

**JESUS, THE MASTER OF LIFE: A STUDY OF JOHN 11:1-44 UTILIZING THE
TRI-POLAR EXEGETICAL MODEL OF DRAPER, GRENHOLM AND PATTE**

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**Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of
Theology in the School of Theology, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg.**

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December 2002

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my father and my mother, innocent victims of civil wars and witchcraft accusations;

And to my young sister, the last born of our family who has been disabled by sickness and has been prevented by poverty to continue her studies.

May God comfort you and bless you.

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is my own reflection and a record of my own work. To my knowledge it has not been submitted in any previous application for assessment. However, since we build on other's fragments, the sources of my information have been specifically acknowledged by means of references and footnotes, and all quotations have been indicated by quotation marks or in small print and set back.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would like to express my sincere thanks to the many people who have contributed to make this dissertation a reality. Particular thanks are due to Rev. Victor Zinkurature, Head of the Department of Biblical Studies at The Catholic University of Eastern Africa in Nairobi, who recommended me to the University of Natal through his colleague and friend Gerald West. I am sincerely grateful to professor Gerald West for having considered the recommendation of Father Victor and proceeded to introduce my application at the School of Theology. At this level, special thanks are due to professor Philippe Denis who did not spare any effort for my admission at the University of Natal. I also owe a debt to my confreres American Dominicans in Nairobi, without whose assistance I would perhaps never been given my study permit.

Furthermore, this work would never been realised were it not for the patient reading and understanding, rigour and careful supervision of my attempts and for the essential directions and timely corrections of my principal supervisor, namely Professor Jonathan A. Draper. He merits my heartiest thanks. In a special way, I also thank Gabriel Marie Tchonang who gathered most of the data for my work from the university of Strasbourg in France.

To those who assisted me, supported me and encouraged in one way or another: Father Albert Nolan, Father Kees Keijsper, Father Martin Badenhorst, Symphorien Ntibagirirwa, Dominic Chihota, Stan Muyebe, John Restrepo, Happy Patrick Mzumara, Mrs Smith, Euthalie Nyirabega, Viviane Deigna, Innocent Nzeyimana, and all my brothers and sisters of the French speaking community in

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Pietermaritzburg, I also say thank you very much. Lastly, I would like to express my gratitude to those who voluntarily took initiative and pains to check my broken English (or the Greek text) before submission, namely the Dominican sisters at Villa Siena, Father Edward Dougherty, S.J., Mrs Patricia Bruce and Marion Jordaan.

ABSTRACT

What is the real meaning of life and death; the absence and presence of Jesus at Bethany? These fundamental biblical questions, which constitute the theological concern of the Lazarus story, not only tortured the Johannine Community, the Community of Eternal Life but they still challenge each believer who goes through the same experience today. Could sickness, suffering and death be a way of glory and life?

The present study is concerned with these very harsh issues through a contextual exegesis of John 11:1-44 based on the Tri-Polar Exegetical model of Draper, Grenholm and Patte. Considering the disastrous consequences caused by sickness and death, divisions, distress, fear, weakness of faith, especially in the context of crisis of values in Congo-Brazzaville, this work stands as a help.

The study would like to be an appeal, a challenge for each believer in order to overcome and make the reality of death part of his/her life, as well as the fear this phenomenon generates. In other words, the findings of the exegesis of the Lazarus story challenge each Christian in Congo-Brazzaville to a true *meta-noia* which allows one to give a human response of high quality to God's initiative, God's presence and action which are revealed in "the signs of the times." In this process, the Church could help believers by referring to African values as a precious treasure of African wisdom and proverbs as dynamic elements of the language capable to strengthen faith and hope, thanks to their rhetorical dimension.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

D V: Dei Verbum

G I: General Instruction (of the Roman Missal)

RDC: République Démocratique du Congo

S G: Sacrosanctum Concilium

CHAPTER ONE: GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1 Problematic and interest of the topic

In her study of John 11 focussed on the issues of death and life in the Johannine community, Sandra M. Schneiders spells out the most fundamental theological concern of the Lazarus story, namely the real meaning of these two realities, and of the absence and presence of Jesus (1987:48). Basing herself on the importance of the passages of John's Gospel which refer to life (cf. 1:12; 3:16; 5:24; 6:50, 51; 10:10, etc), Schneiders emphasizes that the central message of the Fourth Gospel as a whole lies on the good news that "Jesus came to give divine life in all its fulness to those who believe in him" (Ibid.:48).

Of course, this authentic life which Jesus communicates to believers is not simply physical, nor is it a mere continuation of mortal life but life as a symbol standing for life in its fulness and new quality (cf. Suggit 1993:96). In truth, for John believers in Christ already have this life in faith (cf. 5:25), and they have passed from death to life (cf. 5:24). In addition, Jesus has even already given glory to believers. Therefore, although true life has an eternal future (4:14; 6:27) and although there is the promise of new vision of glory (17:27) (see Kittel and Friedrich 1985), in John's Gospel realised eschatology prevails over future eschatology.

The conviction was so firm that Jesus was truly present, indwelling in his disciples as a principle of eternal life (cf. Schneiders 1987:48) and that believers received life in the present, that the question

of death - the death of a believer came to cause serious problems. If now believers possess eternal life in its fulness and of new quality, how can one justify the reality of death again? In the Lazarus story, this fundamental question of the meaning of death and its compatibility with eternal life is posed with acuteness. Right from the beginning of the narrative, the theological issue of death is taken up and approached in its origin or cause, its nature as human experience and spiritual reality, and its outcome (see Schneiders 1987:48). Immediately after the introduction of the story (v. 1-6), a hot discussion set Jesus against his disciples on this very issue of death. Throughout the story, the issue will never cease to torture the characters of the narrative at different levels. The concern of “the Jews” is explained in their pertinent question: “Could not the one who opened the eyes of the blind man have done something so that this man would not have died?” (11:37). This already was the crucial question of Martha and Mary when they addressed Jesus with these words: “Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died” (11:21.32).

