

TANGAZA COLLEGE
THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA

TITUS KANAKKASSERY, I.C.

**THE JOHANNINE "SIGNS": THEIR MEANING AND
FUNCTION IN JOHN'S TIME AND TODAY**

Moderator

Rev. Fr. Aelred Lacomara, C.P.

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DECLARATION

I here by declare that the material used herein has not been submitted for academic credit to any other Institution/University.

All sources have been cited in full.

Signed.....Titus.K.17.....

TITUS KANAKKASSERY, I.C.

Date: 31/01/03

This long essay has been submitted for examination with my approval as the college supervisor.

Signed.....Aelred Lacomara, C.P......

FR. AELRED LACOMARA, C.P.

Date: 31/01/03

DEDICATION

I dedicate my Long Essay to my parents who lit in me the flame of Christian faith. I admire so much their life as a good Christians and a very good Christian “sign” to me is an inspiration and model.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

With great joy, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to Fr. Aelred Lacomare, C.P. who graciously accepted to be my tutor and allowed me to pursue my topic with complete freedom and creativity. Without his patience, follow-up and commendations this essay wouldn't have taken the shape it now assumes. I am very grateful to Fr. Oliver Stansfield, I.C. for reading, correcting and making insightful and positive criticism.

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ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
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| DNTT | Colin Brown, ed., <i>The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology</i> , I-III, Grand Rapids 1967-1980. |
| LXX | Septuagint |
| NJBC | R.E. Brown – J.A. Fitzmyer – R.E. Murrhy, ed., <i>The New Jerome Biblical Commentary</i> , London 1989. |
| TDNT | G. Kittel – G. Friedrich, ed., <i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> , I-X, Grand Rapids 1964-1979. |
| TDOT | G. Johannes Botterweck – Helmer Ringger, ed., <i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> , I-VIII, Grand Rapids 1970-1977. |

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The Gospel according to St. John, to many people, is the most precious book in the Bible. It can be read and loved without any commentary at all. But the more one studies John, the more wealth arises out of it. Down through the centuries, the Fourth Gospel has been considered as a Gospel with a difference, right from its opening words, which begin, not in Palestine, but in Eternity. The longer one studies the Gospel of John, the clearer it becomes that the Fourth Gospel raises theological questions of great and universal importance.

Many scholars have been passionately attracted by the richness of the symbolism and the use of the theological vocabulary in the Fourth Gospel. More attention is called to the spiritual significance of apparently routine happenings and to the fuller meaning of words and events narrated in the Gospel. Symbolism is extended to the events and persons and makes it necessary for us to read John with close attention lest its full meaning escape us. Symbolism for its own sake does not exist in John. The author never challenges the reader's subtlety as an end in itself, but always to make him realize that there was nothing trivial in the Gospel.

In this essay our sole aim is to locate our study in the meaning and function of the Johannine usage of the term “sign” and to bring out the challenges it offers to us Christians today. The term “sign” which appears for the first time in Jn 2:11 is a theological one deliberately chosen by the Evangelist, with a meaning which must be assessed in relation to the whole Gospel. John has used the term to designate the major miracles of Jesus, which are not merely mentioned but described in some detail.

Even though we will take a comprehensive look at the use of “sign” in the Gospel as a whole, we will mainly focus our attention on the meaning and function of the “seven signs” narrated in the “book of signs”. Our aim is to show how these “signs” unfold progressively the identity of Jesus as the Life-Giver.

This essay is divided into three chapters with a general introduction and a general conclusion. In the first chapter we examine the non-biblical and biblical background of John’s concept of the term “sign”. This study will take us to the usage of “sign” in history, in the Old Testament and in the synoptic Gospels.

In the second chapter we examine the general aspect of the Johannine usage of “sign” and the meanings and functions of the “seven signs”.

The third chapter deals with the challenges of today in responding to the “signs” of Jesus, especially the present day challenges that the Church in India has to face, if it wants to be a true “sign” of Jesus, the Life-Giver.

In short, the essay is an attempt to study the theology of the Johannine “signs” through which the Evangelist unfolds the identity of Jesus as the Life-Giver in a progressive and dramatic way and to identify the pragmatic demands of Christian life.

CHAPTER 1

THE HISTORICAL AND BIBLICAL BACKGROUND OF THE CONCEPT OF “SIGN”

1.1 Introduction

In this first chapter, we examine the non- Biblical and Biblical background of Johannine usage of the term “sign”. We will have a brief inspection on the usage of the term “sign” in the Old Testament and in the Synoptic Gospels. From this background I would like to make a journey to the “sign” of Jonah and the meaning of the miracles and the “signs”.

1.2 *Historical Background of “Sign”*

1.2.1 *Etymological Data*

The word “sign” comes from the Greek word ‘*semeion*’. ‘*Semeion*’ is a development of ‘*sema*’ and Doric ‘*sama*’ by way of Ionic ‘*semeion*’ and Doric

'*semeion*' and related constructs. It occurs only in the form '*sema*' in the early epics and '*sema*' and '*sama*' did not disappear later but persisted until well on in the Christian era. Especially in prose, however, '*semeion*' came into more general use. It shares with '*sema*' and '*sama*' the sense of "sign", 'characteristic' and 'mark' with their many nuances. Etymological research has hardly reached any assured results regarding the original sense of the word. Today it is usually traced back to Indo – European 'dhia – mu' and Sanskrit 'dhyana' thought.¹

In a broader sense, too, '*semeion*' came into more comprehensive use. Thus in Herodotus of Halicarnassus(484–425 B.C), the first real Greek historian, it is a summons in the special military sense of a command to depart. More basic, however, is the fact that '*semeion*' here becomes a special term for a manifestation of the will, which impresses itself upon the will of others, and shapes their insight. This kind of '*semeion*' is fundamentally on the same level as the spoken word, whether the detailed reference be to enlightenment, instruction, direction or command.²

1.2.2 "Sign" as Used by Philo

In a few instances Philo follows LXX usage, e.g., when on the basis of Gen. 4: 15 he calls the mark of Cain a '*semeion*' in '*De praenuis et poenis*', 72, or when on the basis of Gen 1:14 he calls the stars '*semeion*' in '*De Opificio Mundi*', 55. In the main, the word retains for Philo the basic sense according to which it denotes things or processes which leads to insight or knowledge by way of perception. Thus, laughing is a sign. But this concrete use is rare, apart from the use in the mathematical sense of

¹ K.H.RENGSTORF., "Semeion", *TDNT* VII, 201.

² K.H. RENGSTORF., "Semeion", *TDNT* VII, 205.

“point”. Predominantly however, ‘*semeion*’ in Philo has reference to mental operations in the sense of “indication”, “argument” and “proof”.

In allegorising, to which Philo’s proofs from Scripture often lead, ‘*semeion*’ with genitive case has much the sense of “point towards”, “is to be taken in the sense of ...”etc. The ‘*semeion*’ of Gen. 4:8 is ‘*semeion*’ which points in a deeper sense to rivalry and strife. Obviously, “sign” can come from God, and this in many forms, e.g., the sounding of trumpets at the giving of the law on Sinai in ‘*De Vita Moisis*’, 210. They are designed to make perceptible what God wills. Fundamentally, all Scripture is for Philo an inexhaustible reservoir of ‘*semeia*’. When he quotes it, then, the reference is to divine *semeia* even if he does not say so explicitly.³

1.2.3 “Sign” as Used by Josephus

Like Philo, Flavius Josephus took ‘*semeion*’ in Holy Scripture for the mark of Cain in ‘*Antiquitates*’ I, 59. He did so without adding any explanation. One may gather from this that for Josephus, too, what can be called ‘*semeion*’ is there to be seen and is adapted and indeed designed to awaken insight or knowledge. In this case ‘*semeion*’ shows that its bearer is not to be touched by wild animals.

Yet Josephus also uses the word for the sounding of the attack by the trumpet. Blowing the trumpet can also be called a ‘*semeion*’ when it proclaims to the hearer that something definite will happen or a goal will be reached when it was not certain before that it would be reached. This shows that a constitutive element in the meaning is the gaining of knowledge by sense perception, even if not, in this instance, by visual

³ K.H. RENGSTORF., “Semeion”, *TDNT* VII, 221-222.

perception. It this formal character which '*semeion*' unmistakably has in Josephus, too, that enables it to be used in the military world for the "watchword" or "password" by which it is known that one belongs to the same army.

In accordance with its formal character, '*semeion*' can also be used in Josephus for any phenomenon, which produces knowledge quite apart from its specific nature. In connection with the fact that, for Josephus, God directs the history both of nations and individuals, the word necessarily enters the religious sphere when it embraces specific providences. But it does not for this reason become a distinctively religious thought. In particular, one cannot say that '*semeion*' is a fixed term for miracles in Josephus.

1.3 The General Use of "Sign" in the Old Testament

1.3.1 Statistical Survey

The word '*oth*' occurs 78 times in the Old Testament; in 75 cases the LXX translates it by '*semeion*'. Since '*semeion*' appears in the LXX only 125 times in all, it is clear that its major use is as a translation of '*oth*'.⁴

1.3.2 Synonyms

Alongside '*oth*' there appear in the Old Testament many synonyms, which characterize the function of the '*sign*' or its exact nature. The most frequently used synonym of '*oth*' is '*mopheth*', meaning, "wonder" (Ex 7: 3; Deut 4:34; 6: 22; Is 8: 18; Je 32: 20).⁵ In the combination, '*oth*' usually comes first and the combined expression is

⁴ F.J. HELFMEYER., "Oth", *TDOT* 1, 168.

⁵ F.J. HELFMEYER., "Oth", *TDOT* 1, 168.

in the plural. As far as one can see, it is only relatively late that *'mopheth'* occurs alone in the biblical Hebrew that is, in exilic and postexilic works.⁶

It should be pointed out, however, that *'oth'* and *'mopheth'* are found especially in Deuteronomy – nine times – and that its use in other Old Testament books seems to follow that of Deuteronomy. Obviously, this is all-important in any attempt to fix the meaning of *'oth'*. It must therefore be kept in mind, especially as LXX normally has *'semeia'* and *'terata'* for the combination of the two words.

