5-6)

But this analysis has the danger of being politically naïve. Theology that fails to recognise the fact that there is a class struggle, expressed in the daily struggle of the poor simply to get by, in the end runs the risk of being at ease with the status quo,

thus unknowingly supporting a class struggle in which the wealthy already have the upper hand and in which violence is already being perpetrated through exploitation.

Underlying this criticism appears to be a resistance to seeing Marxist tools of analysis used at the service of theological reflection. The 'rebuttal' to such accusations and reservations has been succinctly expressed in the oft-quoted words of Dom Hélda Câmara:

“When I build houses for the poor, they call me a saint. But when I try to help the poor by calling by name the injustices which have made them poor, they call me a subversive, a Marxist” (in Bosch 1991:44).

Bosch (1991:440) believes that there are sound reasons why liberation theologians resort to a Marxist critique of traditional Christianity and society, for Marx himself was consumed by the desire to bring exploitation and oppression of the poor to an end, “and this can hardly be faulted” (Bosch 1991:440).

4) Fourth, Lamoureux points out that the option for the poor has led to claims that all poverty is due to exploitation and is thus to be blamed on capitalism (Lamoureux 1996:262).

This is a valid criticism. It has to be admitted that not all poverty is created by exploitation. Some poverty is created by bad decisions, inability to manage financial resources, substance abuse problems amongst other things. Liberation theology that does not take into account the reality of individual sin, will never enable the poor to be truly free either (cf. Ratzinger 1984:introduction)

In this regard, Ratzinger writes:

“Some [liberation theologians] are tempted to emphasize, unilaterally, the liberation from servitude of an earthly and temporal kind. They do so in such a way that they seem to put liberation from sin in second place, and so fail to give it the primary importance it is due” (Ratzinger 1984:introduction).

In answer to these criticisms, one of the world most prominent exponents of the notion of ‘God’s preferential option for the poor’ addresses the topic of sin, suggesting, “a social transformation, no matter how radical... does not automatically achieve suppression of all evils” (Gutierrez 1973:35). In doing so, Gutierrez demonstrates a very sober view of humanities need for inner liberation as well as the need for liberation from the structural injustices of society. Bosch also writes that in speaking of ‘God’s preferential option for the poor’, liberation theologians mean that:

“...they [the poor] deserve preference not because they are morally or religiously better than others, but because God is God, in whose eyes ‘the first are last’; or in the words of Las Casas, ‘God has the freshest and keenest memory of the least and the most forgotten’” (Bosch 1991:443).

Having examined briefly some of the central criticisms against the phrase “God’s preferential option for the poor”, it is perhaps important also clarify some of the intention behind the phrase.

Bosch writes that those theologians who speak of a preferential option for the poor are not referring to the church's need to engage in charity, but rather to stand in solidarity with the poor (Bosch 1991:435). The Church is thus not to be thought of as the 'church for the poor', but rather the 'church of the poor', thus seeking to avoid all traces of the traditional condescending attitude of the church toward the poor (Bosch 1991:436).

The word 'preferential' also needs to be examined and understood, not as though God is interested only in the poor as though the non-poor were excluded from God's love (Bosch 1991:435-437). Referring to Sider's (1980) interpretation of the preferential option for the poor, Bosch thus writes:

“...if the privileged are really the people of God, they too would be on the side of the poor; indeed those who neglect the poor are not really God's people at all, no matter how frequent their religious rituals are” (Bosch 1991:438).

Thirdly, the word 'option' is does not mean 'optional', but rather the poor are first because they are the most vulnerable and excluded (Bosch 1991:436). As has been suggested above, a bias has always existed within the church in the direction of the poor. Bosch (1991:436) writes that the rediscovery of the poor in our own day and age is thus a reaffirmation of an ancient theological tradition, a tradition which as has been suggested goes right back to the Israelites experience of freedom in the exodus from Egypt, but which found new impetus and new meaning in the life of Jesus of Nazareth.

For the purposes of this dissertation it is of vital importance that we examine the sense in which Jesus showed a 'preferential option for the poor', and it is to this that we now turn.

3.2 Making a case for Jesus' commitment and mission to the poor (Jesus' preferential option for the poor)

If one is going to make a case for reading John 11 as expressing Jesus' mission and commitment to the poor, it is important firstly to justify seeing Jesus in those terms at all. Did the historical Jesus really have as a central dimension to his mission and ministry, a commitment to the poor? Does the collective witness of the other three Synoptic Gospels point us in this direction, or is this a misdirected and a mistaken view of Jesus?

In order to make a case for Jesus' commitment and mission to the poor I will start by reviewing the views of Crossan, a contemporary Jesus scholar, placing Crossan alongside other scholars of the historical Jesus. Having examined Crossan's historical reconstruction of Jesus, I will then examine the three Synoptic Gospels to bring out what I believe to be Jesus' clear socio-political commitment to the poor.

3.2.1 Crossan's reconstruction of Jesus as a political revolutionary (with reference to other scholars of the historical Jesus)

In *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*, Crossan (1994) seeks to uncover the “historical Jesus” from behind the myths and theology of Christian tradition. In doing so Crossan uses a three-pronged approach combining three disciplines that he believes are mutually corrective (1994:xi). The three disciplines Crossan uses are:

- i) Cross cultural anthropology
- ii) Greco-Roman and Jewish history of the first quarter of the first century
- iii) Literary and textual research and criticism (see 1994:xii-xiv).

Using these three disciplines, Crossan paints a picture of Jesus as a Mediterranean Jewish peasant with a radical and revolutionary socio-political program. In this regard, it would be incorrect to interpret revolutionary as meaning or including a programme of violence. But then as political history from various times and places has shown (eg. the life of Ghandi), it is not necessary to use violence to be a political revolutionary (cf. Myers 1988:47).

In this regard, Crossan is not the only scholar of the historical Jesus who regards Jesus as being a political revolutionary. Although placing their own particular emphases on the theme of Jesus as a political revolutionary, both Borg (1987 and 1994) and Wright (1999) speak of Jesus as a political revolutionary of one kind or another. Borg, in examining the death of Jesus writes:

“The most certain fact about the historical Jesus is his execution as a political rebel. In one sense he was not guilty... We have no reason to think of him as sympathetic to violent resistance against Rome and much to indicate the opposite” (Borg 1987:179).

In another sense, Borg believes that Jesus was guilty, “for he did not give his ultimate allegiance to Rome or to any other kingdom of the world” (Borg 1987:179). Political revolutionaries are those who are dissatisfied with the ways in which society is operating, and who call for a radical reordering of society. In this sense, Borg in a similar way paints a portrait of the radical new vision Jesus had for society based on compassion rather than on the holiness codes of much of Jewish culture at the time (Borg 1987:129ff; 1994:46ff).

One of the key reasons that Borg suggests for Jesus’ crucifixion was thus his revolutionary call for the transformation of society:

“Jesus spoke of a way of life in which righteousness, purity, honour and position did not matter, which meant blessing to the poor and woe to the rich, which loosened the ties of loyalty to cultural ways, in which outcasts were accepted – all this challenging the conventional wisdom of the time... thus... Jesus was not only a threat to public order, but profoundly wrong. To the established classes, this teaching spoke of a social transformation that was threatening” (Borg 1987:181-182).

With regard to Jesus’ crucifixion and its meaning, Crossan, resonating with Borg’s analysis, writes plainly that “...Roman crucifixion was state terrorism; that its function was to deter resistance or revolt, especially among the lower classes...” (Crossan 1994:127). Thus, for Crossan, the death of Jesus was not about some eternal plan for atonement, but the consequence of Jesus’ radical social and political agenda

that threatened the Jewish and Roman hierarchies by giving dignity and “new life” to those who were poor and oppressed in his day.

Crossan, making specific reference to the story of Lazarus being raised from the dead, believes that the peasant villagers and subsistence farmers, the poor and destitute of Jesus’ day, would have said that Jesus brought life out of death (Crossan 1994:95). Crossan believes they would not have been referring to a heavenly future but the earthly present. “Life out of death is how they would have understood the Kingdom of God, in which they began to take back control of their own bodies, their hopes, and their own destinies” (Crossan 1994:95).

3.2.1.1 Kingdom of God as a present, socio-political reality (a kingdom of nobodies)

Whereas Crossan believes that John the Baptist preached an apocalyptic message preparing people for a radical in breaking of God’s sovereign rule (which had revolutionary overtones in and of itself) (Crossan 1994:29-44), Crossan believes that Jesus’ message (communicated both in words and actions) was very different (Crossan 1994:47-48). According to Crossan, Jesus did not believe that it was enough to wait for an intervention of God into the affairs of this world. Rather he believed that one must enter a present Kingdom or “realm” of God, here and now (Crossan 1994:48, 55-56). While not referring directly to the Kingdom of God as a present reality in quite the same way as Crossan does, Borg’s perspective compliments Crossan’s in this respect. Borg (1987:14ff) writes that the majority of scholars no

longer hold the view that Jesus was an eschatological prophet who expected the end of the world in his own day. He continues:

“Moreover, if Jesus did not expect the imminent end of the world, then it follows that ‘Kingdom of God’ must be given a meaning other than its eschatological one” (Borg 1987:14).

An important part of Jesus’ understanding of the Kingdom of God was, according to Borg, shaped by his experiential awareness of the reality of God (Borg 1994:30). According to Borg, Jesus had a vivid relationship with the world of Spirit, and it was this relationship with the sacred reality of God that became the source and power of his “teaching, his freedom, courage and compassion” and of his call for a transformation of the society and culture of his day (Borg 1987:15-16).

In this sense, Borg’s perspective in many ways compliments the view of Crossan (1994:56), that the Kingdom that Jesus proclaimed and lived was a present reality with a profound socio-political dimension. Crossan’s particular emphasis in understanding this Kingdom that Jesus proclaimed was that it was a Kingdom of radical egalitarianism and radical inclusivity (Crossan 1994:71-74).

One of the ways in which Crossan believes that Jesus emphasized the nature of this Kingdom of radical egalitarianism and radical inclusivity was by emphasizing the important place of the lowest of the low in God’s scheme of things. According to Crossan (1994:62), in the Kingdom that Jesus proclaimed and lived, those who were destitute were proclaimed to be “blessed” on the basis that “the only ones who are innocent or blessed are those squeezed out deliberately as human junk from the

system's own evil operations" (Crossan 1994:62). Referring to Luke 6:20, "Blessed are you who are poor" and its corollary "Woe to you rich", Crossan writes that this "...is a terrifying aphorism against society because... it focuses not just on personal or individual abuse of power, but on such abuse in its systemic or structural possibilities" so that none of us can truly be regarded as truly innocent (Crossan 1994:62).

In addition to the destitute being called blessed in the Kingdom of God, the radical egalitarianism of the Kingdom that Jesus proclaimed was emphasized also by his elevating the status of children as the model for disciples to emulate. The passage comes to us in Mark 10:13-16 in which Jesus proclaims: "I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the Kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it".

Crossan in this regard believes that it is important to note the status of children within the Mediterranean world at the time, namely, that the horrifying situation was that a child was a non-person in the Mediterranean world of paternal power, which was absolute in its acceptance or rejection of the newly born infant (Crossan 1994:64). Crossan thus writes that "a Kingdom of children is a Kingdom of nobodies" (Crossan 1994:64).

Crossan is not alone in reading Jesus' teaching on children from Mark 10:13ff in this way. Myers, in his own perspective on this passage, believes that it "reverses the normal socio-cultural assumptions about status, elevating the 'last' to the 'first'" (Myers 1988:267). Thus while Crossan writes that children were regarded as nobodies, Myers believes that in Mark 10, they represent for us the 'least of the least'

(Myers 1988:267). By implication, a Kingdom where the nobodies are given absolute status is a Kingdom of radical inclusion and radical egalitarianism.

3.2.1.2 A Kingdom of radical egalitarianism expressed in ‘open commensality’

The radical egalitarianism of this Kingdom which Crossan believes Jesus proclaimed, was profoundly symbolised in what Crossan calls Jesus’ ‘open commensality’, in other words, Jesus’ policy of open and inclusive sharing of meals especially with the nobodies of his world (Crossan 1994:66). Crossan writes that in almost every time, and culture, rules for eating and sharing of meals most often reflect the social rules and hierarchy of society (Crossan 1994:68-69). It is around the table that one sees who has power and who doesn’t have power, who is acceptable and who is unacceptable. Eating arrangements are thus like a map of society (Crossan 1994:68). Crossan believes that Jesus’ eating habits represented and enacted in a powerful way Jesus’ vision of an alternative social order based on the radical egalitarianism and inclusiveness referred to above (Crossan 1994:70).

It is at this point that Crossan, Borg and Wright find much common ground. In a similar way to Crossan, Wright (1999:45) speaks of the ‘festive meals’ of Jesus, in which Jesus welcomed all and sundry. He believes that what was so offensive about these ‘festive meals’ of radical invitation and radical welcome and inclusion, was not “that he as an individual was associating with disreputable people... it was because he was doing so *as a prophet of the Kingdom* and was making these meals and their free-for-all welcome a central feature of his program” (Wright 1999:45). In a similar way to

which Crossan speaks of the eating habits of antiquity as drawing a map of society (Crossan 1994:68), mirroring and reflecting the structure of society, Wright believes that the free-for-all festive meals of Jesus gave profound expression to Jesus' vision of the Kingdom, a vision that was subversive of other kingdom-agendas (Wright 1999:45).

Crossan's work thus helps us to see Jesus within his own social and political context as having a mission and a ministry that 'raised the poor' from places of death enabling them to discover new life (Crossan 1994:94-95).

For many trained and schooled in the theology and tradition of the church, this picture of Jesus might seem startling and even frightening for it lifts Jesus out of the abstraction of so much of our atonement theologies and forces us to see the political and social implications of Jesus' life and message. But if we make an examination of each of the Synoptic Gospels we discover that each of these Gospel's in their own way provides evidence of Jesus' socio-political engagement with a special emphasis on the poor.

3.2 .2 Jesus' commitment to the poor in Mark's Gospel

While the socio-political commitments of Jesus can be easily uncovered in Mark's Gospel, often they have been hidden behind the apocalyptic framework of Mark (cf. Myers 1988:101). With Jesus moving from place to place, healing and casting out demons, being tempted by Satan in the wilderness, and the suggestion in Mark 3:20ff that he had come to bind up Satan the strong man, it is easy to get caught up in an

interpretation that would remove Jesus from the dust and sweat of this world and interpret Jesus' mission and ministry as being a cosmic, spiritual battle with the forces of evil (cf. Spong 1991:132). But what such an interpretation fails to understand is that apocalyptic writings in Jewish tradition were precisely *not* about otherworldly spiritual battles, but rather commentary on this-worldly political situations of oppression and injustice (Myers 1988:101ff). Within political contexts of oppression and injustice, Jewish writers would adopt the apocalyptic genre precisely to uncover and expose the injustices for what they were, and to arouse within their readers and hearers a sense of hope that God would still have the final say (see du Rand 1997: 257-262).

Mark's Gospel therefore needs to be seen as a thoroughly political text. It is from this perspective that Myers (1988 and 1996) reads and interprets Mark's Gospel. In *Binding the Strong Man*, Myers (1988:11) believes that what we see is a manifesto for calling followers of Jesus to a place of radical discipleship. Myers quotes Carney (1975) who believes that the scholarship and writings of antiquity are overwhelmingly the voices of the elite and the wealthy. Following Carney, Myers thus believes that

“Mark's story of Jesus stands virtually alone among the literary achievements of antiquity for one reason: it is a narrative for and about the common people. The Gospel reflects the daily realities of disease, poverty, disenfranchisement that characterised the social existence of first century Palestine's 'other 95%'” (Myers 1988:39).

Myers demonstrates how Mark's Gospel presents a picture of Jesus whose compassion is constantly directed to the "importunate masses and their overwhelming needs and demands. He responds to their desperate situation of hunger and hopelessness, and nurtures their dreams of liberation" (Myers 1988:39).

3.2.2.1 Socio-economic situation of Mark's day (and of Jesus' day)

In writing his commentary on Mark's Gospel, Myers believes that Mark wrote his Gospel in northern Palestine, before the fall of the Jerusalem temple after the Jewish War of 66-70 AD (Myers 1988:41). Thus while Mark wrote a generation after Jesus, Myers believes that generally speaking, Mark wrote within the same historical era as the life and times of Jesus himself (Myers 1988:42). Myers writes therefore: "there is then a fundamental structural, if not exactly historical, symmetry between the world in which Mark sets his story and his own world" (Myers 1988:42).

Within this context, Myers (like Crossan) reconstructs some of the harsh socio-economic realities of Palestine. Galilee and northern Palestine operated within two economic systems. On the one hand it operated on the traditional "sub-Asiatic" economic system of reciprocity and subsistence farming. At the same time it also operated on another level, namely the slave based economy of Roman Hellenism (Myers 1988:49-50).

He writes that northern Palestine and Galilee found themselves largely in the hands of dynasties and royal family estates (Myers 1988:47/48). The increased Hellenization of the region meant an increased economic marginalization for subsistence farmers

and those who lived a traditional way of life (Myers 1988:50). Myers goes on to say that:

“...peasant families had three obligations for production. Above all they had to grow enough food to feed themselves and their animals, and to have seed for the following year’s crop. Then there was the need for a surplus because of the demands of both the reciprocity and the redistributive systems” (Myers 1988:51).

The Roman economy also demanded a surplus extraction from the peasants, who were not geared for this kind of commercial production. This cemented the peasant cycle of poverty (Myers 1988:51-52) in which small landholders and tenant workers found themselves in extremely vulnerable economic circumstances.

The result of Roman Hellenization was a system that is not unlike the phenomenon of urbanisation in South Africa today. Rural villages are culturally, educationally and economically disadvantaged. Those in the rural areas find themselves at the margins of society with very little in the way of resources to ever “make it” in the large sophisticated urban areas. Those moving from country to city often find themselves unable to find a place of significance within the new urban environment. Myers (1988:53) therefore describes the phenomenon of centre versus periphery that occurred between city and village.

This phenomenon of marginalization of the periphery from the centre could also be seen with the structure of Jewish religious and social life. The second-class status of Galileans is according to Myers a well-attested fact (Myers 1988:51). Myers writes

that those from Galilee held a clear second-class status in relationship to Jews from the south (Myers 1988:54). There was a strong Jewish elitism held particularly in the hands of the Sadducees, but also in a different and less obvious way in the hands of the Pharisees (Myers 1988:76). In a context where religious life was central to the life of the Jews, the scribal caste of both the Pharisees and the Sadducees held enormous social, political and economic power through their authority to interpret the scriptures (Myers 1988:78). In addition, within Jerusalem itself the temple, which was the symbolic centre of all of Jewish life, became a centre for economic power (Myers 1988:78-79). Myers writes that surplus flowed into and piled up in Jerusalem with no adequate mechanisms to re-channel those resources to those who were in need. Rather the surplus became translated into wealth. The temple trade thus became the very centre of the city's wealth and economy (Myers 1988:79).

Therefore, both within Roman Hellenization and within the Judaism of Jesus' and Mark's day, one finds a hierarchical system of domination, alienation and marginalization. As a result of these systems of domination, there arose particularly within Galilee widespread popular subversive political activity in the form of social banditry (Myers 1988:58).