Obviously, in each scene of the story (including the closing scene, v. 45-53), there is a mention of death and “an increasing sense of Jesus’ involvement in the full painful reality of death” (Brodie 1993:386). Definitely, the issue sets out the chief theological concern of the evangelist. In view of this, one may wonder, what is death? Where does this phenomenon come from and why does it cause so much disaster? What is life and who is the Master of life? These questions do not worry only the community of eternal life in John’s Gospel but they also torture the Congolese in general, the faith community of my parish, my family circle and myself in particular, in the specific context of Congo-Brazzaville, and have determined the interest and the choice of my topic.

1.2 Reasons justifying the choice of the topic and relevance of the study

The theological concern of the Lazarus story, which I have spelled out above, lets us foresee that Lazarus is a major and unforgettable figure for each human being. He represents our condition, an evident symbolic figure for each human being if s/he believes the same Word that calls and delivers Lazarus; an obscure figure if s/he just shares his servitude and his confinement (cf. Manigne 1998:12-13).

Yet, for some people, Lazarus is just this obscure figure. This is the case for most of the Congolese, after the experience of sickness (malaria, AIDS) and death, especially during the recent devastating civil wars (1993, 1997-1999). There is no more respect for and sense of human life, nor fear of God for those who have taken pleasure in killing. In the face of this dramatic situation, because they have lost dearest members of their family (parents, children, friends) or all their belongings, people, including the most fervent Christians, do not see the meaning of life any more.

In the discussions I had with some of them, I could note a couple of crucial questions coming to prominence that I can formulate as follows. If God really so loved the world and sent his only Son so that everyone who believes in him might have life, how can one understand that the same God let the believers die like flies? Did Jesus really save Africa as well? Where was the Master of life at the height of our tragedy?

As one can notice, Congolese have real trouble understanding and accepting Jesus as the Master of life: the one who has life in himself and the power to mediate it, to lay down his life and to take it up again and to give it to whom he wants. Congolese cannot realize that the Master is here (there) and he is asking for them (cf. 11:28). Some live in eternal mourning. This critical situation in the present context of Congo-Brazzaville concerns every person of goodwill and, especially myself as a religious person and Dominican priest. In other words, the importance of the issues of sickness, death and life in the work of Jesus in the Lazarus story and its relevance in the context of crisis in Congo-Brazzaville, constitute the principal motivation for choosing my topic.

To study the theme of Jesus, the Master of life in this key text could not be more significant, for I would like to understand more clearly the meaning of Jesus' claim and work in John 11:1-44 in order to probe it for the Congolese, the faith community of my parish, my family circle and myself. In addition, I believe that the appropriation of the findings of the exegesis of this sacred text will help believers in Congo-Brazzaville to make death part of their view of life, to take responsibility for their conditions and respond positively to God's initiative, God's presence, which are manifested through "the signs of the times." The Church herself will be more aware of what to do and what to teach about Jesus and Lazarus, especially about her shepherding mission and care of the faithful, the ordinary people, those who are suffering from different illnesses (HIV-AIDS), those who are rejected, arbitrarily accused of being witches or sorcerers or who die alone.

In addition, my interpretation of the Lazarus story could be significant for the Congolese society in the sense that it could offer a way out of the crisis of values which shakes young people as well as

older generation, to deliver each Congolese from his/her different condition of mourning and set free his/her creative energy, to take responsibility of his/her life and future, and to rise up for the building of their being, their Church and their country.

In short, the particular episode of Lazarus brought to life gives me an opportunity to substantiate some assumptions, which I made while faced with the context of crisis of values in Congo-Brazzaville. First of all, I do think that Lazarus is an emblematic figure for all human life. What is more, Jesus' work by his words is significant and relevant for Africa. His action to Lazarus shows the evidence of the creative power of the Word in his word which can raise us and deliver us from every illness, crisis and death. Therefore, it is necessary to reassert the value of the word in its curative dimension in African culture and to promote the preaching of the word of God through African proverbs as powerful elements of the language and genuine rhetorical devices capable of persuading African believers.

1.3 Delimitation of the investigation

The importance of the theological concern of the Lazarus story shows how rich and wide-ranging the pericope of John 11:1-44 is. The passage is a reservoir of the most important Johannine themes and the story goes beyond the boundaries of John 11. Scholars locate the *terminus a quo* of the story in 10:40-42 and the *terminus ad quem* in 12:50. In view of this, in this restricted research, it is obviously impossible to tackle all the aspects, questions and issues raised by this vast theme, no matter how interesting and important they are.

Consequently, the question of the identity of Mary, and her relationship with the other Mary mentioned in the Gospels, is not the focus of the present work, and the historicity of Lazarus will not receive my main attention either. Following Manigne (1994:17), I shall support that whatever is said about the historical Lazarus, he now belongs to our familiar mythology and he is the figure of our hope and our martyrdom. His sign enlightens our lives and strengthens our faith. Furthermore, I shall confine myself to the small unit of Jn 11:1-44 and, more particularly, I shall concentrate on the one aspect: Jesus as the Master of life. To this end, in order to go deeper, I shall study the semantics of some important Greek concepts. But what results from the raising of Lazarus, namely the plot to kill Jesus will not receive special attention.