The synonym, *'zikkaron'*, “memorial, remembrance”(which is used in, connection with *'oth'* in Ex 13: 9; Josh 4: 6;), sheds light on the function of *'oth'*, in as much as it alludes to the mnemonic use of ‘sign’. The purpose of *'zikkaron'* is 'to prevent something from being forgotten which deserves to be handed down, and to make it real over and over again"; therefore, it is natural to translate this word as “remembrance, actualisation.”⁷

1.3.3 “Signs” Used in Different Settings

An *'oth'* may occur in different settings: creation, history, and cultic institutions. In a few instances in the Old Testament, ‘signs’ refers to the observances of heavenly bodies, probably in an astrological sense (Gen 1:14; Jer 10:2), or to “signs and wonders” as marks of the miraculous actions of God within the history of the world (Deut 4:34; 6:22; Neh 9:10; Ps 105, 27; Jer 32:20). On other occasions it is used as an insignia of the Mosaic covenant. Thus the wearing of the law on the wrist and forehead and the

⁶ K.H.RENGSTORF., “Semeion”, *TDNT* VII, 210.

⁷ F.J. HELFMEYER., “Oth”, *TDOT* 1, 168-69.

keeping of the Sabbath are considered “signs” of the relationship between Israel and God (Deut 6:8; 11:18; Ez 20: 12). In harmony with the Israelite’s tendency to historicize, signs in creation and cultic institutions are often connected with historical events.⁸

1.4 The General Use of “Sign” in the New Testament

1.4.1 Statistics

In the New Testament ‘*semeion*’ occurs 73 times. It is used 10 times in Matthew, 7 times in Mark, 23 times in Luke (Luke 10 and Acts 13), 24 times in John, 8 in Paul and once in Hebrews.⁹

1.4.2 Parallel Words and Concepts

Four Greek words are employed in the New Testament to describe the works of Jesus. They are ‘*tera*’, – wonder (Mk 8: 22; Jn 4:48; Mt 24:24); ‘*dynamis*’, – power (Mk 6:2,5,14; 9: 39; Mt 11: 20-23); ‘*semeion*’, – sign (Mk 2:12; 16:17,20; Jn 2:18; 4: 48; 6:30) and ‘*ergon*’, – miraculous deed.¹⁰

1.4.3 Teras– Wonder

It tells of “that which for its extraordinary character is wont to be observed and kept in memory”.¹¹ The word is fairly common in the LXX, and occurs in the New Testament only in combination with ‘*semeion*’ and only in the plural (*terata*), that is

⁸ WALTER, A.ELWELL., *Encyclopaedia of the Bible*, 1961-1962.

⁹ K.H. RENGSTORF., “Semeion”, *TDNT* VII, 230.

¹⁰ SCROGGIE, W.GRAHAM., *A Guide to the Gospel*, London, 204.

¹¹ SCROGGIE, W.GRAHAM., 204.

"signs and wonders" or "wonders and signs"; hence it does not play any independent role alongside 'semeion'.¹²

1.4.4 Dynamis– Power

The miracles are also "powers", out-comings of that mighty power of God, which was inherent in Christ himself, that "great power of God" (Acts 8:10). This word points to 'new and higher forces', 'powers of the world to come' (Heb 6:5), which have entered and are working in this lower world of ours.¹³

It is sometimes used, by metonymy, of persons and things, for example (a) of God (Mt 26: 64; Mk 14:62 etc); (b) of angels (Eph 1:2; Rom 8:38, 1 Pet 3:22); (c) of that which manifests God's power (1Cor 1:24; Rom 1:16); and (d) of mighty works (Mk 6:5, 9:39, Acts 2:22 or 'miracles' (2Cor 12:12)).¹⁴

1.5 The Sign Demanded from Jesus

The Jonah saying is Jesus' answer in Matthew 12: 38f and Lk 11: 29f to the demand that he should give a 'semeion' (Lk 11:16). There is reference to a similar demand in Mt 16:1 and Mk 18:11. Finally, Luke, in his special material, has the story that Herod Antipas hoped to see a *semeion* from Jesus when Pilate sent Jesus to him as a prisoner because he belonged to Herod's territory and was thus within his jurisdiction (Lk 23: 6f).

¹² K.H. RENGSTORF., "Semeion", *TDNT* VII, 230.

¹³ W. GRAHAM SCROGGIE., *A Guide to the Gospel*, 204.

¹⁴ W. E. VINE., *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, 868.

1.5.1 *Mark 8: 11–13*

The Pharisees were seeking of Jesus a sign from heaven, tempting him. The rabbis held that when the Messiah came he would take his stand on the roof of the temple, proclaim the salvation of the people, and show them a light from heaven as a “sign” of his messiah ship. This was the sort of a “sign” the Pharisees demanded.¹⁵

1.5.2 *Matthew 16: 1–2*

Both the Pharisees and Sadducees came to test Jesus about giving a “sign”. The Pharisees delighted in emphasizing scripture and tried to do exactly what the law required. Of course, the minute they had fulfilled the letter of the law, they stopped. The Sadducees, on the other hand, claimed all the benefits and blessings promised in scripture, but doubted the reality of the supernatural events as recorded in the scripture. To the demand of the Pharisees and Sadducees for a “sign”, Jesus remarked to them that they could read the “signs” of the weather, but not the “signs” of the times. Since they had known the promises of the Old Testament, they should have been able to recognize Jesus Christ.¹⁶

1.5.3 *Luke 11: 16*

Just as faith in the Messiah was beginning to take root, the objection was raised that he has not worked the “sign”, which was expected, the “sign” by which he must prove he was the Messiah. This was a “sign” from heaven, such as making the sun or the moon stand still, or some “sign” in the stars. Casting out devils and miracles of

¹⁵ RALPH EARLE., *Mark, the Gospel of Action*, 70.

¹⁶ M. GEORGE GUTZKE., *Plain Talk on Matthew*, 139.

healing were not regarded as such “signs”. Jesus, therefore, was measured by human standards, God was told what he had to do, how he must convince human beings.¹⁷

1.6 The Sign of Jonah

In the Gospel of Matthew we notice that a good number of the demands for “signs” from Jesus end up in the Jonah sayings by Jesus. In Mt 12:39f, 16:4, Lk 11: 29f. We find a saying of Jesus in which He relates to Himself the “sign” of Jonah from the standpoint of His own work. Among the many attempts to explain this, the one that has most to commend it is that which takes Jonah as a genitive of apposition and finds in the “sign” of Jonah the “sign” which Jonah himself is, the singularity of his historical manifestation.¹⁸

In Mt 12: 40 the resurrection of Jesus, typified by the miracle of Jonah, will be the only sign he will give, but a decisive one. Luke 11: 29f gives an early Christian adaptation of the same saying. Now it refers to the parousia. Jonah had been warning of ruin to the Ninevites: Jesus at His coming will be a “sign” of rain to those who have rejected Him.¹⁹ The understanding of the Jonah saying as referring to the prophet in his special historical manifestation is supported on the one side by the Lucan version, which makes Jonah himself the sign and thus does greater justice to be the case than in Matthew. On the other side it is also backed up by the view of Jonah in later Judaism. The implied idea that a person can be God’s “sign” is linked with prophetic figures in the Old Testament, (Is 8:18, 20:3, Ez. 12:6). It is also to be found in the New

¹⁷ ALOIS STOZER., *The gospel According to St. Luke for Spiritual Reading*, 220.

¹⁸ K.H. RENGSTORF., “Semeion”, *TDNT* VII, 230.

¹⁹ REGINALD C.FULLER., *A New Catholic Commentary on the Holy Scripture*, 1009.

Testament, where it is again connected with prophetic phenomena. When Mt. 12:39, Lk 11:29, call Jonah a prophet, there also, on the basis of Old Testament and Jewish ideas, we have a reference to the way in which he can and must be a “sign”.²⁰

1.7 Jesus’ Rejection of the Demand for “Signs”

It is the Old Testament conception of the prophet as Yahweh’s “sign” that underlines Jesus’ being the God-given “sign” (Lk 2:34), by which the rise or fall, the salvation or ruin of every man is decided. In this connection we also have Jesus’ rejection of the demand for the “signs”. In Mk 8: 12 we have the typical example of Jesus’ rejection of the demand for a “sign”. The text reads literally, “ If a ‘sign’ will be given to this generation.” This comment is part of an oath formula, though it omits the threat of evil on oneself that normally accompanies such a comment: “May God strike me down” or “May I be accursed of God if a ‘sign’ is to be given to this generation.” This oath fragment does more than say that no “sign” will be given to this generation. It conveys with some vehemence that he will prevent it from happening at all costs.²¹

1.7.1 *Why the Rejection?*

Why does Jesus oppose the Pharisees’ asking a sign from heaven? In the Old Testament a sign was a public event that certified or conformed a distrusted prophesy or a disputed claim. One sought a sign when a claimant did or said something that was strange, surprising, unconventional or contrary to the Mosaic Law. The “sign” did not happen by chance but had been predicted and thereby proved the legitimacy of a suspected utterance or claim. It did not have to comprise anything spectacular or

²⁰ O. HOFIUS., “Miracle”, *DNTT* II, 629–30.