Myers (1988:86) believes that within this context arose the prophetic voice and ministry of Jesus who advocated disdain for the Jewish collaborationist aristocracy of the Sadducees, as well as for the Romans (cf. Richardson 1973:45). At the same time he repudiated Qumranite withdrawal and Pharisaic activism on the grounds that they failed to address the roots of oppression in the dominant symbolic order (Myers 1988:86). In addition he rejected the social banditry of local vigilante groups. Myers believes that Mark presents a picture of Jesus who developed a pedagogy "...to help

the peasants unmask the oppressive economic self-interest of the Jerusalem hierarchy, their tithing structure, Sabbath regulations and temple” (Myers 1988:86). He suggests that Jesus took the “...logic of solidarity with the poor so far as to challenge the artificial gulf that kept the oppressed Jew and gentile segregated” (Myers 1988:86). Thus Myers can write that “Mark’s narrative clearly presents the practice of Jesus as socio-politically revolutionary without recourse to an organised strategy of violence” (Myers 1988:47).

Taking the Gospel of Mark section by section (and at times verse by verse), Myers (1988 and 1996) demonstrates how Mark’s text presents a vision of Jesus as one who was socially engaged in the issues of his day and particularly on the side of the poor and the oppressed. In summarising some of Myers views on Mark’s Gospel, I will seek to highlight those aspects that are particularly and immediately relevant in examining Jesus’ relationship to the poor.

3.2.2.2 Jubilee teaching in Mark’s Gospel

The teaching of the Jubilee in Leviticus 25 forms the heart of the ancient Hebrew vision for a just society. Yoder summarises the Leviticus 25 teaching on the year of Jubilee as including four prescriptions:

“(1) leaving the soil fallow, (2) remission of debts, (3) the liberation of slaves, (4) the return to each individual of his family’s property” (Yoder 1972:60).

Connecting the Jubilee with an understanding of the place and role of the Sabbath, Myers gives broader understanding of the Jubilee vision and teaching when he writes that:

“The Torah’s Sabbath regulations sought to teach people about their dependence upon the land and upon the ‘divine economy of grace’. Because the earth belongs to God and its fruits are ‘free’, the people should justly distribute those fruits instead of seeking to own and hoard them.

The word ‘Sabbath’ first appears in the story of manna in the wilderness (read Exodus 16:15-26). The story was more than a lesson about God’s sustaining love. It served as an archetypal reminder that the purpose of economic organisation was to guarantee enough for everyone, *not* surplus accumulation by the few. Human attempts to control the forces of production are to be regularly interrupted by prescribed Sabbath rest (once a year and once every seven years) for both the land and human labour (Exodus 31:12-17; Deuteronomy 15:1-7), patterned after the order of creation (Genesis 2:2).

The Sabbath cycle was supposed to culminate in a ‘Jubilee’ every forty-ninth year (read Leviticus 25). The Jubilee was intended as Israel’s hedge against the inevitable tendency of human societies to concentrate power in the hands of the few, creating hierarchical classes with the poor at the bottom” (Myers 1996:24).

It is important to note that much scholarly debate has taken place as to whether the Jubilee was ever practically implemented in Israel’s life as a nation (Myers 1996:25; cf.

Yoder 1972:30). Yoder (1972: 31) writes however that our interest in the Jubilee is not so much on whether it was actually implemented as understanding the fact that it remained a prophetic vision that was an ideal of what life could and should be like. In a similar way, Myers (1996:25) believes that despite the scholarly debate over implementation, the Jubilee remains at the heart of Torah, and Mark's Jesus. For those who believe that the implementation of the Jubilee vision is in fact an important part of the debate, Yoder does note that "at least once in Israel's experience it came to life as a concrete experience of national revival" under the reign of King Zedekiah (Yoder 1972:31). In addition he makes reference to the writings of Josephus where Josephus affirms a widespread use of the Sabbath year regulations even in his own day (Yoder 1972:30-31 footnotes).

In a more recent publication, Myers addresses the issue of the practice of Jubilee in the following way. He writes:

"Biblical interpreters, sceptical of the Jubilee tradition, have not found evidence for its practice because they have not been looking for it. But once we restore Sabbath economics to its central place in the Torah, we hear its echoes *everywhere* in the rest of scripture. The standard of economic justice is woven into the warp and weft of the Bible; pull this strand, and the whole fabric unravels" (Myers 1998).

In Myers' analysis of Mark and various pericopes in Mark's Gospel he identifies a number of places where the theme of the Jubilee teaching arises. It is to those that I will now seek to briefly summarise.

3.2.2.3 Jubilee forgiveness and politics of food

The first instance where Myers believes Mark points us in the direction of the Jubilee comes in Mark 2:1-14. In this regard, Myers writes that in Mark, "Jesus' first substantive clash with the authorities arose as a result of his practice of "unlicensed" forgiving of sins, which has clear Jubilee overtones" (Myers 1998).

The next story in Mark's Gospel that stands as a pointer in the direction of the Jubilee comes as Jesus clashes with the Pharisees over what Myers calls the 'politics of food' (Myers 1996:24). Giving some background to this incident and then identifying the issues at stake in this pericope, Myers writes:

"There was resentment among Galilean peasants about the control exercised by the Pharisaic establishment over the sowing, harvesting and marketing of produce. Many poor peasants could not afford to obey laws concerning tithing, or leaving their fields fallow during the Sabbath year, or what they should and shouldn't plant or eat. From their point of view, the Pharisees' adjudication of Sabbath rules had become a way of regulating the economy to Pharisaic benefit. Mark's grain-field episode thus contrasts Jesus' positive Jubilee ethic of Sabbath redistribution with the Pharisees' proprietary ethic of Sabbath restriction

Cutting through a field and stripping grain, the disciples draw fire from Pharisees because Sabbath rules regarding harvesting (2:23f). Jesus' justification of his disciples' practice appeals to a (somewhat loosely rendered) scriptural story about David (2:25; see Samuel 21:1-6). As a guerrilla fighter on campaign, David commandeered the Bread of the Presence for his soldiers, violating the holiness codes because he was in 'need' (see 11:2f). But Jesus has added something to the story: David and his followers were hungry" (Myers 1996:25).

Myers concludes that "this story endorses the Jubilee notion that hungry people have a right to food despite laws that restrict such access" (Myers 1996:25). In doing so, Myers believes that this passage resonates with two important Levitical principles, namely:

"If one of your countrymen becomes poor and is unable to support himself among you, help him... You must not lend him money at interest or sell him food for a profit" (Lev 25:35,37).

"When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Leave them for the poor and the alien" (Lev 23:22).

3.2.2.4 Jubilee economics in the feeding of the five thousand (and the four thousand)

The feeding of the five thousand (and the four thousand) again raises the profile of an economic system that benefits the poor. According to Myers, "...this episode obviously alludes to the old story of the wilderness manna, which... under girds the Sabbath economics of grace" (Myers 1996:74). In the episode, as Jesus confronts the disciples with the call to feed the crowds, Myers believes that Mark highlights the debate between market economics represented by the disciples response, versus the economics of sharing represented by Jesus' action (cf. Arias 1992:45) whereby "Jesus teaches self-sufficiency through a practice of sharing available resources" (Myers 1996:74) and in doing so demonstrates what it means to live a Jubilee life-style of radical sharing based on Leviticus 25. Although Arias does not make the same link with the Jubilee teaching of Leviticus 25, much of what he writes regarding Mark 6:30ff and Mark 8:1ff resonates with the socio-economic emphasis of Myers (Arias 1992:40-41). Arias own perspective on these passages is that they point to what he calls the 'hermeneutics of life' and that in these feeding episodes, we see demonstrated Jesus' passion to defend the right to life by responding personally, and calling his disciples to respond concretely to the most basic human need of food (Arias 1992:40).

3.2.2.5 Jubilee, repentance and reparation

The last reference to Myers emphasis on the Jubilee in the Gospel of Mark that I wish to highlight is with regard to the story of the rich young man (Mark 10:17ff). Myers

believes that Mark would have us see in this story that the way to enter God's Kingdom, particularly for the rich, is through repentance given expression by means of reparation (Myers 1996:124ff). Reparation and redistribution of wealth to the poor lies at the heart of the Jubilee injunctions of Leviticus 25

At the time of Jesus, socio-economic inequality had become widespread primarily by the rich acquiring land through the debt default of small agricultural landholders (Myers 1996:125, cf. Myers 1988:49 and 1996:74). In this context Jesus calls the rich young man (who is said to have many properties in vs10) to dismantle the system from which he derives his privilege by using Jubilee logic, by redistributing his ill-gotten surplus back to the poor (Myers 1996:125).

Myers (1996:126) sums up that, in the context of the class inequality, Jesus' response to the rich young man was a call to repentance by means of reparation. In doing so, Jesus was reiterating the Jubiliary practice of redistributive justice.

In this pericope it is interesting to note that whereas some liberation theologians have been accused of an absolutist understanding of the class struggle, leading to support for programs of violence, Jesus is able to value the rich man as a person (vs 21 "Jesus looked at him and loved him"), despite the fact that he lives on the 'other side' of the class struggle.

3.2.2.6 Jesus and the priority of the poor in Mark's Gospel

As mentioned earlier (section 3.1.1), Arias (1980: introduction) writes that when one reads the Bible 'through the eyes of the poor' or with the poor as a priority, one discovers an abiding theme of concern for the poor and the dispossessed running through the Bible as a golden thread. Mark's Gospel is no exception.

3.2.2.7 Jesus and the crowds in Mark's Gospel

Perhaps the first important observation that needs to be made in examining the priority of the poor in Mark's Gospel is Jesus' relationship to the crowds. Jesus is constantly surrounded by, or sought after by the crowds. While Mark introduces the crowds to us by implication already in chapter one where they are referred to as 'the people' (vs32) and 'the whole town' (vs 33) which gathered at the door of the house where Jesus was staying, the crowds (*ho ochlos*) are introduced to us explicitly in Mark 2:4 (Myers 1988:156). Korean liberation theologian Ahn (1981) explores the significance of this term that occurs thirty-eight times in Mark's Gospel:

“We would normally expect the term *laos* rather than *ochlos* to be used for the people, since the term *laos* occurs far more frequently in the language of the biblical writers... used around 2000 times in the Septuagint... It is certain that in the New Testament, Mark is the first writer to introduce the term *ochlos*... The term *ochlos* in Greek appears in Greek documents referring to a confused majority or to the ordinary soldiers in a combat unit but not to officers. It also refers to non-combat people who follow the army and perform menial duties.

We must note that the anonymous people referred to as the *ochlos* are differentiated from the ruling class... the Septuagint uses this Greek term with this general meaning of ‘the mass’” (Ahn 1981:139, 140).

Myers writes that Ahn concludes that Mark’s understanding of the term *ochlos* is analogous to the rabbinic expression ‘*am ha’ aretz*’ meaning ‘people of the land’, who after the time of Ezra “came to specifically mean the lower class, poor, uneducated and ignorant of the law” (Myers 1988:156). It is significant Ahn points out that the *ochlos* in Mark’s Gospel are identified as sinners and outcasts (in Myers 1988:156). Richardson adds backing to this when he writes that “the scrupulous observers of the Law and the oral tradition were the *chaberim*, the true Israelites; the rest were the ‘*am ha’ aret*, the ‘people of the land’, who were regarded as worse than the heathen” (Richardson 1973:24). It is therefore significant that Rabbis taught that neither meals, nor travel should be shared with the ‘*am ha’ aretz*’ (Myers 1988:156), while in Mark’s Gospel Jesus is castigated by the scribes and Pharisees for eating with sinners (Mark 2:15ff).

Closely connected with the fact that Jesus’ ministry is conducted primarily among the crowds (*ochlos*), thus emphasizing the priority of the poor, it is also deeply significant that geographically speaking, Jesus mostly ministers within the small villages of Galilee and avoids the larger cities. Jesus’ ministry is thus primarily on the periphery of the social hierarchy as apposed to the cities which were centres of power (see Myers 1988:53-55).

3.2.2.8 The priority of the poor: a dying girl and a bleeding woman

A second key area in Mark's Gospel that emphasizes the priority of the poor is found in Mark 5:21-43 in which we see Jesus' response to a dying girl and a bleeding woman. In this story, Jesus' mission to heal the dying daughter of a synagogue ruler is interrupted by an unclean, or impure woman who had been suffering an ongoing menstrual problem. Doctors who had failed to provide any real help to her had bankrupted her, and thus she was not only rejected as an unclean outcast, but she thus also represents the poor of Israel (Myers 1988:200-201).

What is important to note in this story is that Jesus gives priority to her need, despite the fact that he is on the way to see the synagogue rulers' daughter (see Myers 1996:65-66). In addition, Jesus seeks to know the human face of the poor in the crowd as he insists on knowing who it is who has touched him (Myers 1996:65).

In this story, we are thus confronted with both the privileged and the impoverished. In his exegesis of this passage, Myers believes that Mark would have us see and understand that:

“...only when the outcast woman is restored to true ‘daughterhood’ can the daughter of the synagogue be restored to true life. That is, the faith of the privileged must learn from the poor. This story thus shows a characteristic of the sovereignty of God that Jesus will later address: The ‘last will be first’ and the ‘least will be the greatest’” (see Mark 10:31; 43) (Myers 1996:66).

3.2.2.9 The poor, the temple, and the crucifixion of Jesus

The last reference to Jesus' commitment to the poor in Mark's Gospel that I wish to highlight comes in Mark 11:15-19, commonly referred to as the 'cleansing of the temple'. Myers points out that the real issue at stake in this pericope was not the fact that buying and selling were happening in the temple, but "rather the way in which the political economy of the [temple] cult had become oppressive to the poor" (Myers 1996:147). Mark pointedly refers us to the fact that it was the pigeon sellers' tables that were over-turned. The sacrifice of a pigeon was very particularly the sacrifice made by those who were too poor to make the sacrifice of a larger animal. Thus, "Jesus overturns the stations used to make a profit off those condemned to second-class citizenship" (Myers 1996:147).

While not all scholars might agree with Myers analysis of this passage (cf. Nineham 1963:301), Barclay, in examining this passage in Mark, does a very similar analysis of the socio-economic realities behind the selling of pigeons in the temple (Barclay 1975:272-275 cf. Cole 1961:177-178). In doing so he draws very similar conclusions to Myers, summarising the incident by saying that:

"...it was the fact that the poor, humble pilgrims were being swindled which moved Jesus to wrath... The temple authorities were treating them not as worshippers, not even as human beings, but as things to be exploited for their own ends" (Barclay 1975:274-275).

An important point which will be picked up later on is that according to Mark, it was this confronting of economic abuse in the temple that precipitated the immediate plot to take his life (see Mark 11:18). Mark's suggested reason for Jesus' crucifixion will need to be compared with and evaluated in terms of John's reason for Jesus' crucifixion, namely the raising of Lazarus, which according to this thesis is none other than John's symbolic representation of Jesus' raising of the poor and oppressed. When interpreted in this way, Mark and John's reasons for the death of Jesus become remarkably similar, with a common connection with the poor.

This cursory view of portions of Mark's Gospel helps to demonstrate that even from a straight biblical analysis, like the one that Myers has done with Mark's Gospel, it is possible to demonstrate Jesus' missionary commitment to the poor in Mark's Gospel. I believe that the same commitment to the poor is also demonstrable in the other two Synoptic Gospels, Matthew and Luke, who, according to widespread scholarly agreement, are in fact based substantially on Mark, though not on Mark alone. It thus should not surprise us to find the Markan commitment to the poor surfacing again in Luke and Matthew, albeit sometimes in slightly different ways.

3.2.3 Jesus' missionary commitment to the poor in Matthew

As has been suggested already in the introduction, Matthew's Gospel has often been characterised as the Gospel for the Jews in order to convince Jews that Jesus is the long awaited Messiah, the fulfilment of the prophecies of the Hebrew scriptures (Barclay 1975:5 cf. Bosch 1991:59). This is undeniably true of Matthew's Gospel, however it has been so emphasized that other very important thrusts and themes in

Matthew have been either downplayed or overlooked, such as Jesus' socio-political commitment to the poor.

It has been written elsewhere (see Bosch 1991:73-74 and Arias 1992) that Matthew's Gospel was in fact written as a discipleship manual designed to "make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). As Bosch and Arias both suggest, Matthew's concern for disciple-making placed a great emphasis on action as opposed to just theological theory (see Bosch 1991:81). According to Arias (1992:20), Matthew's concern was for 'orthopraxis' rather than 'orthodoxy' (cf. Bosch 1991:68). In this regard, it is important to note that quite substantial parts of the teaching of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel are about teaching people a life-style in solidarity with the poor and one's neighbours in need (Arias 1992:21). Bosch thus writes that in Matthew's Gospel "love of neighbour may be regarded as the litmus test for love of God" (Bosch 1991:67).

3.2.3.1 *Dikaiosyne*: righteousness and justice

Central to Matthew's understanding of Jesus' message and teaching is what Matthew called the Kingdom of Heaven, or to put it in slightly different language, the Kingdom or Reign of God. In terms of the concept of the Kingdom or Reign of God in Matthew's Gospel, Bosch writes that "linked with God's Reign in a mysterious way is the concept *dikaiosyne*, which is the most Matthean notion of all" (Bosch 1991:71). Bosch (1991:71) believes that the two words, which help most to express the meaning of the word *dikaiosyne* are the English words "justice" and "righteousness". The Kingdom of God is essentially a Kingdom of righteousness and justice, suggesting both a personal moral dimension of integrity (see Matthew 5-7), and a concern for

social issues of justice and injustice (Arias 1992:24-25). Matthew's disciples who are initiated into the church and into the Reign of God are thus initiated and taught in the way of righteousness and social justice. Disciples of Christ in Matthew's Gospel are moreover instructed to place pursuit after this Kingdom of righteousness and justice over and above all other activities and pursuits (Matthew 6:33) (Bosch 1991:71).

It is important to read between the lines here, and acknowledge fully the implications for this understanding of the Kingdom. Where one uses the word 'justice', one is referring to a just ordering of society, and by implication the uprooting of injustice and oppression. Wherever one speaks in this way, the concern for the place of the poor in society would be inevitable. Here, although in a different way from Mark and Luke, Matthew has preserved the very real socio-political dimension of Jesus' life and ministry. Even if Matthew can be accused of watering down this dimension of Jesus' message, for example in the beatitudes where Matthew speaks of the poor in *spirit* (cf. Fenton 1963:80, Bosch 1991:98-99) in contrast to Luke's "blessed are the poor" (Matthew 5:3; Luke 6:20), when one defines the "Kingdom of Heaven" with the word "justice" there is an unequivocal socio-political implication in the direction of the poor.

The most clear and profound emphasis on the importance of the poor in Matthew's Gospel is found in Matthew 25: 31-46 with the parable of the sheep and the goats. In this parable, Matthew has Jesus identifying himself with the poor and the excluded in society in a most direct way. In fact Matthew suggests that 'entrance into God's Kingdom' at the final judgement will be dependent on the way disciples had responded to the needs of the poor and the oppressed (Fenton 1963:400). The explicit

connection that Matthew makes is that whatever a disciple does for the poor one in actual fact does for and to Jesus himself. As Mother Teresa often said in reference to this Matthean passage, “Each one of them [the poor] is Jesus in disguise” (Brainy Quote 2007).

Now it might be said that what Matthew is doing in this passage is transforming Jesus’ radical message of equality and dignity into a condescending ‘charity’ towards the poor, but the point is still made, that Jesus’ mission and ministry were intricately connected with the poor.

3.2.4 Jesus’ commitment to the poor in Luke’s Gospel

Probably more than any of the other gospels, Luke’s Gospel has been characterised as the ‘Gospel of the Poor’ (cf. Bosch 1991:84ff). Clearly from what I have written about Mark and Matthew’s Gospel, I do not believe that only Luke’s Gospel contains an emphasis on Jesus’ mission and ministry to the poor. Having said that, it cannot really be denied that in a more obvious way than the other Gospels, Luke constantly portrays Jesus as good news for the poor. One of the ways Luke does this is to very deliberately portray Jesus’ mission and ministry as inaugurating the Jubilee (Arias 1992:56). As Arias puts it, Luke presents Jesus announcing the Kingdom Jubilee style (Arias 1992:66). It is within this Jubilee framework that we are able to begin to understand some of Luke’s most important missionary themes: concern for the poor and the outcast, restitution and restoration, repentance and forgiveness, and salvation.