1.4 Approach and Methodology

Following the very nature of our pericope, namely a narrative passage which speaks to believers about the person/ identity and work/ mission of Jesus, and develops theological issues of capital importance in terms of a tragic story, my approach to this particular sacred text will essentially be a narrative analysis or criticism. In the hope of a better understanding of the internal meaning of the theological concern of John 11:1-44 which I have brought to light above, and to appropriate the findings of the interpretation of this narrative, I intend to find the key to reading this short but climactic story, in the narrative itself. In other words, I shall base my search for the internal meaning of the Lazarus story on the various literary patterns or signals which enable the pericope to communicate meaning to its hearers and readers (cf. Malbon 1992:26).

Concretely, the use of the narrative approach will lead me to focus on elements or aspects in the text which have to do with “real author” and “real reader”, “implied author” and “implied reader”, characterization, setting, plot, structure, rhetoric, point of view taken by the narrator. Following the purpose of my work, I shall choose the more significant of these elements while I shall omit others.

Since in narrative approach the “implied author” and the “implied reader” are understood as aspects of the narrative and that the author and the reader are not isolated entities but they constitute poles of a “continuum of communication” (Ibid.:27), it is worth spelling out the difference between these terms. By “real author” narrative criticism understands the person who actually composed or wrote the text (in the case of our pericope it is supposed to be John, though we shall not go into any discussion concerning the real or imagined identity of John). The “implied author” is the one who is supposed to be necessary for a particular narrative to be told or written (cf. Ibid.:27), or “the image of the author which the text progressively creates in the course of the reading with his or her own culture, character, inclinations, faith...” (Pontifical Biblical Commission 1994:31). In this way, “the real” reader is any person who has the possibility to be in contact with the text, beginning with those who first read it or heard it, right down to us who read and/or hear it, interpret it today (cf. Ibid.:31). In the context of Congo-Brazzaville, these “real readers” refer to each Congolese, to the faith community of my parish, to my family circle and to myself. As for “the implied reader”, s/he refers to “reader which the text presupposes and in effect creates” (Ibid.:31), the one “who would be necessary for this narrative to be heard or read” (Malbon 1992:27). Here one thinks of the Johannine community or the community of eternal life.

To deal with a sacred text in a way which focusses on literary features of the text presupposes taking into account the language with its system of signs. Now this concern is the proper task of structuralism. Since in interpreting the Lazarus story I shall refer to the internal signals of the text, which recall the language as a means of communicating the meaning of the theological concern of John 11:1-44, then structuralism will also be part of my approach. Furthermore, since a language is a “cultural code”, although I follow a narrative perspective (which includes structuralism), my comments on some literary elements of the Lazarus story (i.e., “four days” after death, Jn 11:39) will lead me, from time to time, to provide basic information about cultural context. To carry my interpretation of John 11:1-44 through to a successful conclusion, I will use as main method, the Tri-Polar Exegetical Model of Jonathan Draper, Cristina Grenholm and Daniel Patte. My description in the following chapter will show the Tri-Polar Exegetical Model of Draper, as this modifies the model of Grenholm and Patte, is an integrated and excellent method for contextual exegesis which based its interpretive process on three specific moments, namely *Distantiation*, *Contextualisation* and *Appropriation*.

1.5 Outline

This dissertation will have seven chapters. This General introduction which includes the present section constitutes my first chapter. The second chapter deals with the presentation of the narrative theory of the Tri-Polar exegetical Model of Draper, Grenholm and Patte. It will be question of describing this method and appreciating its potentials and limits. In the third chapter I shall be concerned with the reconstruction of John 11:1-44. My task will be to create space, to take distance

from the text and let it speak in its own right. This chapter will be followed by the narrative meaning of our pericope in the fourth chapter. It will be the time to consider profoundly the theological concern of the Lazarus story. Chapter five will be dedicated to the analysis and evaluation of the context of the real readers, hearers and interpreter of John 11:1-44 today, namely the context of Congo-Brazzaville. The purpose of the sixth chapter will fall on the appropriation of the findings of the exegesis of our sacred text in terms of African values and proverbs. Lastly, in the General Conclusion, after a synthesis of the major ideas which guide my work, I shall end my dissertation with an overture to a Theology of Reconstruction.

CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGICAL INTRODUCTION: THE TRI-POLAR EXEGETICAL MODEL'S NARRATIVE THEORY

Before going into the narrative theory of the Tri-Polar Exegetical Model, I would like to start with two fundamental statements which will allow us better to understand the specificity of our method and the importance of the exegesis. First, the Bible is a 'sacred text' which is regarded as normative for faith and life for a particular faith community (Draper 2001:155). As a religious text, the Bible matters for believers and their interpretation of the sacred text determines their behaviour in important respects. This is the *raison d'être* of the exegesis which seeks to lead the meaning out of the biblical text for today, which was written for some particular people (cf. Nolan 1988:11f). Second, the choice, reading and interpretation of a sacred text are never neutral. They are always justified by a particular motivation.

In order to achieve this important and delicate task of "making more available the riches contained in the biblical texts", the exegesis seeks for "the paths most appropriate for arriving at an interpretation of the Bible as faithful as possible to its character both human and divine" (Pontifical Biblical Commission 1994:22). Such is the goal of this introductory chapter: to explain the origin, to describe and present the theory, potentials and limitations of the Tri-Polar Exegetical Model of Draper, Grenholm and Patte. In other words, my central concern is to determine how the Tri-Polar Exegetical Model functions to discern and formulate the message of a sacred text and allow it to become more and more the "spiritual nourishment" of the people of God, "the source for them of a life of faith, of hope and love" (Ibid.:22, DV.21).

2.1 Genesis of the Tri-Polar Exegetical Model

There are things that people know or spontaneously practice but which they have never formulated clearly in writing, as they have never described the modes of their process. In many African countries, as in Congo-Kinshasa and Congo-Brazzaville, there are certain talented musicians, singers and guitarists alike, who practice music intuitively and spontaneously. They have never written their works on a musical score. They play music following their inspiration, imagination and natural musical skills. They improve their work by working as a group, intensifying practice sessions with great eagerness and rigour; they are constantly attentive to what others do, compare their work and subject it to criticism and comments.