²¹ O. HOFIUS., “Miracle”, *DNTT* II, 629–30.

miraculous but had to correspond to the prediction of what would occur. Some incorrectly argue that Jesus resolutely refused to give any “sign” in Mark's gospel. For example, when the teachers of the law muttered under their breath that Jesus verged on blasphemy by announcing that the sins of the paralytic were forgiven, he proved his claim by something that happens (Mk 2:1-10). The reason Jesus balks at giving a “sign” here in Mk 8: 11-12 revolves around two issues: the meaning of the expression “a sign from heaven”, and the defiant dispositions of these opponents.²²

1.7.2 A “Sign” from Heaven

It does not refer to a sign from God. “Signs” by their very nature came from God, so that the phrase ‘a sign from God’ is redundant. Pharisees have in mind a peculiar type of “sign” distinct from any another “sign” they may have requested. A “sign” from heaven is something apocalyptic in tone, triumphalistic in character, and the embodiment of one of the ‘mighty deeds of deliverance’ that God had worked on Israel's behalf in securing it from slavery. Ironically, this request comes after the miraculous feeding, a miracle that pointed to the blessing, not the destruction. Jesus refuses to give the Pharisees a sign from heaven that would imply that God has sent him to give the nation political mastery of the world.²³

1.8 Miracles and “Signs”

In Matthew's Gospel we can see that the term “sign” is very closely connected with the miracles of Jesus. It would not be inappropriate to mention here some complimentary theological aspects of the miracles in the synoptic gospel.

²² DAVID E. GARLAWD., “Mark”, *The New Testament Application Commentary*, 307–309.

²³ DAVID E. GARLAWD., “Mark”, 307–309.

1.8.1 *Miracles as the "Signs" of the Kingdom of God*

In the preaching of Jesus the miracles are in fact inseparable from the theme of the inauguration of the kingdom of God; they are performed as signs that manifest the coming and true nature of the kingdom which the prophets had foretold. Thus we can also say that signs are standing as a criterion of continuity in the salvific plan of God. "Signs" are a component part of the kingdom. For the kingdom of God is not something static, but a dynamic force that effectively changes the human condition and establishes the lordship of Christ over all things, including bodies and the cosmos.

When the disciples of John the Baptist come to question him, Jesus tells them that all the "signs" of the messianic kingdom, which the prophet had foretold (Is 35: 56; 29:18; Jer 31:34; Ez 36: 25) are being fulfilled by him (Lk 7: 22;). By healing bodies and bringing them to life and by exorcisms Jesus is effectively destroying the reign of Satan and establishing the reign of God; he is the "stronger one" of the parables (Mt 12: 29; Mk 6: 1-20).²⁴ They were the "signs" that the messianic age had dawned. Thus to the question of John the Baptist, " Are you the one that is to come....", Jesus replies, "Go and tell John what you hear and see...."(Mt 11: 4f; Lk 7: 22). It is clear that Jesus sees in his mighty acts the "signs" that the messianic predictions of the Old Testament are being fulfilled.²⁵ The miracles were the kingdom of God in action- God's sovereign grace and forgiveness operative in Christ. "If I by the finger of God cast out devils", says Jesus, 'then is the kingdom of God come upon you' (Mt 12: 28; Mk 3: 22-30).

²⁴ RENE LATOURELLE., *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, 60 – 61.

²⁵ ALAN RICHARDSON., *A Theological Word Book of the Bible*, 53.

1.8.2 *The Context of Faith*

The miracles of Jesus are intelligible only in the context of faith. The saying of Jesus, "your faith has made you well", which he addressed to the woman suffering from haemorrhage (Mk 5: 34) or to the blind beggar Bartimaeus (Mk 10: 52); or the comment of the evangelist that Jesus could not do many mighty works in Nazareth because of the unbelief of the people (Mk 6: 6), show how important faith is for a miracle to happen. But faith is needed, too, for a miracle to be recognized for what it is. This is brought out strikingly in the story of the healing of the dumb man (Mt 9: 32-34) with which Matthew concludes his Miracle Cycle (Mt 8-9). The miracles of Jesus are not proofs compelling belief. They are "signs" visible to those who have faith, which is the willingness to see.²⁶

1.9 Jesus, the "Sign" of Opposition

The "sign" at issue here, both in its factuality and also its singularity, rests on a direct positing by God. The fact that it is displayed in a man is not unusual in biblical thinking. If a Semitic equivalent is sought it can only be 'oth'. This is supposed by what is said in Lk 2: 35, about the effect of Him who is called the "sign"; he will disclose the thoughts of many hearts. Since this will take place in a two fold way it is better to take opposition here in the sense of 'contradicted' or 'contested' rather than 'resisted' or 'rejected'. The bad thing from Simeon's standpoint is that the "sign" is not regarded as God's "sign" with all that implied. Nor does the mother of Jesus escape the discord, which He unleashes as the objective "sign" of God. Since the reference to the "sign" which God sets up, according to the attitude taken there, is falling and rising again in

²⁶ G. SORES PRADHU., "Signs, not Wonders", *The Way* (April 1990) 312.

Israel. The last point guarantees the Messianic horizon of the term and the filling out of what is here again the formal “sign” by the definition as “a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people” (Lk 24: 19).²⁷

1.10 Conclusion

At the end of this brief survey of the background of John’s idea of the term “sign” in the non- biblical and the biblical world, we have gathered the main ideas that have come together with their implications for our study of Johannine “sign”.

We have seen that even in the non-biblical world, the word “sign” was connoting a visible event intended to convey meaning beyond that which is normally perceived in the outward appearance of the event. The word does not originally come from the sphere of religion, but it takes on theological colouring in appropriate contexts. In our daily life we use many sorts of “signs” in our dealings with others. Since God adapts to our nature, as we have seen both in the Old Testament and New Testament, He gives the people “signs” in order to save them. We can say that in the synoptic Gospels, the usage of the term “sign” is very much connected with its confirmatory character, its warning aspect, and also its revelatory elements for the eschatological coming of Jesus.

²⁷ K.H. RENGSTORF., “Semeion”, *TDNT* VII, 237-238.

Chapter 2

The Theological Significance of Johannine “Signs”

2.1 Introduction

We have seen the non-Biblical and Biblical background of the Johannine usage of the term “sign”. In this chapter, I am going to examine the uniqueness of the meaning and function of “sign” in the Fourth Gospel. This is the central section of this work both structurally and thematically. Having dealt with the general aspects of the use of the term “sign” in the Gospel of John, we then turn to the meaning and function of the series of “seven signs” in the Gospel. Our aim is to trace out the elements from the ‘seven signs’, which will help us to reach a conclusion that all these ‘signs’ were pointing towards the identity of Jesus as the Life-Giver.

2.2 Johannine Usage of “Signs” in General

The word “sign” occurs seventeen times in John’s Gospel and bears a weighty meaning. It is used of the mighty works of Jesus, which John never calls miracles (*dunamis*) or wonders (*terata*).²⁸ John knows and uses ‘*semeion*’ in the sense of “signs”, ‘pointer’ and ‘mark’ in such a way as to do justice to the formal character of the word.²⁹

2.3 “Sign” Used for Miracles

John agrees with the Synoptics that the miracles of Jesus have a deep spiritual meaning and that this meaning has nothing to do with their impressiveness as wonders (Jn 2:18; 4:48). Yet the miracles recounted in the Fourth Gospel are all of them very great supernatural acts of power. They were not the kind of ‘wonders’, which any village sorceress might work or the symbolic actions, which any prophet in Israel might have performed. They were ‘the works which none other did’. But only those who have faith in Christ know their meaning, and in several cases a miracle is used as the peg on which to hang a long discourse of the Lord.³⁰ Thus John calls the miracles of Jesus “signs” because he sees them as visible manifestations of the new reality (elsewhere symbolised as ‘light’, ‘life’, ‘glory’) revealed to us in Jesus.³¹

2.4 Symbolism of John

The thinking of the Fourth Gospel is best understood when we keep in mind the fact that the author expresses the heavenly reality become present through the coming of Jesus by means of everyday images, small homely parables and rich symbols. In a

²⁸ ALAN RICHARDSON., *Saint John*, 62.

²⁹ K.H. RENGSTORF., “Semeion”, *TDNT* VII, 243.

³⁰ ALAN RICHARDSON., *Saint John*, 63.

³¹ G. SORES PRADHU., “Signs, not Wonders”, *The Way* (April 1990) 312.

general sense, the miracles performed by Jesus are “signs” that point to another reality beyond the visible and the tangible. Above all, John uses the symbols in the original meaning of the term, for example, water, bread, light, darkness, and so on, to express in addition to the earthly realities, heavenly realities brought by Jesus.³²

The greatest symbol for John is the ‘Son’, taken from the family ambient, a term that expresses a relationship of intimacy and love, the sharing of family secrets, the authority of the father in the family, and obedience of the son to the father. At the same time, the evangelist uses another great symbol of ‘life’ to express in a positive way the salvation brought by Jesus.³³ Therefore, we see that the thought is not simply logical, but symbolical where two threads run parallel, in such a way that the evangelist seems to deal with everyday facts of birth and death, eating and drinking, light and darkness, but actually takes the reader beyond the earthly realities to those that are transcendental and eternal.

2.5 Gospel of Life

‘Life’ is the most prominent term used by John to convey the work and mission of Jesus in the world. Although the Father is the ultimate source of life (Jn 5:26; 6:57) and the spirit gives life (Jn 6:63), it is the Son who is portrayed in the Fourth Gospel as the source of life for those who believe in him. The whole purpose of the Son’s coming into the world is to give life (Jn 10:10).³⁴ Significantly, the gospel begins and ends with the statements about the life-giving mission of Jesus, the Son of God. In Jn 1:4 we read;

³² EVERIST PENTO., *Jesus the Son and Giver of Life in the Fourth Gospel*, 271.

³³ EVERIST PENTO., *Jesus the Son and Giver of Life in the Fourth Gospel*, 272.

³⁴ EVERIST PENTO., *Jesus the Son and Giver of Life in the Fourth Gospel*, 45.