3.2.4.1 Jubilee mission

Luke 4:16ff stands for many scholars as a key announcement in the Gospel of Luke of the agenda for the mission and ministry of Jesus. Saayman writes that this passage can only be understood adequately in the light of the teaching about the Jubilee, and specifically, the Jubilee as a paradigm for Kingdom action in the world (Saayman 1991:5). Indeed, Arias in his 1992 publication, writes that Luke 4:16ff represents distinctive Jubilee language and that “the acceptable year of the Lord is precisely the year of Jubilee (Arias 1992:60-61, cf. Yoder 1972:30-31) which we find expressed in such passages as Leviticus 25; Exodus 21-23; Deuteronomy 15. Arias writes that in Hebrew tradition, Jubilee was God’s revolution within human affairs, a new beginning to correct accumulated injustice, to reconstruct social relationships in ways that brought freedom and liberation from bondage (Arias 1992:61-62). Indeed the Jubilee was an act of God’s grace and any “vertical grace demands horizontal grace” (Arias 1992:62). It was holistic forgiveness at the personal and social level, keeping together the spiritual and the material aspects of life” (Arias 1992:62).

Mission thus understood in the light of the Jubilee as indeed is the case for Luke’s Gospel is therefore a comprehensive and encompassing mission (Saayman 1989:5). Saayman writes that:

“This comprehensiveness is illustrated by the range of activities of the Spirit-filled Servant of God (Messiah): preaching good news to the poor, proclaiming liberty to the captives, restoring sight to the blind, setting free

the oppressed, in short, announcing in word and in deed the year of the Jubilee, the year of God's all-inclusive liberation" (Saayman 1991:5).

Thus, as has been suggested, most of Luke's understanding of his missionary paradigm can be understood more clearly within the framework of Jubilee. Thus we can begin to understand Luke's own understanding of mission in the following ways:

- Jubilee as good news to the poor and the outcast;
- Jubilee as restitution and rectification.

3.2.4.2 Jubilee as good news for the poor and the marginalized (and the rich?)

Bosch writes:

"It is common knowledge that Luke has a particular interest in the poor and other marginalized groups. Already in the Magnificat (Luke 1:53) we read: 'God has filled the hungry with good things and the rich he has sent away empty'. This sentiment is sustained throughout the Gospel" (Bosch 1991:98, cf. Yoder 1972:21f).

As Bosch goes on to say, Luke has frequently edited the tradition handed down to him in such a way that it shows a bias towards the poor and dispossessed (Bosch 1991:98). Bosch quotes Schottroff and Stegemann (1986) as saying that if we did not have Luke, "we would probably have lost an important, if not the most important, part of the earliest Christian tradition and its intense preoccupation with the figure and message of Jesus as the hope of the poor" (Bosch 1991:98).

But who are the poor in Luke's Gospel? On the one hand the category quite clearly in Luke's Gospel has a very strong literal meaning as those who are materially poor, as suggested by parables such as that of Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16:25ff). As we have seen already suggested in Myers analysis of Mark (Myers 1996:125), the poor are "those who have become destitute because of their ever-growing debts" (Bosch 1991:101). Bosch points out that the term *ptochos* (poor) in Luke's Gospel on closer reading has a number of other nuances to it. In fact Bosch (1991:99), without wanting to in any way undermine the literal use of the word poor in Luke's Gospel, believes that Luke uses the term poor as a collective term for all the disadvantaged, the marginalized and any who suffer and experience misery in society including women, those considered to be sinners, Samaritans and gentiles. Poverty in Luke thus takes on a social category in much the same way that Ahn speaks of the *ochlos* (crowds) in Mark being synonymous with the 'am ha' aretz as a lower class in society (in Myers 1988:156, cf. Richardson 1973:24). Bosch writes that Jesus' mission and ministry in Luke's Gospel takes on a strong flavour of "bringing the outsider and the stranger home" (Bosch 1991:108).

Bosch (1991:99) also believes that there are traces in Luke's Gospel that suggest that apart from the clearly social and economic dimensions of the term poor, the term does also at times refer to those who are humble and devout, who live in utter dependence upon. There is thus the sense that the term poor has spiritual dimensions to it, indicating the full extent of Luke's multi-dimensional understanding of mission. But this in no way undermines the very clearly socio-economic dimension to Luke's understanding of the poor.

Bosch (1991:99) also writes that in Luke, the category of the poor stands in contrast to those who are rich, those who exploit, the greedy, those too busy making money to accept an invitation to a banquet, those who do not notice Lazarus at their gate. In a sense, it is the rich in Luke who are truly those who are spiritually poor for they have “through their avarice, haughtiness, exploitation of the poor and godlessness...wilfully and consciously placed themselves outside of the range of God’s grace” (Bosch 1991:99).

Luke’s understanding of the term poor as a comprehensive term denoting all those who find themselves on the margins of society demonstrate very clearly the multi-dimensional nature of mission (Bosch 1999:99). This becomes even more apparent when one sees, as Bosch (1991:99ff) believes, that Luke’s Gospel is not just about a message for the poor, but that in fact it may be more accurately described as a gospel aimed at none other than the rich. Bosch believes that Luke’s Gospel is also a call of liberation to the lives of the rich (Bosch 1991:101). Their situation of being outside of the range of God’s grace need not remain as it is (Bosch 1991:101). Luke thus wants “the rich and respected to be reconciled to the message and way of life of Jesus and the disciples; he wants to motivate them to a conversion that is in keeping with the social message of Jesus” (Schottroff and Stegemann quoted in Bosch 1991:101-2).

Zacchaeus becomes an example of this kind of evangelism of the rich in which his conversion expresses itself in actions of justice in the direction of the poor and the exploited as he seeks to make reparation for his greedy and exploitative life-style, which he lived prior to his encounter with Jesus (Bosch 1991:99, 102; Arias 1992:71). “In economic terms, it means that the rich members of Luke’s community are

challenged to give up a significant portion of their wealth, and also to perform specific unpleasant actions, such as the issuing of risky loans and the cancelling of debts. All this is, of course, also Jubilee language” (Bosch 1991:103) of reparation and restitution, not just in spiritual terms, but in economic terms (Arias 1992:71-72, cf. Yoder 1972:60-61). Luke’s understanding of mission thus has a strong dimension of working towards a new relationship between rich and poor (Bosch 1991:117).

“There are at this point, parallels between Matthew and Luke; the difference is that whereas Matthew emphasized justice in general, Luke seemed to have a peculiar interest in economic justice” (Bosch 1991:117).

3.2.4.3 Salvation

Luke’s primary understanding of salvation is contained in the concepts of repentance and forgiveness. Salvation and entry into the Kingdom of God comes through repentance and the forgiveness that comes from God (Bosch 1991:103ff). An evaluation such as this might give the impression that Luke was much like a modern day evangelical theologian. Repentance however for Luke was about very concrete actions of social concern. Repentance was about sharing one’s coat, of giving food to the hungry and not robbing those who are at one’s mercy (Luke3:11-14). Repentance for Luke involved issues of justice (see Luke 16:19-31- Lazarus and the rich man) and about paying reparations in concrete economic terms when injustices had been done (see Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1ff) (Bosch 1991:106). Thus salvation for Luke had to do with specific contexts and the total transformation of human life in a reversal of the evil consequences of sin against both God and neighbour, such that upon Zacchaeus’

pledge to pay back those whom he had cheated, Jesus' reply was: "Today salvation has come to this house!" (Luke 19:9) (see Arias 1992:72). Clearly, Luke is very concerned about the need for repentance to bear fruit that is in some way visible (see Luke 3:8).

Luke's understanding of salvation through repentance and forgiveness (see Bosch 1991: 104ff) had to do very much with concrete this-worldly issues of justice and fairness. The picture of salvation which Luke gives has a strong sense of carrying with it political undertones which implications of dramatic and radical changes in the social order. Luke's infant narrative provides a key example of this where, in Mary's song after having met Elizabeth she sings of God bringing rulers down from their thrones, the humble being lifted up, the poor being filled with good things and the rich being sent away empty (Luke 1:52-53). Through repentance and forgiveness, Luke presents a theology of salvation that suggests a total transformation of human life through a release from any kind of bondage whether spiritual, social, economic or political (Bosch 1991:107). As Bosch writes, "With Schleffer, one could say that, for Luke, salvation actually had six dimensions: economic, social, political, physical, psychological, and spiritual. Luke seemed to pay special attention to the first of these. Luke's understanding of salvation was indeed both "multidimensional and holistic with a very particular and constant emphasis on the economically poor" (Bosch 1991:117).

3.3 Conclusion

There is undeniable evidence from the three Synoptic Gospels, as well as from the research of scholars of the historical Jesus, like Crossan, that a central element of

Jesus' mission and ministry was an emphasis in the direction of, and in solidarity with the poor.

Perhaps the question that under girds this entire thesis is: "If there is such a strong case for Jesus' mission and ministry to the poor, then why do we not see this same emphasis in John's Gospel?" Surely John could not overlook such an important and central dimension of Jesus' life and meaning? Or is it perhaps that we have been taught to read John differently? Have we so taught to read John's Gospel that we have missed some of the obvious references to John's understanding of Jesus' mission and ministry to the poor? I believe that we have. I also believe that as we begin to see the raising of Lazarus as expressing Jesus' key commitment to the raising of the poor and marginalized from their graves of oppression and death, it will be the key that will begin to unlock John's Gospel as a whole.

4. John's Gospel and the Synoptics

4.1 Introduction

An important part of substantiating the hypothesis of this thesis, that Lazarus was meant to be a symbolic representation of the poor whom Jesus raised to new life through his life and ministry, is dependent on making a case for the connection between John and the Synoptic Gospels and more specifically between John and Luke's Gospel.

Firstly, if one can substantiate the claim that John was in some way dependent on the Synoptics, it would suggest that the writer of John's Gospel could not have been unaware of the socio-political implications of the Synoptic tradition. Unless John was telling the story of a different Jesus, then one would also expect that John's Gospel would in some way reflect the socio-political dimension of the ministry of Jesus.

Secondly, if one is able to substantiate the claim that the writer of John knew of Luke's Gospel and used Luke's Gospel as a source for his own Gospel, then one is able to create a case for the theory that in writing John 11, the writer of John took the character of Lazarus in the Parable of Luke 16:19-31 and remoulded it in narrative form in John 11.

4.2 John's Gospel and the Synoptics: Pre 1938

The understanding of the relationship between John's Gospel and the Synoptic Gospels has been one of much debate over the past century. Brodie (1993:27) writes that prior to 1938, most scholars had operated under the assumption that the Synoptics were in some way used as sources for John's Gospel. "Before that date, the general supposition was that John, to some degree at least, did in fact know and use the Synoptics" (Brodie 1993:27).

This can be seen in the work of a scholar like E.F. Scott. In his 1906 book (republished in 1943), Scott writes that three main influences on John's Gospel, namely, the Synoptic tradition, the writings of Paul and Alexandrian philosophy, are found throughout this Gospel (Scott 1943:30). Scott goes on to say that among these influences "the first place must undoubtedly go to the Synoptics" (Scott 1943:32). Scott believed that the writer of John had a preference for Mark in sequence of events, for Matthew in some of the finer details "while in his larger view of the significance of Christ's life and work, he is most in sympathy with Luke" (Scott 1943:32).

4.3 John's Gospel and the Synoptics: post 1938

As suggested above, Brodie (1993:28) writes that a change in understanding with regard to the relationship between John and the Synoptics began to take place from the late 1930's onwards. Rather than seeing a relationship of dependence, far more emphasis began to be placed on the radical independence of John over against the Synoptics (see Brodie 1993:28). Where there were areas of similarity between John

and the Synoptics, many scholars put it down to John drawing from a similar oral tradition to that of the Synoptics (cf. du Rand 1997:131).

During this period scholars like Bultmann also began to posit the theory of an earlier signs source that formed the underlying narrative structure of John's Gospel. However, Brodie writes that even during a time when it was not popular to do so, Barrett stood out as a lone voice as he continued to assert that John's Gospel was in some way dependent on the Synoptic tradition (Brodie 1993:28). Barrett believed that it was probable that John was familiar with Mark and that also to a smaller degree he knew Luke (Barrett 1978:15). In this regard Barrett believed that John freely used Markan material that suited his purposes (1978:16). With regard to Luke, Barrett believed that it was a plausible hypothesis that John had at least read Luke's Gospel. An indication of this is that only Luke and John out of all of the Gospel writers mentions the names of Mary, Martha and a character called by the name Lazarus within their respective Gospels (Barrett 1978:46ff).

4.4 John's Gospel and the Synoptics: in more recent decades

In more recent decades (from roughly 1975 onwards), the relationship between John's Gospel and the Synoptics has undergone a serious review (Brodie 1993:29). Rather than emphasizing John's independence, an increasing number of scholars from the Louvain School (Brodie 1993:29) have, like Barrett, and pre-1938 scholars, begun to emphasize the dependence of John on the Synoptics.

Brodie, one of the more recent scholars who have begun to emphasize this connection between John and the Synoptics describes their relationship in the following way.

Firstly, Brodie believes that independence is an ambiguous concept. He believes that it is possible to be simultaneously dependent and independent in the sense that John relied on the Synoptics, but reworked them in a completely different framework (1993:28-29).

Brodie believes that “...the fourth evangelist was a wide-ranging writer, in some ways encyclopaedic, who sought to produce a new theological synthesis, and who in doing so used a diverse range of sources – some non-canonical material, the Old Testament, at least one epistle (Ephesians) and above all, the Synoptics, especially Mark” (Brodie 1993:30). Brodie concludes in what I believe to be a significant statement in the context of this thesis that, “thus the reader can have no doubt that one is dealing with the same Jesus” (1993:31). Again a few pages later, Brodie (1993:33) reiterates that John’s Jesus is ultimately Mark’s Jesus and one could say, the Synoptic Jesus (cf. Marsh 1968:75).

John’s use of the Synoptic Gospels is thus, according to Brodie (1993:41), part of a broad midrashic technique which Brodie describes as a world of transformation and synthesis. In this regard, Brodie (1993:39) writes that the Jewish biblical tradition was not static, but rather like a living organism which kept developing new forms in which new cells depended in some way on the old. “It is this concept (that is, the free rewriting of the sacred text), which provides an important clue to the Jewish literary climate of the first century” (Brodie 1993:41), a literary climate of which the writer of John would have been a part.

In addition to the Jewish midrashic process of synthesis and transformation of texts for new contexts, Brodie writes that Greco-Roman literature used a literary tradition of imitation and emulation of classics or prior literary works (Brodie 1993:41). In this regard he writes that: “In contrast to much modern writing, with its emphasis on originality, ancient writing was based on the idea of imitation, in other words, the reworking of existing sources, both in their form and in their content” (Brodie 1993:42). Quoting Hengel, Brodie states that all Judaism of the middle of the first century must be designated Hellenistic Judaism, including first century Palestinian Judaism (Brodie 1993:45).

Thus Brodie believes that there is a very strong case to be made from the literary world of both first century Judaism and first century Greco-Roman Hellenism, to support the idea that John used the Synoptic Gospels (particularly Mark’s Gospel) as sources for his own Gospel, which he then reworked into his own theological synthesis. This view is not particular to Brodie alone. As has been suggested, Barrett is another scholar who holds a similar view to Brodie (Barrett 1978:15-17, 42ff). Barrett’s view is that “John does not so much import foreign material into to the Gospel as bring out what was already inadequately expressed’ (Barrett 1978:64). In addition, Moody-Smith writes that both Barrett and Lightfoot (1956) take up a position that was fundamental to the earlier commentary of Hoskyns (1947), namely, that John is the interpreter of the Synoptic traditions (Moody-Smith 1992:64, 184). This is very much in keeping with the views of Brodie, expressed above.

If one is to consider the implications of the position of Brodie, namely that John’s Gospel was a midrashic reworking of the synoptic material and that John was very

much the interpreter of the Synoptic traditions (Moody-Smith 1992:64,184), then in reading John's Gospel from this perspective, one must expect to find hidden traces of the Synoptic Gospels scattered throughout John's Gospel (Verryn 1999:lecture, cf. Kysar 1976:10-13, Barrett 1978:17). Marsh would probably concur with this view when one considers his following statement:

“For it seems clearer, the more the two traditions, Synoptic and Johannine, are studied together, that what John was trying to do was to enable the readers of the Synoptic Gospels not to go back to them and read them in a Johannine perspective, but to show them that the Synoptists' perspective was substantially identical to their own... The Fourth Evangelist brings no new meaning to the Synoptics but he knows that when a reader of his own Gospel turns back to the Synoptics he cannot fail to penetrate more closely than before into the very heart of their message” (Marsh 1968:60-61cf. 70, 72).

Having examined the broad argument of Brodie that the writer of John had used Mark's Gospel in accordance with the literary traditions of Jewish midrash and from the Greco-Roman literary world, it is perhaps important too to outline briefly some of the connections between the Synoptic Gospels, and John's Gospel. While whole volumes have been written on this relationship, I will seek to outline the major trends that have been identified by Moody-Smith after a survey of significant works in the past century examining the relationship between John and the Synoptics.

Firstly Moody-Smith points out that there are verbatim agreements that occur. He writes: “as to verbatim agreement, there are, as we have seen, verbatim parallels,

agreements in wording involving clauses or sentences, between John and especially Mark” (Moody-Smith 1992:178).

In addition to verbatim agreements that occur between John and the Synoptics (especially Mark), there are also parallels in terms of order of events. Kysar (1976:11) summarises these as follows:

- 1) The preaching of John the Baptist (Mark 1:4-8 and John 1:19-36)
- 2) The movement into Galilee (Mark 1:14ff. and John 4:3)
- 3) The feeding of the crowd (Mark 6:34-44 and John 4:3)
- 4) Walking on the water (Mark 6:45-52 and John 6:1-13)
- 5) Peter’s confession (Mark 8:29 and John 6:68ff.)
- 6) Departure for Jerusalem (Mark 9:30f. , 10:1,32,46 and John 7:10-14)
- 7) The entry in Jerusalem and the anointing (Mark 11:10; 14:3-9 and John 12:12-15, 1-8. (Notice that John reverses the order of the two events.)
- 8) A last supper (Mark 14:17-26 and John 13:1-17:26)
- 9) The passion story (Mark 14:43-16:8 and John 18:1-20:29)

Where parallel events happen between Mark and John (eg. the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus walking on the water and the passion narratives), they are most often in the same order (Moody-Smith 1992:178-179 cf. Barrett 1978:45). In response to Gardner-Smith’s criticism of the theory that John was in some measure based on Mark, Barrett writes:

“The fact is there crops up repeatedly in John evidence that suggests that the evangelist knew a body of traditional material that either was Mark, or was

something much like Mark; and anyone [eg. Gardener-Smith] who after an interval of nineteen centuries feels himself in a position to distinguish nicely between 'Mark' and 'something like Mark', is at liberty to do so. The simpler hypothesis, which does not involve the postulation of otherwise unknown entities, is not without its attractiveness" (Barrett 1978:45).

If one thus takes the suggestion that John knew of, and used Mark's Gospel, the argument would progress to suggest that when John departs from the order in Mark's Gospel, it is generally in a similar order to that of Luke, thus suggesting that John knew Luke and drew on Luke when it suited his own theological purposes (Moody-Smith 1992:178-179).

Moody-Smith (1992:179) thus writes:

"The nature of the agreements of wording and order has led eminent and careful scholars such as Barrett and Kümmel to the conclusion that John knew the Synoptics, certainly Mark, probably Luke, and possibly Matthew."