The origin of the Tri-Polar Exegetical Model falls within more or less this register. Grenholm and Patte are not the initiators of the method, which they have named *Scriptural Criticism*, neither is Jonathan Draper, who has reformulated it and has called it *Contextual Exegesis* or a *Tri-Polar Model of Exegesis*. With intellectual humility and honesty, Grenholm and Patte write: “we want to underscore that scriptural criticism does not originate with us” (2000:6). Referring to Farley, they add that in the model its “three basic modes of interpretation do not originate with scholars. They are already used by believers” (Ibid.:33). The model is an explicitation of believers’ intuitive and spontaneous interpretation. Now let us come to the description of the scriptural criticism by Grenholm and Patte.

2.1.1 Scriptural criticism as an expression of scriptural reading by Christian believers

One of the principles of wisdom states that “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; wisdom and instruction fools despise” (Prv 1:7). Some people show this wisdom through the seriousness of their priestly ministry, pastoral tasks and respect for the word of God which they read, study and preach. This “critical, and self-conscious, practice of scriptural reading” by certain conscientious Christian believers, preachers, pastors and priests Grenholm and Patte call scriptural criticism. These people, including the colleagues of Grenholm and Patte in the *Romans project*, practice scriptural criticism as they “strive to be responsible when they discern and formulate the teaching of Scripture for believers today” (2000: 6). In other words, for these two authors, scriptural criticism refers to the spontaneous scriptural reading used by Christian believers and also by anyone who reads a New Testament text with the awareness that it is held as Scripture by Christians, and assumes responsibility for his/her scriptural reading.

Even if there were only a minority of conscientious preachers, pastors and priests who practised scriptural criticism through the serious preparation of their sermons and the involvement of ethical responsibility in their interpretation, there is a certainty that, at least, the practice existed. Grenholm and Patte refer to some sermons they had the privilege to hear in Sweden, in the United States, in the Philippines, in France, in Congo-Brazzaville, and elsewhere (cf. *Ibid.*: 47, note 18). Furthermore, they highlight that the preaching and the ministry of these conscientious ministers were so substantive because of their disciplined practice of scriptural criticism. It is this admirable scriptural reading in which conscientious preachers show their oratory gifts and exceptional interpretive skills in striving

to interrelate the different interpretive moments that, as academicians, Grenholm and Patte reformulate, name and describe as scriptural criticism.

Grenholm and Patte affirm that the integrated nature of the interpretive practice of scriptural reading became much clearer for them when they observed the way in which conscientious preachers prepared their sermons in three interwoven moments. The role of Grenholm and Patte then was to give consistency to the practice. This work was done in collaboration with several scholars from different disciplines, namely church historians, theologians, specialists of the reception of the Romans and biblical scholars. The two authors testify that the integrated collective interpretive practice, which they later named scriptural criticism, progressively began to develop after much gestation in the collective work.¹

Furthermore, Grenholm and Patte highlight that scriptural criticism emerged from the pertinent and urgent call of believers challenging academicians “to remember the importance in interpretation of faith, value judgements and ethical responsibility” (2000:2). They affirm that in the face of this challenge academicians began to recognize that critical biblical study was best understood as joint endeavour among scholars of different disciplines. To their surprise they “discovered that the integrated interpretive practice that emerges from the collective work of scholars of different disciplines has strong affinities with the practice that conscientious preachers strive to implement and that theological education programmes call for when they are de-centered in an effort to come to grips with the needs of future pastors and priests in contemporary situations” (Ibid.:3). Fruit of a dialogue,

¹The collective work is about the *Romans through History and Cultures project*.

scripture criticism admits that “critical analytical studies are part of a broader investigation that encompasses both the religious and critical dimensions of interpretation”. It deliberately focusses upon individual and communal studies of existing interpretations of biblical texts as scripture, by believers.

2.1.2 Conceptualization of the scriptural criticism: role of Grenholm and Patte

Grenholm and Patte have played an important role in the conceptualization of scriptural criticism. Their work has two aspects: academic or organisational, and theological. In terms of the academic aspect, Grenholm and Patte have tried to give substance to the existing interpretive practice of Christian believers in their reading of the biblical texts. In concrete terms, Grenholm and Patte were concerned with the elucidation of the process of scriptural reading which was implicit and shrouded in the preparation of sermons by conscientious preachers. The task of our two academicians consisted in clarifying as much as possible the basic modes of interpretation which were interwoven in the process of scriptural reading, namely, the analytical, contextual- pragmatic and hermeneutical-theological (2000:35). These three modes supposed three poles of interpretation: the scriptural text, the believers’ life-context and the believers’ religious perception of life².

For Grenholm and Patte, scriptural criticism implies that the interpreter-believers assume responsibility for the ways in which they interrelate in their specific scriptural readings the three modes of existence which they describe as follows: autonomy, relationality and heteronomy (Ibid.:12). Each of these modes corresponds to one of the three basic modes of interpretation mentioned above.

² We shall later come back on these elements when we shall tackle the description of scriptural criticism.

As we shall see later (cf. Potentials of the method), the modes of the process of scriptural reading constitute precious tools which provide contextual, analytical and hermeneutical frames for the practice of scriptural criticism. In elucidating, formulating, naming and describing the interpretive practice of scriptural reading, Grenholm and Patte wanted to make explicit the process of the practice as a tripolar interpretive dynamic movement that interrelates the three characteristics aforesaid. Quoting Farley (1988:71), they assume that “the aim of theological study is to discipline, or to recognize, the basic modes of interpretation that already exist in the situation of faith”. This exactly matches the academic role of Grenholm and Patte in elucidating the process of scriptural reading.