‘In Him was Life, and the Life was the light of man’. If we turn now to the conclusion of the gospel, we have the following statement in Jn 20:31; ‘But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and believing you may have life in His name’.³⁵

2.5.1 *The Theological Meaning of Life*

Salvation is life in this Gospel; it is what is offered to the believer in Christ. The key word in this gospel is ‘Life’ or ‘Eternal Life’. Eternal life is not merely unending life that goes on and on. It stresses the quality of life, the life, which belongs only to God, a kingdom that is not of this world. The Son gives this life to whomever He pleases (Jn 5:21). He gives living water to the thirsty, bread of life to the hungry. Jesus is the mediator of this new quality of life (Jn 10:10) which begins here and now (Jn 17:3) and which because it is God’s own life, can never die but brings complete joy (Jn 15:9-21). It is fascinating to see how John can use the common things of everyday life, Water, Bread, Light, Sheep, Vine, Fruit, as “signs” pointing, to the reality of ‘eternal life’ (Jn 11:25; 14:6; 5:26). Salvation, or Life is essentially fellowship with Jesus through the spirit.³⁶

2.6 The Seven “Signs”

John is highly selective; although he is aware of many more miracles of Jesus (Jn 20:30-31) he narrates only seven. Scholars have found a pattern of ‘sevens’ running right through the gospel, that is seven “signs” narrated at length during the public ministry, seven discourses, seven ‘I am’ saying, seven similes used by Jesus etc.

³⁵ EVERIST PENTO., *Jesus the Son and Giver of Life in the Fourth Gospel*, 45.

³⁶ SEAN P. KEALY., *That You May Believe*, 172-73.

However, John never uses the word 'seven' in his gospel and is rather inclined to let us find out for ourselves, so that we can never be quite sure if it was the author's intention or not.³⁷

One can easily see what are the "signs" in which the evangelist is chiefly interested. They are major miracles, which are not merely mentioned but described in some detail. It has long been customary to count seven of these —

1. The Miracle of the Wine at Cana (2:1-11)
2. The Life Giving Word (4:46-54)
3. The Paralytic Healed (5:1-9)
4. The Multitude Fed (6:1-15)
5. Walking on the Sea (6:16-21)
6. The Sight Restored (9:1-14)
7. Lazarus Raised (11:17-44).

Now in the following points, we will limit our study to the seven "signs" given in the 'Book of Signs' and present Jesus as the Life-Giver basing on these "signs".

2.7 The First Sign: The Newness of Life

The narrative of the Miracle of Cana, 2:1-11, presents, at the very beginning of the 'Book of Sign, a particularly striking feature of this gospel, which will frequently recur. It is the starting point for the whole self-revelations of Jesus, which is given through "signs"(Jn 20:30).³⁸ There is realism in the story, an eye for character and for seemingly trivial detail; there is even a touch of homely humour in the remark of the

³⁷ JOHN T. CARROLL., *Sickness and Healing in the New Testament*, 130-31.

³⁸ R. SCHNACKENBURG., *The Gospel According to St. John* 1, 323.

steward of the feast: 'everyone puts the best wine on the table first, and brings on the poor stuff when the company is drunk; but you have kept your good wine to the last'. And yet we are told Jesus did this as the beginning of his "signs" and so manifested the word of the prologue. The word became flesh and made his abode among us, and we beheld his glory. The story then is not to be taken at its face value. Its true meaning lies deeper.

2.7.1 *The New Creation on the 'Third Day'*

John situates this episode on the 'third day' after the call of his disciples, which began with the Baptist's witness (Jn 1:35). If all of the previous six episodes (Jn 1:19-23; 24-28; 29-34; 35-39; 40-42; 43-51) could be considered as having taken place on six different days, John's intention could be to begin his gospel of the New Covenant with a complete week, after the manner of Gen 1:1-2: 4. The idea would then be that the "sign" of Cana brings to fulfilment the disciples' commitment to Jesus which began with the Baptist's witness and Jesus' call (Jn 1:35-39), as opposed to the refusal of the Jews (Jn 1:19-34). More clearly the phrase the 'third day' must remind any Christian reader, of the 'third day' of Jesus' resurrection, which ironically, was not the seventh but the first day of the week of the new creation. We also see the Old Testament background of the expression 'third day' in Exodus 19:16 in the context of making the Sinaitic Covenant between God and the Israelites. Thus John could intend to suggest that this first of Jesus' "signs" marks the end of the old era and the beginning of the new covenant. The rest of the account tends to confirm this suggestion.³⁹

³⁹ LION SWAIN., *The Gospel According to St. John for Spiritual Reading*, 29.

2.7.2 *The 'Marriage' – The New Covenant*

Here the 'marriage' (*gamos*) is the background, which enables John to put his message in clear relief.⁴⁰ *Gamos* acquires its great religious significance where it is used of the union of close connection between God and man. Marriage is a symbol for the covenant between God and the people as this is to be kept in all fidelity and renewed with all passion (Hos 2:19; Is 54:4ff; Ez 16:7ff).⁴¹ Thus the marriage must recall the covenantal relationship between Yahweh and his people, and so now that of Jesus the Bridegroom, bringing new wine (Mk 2:19-22). John thus uses of the occasion of a marriage-miracle to depict the beginning of the New Covenant established between Jesus and the New Israel. St. John is setting forth the Galilean preaching of Jesus as the time of the divine election and espousal of the New Israel, the Church, His bride.

2.7.3 *The New 'Woman'*

Mary, the historical person, has a theological presence here. She stands for the community of the New Israel. The address 'Woman' to Mary is repeated also at the foot of the Cross-. So there is a theological reason for John, in purposefully placing it at the beginning and end of Jesus' ministry. In Rev 12, the 'woman' stands as a "sign" representing the mother of the Jesus. So when we take into account all the events together, Mary symbolically represents the mother of the New Israel.

2.7.4 *The New Wine – The New Life of Jesus*

In the Old Testament there are many sayings in praise of wine. In Jgs 9:13 it is the drink which makes glad both men and gods (Ps 104:15). Fullness of wine is a

⁴⁰ LION SWAIN., *The Gospel According to St. John for Spiritual Reading*, 29.

⁴¹ E. STAUFFER., "Gamos" *DTNT* 1, 653.

special blessing from God (Gn 28:37; Jl 2:23). Abstinence from wine is rare.⁴² Ecclesiastes mentions, "wine gladdens life"(Eccl 10:19).

For a Jewish feast wine was essential. "Without wine" said the Rabbis, "there is no joy". At any time the failure of provisions would have been a problem, for hospitality in it east is a sacred duty, but for the provisions to fail at a wedding would be a terrible shame for the bride and the bridegroom. That indeed would have been a humiliation.⁴³

The symbolism of the story is polyvalent. From the stone jars that served for Jewish purification rites Christ pours the new wine that is superior to the old and has been kept until the last. This new wine is a "sign" of the new covenant that is sealed in the blood of Christ, a "sign" of the marriage of the bridegroom and his bride, the Church, which gives the latter the blessings of grace in superabundance, and especially the riches of sacramental grace in baptism and Eucharist. The superabundance of the wine at Cana, like the superabundance of the multiplied loaves, signifies that the reality goes far beyond all the promises and all the pre-figurations, that Christ inaugurates the new creation. The changing of water into wine is a symbol of all this.⁴⁴

John is telling us that the old has passed into the new covenant and teaching in Jesus the Messiah. The way of Jesus, symbolised by the wonderful, joyful wine, exceeds and transforms the Jewish way, which is symbolised by the water and the purification rites, which, although they could point the way to man's need of cleansing,

⁴² H. SEESEMAN., "Oinos" *TDNT* V, 162.

⁴³ W. BARCLAY., *The Gospel of John* I, 82.

⁴⁴ RANE LATOURELLE., *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, 212.

were really unable to effect it. The idea will appear again in chapter 15 that Jesus is the true vine. One can see the same symbolism perhaps in the comparison between the good wine kept till last and the poor wine of Judaism.⁴⁵ In the synoptic tradition, seemingly in the context of a wedding feast (Mk 2:19), we find Jesus using the symbolism of new wine in old wineskins in order to compare his new teaching with the customs of the Pharisees.⁴⁶ The precious wine of the Gospel is contrasted with the water of Jewish rites of purification, the order of grace with that of the Law.

2.7.5 *Jesus, the Life – Giver*

Jesus was the agent of creation. He is the agent of that preservation which is only a continual creation. In him is life and all living things live because of the continual presence and operation upon them of his divine power. The power is one, and the reason for the effect is one, that Christ ever works in the world, and is the eternal Word “without whom was not anything come into being that was made”. For John, Jesus is the fountain of eternal life. And when the world’s platters are empty and the world’s cups are all drained dry, Jesus comes with the real wine, which results in the newness of life.⁴⁷

The self-disclosure of Jesus climaxes in the faith of the disciples in him (Jn 2:11). This is fully in tune with the purpose of the Fourth Gospel (Jn 20:30-31). The readers or the listeners of the Gospel are thus invited to believe in Jesus more intensively and to commit themselves to fellow-humans more radically in order that they may share in

⁴⁵ SEAN P. KEALY., *That You May Believe*, 57.

⁴⁶ RAYMOND E. BROWN., *The Gospel According to St. John I*, 105.

⁴⁷ A. MACLAREN., *Exposition of Holy Scripture*, 56.

God's own life.⁴⁸ The theme of 'hour' also points to the same direction (Jn 2:4). In the Gospel of John, the 'hour' is the time of full manifestation of Jesus' divine glory in the event of cross and resurrection.⁴⁹ The divine purpose of fulfilment and new creation cannot be finally accomplished until Christ is crucified, raised, and ascended. What was symbolised at Cana will become a reality when the spirit is given, through shedding his life on the cross and a new age is inaugurated.