While Moody-Smith finds himself unable to conclude one way or the other between those scholars of the last century who argue for John's use of the Synoptics as against those who argue for a theory of independence (Moody-Smith 1992:189), it is not insignificant that he writes that on the face of it, the conclusions of scholars like Barrett and Kümmel are in fact reasonable (Moody-Smith 1992:178).

As was suggested at the beginning of this section, the fact that a plausible case can be made for a connection between John's Gospel and the Synoptics has significant

implications for this thesis. If John knew Mark's Gospel well, and drew heavily on Mark and less heavily of Luke and Matthew, the writer of John could not have been unaware of the socio-political dimensions of the Synoptic tradition. If this is the case then one must expect that this socio-political emphasis would be reflected in some way within John's Gospel itself. It is the assertion of this thesis that the Synoptics' socio-political emphasis does indeed find expression in John's Gospel, primarily, though not exclusively, in the story of John 11, the raising of Lazarus, but also in other parts of John's Gospel.

4.5 John's Gospel and Luke's Gospel

Establishing a connection between the Synoptics and John's Gospel is important for this thesis in creating a foundation from which we can also see the further connection between John's Gospel and Luke's Gospel. At the heart of the current thesis is the assertion that in writing his narrative of the raising of Lazarus in John 11, the writer of John had taken the parable of Lazarus and the rich man in Luke 16:19-31 and reworked it, weaving it into his own version of the story of Jesus and into his own theological synthesis. If the link between John 11 and Luke 16:19-31 is to be made, then the prior argument for the link between John and Luke needs to be shown at least to be plausible.

Brodie himself does not emphasize John's dependence on Luke as much as he emphasizes John's dependence on Mark and Matthew. Despite this fact, a number of other notable works have been written devoted to the topic of John's dependence on Luke and the similarities between John's Gospel and Luke's Gospel.

Two of the most notable works are by Schnackenberg who lists the similarities between John and Luke in his 1965 book *Das Johannesevangelium* and Bailey, who in his 1963 book *The traditions common to the Gospels of Luke and John* lists 12 parallels between Luke and John (du Rand 1997: 128-134). In doing so, Bailey found that John made literary use of Luke in its final written form. He also shows possible links with common sources (du Rand 1997: 128-134). Moody-Smith (1992:93) points out that for Bailey, a key passage pointing to the dependence of John on Luke in its final written form, and not merely on a common source is found in the comparison between John 12:1-8 and Luke 7:36-50. According to Moody-Smith, Bailey believes that:

“The remarkable contacts between John’s account and Mark’s (14:3-9) make it absolutely certain that John used Mark’s text directly as a source. When this is recognized, it becomes clear also that John has drawn two elements from Luke as well, the anointing of the feet (in Mark it is the head) and the drying with the hair... Furthermore, the reference to Martha’s serving in John 12:2 is based on Luke 10:38ff; John has added it to be sure that the reader will identify the woman mentioned here [John 12:1-8] and in John 11 with the same characters who figure in Luke” (Moody-Smith 1992:94).

Barrett (1978:46) also believed that while John had primarily used Mark’s Gospel, he had also to a lesser extent used Luke’s Gospel as a source for compiling and writing his own Gospel. In this regard he writes that “the resemblance between John and

Luke is much slighter than between John and Mark; but it is at least a plausible hypothesis that John had read Luke” (Barrett 1978:46).

Summarising the evidence set out by Creed (1930), Barrett suggests that in two main areas one finds evidence to support the hypothesis that John knew and used Luke’s Gospel. Firstly Barrett identifies the fact that John and Luke have common characters that do not appear in the other Gospels. Thus:

“...only Luke and John mention the sisters Mary and Martha. Only John mentions their brother Lazarus, but the same name occurs in Luke 16:19f. John mentions a disciple called Judas, other than Judas Iscariot (14.22); this man is presumably the ‘Judas of James’ who appears only in the Lucan lists of the Twelve. Only Luke and John refer to Annas” (Barrett 1978:46).

Secondly, Barrett refers to some of the key details in which John concurs with Luke’s Gospel:

“The betrayal is due to the possession of Judas by Satan (Luke 22:3; John 13:2,27; cf. 6:70). In both Luke and John the prediction of Peter’s denial is made at the Supper, and not after it as in Mark; and the language of John 13:38 is closer to Luke 22:34 than to Mark 14:30. At the arrest it was the right ear of the high priest’s servant that was struck off, and at the tomb on Easter morning there were two angels, not one, as in Mark. The details of the Johannine anointing story recall the Lucan as well as the Marcan narrative” (Barrett 1978:46).

Concluding this section, Barrett makes some very important remarks when one considers that a number of scholars such as Schniewind (1958) and Grant (1937), while affirming the similarities between Luke and John, put these similarities down to common source material, rather than to direct knowledge of Luke by the author of John (Moody-Smith 1992:88-93). In this regard, Barrett writes:

“It would no doubt be possible to ascribe these agreements to coincidence, or to common use of an oral tradition; but it seems equally possible, and, it may be preferable, to explain them as due to the fact that John had read Luke. Certainly there is no good reason why he should not have read this Gospel, or some early draft of it” (Barrett 1978:46).

In summarizing the findings of Bailey and Schnackenberg, du Rand, in a similar way to Barrett, makes a summary of the key areas of resonance and connection between Luke and John. What is interesting is that the list (below) offers further connections and parallels that Barrett does not even mention:

“The similarities between John and Luke occur on the level of detail as well as on the broad narrative lines, for instance, the names of Lazarus, Martha and Mary; one of the Twelve named Judas; the fact that the night hearing before Caiaphas is not mentioned; the double question to Jesus concerning his Messiahship (cf. Luke 22:67; 70 with John 10:24-25; 33); appearances of Jesus in Jerusalem after his resurrection; the catch of miraculous fish (cf. Luke 5:4-9 with John 21:5-11)... At the anointing of Jesus (12:1-7), it rather appears as if John could have made use of a development in Luke” (du Rand 1997:134).

While there may well be scholars who might dispute the hypothesis that John used Luke as a source in writing his own Gospel, there are clearly other well-respected voices like Schnackenberg, Bailey, Barrett as well as du Rand, who believe that this hypothesis is probably true.

4.6 Making the link between Luke 16:19-31 and John 11

If one builds on this hypothesis, supported by the above scholars, then it is possible to support the hypothesis that underlies this current thesis, that the story of the raising of Lazarus in John 11 is none other than John reworking the Luke 16:19-31 parable of Lazarus and the rich man. This is by no means a fanciful speculation, and in fact not the first time that such an assertion has been made (see Spong 1991:235 and Crossan 1994:95; cf. Scott 1943), especially when one considers Brodie's argument that the style of John, and the use of sources by John was midrashic (1993:34-39). In other words, Brodie believes that it was a standard Jewish literary practice that John adopted in using sources and older literary works, and transforming them in a new form in a new narrative (see Brodie 1993:34-39). Even though Marsh himself is unwilling to make the connection, nevertheless it is significant that he writes:

“It is claimed that, on analogy with other literatures, it is possible and indeed probable that John has compiled the story on the basis of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus told by Jesus on Luke 16:19-31” (Marsh 1968:419).

The hypothesis that John used Luke 16:19-31 as the source for John 11 is not simply based on the evidence that John knew Luke's Gospel and used it as a source for his own, but also extends to the internal evidence within the two narratives themselves.

In terms of the relationship between Luke 16:19-31 and John 11, Moody-Smith (1985:551) thus writes the following:

“In the Lukan parable, Lazarus dies a poor man and is carried by angels to Abraham's bosom, while the rich man is tormented in Hades. When the rich man seeks relief and is denied it, he asks Abraham to send Lazarus back to warn his five brothers, lest they meet a similar fate. But Abraham replies, “If they do not hear from Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead (Luke 16:31).

In John 11, Lazarus does rise from the dead at the command of Jesus, and his resurrection precipitates Jesus' own death (John 11:45-53). But it does not result in general repentance or salvation. Seemingly Abraham's prediction is fulfilled.”

Spong (1991:235) makes the same observation when he writes:

“In Luke's parable, the narrative concludes as Abraham denies the rich man's request that Lazarus return from the dead to warn his brothers. ‘If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets’, says Abraham, ‘then neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead’ (Luke 16:20). That is exactly what happened, argued the Fourth Gospel. Lazarus was called back to life

and still no one believed. Indeed, the raising of Lazarus resulted, according to this Gospel, in the Crucifixion itself (John 11:1ff).”

Moody-Smith believes that the web of relationship does not end there. He continues:

“In John, Lazarus is the brother of Martha and Mary of Bethany, a village near Jerusalem (John 11:1-2). In Luke Jesus enters an unnamed village (hardly Bethany, for Jesus is presumably still in Galilee), and is entertained by the sisters, Mary and Martha, as he is in John 12:2. In Luke, Mary sits at Jesus’ feet while Martha serves; in John Mary anoints Jesus’ feet and again Martha serves.

Although Luke does not link Mary and Martha to Lazarus, and though all the episodes are different, these sisters and Lazarus who dies and whose resurrection is either suggested or recounted are only encountered in the Gospels of Luke and John” (Moody-Smith 1985:551-552).

4.7 Conclusion

The above discussion demonstrates that a strong case can indeed be made that John 11 is indeed based on Luke 16:19-31, and that the Lazarus that we find in parabolic form in Luke 16:19-31 is the same Lazarus that we find in John 11 in symbolic form. The poor man Lazarus who is raised to Abraham’s side in Luke 16:19-31, is none other than the Lazarus of John 11 who stands as a symbolic figure for the poor who found themselves “raised from death” through the friendship and ministry of Jesus.

It was also this friendship and ministry of empowering and raising the poor that made Jesus so objectionable to the ruling class of his day that he, like many others after him (eg. Martin Luther King Jnr, Gandhi, Oscar Romero, Steve Biko) paid with his life, for in John's Gospel, it is the very raising of Lazarus in John 11 that precipitates the final plan to put Jesus to death (see John 11:45ff).

5. John 11 as a metaphor for the mission of the church

Up to this point, I have tried to provide a justification for rereading the story of John 11, the raising of Lazarus, as a symbolic metaphor for Jesus' ministry of raising the poor to new places of life and dignity. The argument could be summarised as follows:

Firstly, the Jesus we meet in the pages of the Gospels had a radical socio-political agenda and mission (which is not to say that that is all that Jesus was about). Recent scholars of the historical Jesus, like Crossan, have made a very compelling case for seeing Jesus in this light, by digging beneath the surface of the gospel accounts and seeing them in their historical context. It is however not only recent scholars of the historical Jesus who are making a case for such an understanding of Jesus' mission and ministry. If we read the Synoptic Gospels with eyes to see, the socio-political implications of the 'Synoptic Jesus' are quite evident.

The question was raised that unless John is describing a different Jesus, one should expect to be able to see this central socio-political dimension of Jesus within the Fourth Gospel. The fact that John's Gospel has often been described as a 'spiritual' Gospel, suggests that the socio-political dimensions of Jesus in John's Gospel have not always been seen. With all the abstract language and symbolism of John it is easy for those who come from more affluent backgrounds to fail to see any socio-political implications in John.

Having created a case for a 'socio-political' Jesus in which the poor occupied a place of priority, the argument followed by looking briefly at the connection between

John's Gospel and the Synoptics. It was found that recent scholarship has increasingly asserted that John's Gospel used all three of the Synoptic Gospels in different ways. John's primary source was Mark's Gospel although in significant ways, John was not simply aware of Matthew and Luke, but also drew on them in the formation of the Fourth Gospel.

This is significant in two respects:

- 1) It further confirms the assertion that John could not have been blind to the central socio-political dimension of Jesus seen in the Synoptic Gospels. The implication being that one should also find something of this central socio-political dimension in John's Gospel.
- 2) Secondly, when taken in conjunction with the argument that John's Gospel is a deliberately symbolic gospel and written in the midrashic style of first century Judaism, it makes a case for suggesting that John took the parable in Luke 16:19-31 and transformed it into part of his narrative. The implication is that Lazarus of John 11 is none other than the poor man Lazarus of Luke 16:19-31. John thus makes the poor man Lazarus of Luke 16:19-31 a key and a central figure in John's Gospel, as he becomes a symbolic representation of the poor whom Jesus sought to raise from places of death.

In the light of the above argument, when one begins to reread John 11 viewing Lazarus as a symbolic representative of the poor, this chapter in John's Gospel becomes for us a profound metaphor and springboard for the church's mission to and amongst the poor.

5.1 Bridging the hermeneutical gap

In exploring John 11 as a metaphor for the mission of the church today, it is important to explore the issue of the hermeneutical gap between the author of John's Gospel's original intentions, his readers' first reception of the book, and the way we interpret John for the context in which we live in today.

It needs to be acknowledged that between the writing of John's Gospel and today, there exists between nineteen hundred and nineteen hundred and forty years, depending roughly on when John's Gospel was first written. In addition there are issues of cultural, geographical, socio-political and linguistic differences, all which somehow need to be taken into account in interpreting John 11 as a metaphor for mission in the context of South Africa and the world today. How does one successfully bridge this hermeneutical gap?

A few comments in this regard are in order. Firstly, as West (1991:24) writes, since the Enlightenment, the dominant model for interpreting the biblical texts has been the scientific paradigm (cf. Bosch 1991:422). This approach entailed assuming that the text was itself a static, stable and objective reality which, if examined with the correct tools of analysis, would reveal its meaning to the unbiased observer (West 1991:24). The two basic assumptions of this approach are i) the assumption of an objective observer and ii) the assumption of an objective object (West 1991:24). The historical critical method was thus a key tool in the hands of those who approached the Bible in this way.

West (1991:25ff) goes on to suggest that in more recent years, there has been a demise of the notion of an 'objective observer', and claims for a ahistorical truth and non-hermeneutical insight have collapsed. This has in part been due to developments within the scientific world itself, where the advent of quantum theory has led to the discovery that all experiments are in some way influenced by the observer and that all data is theory-laden (see West 1991:25). West believes that an image that can be helpful for us in expressing these new understandings of how people understand the world is that of "a searchlight playing upon the areas of reality; the point about the searchlight being, of course, that it is inevitably directed from a point of view and that what it illuminates is determined as much by this as what is there for it to shine upon" (West 1991:26).

In this regard, Bosch (1991:423) writes that Paul Ricoeur and other recent literary critics have held the view that:

"Every text is an interpreted text and that, in a sense, the reader 'creates' the text when he or she reads it. The text is not only 'out there', waiting to be interpreted; the text 'becomes' as we engage with it" (Bosch 1991:423).

What the demise of the absolutism of the scientific approach has done has been to open biblical interpretation to greater ambiguity and plurality (West 1991:41). It has given rise to the acknowledgment that those who do the interpreting of the texts bring as much meaning to the exercise as the meaning that is within the text itself. While on the one hand, it may still be the reader's task to do her/his best to decipher the codes within the text in order to do her/his best to get a sense of what the original author may have intended (cf. van den Heever 1991:116ff), there is also the

acknowledgement that the reader inevitably brings her/himself to the text in the form of presuppositions and values and thus brings meaning to the text and interprets the author's meaning through his or her own meaning and presuppositions (cf. van den Heever 1991:122).

In some ways this resonates with the perspective of Suggit, shared earlier, with regard to the interpretation of symbolism in John's Gospel (chapter 2). We are thus reminded of Suggit's designation of the four Gospels as being what he called 'tensive' symbols, as those that need to be interpreted and given meaning by the observer or the reader (Suggit 1993:4). As noted earlier in chapter 2, Suggit believes that the meaning of the Gospels, similar to that of poetry or literature, is not "fixed once and for all, but has continually to be discovered or rediscovered by the reader or the hearer, who needs to share at least some of the attitudes of the evangelist" (Suggit 1993:5).

Suggit (1993:164-165) writes that while determining the meaning of a text needs to include, as far as is possible, an understanding of the original intention and meaning of the original author, the meaning of a literary text is by no means exhausted when we have discovered what the author him/herself might have intended. Suggit (1993:165) goes on to suggest that any great literary text (a description which certainly applies to the Bible and John's Gospel) has the ability to challenge its readers in ways in which the author may never have intended. Thus:

"The meaning of a literary text, as opposed... to a legal text, lies not simply in the words themselves, but in the relationship established between the reader and the text" (Suggit 1993:165).

Suggit however believes that in order to avoid bizarre interpretations it is necessary for any interpretation of John's Gospel (and indeed any biblical text), "to see it *both* in its historical-critical sense *and* in the sense given by the theology and contemplation of tradition, the liturgical prayer life of the church... and the resonance of the text in the life of the people of God at any given period" (Malatetsa 1977 in Suggit 1993:165).

The interpretation of any text in John's Gospel thus needs to exist within certain parameters, given firstly by the text itself, as well as given by the ongoing theology and contemplation of the tradition of the church's life, built on the foundation of our understanding of Jesus himself.

In some ways, the current thesis seeks to re-evaluate what some of the parameters of John 11 might be in terms of seeing Lazarus as a symbolic representative of the poor in John's Gospel, but this is done in conjunction with an understanding of Jesus' mission and ministry to the poor, verified by examining the Synoptic Gospels' account of Jesus' mission and ministry (see chapter 3 above).

An important phrase in the quote of Malatetsa (in Suggit 1993) above is that meaning thus also resides within the "resonance of the text in the life of the people of God at any given period".

While it may still be important to make the distinction between eisegesis and exegesis (cf. TEEC 1996:2), from the discussion above, it is thus clear that in the field of interpretation of texts, the line between eisegesis and exegesis is not an exact one,

and at points becomes more blurred than at other times. The line between eisegesis and exegesis can thus only be maintained in a very general sense, and to the extent that the reader and interpreter is willing to do his or her best to understand the cultural and linguistic world of the original author and readers, as well as the extent to which the reader today is willing to be conscious of his/her own values and presuppositions, and be willing to move beyond them if necessary (cf. van den Heever 1991:122). This may well be considered part of what might be called a 'hermeneutic of responsibility' (cf. van den Heever 1991:123).

Liberation theologians have sought to bring these issues into the fore by debunking the notion of a pure, objective (scientific) interpretation of scripture (and theology) on the basis that scripture contained 'revealed truth' (see Bosch 1991:423ff. and cf. discussion above exploring praxis methodology in Introduction: iii). What such scientific views of biblical interpretation have done is to hide the fact that scripture has often been read and interpreted through the values and perspective of the wealthy and the powerful, thus performing a legitimising function on behalf of the status quo of society, or simply addressing issues that do not touch the hearts and lives of those who do not share the socio-economic and cultural presuppositions of the interpreter (Bosch 1991:423).

Liberation theologians have thus sought rescue the Bible from interpretations of scripture that come from only the wealthy and the powerful segments of society, and facilitate interpretations of scripture that come from the perspective of what has been called the 'underside of history' and from the perspective of a firm commitment to the poor (Bosch 1991:423 cf. EATWOT 1976: 178; 192; Torres and Fabella 1978 and 1983).

In interpreting John 11 as a metaphor for the mission of the church, it is perhaps important therefore to state openly some of my own presuppositions and values, as well as my own position in society. While I need to acknowledge that I can by no means describe myself as being materially poor, living in a middle-class town, and serving in a congregation that is primarily made up of middle-class and upper middle class people, one of the values I bring to the following interpretation of John 11 is the sense of the 'priority of the poor' in my understanding of God, and a desire to build a more just and equitable society. I would need to acknowledge that even in holding these values, my understanding of them would probably reflect my own middle-class upbringing and understanding of life, and may well differ from someone whose lived experience was one of struggling with issues of poverty on a daily basis.