As for the theological aspect of the role of the theologian (Grenholm) and biblical scholar (Patte), it is distinguished by the analysis of existing interpretations in order to bring out hermeneutical categories that the original interpreters may not have had when writing. The focus on hermeneutical categories allowed Grenholm and Patte to highlight, both in their reviews as well as in their marginal notations, the characteristics of the interpretive frame that the initial scriptural readers had chosen to emphasize (cf. 2000:44).

Our two authors have the merit of bringing out and reflecting on the distinctive aspect of scriptural texts, namely their effective participating role in the “self-communication of God directed to human beings” (Ibid.:15). Of course, Grenholm and Patte emphasize that scripture as the word of God is “revelatory and authoritative for believers”. Therefore, the focus and the originality of their theological work fall on their reflection and analysis of the location and construction of the revelation of God. In developing scriptural criticism, Grenholm and Patte aim to find out where the message of God is

located and how believers and interpreters can appreciate it at its right value. In view of the various aspects of Revelation and scriptural authority which suppose different ways of construction, Grenholm and Patte have seen in scriptural criticism, with its three basic modes and interrelated poles of interpretation, an appropriate integrative practice capable of allowing the text to speak for itself in its own right and to the believers. Because of its threefold interpretive aspect, Grenholm and Patte named and described scriptural criticism as a Tripolar Practice.

2.2 Description of the Tripolar Model of Grenholm and Patte

In the preceding developments, I have alluded to the three poles of scriptural criticism. In this section, I would like to name and describe each moment as Grenholm and Patte have represented them in their work, namely a scriptural text, the believers' life and the believers' religious perception of life.

2.2.1 A scriptural text

As noted earlier, a scriptural text is not any kind of text but a "sacred text". It is a normative text for a community of faith which considers it as the word of God, particularly addressed to them, and, therefore, its interpretation does matter. In choosing deliberately a specific scriptural text for personal and/or community motivation, the interpreter-believer seeks to construct the revelation and authority of that text. This work is accomplished by reading and analysing carefully the biblical text in terms of "certain critical categories." In other words, the interpreter-believer focusses her/his reading upon certain textual features that s/he finds as more significant than others (cf. Ibid.:41). Furthermore, since

the biblical text is an autonomous, revelatory and authoritative word of God, at this analytical stage, conscientious preachers refer to the text in its original language if possible. They discern the message of the text and consolidate its teaching for believers today by reading the text in Hebrew and/or in Greek and consulting the most important critical studies and credible commentaries. To achieve this foundational work, the interpreter-believer approaches the text by using suitable critical categories which help him/her to better analyse features and specific characteristics of the text (rhetoric, philology, metaphor, euphemism, etc). Depending on the text, these critical categories can stress historical, literary³ or theological aspects.⁴

2.2.2 The believers' life

The second stage of the tripolar interpretive practice is the moment of careful analysis of a life situation of believers. At this level, it is a question of emphasizing the functional and creative impact of a biblical text in believers' lives. Since a biblical text always matters, it is question here of seeing how the word of God "affects believers in their particular context and conversely how they find a teaching for life and about life in the scriptural text" (Grenholm and Patte 2000:17). The preacher moves from a "casual reading" to a "contextual-pragmatic" reading of the concrete relational daily life of believers. Using certain contextual frames, conscientious preachers read and analyse carefully the

³ Grenholm and Patte acknowledge that as "Holy Scripture", biblical text contains aesthetic elements and that such aesthetic interaction may strongly emphasize the scriptural text as revelatory (2000:16).

⁴ Grenholm and Patte suggest six kinds of critical categories relating to analytical frames: window dimension, story dimension, symbolic message, transformative thrust, subversive thrust and voices from the margin. We shall later come back to these critical categories.

life-situation of people in its various dimensions: social, political, economic, cultural, historical. They do this important work in order to bring “new insights for or about their lives, and thus by addressing their actual needs or problems” (Ibid.:13). The goal of this contextual-pragmatic interpretive moment is therefore to bring out the nature of biblical text as bearer of the word of God and the interaction between text and life so that believers may implement and appreciate revelation events in their life.

2.2.3 The believers’ religious perception of life

Grenholm and Patte define the third stage of the tripolar interpretive model as “a hermeneutical interpretive moment that accounts for the perceptions of life arising out of heteronomous experiences” (2000:14). At this level of the process, interpreter-believers seek to conceptualize the message of the biblical text by identifying theological categories that reflect the way in which the text, that has been studied in its own context and contextualized in the life-situation of present-day believers, relates to their religious experience today. The theological reflection emphasizes the dynamic dialogue between a biblical text and believers’ religious interpretation of the events of their lives. In other words, Grenholm and Patte would argue that a fresh and clear understanding of biblical issues such as the traditional images and attributes of God, the absolute traditional formulations of faith, offer a new approach, a new appreciation and appropriation of heart-wrenching personal or social tragedies (war, sickness, suffering, death, natural catastrophes), and awe-inspiring experience of the divine (presence, absence, silence indifference of God), in the midst of the messiness of the present-day believers’ lives. For them, the reading of biblical text is a pious and religious act. It is a precious “holy time and space where the reader-believers encounter God, hear God’s Word, are moved and transported by it”

(2000:16). They would also insist that through this experience, believers could find a religious dimension in the scriptural text which could powerfully affect their concrete life-situations by the teaching of biblical texts and at times encounter divine mystery through the mediation of the Word of God.