2.8 The Second "Sign": The Life-Giving Word

2.8.1 *A Request for the Gift of Life*

The Official's son was at the point of death. The imminent danger of death is dramatically underlined. There is a double affirmation that the death is near (Jn 4:47-49). And the official is at the point of helplessness when Jesus first, apparently, discouraged him from expecting any miracle from Jesus. The father, however, is not discouraged and repeats his request still more urgently. The father's appeal is therefore, for the gift of life. And the double affirmation that the death is near has its counterpart in the triple affirmation that the child will live (Jn 4:50-51). The contrast is deliberate, and shows the wish to depict the miracle as a recall from death to life.⁵⁰

2.8.2 *Faith in Jesus as the Life-Giver*

Particularly in John, we will find two great themes of his Gospel stressed here: Faith and Life. Faith has been a key theme in chapters 2-4, where John puts before us different reactions to Jesus; the Samaritans growing in Faith from the account of the woman's personal experience to Jesus and his Word. Life is also a main theme in the

⁴⁸ SEAN P. KEALY., *That You May Believe*, 57.

⁴⁹ W. BARCLAY., *The Gospel of John* 1, 90-91.

⁵⁰ R. SCHNACKENBURG., *The Gospel According to St. John* I, 467.

Gospel. In him was the Life (Jn 1:4). Nicodemus has been told that the word of Jesus gives new life. The Samaritan woman learns of the water that is a never failing spring of eternal life. Here we have a “sign” that the word of Jesus gives new life.⁵¹

In Jn 4:48-49 Jesus reaction to the request for help seems unduly harsh and not in accord with his treatment of other instances of sickness; indeed in Jn 5:6 and Jn 9:6 Jesus takes the initiative in working a “sign”. One explanation is that Jesus wanted to raise the man from a faith based on seeing “signs” to a faith based on Jesus’ word, and the latter part of Jn 4:50 is cited in support of this. It is usually supposed that by using the second person plural Jesus is regarding the official’s request as typical of the Jewish demand for a “sign”, of which Jesus had a recent example in Jerusalem (Jn 2:18).⁵² However, the official did not come to complete faith on the strength of Jesus’ word, but only after he found out that the “sign” had actually been performed (Jn 4:53).

2.8.3 *The Life Giving Word*

Jesus pronounces the efficacious word in a form which recalls that of 1 Kings 17: 23, where the prophet Elijah says to the widow of Zarephath, after reviving her dead son, “see, your son lives”. There is no special word in Hebrew for “be cured”; but the Greek-speaking readers are invited to recognize clearly Jesus’ life-giving power, as he restores life by his word alone, in contrast to the ancient prophet.⁵³ He simply commanded with his word and the healing took place at the very moment (Jn 4:50.52). The word of Jesus is efficacious in bringing this healing.

⁵¹ SEAN P. KEALY., *That You May Believe*, 76.

⁵² R. V. G TASKER., *John*, 81.

⁵³ R. SCHNACKENBURG., *The Gospel According to St. John* 1, 467.

2.8.4 *The Acceptance of Jesus as the Life-Giver*

The real healing that has occurred in this episode is the healing of the father and his household as well as that of his son. The official believes the word of Jesus, as is expressly stated; he sets off for home, full of confidence in this word. Thus he seems to have attained a degree of faith greater than that of the Galileans, which would in turn, provide him with eternal life. He begins to confide in Jesus as a person. He already believes in Jesus, without having seen a “sign”. In fact he did not see a “sign” at all. He freely attributes his son’s cure to Jesus’ word, and thus arrives, finally, in believing in Jesus as God’s life giving word (Jn 1:14). The real life that has been communicated by Jesus’ word is the eternal life, which flows from believing in him as God’s envoy.⁵⁴

2.9 **The Third “Sign”: The Permanency of the Life-Giving Presence**

2.9.1 *The Setting*

The setting of this “sign” is not only Jerusalem, but also the occasion of a religious festival and the Jewish Sabbath. Chapters 5–12 are linked together by a series of feasts beginning with the unnamed feast in chapter 5. Jesus now steps on to the public stage in confrontation with “the Jews” (Jn 5:10.15; 6:41.52; 7:15.35). Every chapter contains some kind of hostility against Jesus. His life is frequently threatened.

The present sequence of chapter 5 follows the pattern of alternation between Galilee and Judea and the lengthening of Jesus’ ministry with visits to Jerusalem prior to the passion, which has already been established in chapter 2. The miracle in chapter 5

⁵⁴ LION SWAIN., *The Gospel According to St. John for Spiritual Reading*, 59.

serves as the occasion for the discourse on Jesus' relationship to the Father and his power to give life.⁵⁵

2.9.2 *The Situation of Life-Suspended and Abandoned*

C.H.Dodd observes the second and third miracles as telling us clearly how the word of Christ gave life to those who were as good as dead, either in the sense of being at the point of death or in the sense of living chronically in the sense of suspended vitality. Here, in the present case, the narration is about a man who had spent half a life time in such a devitalised condition that he could not even make use of means of healing which lay within his reach.⁵⁶

In Mark, a parallel incident (Mk 2: 1-12) takes place at Capernaum, in a house, and in the presence of a crowd; in John it takes place in Jerusalem, beside a pool, and involves Christ and a helpless man, without any crowd. In Mark the paralytic has several friends, and his personal trust is reflected in the faith of the four men carrying him; in John the invalid is alone, abandoned, lying beside the pool.⁵⁷ Thus John here wants to emphasize the helpless situation of man, left abandoned and lying in the state of a suspended vitality. And it is into this situation that the life-giving presence of Jesus appears.

2.9.3 *The Symbolism of the Suspended Life*

The miracle is linked with the preceding episode by recurrence of the symbol of water. We have previously had the water of Jacob's well as a symbol of the ineffective

⁵⁵ PHEME PERKINS., "The Gospel According to John", *NJBC*, 958-959.

⁵⁶ C.H. DODD., *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, 318.

⁵⁷ RANE LATOURELLE., *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, 218.

ordinances of religion on the level of mere *sarx*, flesh, as opposed to religion in spirit and truth. In the Bethesda narrative we have, once again, water, which offers healing, but has not been effective to heal a cripple of thirty-eight year's standing. In the light of what has gone before, we should think of the 'law given through Moses' set over against the life-giving word of Jesus. There lies the healing water, but the cripple remains unhealed; so the Torah promised life to men, but the gospel tradition knew of 'publicans and sinners' for whom it did nothing: the sick, who needed a physician (Mk 2: 16-17).⁵⁸

2.9.4 *The Initiative of the Life-Giver*

In working his previous "signs", Jesus responded to another's initiative (2: 4; 4:47), here he approaches the sick man himself and asks him if he wants to be healed. In Mark the paralytic and his carriers take the initiative and approach Jesus; in John it is Jesus who takes the initiative. Jesus is always the friend of the friendless and those who are destitute of any earthly help. It seems strange that Jesus would ask, "Do you want to be cured?" He knew what was in the minds of men. And anyone in that crowd at Bethesda knew the sick wanted to be cured. Perhaps Jesus wanted to draw from the man the admission of his helplessness which he gave in verse 7, "...Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool; but while I am coming, another steps down before me".

⁵⁸ C.H. DODD., *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, 319-320.

2.9.5 *The Permanency of the Life-Giving Presence of Jesus*

We have seen that God alone can 'bring life' on the Sabbath day. Here Jesus claims to have used the same prerogative of the Father. Thus he can say that 'I am God'. Just like the Father gives life, the son also gives life. The Son has the very nature of the Father. In the development of the discourse, however, the Sabbath question is forgotten, and attention is centred on the claim that Christ, as the Son of God, has both authority and power to exercise the two divine functions of salvation and Judgement, "as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the son gives life to whom he will"(Jn 5:21). No one should be surprised that the Son should Judge the world, since he is vested with the power of life.⁵⁹

Here we have to understand the "sign" of Bethesda in the sense: "Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent, has eternal life; he does not come into judgement, but has passed from death of life"(Jn 5:24). Thus Jesus' life-giving and healing word is a "sign" of God's permanent presence. Jesus' life-giving action is a "sign" of the life, which God is offering to the world in him.

2.10 **The Fourth "Sign": Jesus, the Bread of Life (6: 1-15)**

2.10.1 *The "Sign" of the Great Feeding*

The feeding of the five thousand is recorded in all four gospels but John's interpretation of it has distinctive emphases. John alone says that it took place as Passover approached (Jn 6:4). The whole passage, however, reveals a continuous narrative framework, carefully composed with attention to dramatic verisimilitude. Verses 1-3, do no more than provide a setting for the narrative, out of familiar

⁵⁹ C.H. DODD., *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, 324.

traditional material. With verse 4 we arrive at a distinctively Johannine trait; the reference is to the festival of Passover. Here we are justified in seeking for something more than the surface meaning. The Christian reader could hardly fail to remember that the Christians Passover was the Eucharist.⁶⁰ The point is important theologically rather than chronologically; Christ is the Christian Passover lamb whose flesh is given for the life of the world in the living bread (Jn 6:51).⁶¹

2.10.2 Initiative of the Messianic Shepherd

We notice that Jesus takes the initiative as usual in John. In the Synoptics it is the disciples who take the initiative and distribute the food. In John, Jesus takes the initiative and even distributes the food himself (Jn 6:11) Jesus is thus presented as one who knows men's hunger and personally feeds them.⁶² Even though the material is rather unpromising, Jesus asks the disciples to make the people sit down on the green grass. It is striking, however, that in the Johannine account the 'much grass' is stressed separately. John is interested in the saving time of Passover rather than in the wilderness scene. The 'much grass' is also a symbol of the presence of life. Jesus, the messianic shepherd, is leading his people, no longer the old Israel, but the universal people of God in green pastures (Ps 23:2) and provides them with rich nourishment in the meadows, the food of life (Jn 10:9-10).

⁶⁰ C.H. DODD., *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, 333.

⁶¹ ALAN RICHARDSON., *Saint John*, 98.

⁶² E. KILMATIN., *Bread from Heaven*, 2.