As any interpretation of scripture should be, this interpretation of John 11 needs to be regarded as provisional (cf. West 1991:26), for it is done from 'a perspective'. There are many other perspectives from which John 11 may need to be read. My hope is that the proposed interpretation would at a minimum be an enriching one in the ongoing conversation and debate in interpretation, not simply as an academic exercise, but also as part of the search to build a better world in which together with other followers of Christ we pray on a weekly basis 'your Kingdom come... on earth as it is in heaven' (Matthew 6:10).

In terms of the specifics of bridging the hermeneutical gap between the time of the writing of John's Gospel and this interpretation that comes out of a missiological commitment in the direction of 'God's preferential option for the poor', a few key comments need to be made.

While there may be a time and cultural gap between 'then' and 'now', when seeking to interpret a biblical text from the perspective of the issues of poverty, Myers (1988:7) believes that we have the advantage of a certain 'affinity of site'. There are thus notable parallels between the position and experience of the poor in Jesus day (and John's day) and the position and experience of the poor today (Myers 1988:7). Firstly, contrary to much post-modern theory Eagleton (2004) provides a strong argument for a claim that the poor of Jesus' day (and John's day) share a common humanity with the poor of today, a common underlying humanity that is woven through the warp and woof of every culture. Secondly, the experience of exclusion and marginalisation of poor people of 'then' and 'now', while perhaps differing in cultural specifics, is itself a common experience. Thirdly, the experience of a daily struggle to meet the basic necessities of life (though today complicated by industrialism and the development of technology) would also be stand as a common experience for many of the poorest of the poor 'then' and 'now'.

In terms of the church's mission to stand in solidarity with the poor and to work for justice in the world, again there may be many cultural and structural differences between the world of the church of the first century which gave rise to the four Gospels, but underlying the church's mission both then and now, there remains a common commitment to a just and fair ordering of society (cf. chapter 3 regarding the how the early church, through the evangelists, saw in Jesus a commitment to a just and fair ordering of society). How one negotiates these things today, in the light of industrialisation, the rise of technology and issues of globalisation (Greider 1997) may well be different from how that might have been done when these texts were first written, but working for the dignity of every human being today can remain a common goal with those who sought to work for the dignity of every human being in

the time of Jesus and the time that John, reflected on the implications of the life of Jesus for his own community.

It is with these preliminary remarks on the hermeneutical gap between the text of John and an interpretation of it today that I will now seek to explore a provisional rereading of John 11 as a metaphor for the church's mission of solidarity with the poor today. In some ways, the following discussion builds on the exegesis of John 11 included as an appendix. At times it may be helpful to refer back to the appendix for further discussion on the text as a whole.

5.2 Priority of the poor (God's preferential option for the poor)

The first thing that John 11 suggests with regard to the mission of Christ and the mission of the church is the priority of the poor, otherwise expressed by liberation theologians as "God's preferential option for the poor".

As mentioned earlier, Gutierrez suggests that "the entire Bible beginning with the story of Cain and Abel, mirrors God's predilection for the weak and the abused of human history" (Gutierrez 1988:xxvii). According to this rereading of John 11, John's Gospel is no exception.

I believe that Marsh's comment that John 11 (the raising of Lazarus) is the '*crux interpretationis*' (Marsh 1968:415) of John's Gospel begins to take on significant meaning as one begins to reread John 11 from a liberation theology perspective. Given the central thesis of this dissertation, namely that Lazarus is John's symbolic

representative of the poor, Marsh's comment might begin to suggest that the *poor* are in fact *the crux interpretationis* of John's Gospel. In other words, without an understanding of the central place of the poor in the mission and ministry of Jesus, we will never truly understand John's presentation of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel.

If John's Gospel indeed places the poor in a place of primacy in the narrative of the raising of Lazarus, then John's Gospel becomes a powerful advocate for what twentieth century liberation theologians referred to as 'God's preferential option for the poor' (see chapter 3 above). The implication of this is that unless the church engages with the poor as a priority in mission, the church cannot truly be said to be engaging in the mission of Christ or the *Missio Dei* as demonstrated in the life and ministry of Christ.

Furthermore, as one begins to unpack the symbolism contained in John II one finds further backing for the suggestion that John II represents the priority of the poor in Christ's mission and ministry.

Firstly, the name Lazarus is deeply significant for us in this regard. In Aramaic and Hebrew the name Lazarus means 'the one whom God helps' (Smith 1993:349). If it is a plausible interpretation that Lazarus in John's Gospel is a midrashic reworking of the character in Luke 16:19-31, then the 'one whom God helps' in John's Gospel is none other than the poor, the marginalized and the dispossessed. The poor in the form of Lazarus become the priority in God's mission to bring salvation to the world (John 3:16). While God's mission is to bring salvation to the world, Lazarus or the poor are the starting point or priority in God's mission to 'help' or to save.

Secondly, if one takes the place names of John's Gospel as having particular symbolic value, then the name Bethany also begins to take on particular significance in a rereading of John 11.

The name Bethany, in its original Aramaic means 'house of misery or pain', or 'house of affliction' (Smith 1993:85). (For further discussion on the meaning of the name Bethany in the context of John 11, see Appendix). It is of great significance that Lazarus, who has become for us a representative of the poor and oppressed is said to reside in "a house of pain or misery".

On the one hand such a reading of the name Bethany acts to reinforce the suggestion that Lazarus is in fact a symbolic representative of the poor and oppressed and not just a representative figure for humanity in general. Like the Lazarus of Luke 16:19-31 who lives in a state of desperate destitution and misery (and whom God helps and justifies at the time of his death), so Lazarus of John 11 is also said to be living in a "house of misery".

As Myers and others (like Crossan) point out, misery was the state in which most of the peasant population lived in Palestine at the time of Jesus and after Jesus (see Myers 1988:49-50).

In John 11, the '*crux interpretationis*' of John's Gospel according to Marsh (1968:415), Jesus is thus pictured as journeying into Bethany, the 'place of misery'. The heart (priority) of Jesus' mission and ministry (according to this interpretation of John's

Gospel) is expressed as Jesus connects with the poor in their places of poverty and pain. Jesus in this interpretation of John's Gospel exercises a preferential option for the poor in the central and decisive passage of John's Gospel.

When a preferential option for the poor is exercised in the world, it is often met with opposition by those who have a vested interest in keeping the status quo as it is (as the examples of Steve Biko, Oscar Romero, and even Archbishop Desmond Tutu demonstrate). So it is in John's Gospel. As Jesus makes this decisive journey to the place of misery and pain to come to the help of Lazarus, John's symbolic representative for the poor, so opposition from 'the Jews' immediately meets Jesus. 'The Jews' is John's favoured term (although in the light of subsequent history it has dangerous anti-Semitic overtones) for those in leadership, holding the status quo. In this regard, Brown writes that 'the Jews' is used as "almost a technical title for the religious authorities, particularly those in Jerusalem, who are hostile to Jesus" (Brown 1970:LXXI). Thus, the holders of the status quo, immediately upon hearing how Jesus has raised Lazarus (the poor) from their tombs of pain and misery, begin to plot Jesus' death (an odd reaction if the raising of Lazarus from the dead is simply taken as a literal historical event.) In this regard it is indeed significant that Crossan writes:

“...Roman crucifixion was state terrorism; that its function was to deter resistance or revolt, especially among the lower classes...” (Crossan 1994:127).

The crucifixion of Jesus thus comes as a result of his unsettling of the status quo by raising the poor from their tombs of suffering and misery and by living a message that expressed the meaning of the phrase 'God's preferential option for the poor'. (For further discussion see Appendix).

John 11 thus stands as a powerful metaphor for the church's mission which, if it is to be in accord with the mission of Christ, needs to begin with a commitment to the priority of the poor.

5.3 Mission as friendship

A second powerful motif contained in John 11 that can help shape a Christ-like mission with a priority for the poor is the motif of friendship.

In John 11:11 Lazarus is referred to as the friend of Jesus. Within the context of this thesis, the writer of John's Gospel thus asserts for us the special relationship that exists between Jesus and the poor; Jesus is described as the 'friend of the poor'.

The mission of Jesus in raising the poor from their places of misery and death is thus not done from a place of superiority or from a place of condescension (cf. Bosch 1991:436). It is not even done from a place of obligation (for Jesus does not rush to Bethany when Martha and Mary send out the call for Jesus to come (John 11:2). Rather Jesus' mission to and amongst the poor is done out of *a place of relationship*. Jesus cares for the poor for he is a friend of the poor. Jesus cares for those living in places of pain and misery out of a deep place of love; "Lord, the one you love is sick" (John 11:3).

This comes to us as a powerful challenge to our own motivation and method of being in mission with the poor. It suggests that if we are going to be faithful to the mission

of Jesus, it is going to come as we build real friendships and relationships with the poor.

The crucial place of relationship in working with and amongst the poor is highlighted by Myers (1999), one of the world's foremost authorities in teaching about developmental ministry amongst the poor. Qualifying a discussion on the poor, Myers writes "referring to people by a label is always dangerous" (Myers 1999:57). He goes on to say that when we talk about the poor we always need to remember that the poor are people with names (Myers 1999:57), thus highlighting that working with and amongst the poor needs to be done out of deep respect for their personhood and human dignity (see Christian 1999:11).

Referring more specifically to poverty and relationships, Myers writes that "poverty is about relationships that don't work, that isolate, that abandon, that devalue" (1999:36). He goes on to suggest that focussing on relationships in development "...should not be a surprise... There is a temptation to begin with the problem or with the research that allows us to understand the problem. Getting on with the work of analysis and planning is tempting to all of us. Yet we must not yield. Paraphrasing Koyama, we can know a poor person, but we cannot know poverty. We must begin with people, not abstractions, data, analysis, or technique. Without transforming relationships, there is unlikely to be much transformation" (Myers 1999:122).

Christian (1999:7-8) echoes these sentiments when he writes that poverty is essentially about broken relationships. Thus transformational initiatives must result in rebuilding community in which people's personhood is central rather than the "issues' of transformation.

Jesus' friendship with Lazarus, thus becomes a key biblical image in identifying the nature of Jesus' own mission and ministry, namely that it is built on relationship rather than "issues", and that the same should apply to the church's own mission and ministry (especially amongst the "poor").

Lewis (1960) in his reflections on what he calls the "Four Loves" provides us with a helpful description of the nature of friendship. As one reflects on the nature of friendship, one is also able to see how the concept of friendship can deeply enrich our understanding of the nature of mission, especially when speaking of the priority of the poor.

5.3.1 Friendship and self worth

Friendship as CS Lewis reminds us is a relationship freely chosen (Lewis 1960:56). To be freely chosen as a friend by another is an affirmation of one's own existence. Jesus' mission of friendship with the poor would have come as a huge affirmation of their personhood and their sense of dignity and self-worth.

Because friendship makes people feel valuable it also strengthens their resolve to fulfil their own potential. Today it is not uncommon to hear people talking about a "mindset of poverty" (a discussion on SAfm in July 2006 cf. Myers 1999:84; Gorski 2006). Breaking a mindset of poverty is part of what is required in order to break out of the cycle of poverty. Poverty can often undermine a person's sense of self-worth in what Christian refers to as the "marring of the identity of the poor" (Christian

1999:11). As a result, the poor are often left with a sense of powerlessness to contribute creatively to society. In this regard, Mamphela writes of the struggles of development agencies in making any progress in breaking the cycle of poverty. She writes:

“The capacity of the poor to engage effectively in the development process and to use substantial resources has been found to be extremely limited. The most devastating impact of apartheid on poor black South Africans has been the destruction of people’s faith in themselves as agents of history.” (Mamphela 1995:212).

The sense of affirmation that friendship brings is strengthened by the fact that friendship “withdraws people from the sense of collective togetherness and helps to define a person’s worth as an individual” (Lewis 1960:57). Clearly there are also great dangers in individualism. In fact part of our socio-economic crisis in the contemporary world has been created due to an individualism that does not care about others. Having said this, the affirmation of the individual person is utterly important in a genuine system of morality (a constant emphasis in the thinking of Pope John Paul II on the issue of morality; see Pope John Paul II 1996:178). While it might be said that Jesus loved all people, his love was not just for humanity as an abstract concept, but found expression in the lives of individuals, (Zacchaeus, Mary Magdalene, Peter, James, John and Lazarus). Love is not love if it does not find expression towards individuals. Being recognised as an individual as opposed to simply being a statistic or part of a collective is of utmost importance in drawing out of a person their full human potential. The poor are often spoken of as simply a

statistic or part of a collective. Friendship and relationship is therefore indispensable if the poor are to embrace and fulfil their true potential.

5.3.2 Friendship and mutuality

Another powerful dimension of friendship that can enrich our understanding of mission is that mutuality is part of the very nature of friendship. Friendship is (or at least should be) a relationship that benefits both parties. If one did not benefit from the friendship it would soon cease to exist because, as Lewis points out, friendship is a freely chosen relationship (Lewis 1960:56). People become friends because there is benefit and personal reward from being in friendship: companionship; a common vision and dream that is affirmed by the other who shares that vision and dream; mutual sharing and support (Lewis 1960:61-62).

The mutual nature of friendship is the kind of relationship that is needed in mission, especially mission with the poor. One of the key things that robs the poor of their dignity is the impression that is given that the poor are somehow less valuable than those who are wealthy (cf. Christian 1999:11ff). Friendship cuts across the superior-inferior relationship that so often defines relationships between people who are wealthy and those who are poor.

When mission is done from a place of genuine friendship, it automatically discounts a missionary arrogance, and subverts a mission amongst the poor based on paternalism that so often characterises the church's work amongst the poor (cf. Bosch 1991:295-296). If mission to and amongst the poor were conducted from a place of real

friendship, it would encourage a new relationship of solidarity and mutuality between the one 'doing' the mission and the one 'receiving' the mission. In fact, the very categories of giver and recipient begin to be subverted as well, for true friendship is always a mutually enriching and beneficial exercise.

On the issue of the importance of mutuality in relationship with the poor, Morris Stewart writes:

“The poor are not simply objects, unfortunate problems. They are the image of God, fellow human beings and therefore our partners... our sister, our brother, our offspring... if their very existence is threatened by poverty or oppression, then the image of all other humans is threatened. Therefore development workers have to stand with the poor in a relationship of mutual respect” (Stewart 1996: 82).

Jesus' relationship of friendship with Lazarus in John 11 urges us to re-examine the church's mission from the perspective of mutuality and mutual friendship.

5.3.3 Friendship and the sharing of a common vision

One of the key things that CS Lewis believes forms friendships and binds friendships together is the sharing of a common interest or vision (Lewis 1960:61-62). Friendships according to Lewis are most often formed when two or more people discover that they hold something in common, that they share in a common interest or a common vision (Lewis 1960:62). Lewis suggests that the phrase “do you love me”

means the same as “do you see the same truth” or at least: “Do you care about the same truth?” (Lewis 1960:63).

One of the things that will help a mission with a preferential option for the poor would be the discovery that in a fundamental way, rich and poor ultimately hold many of the same dreams for themselves and their world. In fact, unless rich and poor can discover that they do have a common interest and vision, true justice and equality will never take root in the world. A mission and a struggle to overcome poverty will require the dawning of a realisation that it will only be achieved from a genuine partnership based on the sharing of a common vision and interest.

One of Archbishop Tutu’s favourite images for this was from the film *The Defiant Ones* (2004:27). Having escaped from prison together, two convicts (bound together by prison shackles) discovered that if they did not learn to work together with common goals and a common vision, they would not be able to free themselves.

Ottley (1992), in his essay *Compassionate Service to the needy*, makes a similar illustration from the film *The Poseidon Adventure*. He writes that:

“In the movie *The Poseidon Adventure*, there is a scene where one of the actors attempts to find a way out of a ship that has capsized. An old priest comes to him and, as they are climbing an artificial Christmas tree to get through the galley, and maybe to safety, asks him the question, ‘What is up there?’ The man responds, ‘I am not sure, but down there is death. Certain death. Up there is an opportunity for life, and, if we go together, the

possibility is greater, since we may be able to help each other and if we stick together we may very well find the way out to life” (Ottley 1992:35).

Ottley, addressing the call to be in compassionate service to the needy, writes:

“We must find the way out together. Together we can support one another in our search for love. Togetherness is not a bilateral conversation, but the act of standing together” (Ottley 1992: 35).

In John 11, the writer describes Jesus as the friend of Lazarus, thus providing the image of ‘friendship’ as a key element in Jesus’ mission and ministry amongst the poor. The importance of friends sharing a common vision and common interest is a key value that needs to be embraced in mission as the church joins with all who struggle to overcome the scourge of poverty in our own day and age. This is not a battle that can be won except by working together and finding common values, hopes and dreams that can be held together.

5.4 Compassion: The heart of mission

A third key image that John 11 provides us with in examining the question of the church’s mission is the fact that *compassion* forms the heart of mission.

As the narrative of John 11 unfolds, this key component of ‘mission as compassion’ is embodied in the image of Jesus standing outside the tomb of Lazarus, weeping. In the context of this interpretation of John 11, as Jesus journeys to the “the place of

misery” in Bethany, to “the one whom God helps” (Lazarus, John’s symbolic representative of the poor), Jesus feels deeply the pain of those around him as he weeps.

Hudson (1999) in his book *Compassionate Caring* writes that:

“Compassion lies at the heart of the authentic Christ-following life. Any spiritual experience...that does not result in a deeper concern for our suffering neighbour can hardly be called Christian... If our communion with God isolates us from the painful realities of our world, inoculates us against feeling the pain of our neighbours and leads us into an excessive pre-occupation with our own well being, it must be considered suspect... Compassionate caring characterises his interactions with people, particularly to those in distress. (Hudson 1999:7).

Bosch (1980) in his book *Witness to the World* does a brief exposition on this theme of compassion as the heart of mission. He writes

“...in the Old Testament God reveals himself as the One who among other characteristics has compassion on the poor, the oppressed, the weak and the outcast. Israel’s election is attributed to this Divine compassion, not to any good qualities Israel might have possessed. One of the most moving descriptions of this is to be found in Ezekiel 16:3-6: Israel is portrayed as the child of an Amorite father and a Hittite mother, who after birth was discarded in the open field, unwashed and uncared for. YHWH, however had

compassion on this foundling: ‘Then I came by and saw you kicking helplessly in your own blood; I spoke to you, there in your blood and bade you live’” (Bosch 1980: 50).

Going on to the New Testament and the ministry of Jesus himself, Bosch writes that “...compassion may indeed be called *the* key concept in his [Jesus’] total ministry...” and that “Jesus’ compassionate ministry forms the foundation for mission” (1980:56).

The church regarded Jesus’ ministry as the archetype of the missionary (Bosch 1980:56), and thus Jesus’ mission as compassion forms the foundation and heart of the church’s mission. The writer of John’s Gospel expresses this profoundly in John 11 (the *crux interpretationis* of John’s Gospel according to Marsh 1968:415) as he invites us to meditate on the compassionate Christ weeping at the tomb of Lazarus, John’s symbolic representative of the poor, the outcast and the oppressed.

Exploring the biblical roots of compassion in the context of Jesus’ ministry, Hudson identifies the relevant Greek word *splanchna*, which he says reveals the depths of the compassionate response of Christ within the Synoptic Gospels.

Quoting Nouwen (1982), Hudson explains that

“*Splanchna* are the entrails of the body, or as we might say today, the guts. They are the place where our most intimate and intense emotions are located. They are the centre from which both passionate love and passionate hate grow” (in Hudson 1999:74).

Borg gives us another perspective on compassion and on what Christ-like compassion is like. He writes that in Hebrew and Aramaic the word that is most commonly used for compassion is the plural of the word which in the singular means 'womb' (Borg 1994:47).