These are the major moments that interweave in the process of scriptural reading used by conscientious preachers and that Grenholm and Patte have elucidated and structured as the three poles of the tripolar interpretive method. The formulation of the dynamic given by these two authors to the model has much influenced Jonathan Draper, who has reformulated it and named it Tri-Polar Exegetical Model or just, Contextual Exegesis. In fact, in 1991 Draper wrote an article about contextual exegesis in South Africa which already set out the threefold model. In this way, his formulation of 2001 is the continuation and improvement of this feature work, a fresh look at the issue which sounds a few new notes as the title indicates: *Old Scores and New Notes: Where and What Is Contextual Exegesis In The New South Africa?*

2.3. Tri-Polar Exegetical Model: reformulation and description of Jonathan Draper

Although he has appreciated the work of Grenholm and Patte, who have developed and have given substance to the interpretive practice of scriptural criticism, Jonathan Draper has reformulated, described and explored the model by contextualizing it. His role is in itself tripolar or threefold. He critically studies and analyses the model, he contextualizes it (reformulation and description) and he appropriates it (exploration).

2.3.1 Reformulation

Draper has presented his critical study, reformulation and exploration of the Tri-Polar Exegetical Model, in the collective book containing essays in honour of Albert Nolan⁵, one of the pioneers of contextual theology in South African. In his article, which he entitles: *Old Scores and New Notes: Where and What Is Contextual Exegesis*, Draper emphasizes the importance of the context of the reader and reading community as the fundamental element and base of Contextual Exegesis.

The emphasis on the context lies in the nature of the work of exegesis, which refers to ‘leading the meaning out of the text’. For, as Draper notes, “it rests upon the fundamental understanding that there is no neutral or absolute meaning of a text or, for that matter, of any human communication” (2001: 149). Using the register of communication developed by M. A. K. Halliday, with its three factors (field, tenor, mode) that intervene in the sphere of language, Draper has reformulated a new dynamic of Tri-Polar Exegetical Model. Of course, he argues that to avoid misunderstandings and false interpretations of sacred texts, which have been written at a specific time, in a particular context and which have been addressing a specific audience, present-day interpreters must know their own situation, who they are and what kind of communicative medium the Bible is for them (cf. Ibid.: 151). In other words, Draper postulates that the basic starting point of Contextual Exegesis is, incontestably, the knowledge of the ‘master myths’ of the text, which develop a ‘metonymic’

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The collective book which was dedicated to Albert Nolan was edited by McGlory T Speckman and Larry T Kaufmann (2001).

referencing system⁶. On the basis of this guideline, Draper has critically studied the model developed by Grenholm and Patte by suggesting the designation Tri-Polar Exegetical Model and by describing its three interpretive moments.

2.3.2 Description of the Tri-Polar Exegetical Model

The three moments of the Tri-Polar Exegetical Model according to Draper's formulation are the following: Distantiation, Contextualisation and Appropriation. Now let us describe each level.

2.3.2.1 Distantiation

The word distantiation is a key idea that recalls the noun and verb distance, and the adjective distant as well. In this way, distantiation evokes the idea of distancing, making oneself or somebody becoming or feeling separated or far away from somebody or something, in space or time (cf. Onions 1933-1970). Thus, by distantiation, Draper understands the idea of creating sufficient space or critical distance between the reader/hearer and the sacred text. This first part of the exegetical work is also called reconstruction of the sacred text in its own right. Indeed, at this first and fundamental stage, the person who has the important responsibility of leading the meaning out of the text for others, has to allow the text to speak for itself first. She must absolutely let the text be different to her, "alien, intended for others, as first step to entering its world of discourse" (Draper 2001:152).

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Draper borrows the expression "master myths" from the socio-linguist Gee (1998:86) and "metonymic" from J. Miles Foley (1995, 1999).

Although there are no neutral scriptural readings because of the fact that one comes to the text with certain pre-understanding, apprehension, concerns and questions, at this stage of the reconstruction of the text, the exegete is subject to strict rules of exegesis: making a clean sweep of the previous knowledge of the text, emptying somehow his/her mind. This work of losing of a sense of self is a true exegetical asceticism, necessary to hear the genuine voice of the text resounding newly in our ears, hearts and context. Like a person who prays isolates herself, makes silence to be in the face of God and listens to him speaking in the secret of her heart, so is the exegete who put his/her context, concerns behind him/her to be before the text and listen to its voice rather than his/her own murmur and representations.

Since a biblical text is rooted in a specific historical, social, cultural and economic context which is completely different to ours, since each sacred text is addressing its own questions which relate to its needs, and since its language of composition and rhetorical conventions are also different to ours and so is its world-view, in his/her study of the text, the exegete is invited to take into account both contexts, namely diachronic and synchronic considerations (cf. Draper 2001:155-156). In other words, the exegete should consider how the text conveys its message and how it influences and affects the life of the person who is reading that text.

Draper also notes that to carry this analysis of the text through to a successful conclusion, the exegete may use various tools such as both those “relating to the origin and social location of the text: text, source, redaction, sociology or anthropology, comparative study of other contemporary texts; and those relating to its textual encoding: narrative, structure, philology, rhetoric” (Ibid.:156). The nature

of the text, the perspective and goal of the exegete suggest the choice of the tools which are determining for the achievement of the second moment.

2.3.2.2 Contextualisation

By contextualisation, Draper means the analysis and evaluation of the specific context of the reader/hearer today. To some extent, it would be assimilable to a certain maieutic, since for Draper this second moment “involves knowing who we are in the conversation, what our situation is, and how we relate to the communication offered by the text” (2001:152). Contemporary recipients need to determine their identity as readers, hearers, interpreters of the ancient sacred text that they are about to appropriate, and to identify their specific questions that they wish to bring to the text. The task of exegesis here is to consider the text’s intention, gaps and indeterminacies (see Iser 1974:274-294) and to let them speak in our context.