2.10.3 "Bread from Heaven"

In the discourse, the idea of the food of eternal life is developed with reference to the manna spoken of in the Old Testament as 'bread from heaven'. The Jews are here represented as demanding that Jesus shall establish His messianic pretensions by the well-recognized token of restoring the gift of manna, 'the bread from heaven' assuming that this is what He meant by the bread which endures to eternal life. Jesus in reply denies that manna was 'heavenly bread' in any important sense. The bread of which Jesus is speaking is 'real' bread, belonging to that order of existence, which has been described (Jn 4:23) as spirit and truth. The manna, however miraculous, does not belong to that order of existence, since it perished in the using, or became corrupt if it was not used (Ex 16:15-21). It is, in spite of its miraculous origin, the bread that perishes.⁶³

The manna was only an external "sign", which points to the true bread, which the Father gives. So "bread from heaven" refers to bread, which is neither manna nor the torah, bread that "gives life to the world"(Jn 6:33). The crowd accepts this interpretation; "Lord, give us this bread always"(Jn 6:34).⁶⁴

2.10.4 "I am the Bread of Life"

However, Jesus goes on to say that he is the true bread: "I am the bread of life"(Jn 6:35). Thus he shows how a concrete scriptural text points to his mystery, which can only be accepted if the Father grants it (Jn 6:37). The claim of Jesus is unacceptable to the Jews; if there is "spiritual bread" outside the torah, it cannot be Jesus, "the son of Joseph"(Jn 6:42). Jesus answers by insisting that he is the bread of

⁶³ C.H. DODD., *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, 334-335.

⁶⁴ R. SCHNACKENBURG., *The Gospel According to St. John* 1, 317.

life (Jn 6:48) and consequently that “he who believes has eternal life”(Jn 6:47). Hence Jesus denies that because he is the son of Joseph it follows that he does not come down from heaven. Rather he affirms that in him the distinction between the external sphere of weakness of flesh and the spiritual sphere of God is removed; he is really the unique mediator between God and man. This is the message of the discourse down to Jn 6:50, which closes with a reference to the contrast between manna and the true bread of life. Those who eat manna died; those who eat the bread from heaven live.⁶⁵

2.10.5 “I am the Living Bread”

This passage focuses on the reality of Jesus in the flesh as source of life. It affirms that the encounter with Jesus in the flesh gives life and that apart from him this spiritual experience is not realized. The use of Eucharistic terminology allows for an unambiguous affirmation that Jesus is the Son of God who gives life. At the same time it affirms that even after death, Jesus “as flesh and blood”, still remains the source of life.⁶⁶

2.11 The Fifth “Sign”: Jesus the Guardian of Life

The second “sign” in chapter 6, the walking on the water, is also found in the Synoptics linked to the feeding miracle. But here again John’s account is presented in a different way. Jesus’ appearance to the disciples is described as an epiphany of the Son of God who immediately brings the disciples to a safe haven. In the synoptics Jesus gets into the boat and goes with the disciples to the opposite shore, John’s account gives the impression that Jesus did not enter the boat or that as he did so the boat reached the

⁶⁵ R. SCHNACKENBURG., *The Gospel According to St. John* 1, 314.

⁶⁶ R. SCHNACKENBURG., *The Gospel According to St. John* 1, 314.

shore. "And immediately the boat was at land"(Jn 6:21). Thus Jesus' power is emphasized, and together with Jesus' expression, "I am"(Jn 6:20), serves to concentrate the reader's attention on the mystery of Jesus.

2.11.1 *The Situation of Darkness*

The three features of the situation mentioned have theological significance. The disciples, left to themselves, are in 'darkness' (Jn 1:5), far from Jesus and exposed to the onslaughts of hostile forces. The 'strong wind' which 'rouses' the sea and makes it turbulent, is described in different words from the synoptic account, an indication that it derives from an independent account. The anticipatory remark that Jesus had not yet come to them leads up to the reversal, which takes place with the appearance of Jesus and his 'closeness' to them. This strengthens still further the Christological emphasis of the narrative, which paints a stark picture of the contrast between the situation far from Jesus and that in his presence (Jn 12:35).⁶⁷

2.11.2 *The Sacred Formula, "I AM"*

John treats this "sign" not as a natural one but as a divine epiphany. Just as the disciples were temporarily separated from Jesus and in the dark, almost immediately they receive enlightenment. Christ appears to them 'upon the waters' and he pronounces the sacred formula "*Ego Eimi*". It is true that in the story, taken at its face value, these words might mean, no more than "It is I". But in view of the importance which the

⁶⁷ M. GEORGE., *Jesus the Good News*, 123.

formula bears in other Johannine passages it seems more than probable that it is to be understood here, as elsewhere, as the equivalent of the divine name, "I AM".⁶⁸

2.11.3 "Then they were glad..."

The evangelist had an interest in describing how the disciples' fears were overcome with the epiphany of Jesus. Alan Richardson regards the verses 60-71 of this chapter as a comment upon the story of the walking on the sea (Jn 6:21). They were glad to receive him into the boat, after his miraculous revelation of himself to them, as the 'I AM' who works the works of God.⁶⁹ Thus, John presents Jesus as the one, who watches, our life always. Life is lived with the loving eyes of Jesus upon us. John reminds us, Jesus as the one who comes into our life in trouble.

2.12 Sixth "Sign": Jesus the Light of Life

Chapter 9 contains a narrative of the healing of the blind man at Siloam and a dialogue in the form of a trial scene. The two are intimately connected, and together they constitute a simple Johannine unit of narrative and discourse. The immediate context is the Feast of the Tents, one of the most important of the year and marked by two ceremonies that were pregnant with messianic expectations. The beneficiary of this healing "sign" is a man who has been blind from birth. Given John's insistence on the profound connection between light and life. It is obvious that in his mind this "sign" is a life giving mission of Jesus.

⁶⁸ C.H. DODD., *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, 345.

⁶⁹ ALAN RICHARDSON., *Saint John*, 105.

2.12.1 *The Situation of Blindness*

This is the only “sign” in the gospel in which the sufferer is said to have been afflicted from his birth. Not being able to see, this man has never lived in the proper sense of this term. He has only existed. He will not be merely restored to health, but endowed with life itself.⁷⁰ John’s motive is very theological; mankind is born spiritually blind because of sin, and only He can save from sin. The cure of the blindness is a symbol of new birth (Jn 3:1-21) through water and spirit.

2.12.2 *The Pool of Siloam*

From this pool in Jerusalem the ceremonial waters used at the feast of tabernacles were drawn. As John explains, the Hebrew name is derived from the verb ‘to send’. Jesus, as the evangelist reiterates, is the one “sent” from God (Jn 9:4). This incident has also a baptismal connotation. The blind man is washed in the healing laver of God’s Sent One. The forgiveness of healing flows from Christ, and the blind see. Though the Jews reject the healing waters, the living fountain avails for the life of the world.⁷¹

2.12.3 *Jesus, the Light of Life*

Light is a rich symbol for life. God created light first so that life becomes possible (Gen 1:3). Light is also a symbol for spiritual life, which includes obeying the commandments of God and practising righteousness (Ps 37:5-6). Light is, finally though rarely used, a symbol for eternal life (Ps 36:10).⁷²

⁷⁰ LION SWAIN., *The Gospel According to St. John for Spiritual Reading*, 119.

⁷¹ ALAN RICHARDSON., *Saint John*, 125.

⁷² EVERIST PINTO., *Jesus the Son and Life in the Fourth Gospel*, 100.

Throughout the story John emphasises the contrast between the gradual Christological progress of the blind man and the progressive bad faith of the Pharisees. The acceptance of the true nature of Jesus stands as criteria for judgement. Jesus' own way becomes a promise of salvation for all who believe in him. Whoever joins him finds, through him and with him, the goal of existence, the light of life. Thus "sign" will be an indication that all the Jewish hopes and aspirations, previously associated with the 'Feast of Tabernacles', are now to be centred on Jesus. Just as he is the source of Life-Giving water (Jn 7:37-39), so he is the source of Life Giving Light.⁷³

2.13 The Seventh "Sign": Jesus, the Resurrection and the Life

We have seen that all along, John's method has been to relate the distinctive theme of life and the Gospel narratives in such a way that the identity of Jesus as the life-giver is unfolded progressively. In chapter 11 Jesus is seen to be "the resurrection and the life"(Jn 11:25). Here we can see the account of how Jesus raised and restored Lazarus, not only from death but also from the bodily deterioration of four days in the tomb.

2.13.1 The News of Illness

Jesus receives a message that Lazarus, a friend of his, is sick at Bethany, a village just two miles from Jerusalem. Jesus' response (Jn 11:4) calls to mind his earlier words about the man born blind (Jn 9:3). There the man's blindness, while tragically real, was not final. God and His glory would have the last word. Jesus sensed a similar

⁷³ EVERIST PINTO., *Jesus the Son and Life in the Fourth Gospel*, 102.

situation now: death would take place, but it would not have the last word. God and His Son would be magnified through the outcome of Lazarus' serious illness.⁷⁴

2.13.2 *Taking the Initiative*

Only after the two days, heavily stressed by the double specification of time, does Jesus invite the disciples to return to Judea. "Let us go into Judea again"(Jn 11:7). The reason why John tells the story in this way is that John always shows us Jesus taking action entirely on his own initiative, and not on the persuasion of any one else. In the story of the turning of the water into wine at Cana of Galilee John shows us that Jesus does the "sign" not on account of persuasion or compulsion but entirely on his own initiative. So here also in the "seventh sign" Jesus takes the initiative in his own good time. Even though in the first and the seventh "sign" the requests of Mary and the two sisters of Lazarus are mentioned, Jesus wants to do the things in his own chosen time.⁷⁵

2.13.3 *"Your Brother Will Rise Again"*

This saying contains the truth of what is about to take place; Lazarus, will shortly come out of his tomb alive. But the words, though they express this truth, are uttered not so much to inform Martha as to set in motion the ensuing conversation, in which the Christological basis for the interpretation of the "sign" is brought out. The use of words of double meaning is a characteristic of John.⁷⁶ The reply of Martha (Jn 11:24) can be understood in terms of the Jewish belief in resurrection. In Jesus' time the

⁷⁴ ROBERT W. YARBROUGH., *John*, 96.