“Compassion is both a feeling and a way of being that flows out of that feeling. Sometimes in the Bible it is specifically linked with its association with the womb: A woman feels compassion for the child of her own womb; a man feels compassion for his brother who comes out from that same womb. As a feeling compassion is located in a certain part of the body – namely the loins. In women as one would expect this means the womb; in men in the bowels... his bowels were moved with compassion” (Borg 1994:47-48).

Another important definition of compassion might simply be to 'feel with' another. In terms of the English word compassion, it might be broke up into two parts: 'passion', which means to “feel” and “com” which means “with”. In this regard, Borg again writes:

“Compassion thus means feeling the feelings of somebody else in a visceral way, at a level somehow below the level of the head; most commonly compassion is associated with feeling the suffering of somebody else and being moved by that suffering to do something. That is, the feeling of compassion leads to being compassionate” (Borg 1994: 47).

Borg continues by making an important distinction between compassion and mercy, being compassionate and being merciful. He writes that being merciful commonly implies a superior in relationship with a subordinate, whereas compassion implies equality in identifying deeply with the pain of another (Borg 1994:47). “To paraphrase William Blake: Mercy wears a human face and compassion a human heart” (Borg 1994:48).

Therefore, to be compassionate according to Borg, is to be womb like, “in this sense it has connotations of giving life, nourishing, caring, perhaps embracing and encompassing” (Borg 1994:48).

Borg believes that compassion in the life and ministry of Jesus becomes the essential sign and characteristic in what he terms the *Imitatio Dei* (Borg 1994:49 cf. Bosch 1980:56). In this regard, Borg writes:

“Compassion for Jesus was political ... the core value for life in community. He directly and repeatedly challenged the dominant socio-political paradigm of his social world and advocated instead what might be called a politics of compassion. This conflict and this social vision continue to have striking implications for the life of the church today” (Borg 1994:49).

In John 11 it needs to be acknowledged that there is no explicit word that refers to compassion, but the action of Jesus in weeping indicates the sense in which Jesus was indeed ‘feeling with’ those at the tomb of Lazarus in their sense of pain and misery. The image that John gives us in John 11 where Jesus raises the poor Lazarus from his tomb of death suggests that if we are to engage faithfully in the mission of Christ, we

are going to need to learn how to feel within our own beings the pain of the poor. Jesus is moved to tears at the grave of Lazarus. In this moment, Jesus shares the pain of Lazarus' sisters. He feels the pain within his own being, and out of that resonance of pain, Jesus acts on behalf of Lazarus, crying out in a loud voice to bring Lazarus back from the dead (John 11:43).

Thus, unless like Jesus, we *feel with* the poor, and resonate with the pain of the poor in our own beings, we will never truly engage in the mission and ministry of Christ. At best our mission will be an act of pity or an act of mercy (f. Bosch 1991:436). A relationship of superiority will never enable the poor to become all that God intended them to be, for they will be forced to perpetuate the superior-inferior relationship that is so much a part of the plight of the poor already.

If the poor are to discover their full humanity and dignity in Christ, it will only be as the poor are treated as equals. Compassion, a deep and sincere 'feeling with' is the only appropriate motivation for participating in a truly Christ-like mission. For in the feeling of compassion, the one who is motivated to act in friendship with the poor is motivated from a place of equality with the poor and not superiority, as is the case with pity, sympathy or mercy.

As the church follows the example of Christ in weeping at the tomb of Lazarus (the one whom God helps) so the church needs to wrestle with what it really means to be compassionate. Hudson writes that compassion requires a number of key ingredients: awareness, empathy and action (Hudson 1999:75-76)

5.4.1 Awareness

Before being able to truly feel the pain of another, one has to become aware of the situation in which others live. This requires a willingness to journey into the “Bethanies” (places of misery and pain) of others, and a willingness to be open to seeing. As Hudson puts it: “Compassion... flows from our becoming more aware of the human needs around us” (Hudson 1999:76).

5.4.2 Empathy

On the necessity of cultivating empathy, Hudson writes:

“A second aspect of compassion closely linked to a new awareness is empathy... Empathy involves getting alongside others, being with them in whatever they are going through and putting ourselves in their place. At its simplest level this usually means sitting down with a person taking time to listen and trying our best to get his or her story right. More deeply, however, empathy leads us into a close sharing of another’s pain. (Christ’s crucifixion in some ways becomes of deep symbol of Christ’s deep empathy with the pain and suffering of the poor. It is the pain of the poor that Christ takes upon himself on the cross” (Hudson 1999: 80).

Quoting Henry Nouwen (1982), Hudson goes on:

“Compassion asks us to go where it hurts, to enter into places of pain, to share in brokenness, fear, confusion and anguish. Compassion challenges us to cry out with those who are in misery, to mourn with those who are lonely, to weep with those in tears. Compassion requires us to be weak with the weak, vulnerable with the vulnerable, and powerless with the powerless. Compassion means full immersion into the condition of being human”, (in Hudson 1999:80).

Hudson believes that John 11: 35 puts flesh on these words about empathy:

“In John chapter 11 we read about the dramatic events surrounding Lazarus’ death and eventual rising to new life. Tucked away amongst the details of this story are two words, ‘Jesus wept’ (vs 35). Meditating on these words I am struck by the fact that Jesus weeps immediately after witnessing the tears of Mary... his own heart had been moved by the tears and grief of those around him” (Hudson 1999:80).

The weeping of Jesus (John 11:35) reveals that compassion is the heart of mission, and compassion begins in empathy, that is “getting alongside others, being with them in whatever they are going through and putting ourselves in their place” (Hudson 1999:80).

Bosch’s identification of compassion as the key concept and foundation of Jesus’ own ministry (Bosch 1980:50) stands in contrast to the motive of sympathy, which he believes was a particularly dominant motive for mission during the rise of Pietism and continues even today in the hearts of many supporters of mission “...who believe that

on the 'mission field' there are only lamentable creatures, permanently haunted by fear, people who exist in spiritual and bodily misery" (Bosch 1980:57). It is probably at this point that the concept of 'mission as friendship' becomes a safety guard in ensuring that compassion does not slide into sympathy, but rather is rooted in the experience of empathy as we discover in the ministry of Jesus who enters Bethany, the house of misery, and weeps alongside Martha and Mary.

5.4.3 Action

Lastly it needs to be said that compassion without action is empty in the same way the writer of James, addressing issues of wealth and poverty in his own community, writes that faith without works is dead (James 2:14ff). Compassion if not accompanied by compassionate action remains simply sentimentalism (cf. Bosch 1980:57). For compassion to be genuine it requires a third and essential ingredient of action:

"It is not enough to be shocked or indignant at the life circumstances of people who suffer. Compassion tries to respond practically in a situation of human suffering" (Hudson 1999:80).

As the church follows Jesus, the archetype of compassionate mission and ministry, so the church is called also to be involved in compassionate action, symbolised by Jesus as he cries out, calling Lazarus out of his tomb of death (John 11:43).

5.5 Mission as bringing forth life

Central to John 11 is the raising to life of Lazarus. In this narrative we see enacted Jesus' statement of his own mission when he said, "I have come that they may have life, life in all its fullness" (John 10:10). Acting in accordance with this Johannine mission statement of Jesus, we see Jesus bringing life to Lazarus, the Johannine representative of the poor, who was dead.

The central mission of Jesus according to this interpretation of John 11 is that Jesus comes to bring life to all, but especially to the poor who find themselves in tombs of death due to their grinding poverty. As a symbolic representation of Jesus' mission and ministry among the poor, the mission of Jesus can thus be seen as calling forth fullness of life amongst the poor; enabling the poor to re-engage with life; raising the poor from their sense of worthlessness and accompanying lifelessness, and reinvigorating the poor with a passion for living.

It is important to refer back to Crossan, who, making specific reference to the story of Lazarus being raised from the dead, believes that for the peasant villagers and subsistence farmers, the poor and destitute of Jesus' day, they would have said that Jesus brought life out of death (1994:95). Crossan believes they would not have been referring to a heavenly future but the earthly present. "Life out of death is how they would have understood the Kingdom of God, in which they began to take back control of their own bodies, their hopes, and their own destinies" (Crossan 1994:95).

Thus, if this passage of the raising of Lazarus is to become a springboard for the church's mission, then it comes to us as an invitation to join Jesus in nurturing and facilitating life in all its fullness. To fulfil the mission of Jesus as demonstrated in John 11, we are urged to become participants in bringing life to those who live in apparent death, meaninglessness as a result of oppression and grinding poverty. Clearly this is a mission to all God's people, but this interpretation of John 11 suggests that our starting point and priority begins with the poor, the neglected, the marginalized, and the outcast. Until we engage in nurturing life amongst the poorest of the poor, as was suggested earlier, the so-called wealthy will never truly engage with life either. Where the poor remain in poverty, the rich live their lives in the shadow of constant fear and guilt (cf. Tutu 2004:26). Even the greatest pleasures of the rich remain to some degree tinged with fear or emptiness, because there is always the perceived need to protect their wealth against the "threat" of the poor.

Becoming partners in Christ's ministry of raising the poor and marginalized from their tombs of death will have the effect of truly enabling the rich to be free to engage with life fully too and to be saved from their high walls and the constant fear.

The example of Father Trevor Huddleston in South Africa should remain an inspiration as to what it truly means to be a missionary of "life and resurrection". In the midst of the early apartheid days Huddleston made it his mission in the midst of difficult times to nurture life through promoting music, the arts and learning amongst those oppressed by the apartheid system (see ANC 2007).

It was due to the inspiration of providing books for a young Desmond Tutu that South Africa reaped the gift of Tutu's intellectual abilities when South Africa needed

him the most (Du Boulay 1988:27-28). It was also out of the dark days of oppression that Huddleston, who bought them their first instruments, gave musicians like Hugh Masekela, gave youngsters in the townships a new sense of meaning and purpose in their lives, enabling them to become participants in life (see ANC 2007).

Huddleston thus became a subversive in South Africa by nurturing and promoting life amongst the poor, the oppressed and the marginalized, creating a cultural wave that would contribute significantly to the eventual downfall of apartheid.

In the New Delhi Statement (a statement of a consultation of evangelicals from around the world wrestling with the question of the church's call to share good news with the poor), this element of mission as nurturing and bringing forth life is again evident. The New Delhi Statement places important emphasis on training the poor in various fields. The statement goes on to suggest, "training leaders amongst the poor increases the self-image, independence and freedom of poor communities... releasing the latent potential of the poor" (in Nicholls et al 1996: 22-23). This is essentially a statement of bringing forth life and nurturing the life of those whose life may often be hindered and stunted by the adverse effects of poverty.

Bringing forth life and nurturing life amongst the poor might, like Huddleston's example, relate to the nurturing of the creative, artistic and cultural dimension of people's lives, but it might also begin at the simple level of improving health and nutrition. John Wesley himself, in the midst of preaching powerful evangelical sermons that produced a spiritual revival in England in the 18th century, also took time to write a manual for promoting physical hygiene and health (Tink 2005:2).

John's Gospel and particularly the raising of Lazarus to life in John 11 encourages the church of Christ to nurture life amongst the poor, for in doing so, the poor will become participants in their own liberation, as was the case in South Africa, and be liberated from the death of poverty to a new sense of life and purpose.

5.6 Conclusion

In 1989 with the fall of communism in the Soviet Union (1989) and the beginnings of the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa, buoyed by the wave of positive feeling in the world at the time, Mugambi wrote a book entitled *From Liberation to Reconstruction* (1995). It was a book filled with the hope that a new era had arrived in world politics and that the need for liberation struggles in Third World countries around the world were over, and that the time had come to focus on the positive work of building new communities and reconstructing old communities that had been destroyed by systemic injustice and oppression.

In this book, Mugambi used the biblical image of the return of the exiles from Babylon to Palestine and the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem under the leadership of Nehemiah.

In 2007, twelve years since Mugambi first wrote this book, it has become clear that a new era of hope and reconstruction has *not* in fact dawned. Rather, due to the proliferation of neo-capitalism and trade liberalisation, the plight of the poor of this world remains as bad, if not worse, as ever before (cf. Christian Aid 2005, Greider 1997) A shift from liberation to reconstruction has in many respects failed as the gap

between rich and poor continues to widen, not only in Third World countries, but also in developed countries like the United States of America (see Stope 2007).

Looking back on Mugambi's book, it was clearly premature, and may well have caused some to become complacent with regard to the ongoing plight of the poor. It is hard to be too critical, having the benefit of hindsight. The reality today is that the need for liberation from poverty and economic oppression remains an increasingly pressing issue for us today. In the same way as the Exodus motif provided the initial inspiration for many early liberation theologians, and Mugambi hoped the Nehemiah motif would form an inspiration for those committed to reconstruction in the light of the global political changes of the early 1990's, there is a pressing need in the church today for a new biblical motif that would re-inspire the church to take seriously the need to work for the liberation of poor and rich in the light of our current global socio-economic and political situation that is creating an ever widening gap between rich and poor, which leaves millions of people in this world living in abject poverty. I believe that a rereading of John 11 (the Raising of Lazarus from the dead) may be the kind of biblical metaphor and motif that would help the church to refocus its energies on liberating the poor (and the rich) from their tombs of economic death.

At the very least, it is hoped that this dissertation would be part of a collective contribution that would continue to raise to consciousness the need for the church to respond in constructive ways to the issues of poverty in South Africa and, in fact, around the world.

Postscript

Pilgrimage of Pain and Hope:

A tool for building relationships across things that divide

One of the dangers of an academic dissertation such as this is that it may simply remain an academic paper with no real benefit for the real world struggle and pain that most people, especially the poor, experience on a daily basis. It was said at the beginning of this dissertation that the primary methodology that underlies the dissertation is a praxis model of theology that has at its heart the insertion into the realities of this world, theological reflection on the insertion in the light of the Scriptures, and the re-engagement with the world in the light of one's reflections and analysis.

As a minister at a local church, engagement with the realities of this world is of particular importance. Having ministered for one year in Soweto and for three years in the South East Rand Township of Duduza, and now ministering in the comparatively wealthy community of Edenvale, Johannesburg, one of the struggles facing me as a minister is how to enable wealthy congregation members to begin to wrestle with the primacy of the poor in Christ's ministry, and the primacy of the poor in the church's mission and ministry. It is very easy to continue with business as usual, but how does one begin to break through the walls of ignorance and prejudice and enable ordinary congregation members to hear the call of Christ to become the friend of Lazarus, to feel with the 'Lazaruses' of this world in their places of misery and pain, and to become partners in bringing life to those whose lives are ebbing away due to socio-economic hardship and oppression?

In answering this question, I believe that the concept of the Pilgrimage of Pain and Hope might be a tool that can begin to enable the breaking down of these walls of ignorance and prejudice.

The concept of a Pilgrimage of Pain and Hope is one that has been developed and promoted by various Methodist ministers since the latter years of apartheid, and is employed as an ongoing tool in South Africa today for enabling Christians to cross over socio-economic and racial divides. One of the more prominent promoters and in fact the original mind behind the concept of Pilgrimage of Pain and Hope has been Rev. Trevor Hudson. His 1999 publication entitled *Compassionate Caring* is an effort to promote the concept of Pilgrimage of Pain and Hope.

The concept of the Pilgrimage of Pain and Hope is firstly based around the revisiting of the ancient Christian concept of pilgrimage as a journey to a place that is in some way regarded as “sacred” or “holy”. The Pilgrimage of Pain and Hope builds on this sense of journey to a place that is sacred or holy with the understanding that whenever we journey into places of other people’s pain, we are on sacred ground.

Just as Jesus journeyed to Bethany, the ‘house of misery or pain’ to visit Lazarus (the friend of Jesus and the one whom Jesus loved), so the Pilgrimage of Pain and Hope seeks to facilitate a religious experience of journeying to the ‘houses of misery and pain’ of today to visit the friends of Jesus who find themselves in places of struggle and pain.

What this enables is the opportunity for exposure to other people's pain within the context in which awareness of the pain can be experienced. As Hudson suggests, one of the key components to compassion is awareness (Hudson 1999:76). Without an initial awareness of another's pain, there is no hope of growing to identify with that pain in any way.

Having grown in awareness of another's pain through this sacred journey of pilgrimage, the opportunity is also given for the pilgrim to reflect on the experience (or series of exposures and experiences), to begin to get in touch with some of the pain in her/his own life, and to reflect on how God might be speaking through the experience and reflection. In fact the whole concept of the Pilgrimage of Pain and Hope is built on the praxis model of theological reflection of insertion, reflection and action / re-engagement.

Because the pilgrimage is done with close spiritual supervision, those who go on Pilgrimages of Pain and Hope are (hopefully) enabled to begin to engage with the experiences in life-giving ways for themselves and also for others. Compassion and a new vision of the world are often facilitated, which in turn enables pilgrims to become more faithful followers of Christ in extending Christ-like love and action to the world.

The concept of the Pilgrimage of Pain and Hope is thus able to break down barriers between people who otherwise would never have engaged with one another before, and to facilitate relationship and friendship across racial and economic barriers.

In this way I believe that the Pilgrimage of Pain and Hope becomes a helpful tool engaging in the kind of mission that John 11 inspires us to do through understanding more clearly God's preferential option for the poor, the importance of friendship and relationship in becoming a partner in fulfilling the *Missio Dei*, the central place of compassion as identifying with those who experience life as a struggle, and lastly the call to be agents and ambassadors of life, enabling oneself and others to engage more deeply with life and to experience the abundant life that is so central to the Johannine understanding of Jesus' mission and ministry (John 10:10).

As part of this dissertation a Pilgrimage of Pain and Hope was arranged in December 2005 to give expression to the core thesis of this dissertation by facilitating an experience that would enable others to grow in awareness of the pain of others in the world and to begin to respond with a sense of Christ-like compassion of identifying with and feeling with the pain of others as a possible springboard for engaging more deeply in the mission and ministry of Christ ("As the Father sent me so I am sending you", John 20:21).

For some on the Pilgrimage it was the first time they had even been into a South African 'township'. Quite a number of hidden fears needed to be confronted simply in journeying into Duduza. In addition, for most of them who were present it was the first time they had been into an informal settlement and into a "mkhukhu" (shack). It was clearly an event that broke through some of these fears and enabled the pilgrims to connect with the humanity of those whom they visited in their homes. Some of the pilgrims opted to stay the night in people's homes, which helped to root the experience in the realm of relationship rather than simply looking on as an observer.

One of the pilgrims was deeply moved by the humbleness of the church building used as a place of worship. The following week, having come home again, she pledged R1000 towards the building fund, intended to build a new place of worship. In this way, she was able to become a partner with the church community in Duduza in helping them to work towards achieving one of the goals they had set for themselves.

In a previous Pilgrimage of Pain and Hope, (conducted in 1995) one of the participants who was nearing the end of high school came to the decision, based on her experience and exposure from the pilgrimage, to study social work, in order to give practical expression to her desire to serve Christ more deeply in practical ways.

On a pilgrimage organised in 2003, a few of the participants who had stayed at the house of one of the members in Duduza continued to keep telephone contact, and attended the funeral of her husband when he died. A friendship had begun to be formed through the experience of the Pilgrimage of Pain and Hope, so that the relationship transcended the danger of condescension and sympathy to one of real compassion (of 'feeling with' another in a time of distress and pain.)

Some of the quotes that Trevor Hudson relates from pilgrims who have been on Pilgrimages of Pain and Hope demonstrate the powerful transformations that have been facilitated in the lives of Christ-followers who have participated in Pilgrimages of Pain and Hope:

“Central to my experience of the Pilgrimage of Pain and Hope was that of deepened awareness. I became aware for the first time in my life of the tremendous pain experienced by the majority of our society... When leaving (the places we had

visited), I knew I would never be the same again.... To this day, the reality of people continuing to suffer daily due to poverty, crime, violence, sickness and injustice, still challenges me to question its nature and to contribute in some small way to its solution” (a pilgrim in Hudson 1999:76).