The importance of the analysis of our present context lies in the fact that a sacred text always says more than what is written. Its meaning exceeds the intention of the author. Since present-day people are historical beings rooted in a specific time and facing specific problems, having their own concerns totally different from the world of the sacred text, the analysis of their context can only reveal new and fresh insights. Indeed, as noted earlier with Nolan, the primary role of exegesis is to seek the meaning of the text for believers today rather than what it meant for its original addressees. Of course, it is the analysis of our context which is made possible by the rhetorical signals encoded in the text by the author, the opened windows of the text, “as well as the changing valencies of the textual signifiers”

that determine the meaning of the text for the contemporary recipients. In opening us up to the study of our context, different tools can also be used, depending on the focusses : sociological, economical and anthropological analysis for the meaning of the text for the community as a whole; and psychological, for the meaning of text for the individual within the community (cf. Draper: 2001:157). Once this work is done, the exegete can move to the third moment.

2.3.2.3 Appropriation

The last stage of the Tri-Polar Exegetical Model is the moment of appropriation of the text in the light of the context of the reader/hearer. Because the sacred text is normative for the community of faith, and its reading and appropriation matter to them, appropriation is the climactic moment of the tri-polar interpretive process. Furthermore, this very moment leads to praxis and effective changes in the life of believers. Following Draper, Grenholm and Patte I could argue that appropriation is the time where the community of faith believers experience, live concretely in their daily life, what they believe, what they have received from the text, what gaps and indeterminancies inspire them in terms of appropriation. It is the time of the growing of faith, love and hope. It is the time of harvest, testimony and mission. Believers reap the fruits of their reading of the text, live what the text teaches. And since what they believe affects what they do, the testimony of their lives has a positive impact in the society. In this way they bear witness to the hope of the Gospel in the midst of a human and social tragic situation. After this brief description, what critical commentary can one make on the Tri-Polar Exegetical Model? What are the potentials or advantages and limits of the method?

2.4 Critical commentary of the model

Following the Pontifical Biblical Commission, it is reasonable to assume that whatever its overall potential, “no scientific method for the study of the Bible is fully adequate to comprehend the biblical texts in all their richness” (1994:28). Indeed, whatever the validity of a method, “it necessarily has to leave aside many aspects of the writings which it studies” (Ibid.:28). Therefore, having presented the narrative theory and the principles of the Tri-Polar Exegetical Model, the time has come to evaluate our model. I intend to do so by appreciating its potential and limits.

2.4.1 Potential of the model

By potential I mean the positive aspects or advantages provided by the Tri-Polar Exegetical Model. Three relevant features have held my attention and I would like to highlight them as much as possible.

2.4.1.1 An integrated interpretive practice

In their presentation of scriptural criticism and the interpretive practice of certain conscientious preachers, Grenholm and Patte have clearly emphasized that the biblical text is “an autonomous object that can and must be respected and thus carefully analysed” (2000:13). Considering the nature of the biblical texts and the ancient character of these texts which are rooted in a specific historical, social, cultural and economic context and which are addressing specific questions and concerns completely different from ours, Draper has highlighted the importance of the context and the necessity of

determining the process of communication which is going on in these texts, in the process of interpretation. The importance of these issues raises the question of the appropriate method for a good interpretation of biblical texts.

As the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Divine Revelation* (1965) highlights, “seeing that, in sacred Scripture, God speaks through men in human fashion, it follows that the interpreter of the sacred Scriptures, if he is to ascertain what God has wished to communicate to us, should carefully have in mind that meaning which God had thought well to manifest through the medium of their words” (DV 12). To this end, in determining the intention of the sacred writers, the *Constitution* insists:

Attention must be paid, *inter alia*, to ‘literary forms for the fact is that truth is differently presented and expressed in the various types of historical writing, in prophetic and poetical texts,’ and in other forms of literary expression. Hence the exegete must look for that meaning which the sacred writer, in a determined situation and given the circumstances of his time and culture, intended to express and did in fact express, through the medium of contemporary literary form. Rightly to understand what the sacred author wanted to affirm in his work, due attention must be paid both to the customary and characteristic patterns of perception, speech and narrative which prevailed at the age of the sacred writer, and to the conventions which the people of his time followed in their dealings with one another (...) No less attention must be devoted to the content and unity of the whole of Scripture, taking into account the Tradition of the entire Church and the analogy of faith (DV 12).

Far from pretending that the Tri-Polar Exegetical Model is an exhaustive method, I would like just to underline its particular advantage at this point, namely its integrative or inclusive aspect. As fruit of a collective work, interdisciplinarity and critical study, the Tri-Polar Exegetical Model presents a real advantage in scrutinizing the meaning of the sacred texts in their complexity and various facets, that some univocal exegetical methods do not provide. Grenholm and Patte acknowledge that “scholarly integrity in any interpretation requires integrating a plurality of approaches” (2000:2).

The very advantage of the Tri-Polar Exegetical Model is its capacity of interrelating three poles (the scriptural text, the believers’ life context, the believers’ religious perceptions of life), three modes of existence (autonomy, relationality, heteronomy) and modes of interpretation (analytical, contextual, hermeneutical), the three stages of interpretation (Distantiation, Contextualisation and Appropriation).

The three modes of interpretation that Grenholm and Patte have described as tools for the practice of our model are a true combination of various existing exegetical methods. The analytical tool which is described in terms of analytical frame recalls different methods and approaches which open various possibilities of approaching the text, provides various ways of focussing on specific features. On this register, the richness of our model is in its potential for using several analytical frames or critical categories. Depending on the text and the purpose of the interpreter, one can refer to “window dimension,” which recalls historical methods; “story dimension,” which refers to the methods of narrative criticism; “symbolic message,” which refers to the approaches focussing on

redaction criticism in a history of traditions perspective, the history of religions approach, and by certain literary approaches. S/he also has the possibility to use “transformative thrust,” which recalls methods of structural and rhetorical criticism; “subversive thrust,” which refers to the methods of social, economic, political, feminist and postcolonial critical studies; and “voices from the margin,” which refers to the methods of postcolonial and cultural criticism (Grenholm and Patte 2000:41-42).