⁷⁵ W. BARCLAY., *The Gospel of John* 1, 96.

⁷⁶ C.K.BARRETT., *The Gospel According to St. John*, 395.

Pharisees, in opposition to the Sadducees, held belief in the eschatological raising of the dead.

2.13.4 "I am the Resurrection and the Life"

Martha was speaking of the eschatological resurrection, while Jesus was revealing to her that in the presence of the very person of Christ the eschatology has been realized. The 'resurrection' was not merely a future event. It was present in the current moment where Jesus himself was present. Eternal life starts as soon as someone turns to Jesus in faith and is accepted by him. The resurrection will not only happen on the last day, it happens immediately for whoever believes in him now. Jesus rejects one's physical death and the resurrection on the last day as the decisive moment, because Jesus has risen from death and gives life. The intervening physical death will not change the person's fundamental state.⁷⁷ Jesus is the resurrection just as he is also the life (Jn 11:25). So anyone who trusts in him has already escaped death (Jn 11:26). Jesus is the giver of life and conqueror of death.

2.13.5 "Lazarus Come Out": The Voice that Wakes the Dead

The phrase "cried out" '*Kragazein*' occurs only eight times in the whole Greek Bible, six of which are in John. In chapters 18-19 it is used four times for the shout of the crowd to crucify Jesus. Thus a contrast is drawn between the crowd's shout that brings death to Jesus and Jesus' shout that brings life to Lazarus.⁷⁸ When Jesus uttered the words of life, then Lazarus came from the tomb with grave cloths wrapped about him. Therefore Jesus said, "Unbind him. And let him go". The loving hands of sisters

⁷⁷ J. WIJINGAADS., *The Gospel of John and His Letters*, 212.

⁷⁸ RAYMOND E. BROWN., *The Gospel According to St. John* 1, 427.

removed the towel that covered his face; and he who had been held captive by death was restored to Life.⁷⁹

2.14 Conclusion

To conclude this chapter, we can say that in John the meaning and the function of the “seven signs” were to present Jesus as the Life-Giver. Beginning with the atmosphere of the marriage feast, the “signs” reach up to a situation where people weep over the dead. And all throughout the way Jesus was revealing himself as the source of life. The “first sign” at Cana presented Jesus as bringing the “Newness of Life”. The “second sign” of healing the royal official’s son at a distance reveals the efficacy of the “Life-Giving Word of Jesus”. The “third sign” of healing the sick man at the pool of Bethesda on the Sabbath, shows the permanency of the “Life-Giving presence of Jesus”. The “fourth sign” of the multiplication of bread presents Jesus as the “Bread of Life”, thus entering into a relationship with people at a deeper level. In the “fifth sign” we have the picture of Jesus as the guardian of life in the troubles of the disciples’ life. The “sixth sign” depicts Jesus as the “Light of Life”. And in the “seventh sign” we have the picture of “Jesus as the conqueror of Death, the Resurrection and the Life”.

⁷⁹ FULTON J. SHEEN., *Life of Christ*, 267.

Chapter 3

Johannine “signs”, challenges today

3.1 Introduction

So far we have seen that all throughout the Gospel the “signs” Jesus performed always had the function of revealing the identity of Jesus as the Life-Giver. Here we will see the challenges Jesus himself faced throughout his ministry to be the true “sign” of God, the Ultimate Source of Life, in giving himself to others. We will then proceed to examine the present day challenges which the church, as a community and as individual Christians, have to face to be the authentic “signs” of Jesus, the Life-Giver. We will restrict the topic mainly to the challenges of the Church in India, in her mission of being the “sign” of the Life-Giver in our cultural-context.

3.2 Church as a “Sign”

After having seen the challenges faced by Jesus, the Life-Giver, the true “sign” of God, now we will pass over to the challenges that the Church of today has to face on

being a true “sign” of Jesus. Christians should humbly recognize their chosen position and gratefully live up to the covenant to which they have been called. Then, they will be as a “sign” of God’s special favour on earth.

3.2.1 The Johannine Concept of the Church

Although the term Church (Ecclesia) is not used either in the Gospel or in two of the three Epistles of John, the Johannine writings indicate what a Christian community is and should be. The idea that believers constitute a community whose principle of unity is their union with Christ is found in them. The Gospel and the Epistles also emphasize the basis of their community as their relationship with Christ through the Spirit and the communion between the believers themselves. The writings also show that the Johannine Christians had some kind of organizational set up of a community.⁸⁰ We can say that the basic elements of the Johannine Community are their faith in Jesus Christ, whose presence is experienced through the dynamic presence of the Spirit, and the practice of the New Commandment of Love among the members, which was a “sign” of their identity as Christians.

3.2.2 Ecclesial Figures in John

In the Gospel we find certain figures that are ecclesial in signification. The figure of the Shepherd, Sheep and the Sheepfold (Jn 10: 1-16; 21: 15-17) is one of them. In the Old Testament Israel was the flock of Yahweh (Gen 49: 24; Ps 23). Similarly, the figure of the Vine and the Branches (Jn 15: 1-6), according to which the disciples (believers) are the branches of the vine of Christ, and all together constitute the one

⁸⁰ ANTONY EDANAD., “Johannine Theology of Church”, *Bible Bhasyam* (August 1985) 136.

vine, is also an ecclesial figure. The unbroken net with a hundred and fifty-three large fishes is yet another symbol of the Church (Jn 21: 6-11). Moreover, in the statement in John 11: 51-52, that the purpose Jesus' death was "to gather into one the Children of God who are scattered abroad", the idea of forming the Church is present.⁸¹

3.2.3 Believers of Different Background

If we assume that the account of Jesus' ministry in the Gospel of John reflects the historical situation of the Johannine Christians, we have indications to think that the Johannine Christians consisted of believers of different backgrounds. The gospel says that the first disciples of Jesus were former disciples of John the Baptist. They were Jews (Jn 1: 35-40). Among those who believed in Jesus are mentioned also other Jews, Samaritans (Jn 4: 31-42), and Hellenists (Jn 12: 20-23). The various types of people who are presented as having believed in Jesus probably indicate the heterogeneous composition of the Johannine Christians as a group.⁸²

3.3 Church as a "Sign" in the Religious Pluralism in India

India has the privilege and fortune of being the mother and matrix of many religious traditions. Now there is a growing awareness among the Christians living in India that they have to integrate themselves with this reality of pluralism and the ideologies of the land if they want to fulfil their Christian obligation and responsibility in building up a new humanity in the likeness of the kingdom.⁸³

⁸¹ ANTONY EDANAD., "Johannine Theology of Church", *Bible Bhasyam* (August 1985) 136.

⁸² ANTONY EDANAD., "Johannine Theology of Church", *Bible Bhasyam* (August 1985) 137.

⁸³ A. SURESH., "Inter-faith Dialogue in India", *Journal of Dharma* (January 2000) 7.

3.3.1 Conviction and Tolerance

The Church in India has always experienced a tension caused by the task of holding on to the essentials of the Christian faith and the risk of tolerating other religions with their particular convictions. But today this tension between conviction and tolerance has been diluted to a great extent through inter-religious dialogues, openness to critical evaluation of beliefs and practices, interpreting religious symbols and sharing the spiritual experiences with one another.⁸⁴ This does not mean that we have to water down Christian Dogmatic teachings or to mitigate the essentials of values of our faith. The Church can keep hold of its conviction, while without imposing it on other religions. We need to open wider our Christian minds and hearts and realize that we cannot impose culture and religion on others. We should welcome pluralism for its richness and variety. Looking at God's natural creation we see the hallmarks of variety and prodigality. The Second Vatican Council in its declaration on the Relationship of the church to non-Christian Religions shows her appreciation of other religions and speaks of her commitment to foster unity and love among people of different faiths.

3.3.2 Revealing the Identity Through Self-Giving

We have seen that in John's Gospel all the "signs" were intended to reveal Jesus as the Life-Giver. Johannine Jesus reveals his identity to the world irrespective of the differences in culture, religion, cast etc., but through the means of Self-Giving. To the Samaritan woman he promised to give the living water, which was realized at the piercing of his side on the Cross (Jn 4: 10). To the Greeks who came to see who Jesus was, he gave the Laws of Life through Death (Jn 12: 24).

⁸⁴ JOSEPH VELIYATHIL., "Religious Tolerance in India", *The Living Word* (May 1972) 359.

Following the example of Our Lord, the Church in India has the challenge of revealing her identity as the “sign” of Jesus, through her Self-Giving activities. To be a “sign” means to provide a situation for others where they can live the life in its fullness. The church should not be looked upon as “foreign” to the other existing religions in India. She should move in solidarity with the joys and sorrows of the nation and feel always the pulse of the people. She should try to feel at home in the national and religious traditions of the people and promote whatever is true and just, whatever is holy and worth living.

3.4 Authority, as a “Sign” of Service

In John we can see that Jesus, the Heavenly King, revealed his authority over mankind through the humble actions of service to the people. The Incarnation of Jesus himself was the great “sign” of identifying himself with every person and with every aspect of life. “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (Jn 1: 14). It is this great “sign” of Incarnation that Jesus continued to live out by his words and action, death and resurrection.⁸⁵ The new Christian community is that of humble service to others after the model of its master.

3.4.1 Towards a Participative Culture

Democratic culture is a distinctive feature of our country. The Church in India must adopt these democratic elements into her very structure. Participation by all the community in all areas of its life, especially in the decision-making process is necessary for it to continue as a Serving Church. It also demands participation in the process by

⁸⁵ A. SURESH., “Inter-faith Dialogue in India”, *Journal of Dharma* (January 2000) 16.

which the Church leaders are elected, transferred or removed. Accountability to the people as well as transparency in all matters is proper to a genuine democratic culture. In such a participative culture, the exercise of charism and the diversity of roles can function in a healthy way.