“It was on the pilgrimage of pain and hope that I was drawn out of my own little world into the bigger world of those in pain. At first I felt totally overwhelmed. After all, what could I really do that would make a difference? But as the pilgrimage progressed I slowly began to realise the importance of simply getting alongside suffering people and trying to understand life from their point of view.... This learning has made a great difference to the way in which I relate to others. When I am with people in pain, I always try to look past the outward appearances and attempt to put myself in their place” (a pilgrim in Hudson 1999:79).

“The Pilgrimage of Pain and Hope has challenged me to become practically involved in the mission of Christ. I do not want to be a passive spectator any longer. The pilgrimage experience has taught me that the church is most effective when it is seen to be meeting the real needs of people. I want to be an active part of a church that is relevant to the world outside of its walls. I was also challenged to pursue my medical career in a way that will benefit most those on the underside of our society. I realised that it is not enough to be shocked or indignant at the life circumstances of people who suffer. If I am to follow the gospel way seriously, I must be prepared to give my life in practical service as Christ gave his life for us” (a pilgrim in Hudson 1999:82).

“How privileged I was to be able to glimpse into the lives of fellow South Africans. South Africans who are so much less fortunate than ourselves, who welcomed us with such dignity and warmth.

Visits to the homes of some of the members of the church congregation showed me how even the humblest shack was furnished with pride. The people we met also reflected love of their heavenly Father. I felt humbled” (a pilgrim in Hudson 1999:82).

The following quotes come from Pilgrims who participated in the Pilgrimage of Pain and Hope that I organised in December 2005:

“I pray that many more members of our congregation would wish to visit our neighbouring churches and towns and learn to be less insular. We could also invite them to visit us” (Barbara Harris- a pilgrim to Duduza).

“Possessions really felt material to me during this weekend. I learnt how we should be grateful for what we have, even if it seems little in our own eyes. Even to be grateful for the toilet seat to sit on. Then I also noticed that when we don't have possessions we have each other. What would I rather have, stuff or people? I choose people!” (Leigh Booysen – pilgrim to Duduza).

“To witness others living in poverty in squatter camps is something that really affects the way you look at life. We all at some time or other have been in want, but here we find men, women and children who endure these hardships day in and day out, week in and week out. Does God live here? God loved the world so much that he sent his

son to die for us. He loves us so much that he lives and loves in the townships”
(Willie Harris – pilgrim to Duduza).

“In the past I felt really sad for the people that live in these circumstances, but now I have more of a respect. I still think that no one should have to live like that but then no one should be allowed to live in opulence either, so life still isn’t fair...

The pilgrimage made me question true happiness, yes it’s not material, but there were people who had maybe a blanket in the corner of a shack and they shone. Then those who had a house made up of 3 different shacks with a sand floor were really proud... they had something to give me and I’ve always thought it was the other way round”
(Candice McFarlen – Duduza pilgrim).

“Before going on the pilgrimage, I thought that townships were a scary, crime ridden place. Townships were ‘off limits’, having grown up in a conservative family. I thought of them as dark and mysterious places that are home to criminals and the poor. After my exposure to the townships, my opinion has changed. I am no longer afraid of townships. I realise now that they are homes to beautiful, friendly and loving people who are doing the best they can with the resources available to them. My eyes were opened to the lifestyle and living conditions that the majority of South Africans have. I had no idea of how difficult life is for people living there” (Desiree Hooper – Pilgrim to Duduza).

These small quotes hopefully convey the way in which the Pilgrimage of Pain and Hope might be used as a tool for enabling people to gain awareness and empathy that would foster new relationships of friendship and compassion across the wealth and

poverty divide. “Lazarus” can be raised from death. Perhaps “Lazarus” is not just the poor in material wealth, but the wealthy whose lives are lived in narrow ghettos of wealth, who have not found the joy of friendship with brothers and sisters who are less wealthy.

Appendix

The raising of Lazarus: An exegesis of John 11:1-57

The story of the raising of Lazarus in John 11 can be divided into seven parts, the setting and 6 scenes:

- 1) Setting: Bethany near Jerusalem (John 11:1-3)
- 2) Scene 1: Jesus and his disciples (John 11:4-16)
- 3) Scene 2: Jesus and Martha (John 11:17-27)
- 4) Scene 3: Jesus, Mary and the Jewish friends (John 11:28-37)
- 5) Scene 4: Jesus and Lazarus at the tomb (John 11:38-44)
- 6) Scene 6: The plot to kill Jesus (John 11:45-57)

1) The Setting

‘Lazarus’ (vsl) - The setting to chapter 11 introduces us to Lazarus. The name Lazarus was a well-known name having the meaning “the one whom God helps” (Marsh 1968:420). In terms of the four Gospels, this is the first instance in which the name Lazarus is used in the context of a narrative concerning Jesus. The only other instance where the name Lazarus is used in the four Gospels is in the parable of Luke 16. The name Lazarus in Luke 16 is clearly used deliberately and for effect, because in the parable Lazarus portrayed in desperate need of help, being ignored by the rich man who had the capacity to help Lazarus, but chose not to. Barrett, in referring to the use of the name Lazarus in John 11, writes that while he believes it is unlikely that John intended for the name Lazarus to have special significance in the context of the

story, he says that it is not impossible though (Barrett 1978:389). On the hypothesis that John 11 is a reworking of the parable of Luke 16, I believe that it is therefore possible that the author of John's Gospel would have had in mind the significance of Lazarus' name.

Barrett (1978:47-48) suggests that the story of Lazarus is unlikely to be historical, and thus the character of Lazarus in John 11 is unlikely to be an historical figure. Barrett suggests (with particular reference to the raising of Lazarus) that in comparing the structural and historical differences between Mark and John, and particularly the purported reason for Jesus' death, there are irreconcilable differences if both Mark and John are regarded as purely historical documents (Barrett 1978:47, cf. du Rand 1997:125, Marsh 1968:45, 49). It is particularly in terms of the Markan and Johannine reasons for Jesus' death that Barrett identifies historical differences. He writes:

“In Mark 11:18 it is stated that when the chief priests and scribes heard of the cleansing of the temple, they sought how they might destroy Jesus” (Barrett 1978:47).

Barrett goes on to point out that in John's Gospel, the cleansing of the temple occurs right at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, and can therefore have nothing to do with the final plot to kill Jesus (Barrett 1978:47). On the other hand John narrates at length the raising of Lazarus, an incident not mentioned by any of the Synoptists but treated as decisive in the plot to kill Jesus (Barrett 1978:47).

After debating the issue of the differences in 'dating' the cleansing of the temple in relation to the ministry of Jesus, Barrett writes that:

“It seems preferable to accept Mark’s dating, but, if this is done, grave doubt is cast upon the historicity of the Lazarus story as it stands in John, and this is not simply because the narrative is miraculous, but because no room can be found for it in the Marcan narrative” (Barrett 1978:48).

Taking this cue from Barrett, as well as the symbolic nature of John’s Gospel, I believe that Lazarus in John 11 cannot be regarded as a historical person, but rather as a symbolic character and a representative figure (cf. Koester 1995:35). Having noted the striking parallels between Luke 16 and John 11 in chapter 4, I believe it is not unreasonable to proceed on the premise that, as Spong suggests (Spong 1991:187), the narrative about the raising of Lazarus represents the author of John’s meditation on the parable of Luke 16. If this seems like a stretch of interpretation, it is important to note that Crossan sees in the raising of Lazarus a genuine socio-political dimension. In a discussion about the story of the raising of Lazarus he thus writes: “I can imagine peasants all over lower Galilee who would have said... that Jesus brought life out of death” (Crossan 1994:95), and that such life out of death would not have been conceived by them as some kind of heavenly future, but rather the earthly present (Crossan 1994:95).

“Life out of death is how they would have understood the Kingdom of God, in which they began to take back control of their own bodies, their hopes, and their destinies” (Crossan 1994:95).

By implication, these same peasants from lower Galilee (and indeed from other parts of the Mediterranean), in hearing the Lazarus narrative of John 11, would in all

likelihood have interpreted the raising of Lazarus through the lenses of their own need and desire for receiving life out of death, not as a heavenly future, but as an earthly present.

In interpreting the Johannine story of the raising of Lazarus, Crossan thus believes that 'process becomes event' (Crossan 1994:94). The process of peoples lives being transformed from 'life out of death' by the life and ministry of Jesus becomes crystallised in the form of a narrative, such that Lazarus becomes for us a symbolic representative of all those peasants whose lives were touched and transformed by the life and ministry of Jesus.

In proceeding therefore, we do so in this study on the basis that Lazarus (in John 11) is indeed a midrashic reworking (cf. Brodie 1993:34-39) of the Lukan parable of Lazarus and the rich man, and thus becomes for us a symbolic representative of the poor, the marginalised and the oppressed.

Bethany (vs1) – If as Barrett suggests (1978:48), the historicity of the story of the raising of Lazarus is doubtful, then one needs to ask the question why John has chosen to situate this story in the town of Bethany. Luke's reference to Mary and Martha does not say where they live (Luke 10:38-42). In fact Luke's Gospel seems to suggest that the sisters Mary and Martha lived not in Judea near Jerusalem, but rather somewhere in Galilee (Moody-Smith 1985:551). As has been demonstrated earlier in this dissertation, John's Gospel is considered by most Johannine scholars to be thoroughly symbolic, extending in various directions, often including the symbolic relevance of names and places (see chapter 2 Symbolism in John's Gospel).

Why then has John chosen to situate this story in the context of Bethany? What significance might Bethany have in relation to the story, particularly if one rereads the story as John's symbolic representation of Jesus' ministry of 'life out of death' conducted amongst the peasants of Galilee?

The first point of significance may well rest in the name 'Bethany'. The name Bethany, in its original Aramaic means 'house of misery or pain', or 'house of affliction' (Smith 1993:85). If it was John's intention for the name Bethany to be understood in this way, it is of great significance that Lazarus, who has become for us a representative of the poor and oppressed, is said to reside in "a house of pain or misery".

If in fact John 11 is John's meditation and midrashic reinterpretation of the parable of Lazarus and the rich man, then we have yet another parallel between these two passages. On the one hand we have in Luke 16 the parable of Lazarus who lives in pain and misery, and on the other hand in John 11 we have Lazarus in a village called 'the house of pain or misery'. One difficulty with this line of reasoning is the question whether John's original readers would have understood the meaning of 'Bethany'. It is an important question. The answer to this question would be a yes, if John were writing for a community that knew and understood Hebrew or Aramaic.

In examining the question of who the original readers of John's Gospel may have been, du Rand makes references to the Jewish influences in the text of John (du Rand 1997:47ff). In this regard, du Rand draws an important conclusion that 'in any case we get the impression that the first readers and the author were more Jewish orientated' (du Rand 1997: 47). Barrett quotes Temple (1945) in a statement that

supports this suggestion by du Rand: “The Gospel is through and through Palestinian. The notion that it is in any sense Hellenistic is contrary to its whole tenor” (in Barrett 1978:3). Certainly it would be difficult to answer this with absolute certainty, but du Rand’s comments on the Jewish orientation of the author and the first readers of the Gospel of John suggest that it is not a completely implausible suggestion that John intended the meaning of the name Bethany to have significance within the meaning of the narrative of John 11.

It is significant however that despite the fact that John’s Gospel is written in Greek, it is evident that there is an underlying Semitic influence with what du Rand calls a number of ‘Semitisms’ (du Rand 1997:19). Thus du Rand writes that “this has led to the fact that some theologians are of the opinion that the Gospel of John was originally written in Aramiac” (du Rand 1997:19). If this is indeed true, then the issue of the meaning of names would have been a non-issue, in the same way as the African meaning of names are simply taken as given by mother tongue speakers.

Two parallel incidents in John’s Gospel are worth noting, firstly the healing at Bethesda in John 5 and secondly the reference to the pool of Siloam in John 7.

In discussing the possible meaning of the name ‘Bethesda’ in John 5, Barrett dismisses the possibility that the author intended it’s meaning to form part of the purpose of the story (Barrett 1978:252). In this regard he writes that “when John finds meaning in a Semitic word, he draws attention to it explicitly; note especially the name of the pool Siloam (9:7)” (Barrett 1978:252). This may be true, but it is perhaps important for us to remember that John in other places is not always consistent in making explicit things that he may intend the reader to note. One such example is his use of

the term 'sign'. It seems clear from his use of the term 'sign' to describe the first and second miracle (2:11, 4:54) that he intends for the rest of the miracles in the Gospel to be regarded as signs as well, but he fails to make this explicit, despite the fact that the wording in 2:11 and 4:54 suggest it was his intention to do so.

In John 9:7 we discover that the author of John explicitly draws attention to the meaning of the name Siloam. The fact that the meaning of the pool of Siloam in John 9:7 is explained may well be a clue or an indication that the author wishes other names to be interpreted in a similar way.

Notwithstanding the above question, another significant issue in the use of the name Bethany as the setting for the raising of Lazarus is that it is situated approximately three kilometres from Jerusalem. As Crossan points out almost in passing, Bethany could be said to have existed on the outskirts of Jerusalem (Crossan 1994:133). This is a fascinating description, because in many ways, 'living on the outskirts' might be an apt description firstly of the place of the poor in the Judaism of Jesus' day (cf. Ahn 1981:139, 140 and Richardson 1973:24), and secondly, a symbolic description of where Jesus spent most of his time (see discussion above chapter 3 "a case for Jesus commitment to the poor").

While John suggests that Jesus made numerous trips to Jerusalem (John 2:13, 5:1, 7:10 10:22, 12:12), Jesus could never have been said to have a share in the wealth or the power associated with the leadership of the Jewish nation whose centre was found in Jerusalem, primarily due to the presence of the temple. In this regard, Myers writes that the Jerusalem temple had an imposing stature, both literally as a building and as the heart of the nation (Myers 1988:78). In addition, economically the temple

dominated Jerusalem and as a result would have raised the economic and political status of Jerusalem throughout the rest of Judea and to some extent throughout Palestine (cf. Myers 1988:79 and 53-54; 69). The *'am ha' aret*, ('people of the land' or the *ochlos* of Mark's Gospel), although needing to visit Jerusalem for the annual festivals, would not have shared in the wealth, power or the status associated with Jerusalem either. They were peripheral to those who occupied the seats of temporal and religious power. Being described as living on the outskirts of Jerusalem would thus have been a fairly accurate symbolic statement of the social and cultural position the poor would have held in Jesus' day.

Martha and Mary (vs1) - The only other Gospel that mentions the sisters Martha and Mary, is the Gospel of Luke, which as has been suggested in chapter 4, stands as one of the elements that links John's Gospel and Luke's Gospel together. As explored earlier, establishing such a link between John and Luke is important if one is to build on the premise that John 11 is in some way a midrashic reworking of the parable in Luke 16.

Mary is given the added description of being the one who anointed Jesus with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair (John 11:2). This is a story that will not be encountered until after the raising of Lazarus. What is fascinating about this link is that in doing so, the writer of John's Gospel links the story of the raising of Lazarus with the only portion of John's Gospel that explicitly mentions the poor. It is beyond the scope of this study to explore this link in further detail, but it does make for an intriguing link, if Lazarus himself is indeed a symbolic figure representing the poor in Jesus' life and ministry.

‘The one whom you love’ (vs3) – In Mary and Martha’s message to Jesus, they refer to Lazarus as the “the one you [Jesus] love” (John 11:3). Williamson points out that this description of Lazarus has led to the suggestion that Lazarus was “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (John 13:23; 19:26; 21:7, 20) (Williamson 2004:130 cf. Marsh 1968:421). Williamson believes however, that this identification is unlikely on either internal literary grounds or on the basis of the early church tradition that identified the beloved disciple as John the apostle and the son of Zebedee” (Williamson 2004:130, cf. Marsh 1968:421). The other possibility might be that “the disciple whom Jesus loved” is thus also meant in some way as a generic or symbolic term rather than as referring to a specific person (cf. Camille 1998:39ff.). But this is beyond the capacity of this dissertation to prove and cannot be regarded as more than speculation at this point.

If, as has been suggested, Lazarus is indeed John’s representative of the poor, then the phrase “the one whom you love” (John 11:3) might be regarded as giving expression to Jesus’ particular compassion and concern for the poor, which as we have seen earlier in this dissertation is a plausible and likely hypothesis.

Scene 1: Jesus and his disciples (11:4-16)

“This sickness will not end in death” (vs4) – This is an interesting statement, for as we read on, we find that Lazarus has indeed died, and in his raising of Lazarus from death, Jesus’ own death is plotted and executed (John 11:53) (Williamson 2004:131). At a deeper level, Williamson believes that Lazarus’ illness “led beyond death to life, when Jesus called him out of the tomb, and Jesus’ death and resurrection still lead not to death, but to eternal life for all who see in them the glory of God and believe what

God has done” (Williamson 2004:131). This may well be the case, but from a socio-political perspective, it may point to Jesus’ utter faith and belief in what, in Synoptic language, might have called the ‘final victory of the Kingdom’, and what John might have referred to as the final victory of light over darkness, of life over death, of the way of Jesus (John 13) versus the way of the world. It may thus point to the utter faith of Jesus that the way of God’s liberating ‘truth and grace’ (cf. John 1:14) would win the day, despite the seeming hopelessness of the current political environment. It is the kind of hope that archbishop Desmond Tutu held out constantly, even in the darkest hours of Apartheid as he invited white people to come and join the winning side (Tutu 1994:137). Tutu’s faith was one that believed that the ‘sickness’ of Apartheid would not end in death.

“It is for God’s glory” (vs 4 & 40) - Williamson believes that the ‘glory of God’ is the clue to the interpretation of the whole story (Williamson 2004:131). While I believe that Williamson might well be right in this interpretation, I do not believe it to be the case for the same reasons that Williamson gives. From Williamson’s perspective, “the raising of Lazarus is not only a glorious sign pointing to the resurrection of Jesus; it is a manifestation of the splendour and majesty of God, in whom is life and light’ (Williamson 2004:131).

My first criticism of Williamson is that in John’s Gospel, it is not the resurrection of Jesus that is said to reveal the glory of God, but rather it is the *crucifixion* of Jesus that inexplicably reveals God’s glory. Nixon writes that in John’s Gospel, “it is the hour of dedication to death that is essentially the hour of glory” (see John 7:39, 12:23-28, 13:31, 17:5) (Nixon 1962:472 cf. Suggit 1993:131, Dewey 1985:349). In this regard, Suggit

writes that John represents the crucifixion as the victorious display of God's love... the resurrection, therefore... is a forgone conclusion' (Suggit 1993:147). Following this comment from Suggit therefore, in understanding the death of Jesus as the "glory of God" I believe we need to be reminded of Jesus' words in John 15:13 "no one has greater love than this, to lay one's life down for one's friends" (New Revised Standard Version). It is this verse that I believe opens up for us an understanding of the glory of God revealed in the crucifixion of Jesus, for it points to the greatness of the love of Christ for his friends (and indeed the whole world – John 3:16) that he would lay down his life in the crucifixion. In this regard, Legrand (1988:138ff) writes that Dodd has shown that John's Gospel shows a progressive build up in themes. In the first twelve chapters, the book of signs, the focus is on the key words 'life' and 'light', but from chapter thirteen, starting with the washing of the disciples' feet, and culminating in Jesus' death, the focus is on love. Thus the closer John gets to the crucifixion, the more he accentuates the essential truth, that the definitive reality of life and light is given in *agapé*, self-giving love (Legrand 1988:138-139).

The crucifixion of Jesus is thus a moment of glory, because it reveals the full extent of God's (and Jesus') love for the world, a sacrificial love expressed in service to the world (cf. John 13).