3.4.2 The Courage to Handover

A special mark of the religious leaders in the Indian tradition is their ethic-moral and spiritual wealth that helps them rise above the lure of money, institutional power, or juridical authority. The community could very well handle these matters with proper accountability structures in the Church. The Church that we have in this millennium is moving towards a church of the Laity. The sharing of services and responsibilities, almost exclusive reserve of clerics at present, can be deemed as the major contribution to the emergence of the new Church. The community of the church in India, composed of women and men sharing power and responsibilities at all levels, can be a credible “sign” and virtual proclamation to the wider human community that is marked by gender-discrimination.

3.5 Church as a Dynamic “Sign” of Love

Jesus also intends the New Commandment of Love that He gives at the farewell speech as a “sign” of their identity as disciples. The Love, which the disciples are to share among themselves, is to be modelled after the Supreme Example of Jesus their master. This love is essentially a dynamic one (manifested at the washing of the feet in Jn 13: 14), and not as an emotional one. It is an out come of the will power of the person and is deliberately acted out. This love does not look for any reward from the

receiver, nor ponder on the merit of the recipient. It is selfless, sacrificial, understanding and forgiving love.⁸⁶

Today the Church has to put into practice this unique “sign” of the Christians. The Church has to be a living “sign” of this selfless love of their master and the life-giving presence Jesus should be dynamically present among the member of the church under the guidance of Holy Spirit. Through all her undertakings and endeavours, the church should give witness to the selfless and altruistic love of Jesus. The non-Christian should not feel that our institutions, associations, organizations etc of charity works are only the disguised means of accumulating money and the lively-hood of the Church.

3.5.1 “Sign” of Love, a Challenge to the Shepherds of the Church

The role of the Shepherd given to Peter is to share in Jesus’ own role as the shepherd (Jn 10: 10-18), and a continuation of it. Jesus is the model shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep in order to give them life abundantly and who knows his sheep intimately (Jn 10: 14-16). By laying down his life he is to gather all into one flock under his salvific care uniting them through death. Jesus as the shepherd rendered the Supreme service of love for the flock.

This spirit of the Good Shepherd is to be imbibed by those who have received the role of the shepherd in the Church today. There should be an intimate and personal knowledge of the sheep from the part of the shepherds of the Church. Today what we see in our Church is that most of the shepherds do not try to feel the pulse of the people and do not take the initiative to come down to the life situation of the people. They live

⁸⁶ GEORGE MANGATT., *Jesus the Good News*, 174.

with a life-style that is fully foreign, unaccustomed and not according to the expectations of the people.

3.5.2 The “Sign” of Love as the Source of Life

Just as the Johannine “signs” led the believers into the gift of life, today Church as a “sign” must feel the urging need to develop a ‘Culture of Life’ against the ‘Culture of Death’ that dominates in our country today. The Church should become aware of the growth of the ‘Culture against Life’, which is manifested through the increasing number of mass annihilations, suicides, sexual abuses, exploitations, death bringing sicknesses like AIDS, abortion, alienation etc. Death is in no way just a fate but a power hostile to life, against which the Church must live and fight.⁸⁷

Life against these powers of death means loving, sharing life, establishing life, and making life once again worth living. In 1 John 3: 14 we read, “We have passed from death to life because we love...” The Church can manifest this life-giving love, through her works of charity, institutions of education, communication medias, and edification on human values etc. Renouncing our ghetto mentality, the Church should willingly collaborate with other non-Christian agencies and movements, which works with the same orientations. Since Christians are a small minority in our country, we can be effective in our work for the promotion of human rights only if we join hands with others.

⁸⁷ JURGEN MOLTMANN, “Resurrection: the Growth, Power...”, *Concilium* (June 1995) 82.

3.6 Christians, as “Signs”

The negative response to Jesus’ “signs” was due to the fact that Jews could not recognize the “signs” for what they were, while the positive response was due to the fact that many could recognize the “signs” for what they were, namely as “signs” of his ‘Glory’. This distinction seems to be implied in the two differentiated usages, “The signs he did before them” (Jn 12: 37) and “the signs Jesus did in the presence of his disciples” (Jn 20: 30). Both these summaries form a challenge for all to recognize Jesus’ “sign” for what they are, to give a positive response to him “so that they may have life in his name”(Jn 20: 31).⁸⁸

Today, a Christian has before him the challenge to respond positively through his Christian life after the model of the early disciples of Jesus. He has to respond positively through his Christian life, by giving witness to the ‘Life’ that he claims to share in the resurrected Jesus. He has to respond positively to the “signs” to an extent that he himself because a “living sign”, revealing to the world of today, the identity of Jesus, the Life-Giver.

3.7 Christians’ Life, a “ Sign-Act”

“Sign” is a word of John’s own choice for the actions of Jesus and was not simply borrowed from a source.⁸⁹ We have seen in the first chapter that the word *oth* in Old Testament is applied in particular to symbolic acts performed by the prophets. The idea is that the act performed by the prophets is a significant act, which corresponds with something divinely ordered to happen in the real world. In Jesus’ symbolic actions

⁸⁸ MATTHEW VELLANICKAL., *A Studies in the Fourth Gospel*, 19.

⁸⁹ C.K. BARRETT., *Forth Gospel and Recent Criticisms*, 77.

in the symbol was also given the thing symbolized. We have already seen such “sign-acts” of Jesus in the first Chapter.

Today a Christian is challenged by the Johannine “sign-acts” of Jesus that his words and actions should convey the divine messages, which God wants to communicate to the world of today. He should stand before the people and speak for God. His life must be a divine media. To realize this purpose, he will have to face many challenges of being criticized by others, being excommunicated from the groups, being a servant to all, even giving his life for others.

3.8 A Call to On-Going Conversion

Just as faith, conversion is also another impact of responding positively to the “signs”. The connection between this “sign” and conversion is emphasized in the “sign” of healing of the man at the pool of Bethesda (Jn 5:14), “See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may befall you”. The question “Do you want to be made well?”(Jn 5:6), is also a request of Jesus for the *metanoia* of the recipient. The patient must be willing to be healed.

This ‘willingness’, which results in the “sign”, demands a perseverance of the *metanoia*, and places a challenge before us. A Christian is already healing by the life-giving water (Baptism) of Jesus. But he is expected to remain throughout his life, in this *metanoia*. It consists in renouncing everything that is opposed to the ‘eternal life’ that Jesus gives. It supposes an interior ‘change of direction’, a war against oneself, because ‘the eternal life’ in question is that of God and not of selfishness and Satan.⁹⁰ The

⁹⁰ RENE LATOURELLE., *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, 327.

concrete recognition of the “signs” in Christian’s life takes the form of conversion and the acknowledgement of Jesus as the only source of Life.

3.9 Conclusion

By way of concluding this chapter, let us summarize in a few words the main points we have discussed so far. In Jesus we have the perfect example of a genuine “sign” of the Life-Giver. His function was very demanding and challenging. But Jesus overcame all the challenges with the power of Love; he had for the Father and for his brethren. To his disciples Jesus gave the New Covenant of Love, which would serve as a “sign” of their identity. The Church should therefore be the Living “sign” of the Love that was imparted to her by the master. Then she would be able to face the challenges in a true Christian spirit rather than approaching them with distrust. As Christians we must be able to carry with us the “sign” of identity.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

Let us summarize this study to bring out its main findings in the light of the points we have discussed so far. Even in the non-biblical world, the word “sign” connoted a visible event intended to convey meaning beyond that which is normally perceived in the outward appearance of the event. The word does not originally come from the sphere of religion, but it takes on theological colouring in appropriate contexts. In our daily life we use many “signs” in our dealings with others. Since God adapts to our human nature, as we have seen both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, he gives “signs” in order to reveal his divine plans.

John’s usage of “sign” is reserved exclusively for revealing the true identity of Jesus. In John’s Gospel the meaning and function of “seven signs” were to present Jesus as the Life-Giver. The “first sign” at Cana, presented Jesus as bringing the ‘Newness of Life’. The “second sign”, of healing the royal official’s son at a distance, reveals the efficacy of the ‘Life-Giving Word’ of Jesus. The “third sign”, of healing the sick man at the pool of Bethesda on Sabbath, shows the permanency of the Life-Giving presence of Jesus. In the “forth sign”, of the multiplication of bread presents Jesus as the ‘Bread of

life', thus entering into a relationship with people in a more deep level. In the "fifth sign", we have the picture of Jesus, as the guardian of life, in the troubles of the disciples' life. The "Sixth sign" shows Jesus as the 'Light of Life'. And in the "seventh sign", we have the picture of Jesus as the conqueror of Death, Resurrection and the Life.

The Church is meant to be the visible "sign" of Jesus, the Life-Giver. The Church in India in its cultural-context of religious pluralism finds before her many challenges of being true "sign" of Jesus. We have seen that all these challenges can be overcome by looking at them with a wider perspective. The Church should enter into dialogue and collaboration with other religions and accept the positive role of other religions in God's plan of salvation. The Church should submit herself to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, who also works in the cultural-context in which the Church is placed. The Church should also be ready to admit the pluralism within her and try to become a "sign" of unity. Also the Church in India has the great role of being a living "sign" of service rather than a "sign" of authority. All these steps can be realized as the New Commandment of Love, which is the supreme "sign" of the Life-Giver.

To conclude, we can say that when John narrated the "sign" of Jesus in the Gospel, he had intended that one who reads them might believe and have life in Jesus' name. The challenge is extended to the present reader that he may believe in Jesus in a way that his faith in Jesus becomes a life-style of being a "true sign" of Jesus and that by giving life to others, he may have life in Jesus' name.

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