It is significant that Lazarus' death is described in verse four as being for the glory of God, because it was in Jesus' sacrificial service to the poor of this world, and his commitment to raising them from 'death to life' (to use the phrase of Crossan 1994:95) that the full extent of God's love (the 'glory of God', cf. John 13:1) could be revealed through him to the world.

It is also significant that in the first epistle of John (a book that is regarded by most scholars to be related to John's Gospel, if not by the same author, then by a common theological school (see du Rand 1997:153ff), the love of God, revealed in the crucifixion of Christ, is connected inextricably with the call to stand in love and solidarity with the poor (1 John 3:16-17).

A short while ago, the Jews tried to stone you (vs8) – Jesus is clearly not unaware of the dangers that face him in coming to the aid of Lazarus. The phrase “the Jews” is a significant one in this story. While it needs to be acknowledged that there are dangerous anti-Semitic overtones of this phrase in John's Gospel (cf. Casey 1996:223ff) Brown states that ‘the Jews’ in John's Gospel is John's favoured term to describe the ruling class and the aristocracy of Jesus' day (Brown 1970:LXXI). The fact that it was the ruling class and Jewish aristocracy who were trying to kill Jesus is significant from a socio-political perspective, for if Jesus' life and ministry were aimed at bringing about a transformation in society (see Borg 1987: 177, 181) then it would have brought about a disruption in the way of life for this very aristocracy, who were benefiting from the status quo.

In this verse it is in fact the disciples who are the one's that raise the alert concerning the risk to Jesus' (and presumably their own) safety. They are still learning the way of discipleship. The way of self-sacrificing love is still being weighed and balanced by their natural instinct towards self-preservation, as is the case with all who seek to become disciples of Christ.

“Twelve hours of daylight” (vs9-10) – According to Williamson, this phrase is a common sense observation that people stumble in the dark and that in the context of

the story means that Jesus must make full use of the short time that still remains for him on earth (Williamson 2004:131). “He must go now and ‘awaken’ Lazarus, even at the risk of his own life” (Williamson 2004:131).

“Let us go that we may die with him” (vs16) - This verse resonates with the same brashness that we find in Peter in Mark 14:31 where Peter declares: “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you,” and the other disciples make the same affirmation. Perhaps it stands as commentary on the difficult path of discipleship, and that sometimes on the path of discipleship, the disciples of Christ would like to think that they are further ahead than they really are. In some ways it resonates too with the story of James and John in Mark’s Gospel, where they misunderstand the way of Jesus and ask for special positions of power in Jesus’ Kingdom (Mark 10:35ff). Jesus tells them that they do not know what they are asking for (Mark 10:38), and questions whether they will be able to be baptised with the baptism that he is to be baptised with (ie. his death). They too, like Peter (Mark 14:31), and Thomas in John 11:16 answer rather brashly that they can (Mark 10:39). The cost of discipleship is sometimes more than is reckoned for.

Scene 2: Jesus and Martha (11:17-27)

“Many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them” (vs19) - Williamson writes of this verse that speaks of the many Jews coming to console Martha and Mary after their brother’s death, indicates that Judean mourning customs of that time included coming to sit with the family after a funeral (as in many cultures today)” (Williamson 2004:132).

It is interesting that the close proximity of Bethany to Jerusalem is noted in the preceding verse (vs18) is included at this point. While Bethany exists on the periphery of Jerusalem, the wealthy and the powerful of Jerusalem live not that far from the poverty around them.

“I am the resurrection and the life” (vs25) - In the dialogue that ensues between Jesus and Martha, there appears to be an accusatory tone in Martha’s reception of Jesus, “Lord... if you had been here my brother would not have died” (John 11:21). When Jesus replies that her brother will rise, she “takes this to be a routine word of comfort based on the hope of many Jews at that time” (Williamson 2004:132 cf. Marsh 1968:427-428), that is, the hope of an eschatological resurrection at the end of time. Jesus’ answer to her is significant as he declares those familiar words: “I am the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25).

Williamson makes the important observation that “these words embody a central proclamation of the Fourth Gospel: resurrection is not something that happens only after death, nor is eternal life. Both are present in Jesus Christ, and available to whoever believes in Jesus. So the hope Jesus offers is not just life after death; it is spiritual resurrection now, bodily resurrection after death, and eternal life beginning the moment one believes” (Williamson 2004:133 cf. Marsh 1968:419). The important observation that Williamson makes in this is to identify the here and now reality of resurrection, not just the hope of something in the distant eschatological future (cf. Marsh 1968:428, 429). It is also significant that in verse 28 when Martha tells her sister Mary that “the teacher is here”, John uses the verb of the Greek noun *parousia* (Marsh 1968:430). Marsh goes on that “it is entirely in keeping with the Fourth

Gospel that the *parousia* of Jesus Christ should in this way be moved from some date in the future to the present time” (Marsh 1968:430).

There is in this a deep resonance and harmony with Crossan’s view that Jesus (using the language of the Synoptics Gospels) preached a present Kingdom in the here and now, and not just a Kingdom that was to come. While John does not use the phrase ‘Kingdom of God’ as a central feature of his description of the ministry of Jesus, John’s preferred term is usually ‘eternal life’ (Hiers 1985:528) which could be extended to his understanding of a present this-worldly experience of resurrection life. We do well to ask ourselves the question what a present experience of resurrection life would mean in the life of the poor. While an experience of this worldly resurrection may indeed have a spiritual dimension (see Williamson 2004:135, cf. Marsh 1968:438), resurrection in this world, for the poorest of the poor would be difficult to restrict to some kind of limited spiritual category or existential experience of ‘authentic being’ (Suggit 1993:96). It would clearly also have to do with the ability to meet the most basic of human needs.

Scene 3: Jesus, Mary, and the Jewish Friends (John 11:28-37).

“Lord if you had been here my brother would not have died” (vs32) - Mary’s initial conversation with Jesus is very much like that of Martha’s “Lord if you had been here my brother would not have died” (John 11:32). As Williamson observes, Jesus’ response this time is different from his response to Martha (Williamson 2004:133). “When Jesus saw Mary and her friends, he was gripped by a powerful emotion (11:33), variously translated as “greatly disturbed in his spirit”, “deeply

moved”, “troubled”, “he groaned in his spirit” and “his heart was touched” (Williamson 2004:133). Williamson believes that these English translations reflect the understanding of the mourners who have accompanied Mary to Jesus (11:36 “See how he loved him!”) (Williamson 2004:133). The mourners, who are described with the term ‘the Jews’, believe that Jesus’ feelings sprang from his love of Lazarus and his grief at his death (Williamson 204:133).

But Williamson believes that there is another possible translation of the Greek word in verse 33 *embrimaomai*, which according to Williamson has ‘to snort’ as its root meaning (Williamson 2004:133). The connotation of this is anger and indignation (Williamson 2004:133-134, Marsh 1968:433). Williamson believes that the New English Bible come very close to this translation when it renders verse 33 as: “He was moved with indignation and deeply distressed” (Williamson 2004:134).

Why might Jesus have been indignant? Barrett writes that it is far from clear why the sight of the grief of Mary and of the Jews should have angered Jesus (Barrett 1978:398). Barrett goes on to suggest that the source of Jesus’ indignation was the unbelief of the Jews and of Mary (1978:398). It is interesting in this regard that Myers makes a similar observation about the indignation of Jesus in examining the healing of the leper early in Mark’s Gospel. In Mark 1:43, Myers translates the same Greek word used in John 11:33 (*embrimaoma*) as snorting with indignation, (Myers 1988:153). Myers also makes the observation that in Mark 1:41, the Greek word *orgistheis* may be expressive of anger (rather than compassion as it is in the NIV translation) (Myers 1988:153) Marsh concurs with Myers in this basic translation of the Greek term, but feels that anger may be too harsh a translation and that rather a translation of

righteous indignation is preferable (Marsh 1968:433). Ultimately the difference between anger and righteous indignation is not so great as to call into question the basic meaning.

Thus, according to Myers, in this Marcan episode (Mark 1:40ff), Jesus' anger "is directed against the symbolic order of purity of which this man is a victim (Myers 1988:153). Jesus' anger and indignation in Mark's Gospel has its source in Jesus' opposition to the institutionalised injustice perpetuated by Jewish purity laws (Myers 1988:53).

Myers' exegesis of Mark 1:41 and 43 may thus throw interesting light on John 11:33. Indeed, it suggests a potential parallel interpretation in the Johannine story especially in the light of an interpretation of Lazarus as a representative of the poor and oppressed of Jesus' day. Jesus' 'indignant snort' in John 11:33 may well be interpreted as a reaction of anger at the socio-political forces that made the experience of the ordinary peasant class one's of oppression and 'death', from which Jesus seeks to bring resurrection (see Crossan 1994:95).

If one takes the response of the Jewish mourners at face value, namely that Jesus weeps out of love and grief for Lazarus, we still have a significant verse to weave into our understanding of this whole story. In this regard, there are only two reported instances of Jesus' weeping in the Gospels. The one is obviously John 11:35 and the other is in Luke 19:41, where Jesus weeps over Jerusalem as he sees the city before him on the horizon.

If Brodie (1993:34-39) is right that John's Gospel represents a midrashic re-working of Mark's Gospel and elements in Matthew's Gospel, one must expect to see synoptic material resonating with portions of John's Gospel, albeit in different contexts and in different words. One may not be able to say conclusively that John 11:35 is in some way John's reworking of Luke 19:41, but based his midrashic reworking of the Synoptics, neither is it impossible.

While there are obviously the feelings of grief and sorrow expressed by Jesus in Luke 19:41, there is also in this incident a real sense of compassion, especially when one connects it with the parallel passage in Luke where Jesus expresses how he has longed to gather Jerusalem's children as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings (Luke 13:34). Jesus' tears in Luke are thus, in part, tears of compassion in the same way as the tears in John 11:35 might be considered tears of sorrow *and* compassion, as Jesus feels with Mary and Martha in their pain (see Hudson 1999:80).

Reading of Jesus being deeply moved and troubled in his spirit (John 11:33) has resonance with another episode from the Synoptic tradition, namely where Jesus, seeing the crowds lost like sheep without a shepherd (Matthew 9:36), is moved with compassion. The Greek word used in this verse (*splangshnizoma*) is an emotive word that refers to the bowels of a person (Barclay 1975:354). They are thus the place where our most intense and intimate emotions are felt. It is most commonly translated as compassion (see Hudson 1999:74). If it is not too far-fetched to see a resonance between John 11:33 where Jesus weeps as he is deeply moved with anger and indignation, and Matthew 9:36, where Jesus is deeply moved with compassion, then the weeping of Jesus at the tomb of Lazarus might again be for us an indication

of the compassion that Jesus felt in his day, for the poor (portrayed in Lazarus) who found themselves struggling under grinding poverty and oppression.

With regards to Jesus' weeping at the tomb of Lazarus, Marsh (Marsh 1968:434) makes a very important distinction. He points out that the word that John chooses for Jesus' weeping is different from the word to describe the mourning of the Jews. Whereas the Jews are described in terms that suggest they were professional mourners, Jesus shows genuine emotions of grief and sorrow.

Scene 4: Jesus and Lazarus at the tomb (John 11:38-44)

“But Lord...he has been dead four days” (vs39) - The exchange between Martha and Jesus reveals that Lazarus has in fact been dead for four days. This phrase is expressive of the gravity of the situation. Jewish understanding was that a person's spirit would finally leave the person's body after three days (Marsh 1968:424). By emphasizing the fact that Lazarus has been dead for four days emphasizes the fact that Lazarus is really dead and that at this point, no one is able to help Lazarus except God (cf. Marsh 1968:435). Martha's response that Lazarus has been dead four days and that there will be an odour also suggests that in her understanding, Lazarus was beyond any possibility of restoration to life” (Marsh 1968:435).

What significance might this have for us if we continue with a socio-political reading of this passage with Lazarus standing for us as a symbolic representative of the poor? Perhaps it points us to the fact that unravelling the mess of systemic oppression and the damage that it does to the lives and spirits of both the poor and the rich, is a task beyond the powers of mere human beings to get right. It requires an act of divine

power (God's power which is made know in weakness and in the sacrificial love of the crucifixion) to bring about the transformation of society that would release the poor and the oppressed from their tombs and the stench of death.

“Jesus looked up” (vs41) - Marsh points out that lifting one's eyes upward is a typical attitude of prayer (Marsh 1968:439). As Marsh suggests, this verse indicates that the source of the ability to raise Lazarus from death does not reside exclusively in Jesus, but in God (1968:436). He also points out that in this verse prayer ends in action (Marsh 1968:437), suggestive perhaps of the role and place of prayer in the life of discipleship. Prayer should not be an escape from the world, and a way of retreating from the world, but ultimately propels us back into the world in the service of others and with the resources to take part in Christ's transforming work in the world. Myers (1988:16) makes a similar observation early in Mark's Gospel where early in the morning Jesus finds a place of solitude in which to pray. Myers writes that “as integral as prayer was to Jesus' work, it was always placed at the service of the mission to liberate human life” (Myers 1988:16). Having said this it is perhaps also instructive that in John 11:41-43, prayer precedes the action of raising Lazarus. Communion with God underlies Jesus' action in the world (cf. Marsh 1968:437).

“Father I thank you” (vs41) – The word used in this phrase for giving thanks is the Greek word *eucharistein* (Marsh 1968:436). Marsh writes: “...the particular use of the word ‘eucharist’, with its special reference to the death of Jesus, cannot be far beneath the surface” (Marsh 1968:436). The raising of Lazarus if thus connected ultimately with the sacrificial love of Christ, remembered each week by Christians in the Eucharistic meal.

“Jesus called in a loud voice “Lazarus come out!” The dead man came out” (vs43-44) - This is the crux of the entire story. We remember the perspective already expressed by Crossan, that the experience of peasants from lower Galilee in being in the presence of Jesus, was an experience of life out of death, of moving from death to life (Crossan 1994:93-95).

Jesus calls out in a loud voice, perhaps reminiscent of the voice of the prophets of the Old Testament who figuratively speaking had to ‘raise their voices’ above the general public opinion of their day in order to speak a prophetic word in situations of injustice (cf. Grant 1941:45ff). In this instance, Jesus’ prophetic voice is spoken directly to Lazarus (the poor), calling him by name, and in doing so calling him out of the tomb and the stench of death to new life.

“A cloth around his face” (vs44) - Marsh writes that “the wrappings of hands and feet suggests, though it does not establish embalming, while the wrapping of a cloth round the head may well suggest the burial of a poor person, according to some Jewish traditions” (Marsh 1968:438). It is an interesting observation in the context of this dissertation, that Lazarus, John’s symbolic representative of the poor, is indeed buried as a poor person would have been in the context of Jewish tradition.

“Unbind him and let him go” (vs44) - Williamson writes that “with these words of command the bystanders become participants with him in loosing the bonds of death” (Williamson 2004:135) This is a fascinating insight because in verses 18, 31 and 36, John reminds us that those who were present to help unbind Lazarus were none other than the Jews who had come from Jerusalem to mourn with Mary and Martha. Are the Jews who come to mourn with Mary and Martha different from the Jews who

were plotting to take Jesus' life (vs8)? It would seem on the surface that perhaps they are different categories of people and that thus John uses the phrase 'the Jews' differently in different contexts. In this regard, Barrett writes that "no ill is spoken of these Jews, who had voluntarily come out of Jerusalem to comfort the sisters" (Barrett 1978:398 cf. Marsh 1968:428). It is certainly difficult to tell, because John moves with ease and without distinction from speaking of the Jews in verse 8 to the Jews in verses 18, 31 and 36.

Is John trying to bring to our attention that those in the status quo of society are happy to mourn the loss of the poor from a sentimental perspective, but when the poor are raised and the status quo of society is challenged, their attitude begins to change (see John 11:44ff)? It is difficult to verify this with any amount of certainty, but it does become a fascinating point of discussion if in calling Lazarus from his tomb of death, he calls on 'the Jews' (those connected in high places in Jerusalem (cf. John 11:18) to "become participants with him in loosing the bonds of death" (Williamson 204:135).

The command of Jesus for those around him to give Lazarus a change of clothes is also reminiscent of the father in the story of the prodigal son, when the father in, a similar manner to Jesus, commands those around him to "bring the best robe and put it on him, put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet" (Luke 15:22). Interestingly, the errant son, who had become a destitute beggar (Luke 15:16) is described by the father as having been dead, but now alive (Luke 15:24). These two stories provide for us an interesting parallel. Both Lazarus and the prodigal son are destitute and poor, both have moved from death to life, and now those around both of them are being commanded to assist in changing their clothes. God's gracious nature is revealed in a

special way when the poor and destitute are brought from death to life and reintegrated into society.

The raising of Lazarus ends in an interesting way. It is presumably ‘the Jews’ (those who come from Jerusalem, the centre of power and wealth in Jewish society), who have come to console Martha and Mary, who have now received the command to assist Lazarus. In words that are uncannily reminiscent of the words of Moses to Pharaoh, “let my people go” (Exodus 5:1), (words charged with political significance and said in the context of the Egyptian oppression of the Hebrew slaves), Jesus now commands those present (‘the Jews’ who come from Jerusalem, the centre of power and wealth) to let Lazarus go; to release him from the tombs of oppression and poverty. In the context of this rereading of Lazarus in the light of the church’s mission of solidarity with the poor, the phrase comes as a powerful ending to the drama of Lazarus being raised from his tombs of oppression and poverty.

Scene 5: The plot to kill Jesus (John 11:45ff)

It is indeed intriguing that the story of the raising of Lazarus should end in plots being made on Jesus’ life. If we consider this story in the light of the current rereading of this passage, the plot to kill Jesus after the raising of Lazarus begins to ring true with the reasons for Jesus’ death in Mark’s Gospel, and secondly it rings true with the experience of countless ‘prophets’ through history who have raised their voices on behalf of the poor and against injustice and who have found themselves ‘silenced’ as a result. The names of Steve Biko, Oscar Romero, Ghandi, Che Guevera and countless other unnamed advocates for the poor are examples of this.

In Mark's Gospel, the incident that sparks off the plot to kill Jesus is the cleansing of the temple (Mark 11:12-19). As has already been discussed earlier in this dissertation, Myers (1996:147) believes that this was not just a religious act, but a political act of protest against the injustices that were being perpetrated against the poor in the very temple of God. It is in response to this action that the chief priests and the teachers of the law begin to look for a way to kill him (Mark 11:18). It is thus as Jesus' acts in solidarity with the poor and thus threatens to 'destabilise' the status quo, because the crowd was in support of Jesus (Mark 11:18), that those who hold power move to have Jesus killed.

If one simply takes the story of Lazarus literally, then the reasons for Jesus' death in John's Gospel do not correlate with the reasons for Jesus' death in Mark (cf. Barrett 1978:47-48). One has to be true and the other one false, they cannot stand together. But if, as a rereading of the story of John 11 suggests, Lazarus stands as John's symbolic representative of the poor, then the two accounts of the reasons for Jesus' death in Mark and John, begin to correlate in a remarkable way.

In John's Gospel, the rereading of John 11 would suggest that the raising of Lazarus from the dead is symbolic of Jesus' mission and ministry of standing in solidarity with the poor of his day and raising them from their places of poverty and oppression. It is 'the Jews', whom we have already noted, stands as a term for the Jewish leadership and power base, who react strongly to the raising of Lazarus. Indeed, in almost every time and place, where people have stood in solidarity with the poor and oppressed, challenging systemic injustice and oppression, they have faced the wrath of those who are in places of wealth and power, who are the beneficiaries of the status quo.

The reasons for Jesus' death in John's Gospel and Mark's Gospel begin to look remarkably similar in the light of this rereading of John 11.

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