The two other modes have also the advantage of offering contextual and hermeneutical frames which refer to certain theological categories or approaches. Looking at Draper’s description, I have noticed the same potential of the model, as he presents the different tools that one can use while dealing with the construction of the text (Distantiation) and Contextualisation (cf. Draper:2001:155-157).

All things considered, I agree with Draper that Grenholm and Patte “have developed a helpful model” (Draper 2001:153). It has the merit of clearly discerning and highlighting the teaching for life and about what life contains in the sacred texts, for believers today. Surely, the model is appropriate for contextual exegesis, which focusses on the meaning of the sacred text for us today, in our concrete context, with our religious perception of life. In view of the nature of biblical texts, I think that an integrated interpretive model presents much advantage to interpret a sacred text in all its richness. In examining John’s gospel for instance, I agree with Brodie that it is necessary to take account of the three major interpretive emphases namely, historical, literary and theological (cf.1993:10).

In addition, I believe that nowadays successful work such as the interpretation of the biblical texts must pass through openness, sharing, interdisciplinarity and collaboration. For, as Grenholm and Patte have noted “in order to be responsible interpreters we must be open to other interpretations, with the expectation that they are at least as good as our own.” They are right in suggesting that responsibility in the interpretation of scriptural texts requires a certain “respectful attitude, an opened mind to other interpretations;” and also that it “involves keeping in mind that, whatever perspective (method, approach) and criterion an interpreter might adopt, the truth-claim about a text or an interpretation remains narrowly framed by one or another aspect of our human condition, because, ‘we know only in part’, seeing ‘in a mirror, dimly’ ” (2000:7). Indeed, in view of our humanity and its limitations, one might appreciate Grenholm and Patte’s point of view that claiming a single criterion of truth is a scandalous suppression of truth and that well-intentioned univocal interpretation becomes oppressive and destructive (Ibid.). Such honesty and humility are the fruit of the *paideia*.

2.4.1.2 A *Paideia* model

As well as its *maieutic* aspect, which shows the richness of the model that weaves together several methodologies and approaches to the text, the Tri-Polar Exegetical Model takes on another positive element: *the paideia*. Grenholm and Patte have conceived their model as a help and an educative instrument for pastors, priests, seminarians, teachers and each believer, who have the extreme responsibility of interpreting biblical texts. On this point, it is worth stressing two important assumptions made by our two coauthors: first, the accent they put on conscientiousness, discipline

and rigour in reading, studying and preaching the word of God; second, the ethical responsibility that each interpreter must have in choosing her/his interpretation.

To expose the truth of the Gospel, to proclaim the living teaching and message of the sacred texts to the people of God, is the principal office of the Church, for the preaching of the word of God constitutes the very nourishment of the life of faith of Christians and determines their behaviour in important respects. The importance of this task implies seriousness, discipline, rigour and ethical responsibility. For, in explaining the aspects of the scripture readings that, according to the responsible choice of her/his interpretation, the interpreter has found more significant and helpful for her/his audience, his principal goal is to help the congregation to benefit more fully from the richness of God's word. It is probably for this reason that Grenholm and Patte speak of "conscientious" priests and preachers, who take the interpretation of the word of God very seriously. For, as they note, a sermon "cannot simply be a lecture about the text and what it says; it needs to proclaim a teaching that the text offers for believers today" (Grenholm and Patte 2000:13). I would insist by adding that the proper nature of the interpretation of the word of God is the discernment, formulation and presentation of the message contained in the biblical texts. The role of the interpreter is to explain the mysteries of faith and to expose the guiding principles for Christian living of the sacred texts for a specific community of believers.

The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy of 1963 (SC 35,2) and the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* of 1975 (GI 41) make it clearer in affirming that the sermon is the "proclamation of God's wonderful works in the history of salvation, showing how the mystery of Christ is made present and

active within us, especially in the celebration of liturgy.” This is the principal task of the preacher and it requires serious preparation, rigour, discipline and ethical responsibility.

I stress this point as a positive element and a relevant issue because, nowadays, an important number of priests neglect their task. They do not seriously prepare their sermons as conscientious preachers who first practised scriptural reading. For many of them, never read important books, since the completion of their studies. Their sermons become poorer and poorer, monotonous, simple repetitions. They speak of “reheating” their old sermons. Thus, before they open their mouths, their Christians know already what they are going to say. This kind of priest fits very well in the register of those that bishop Edward Adams calls “massing priest(s)”, those who “say[s]” Mass purely as a duty (*The Southern Cross*, April 17 to April 23, 2002:9). Since these priests do not seriously and methodically prepare their sermons, instead of explaining the mysteries of faith and the guiding principles for Christian living, they turn their homilies to useless purposes or make them a means of theatre, comedy or outpouring of their inter-personal conflicts, which thoroughly embarrass and bother the Christians. The homily becomes an opportunity for raising questions of moral standards, smear campaign, verbal war or interpersonal attacks destined to demonize and to destroy our brothers and sisters. Of course, Christians are affected and suffer from this appalling situation. One faithful person from Cape Town did not hesitate to raise the issue in *The Southern Cross* (April 17 to April 23, 2002:13). The concern and disappointment of this believer are expressed in these words:

“What is a homily? A priest told me it was an explanation of the liturgical readings at Mass and was compulsory. Honestly, I think we could do without it.

I find that the preacher always tells me exactly what the readings have already said in clear language, taking about 20 minutes to do so. Can't our preachers hand out questionnaires now and then so that we can freely tell them what is good and bad about their preaching?

If I decide to arrive at Sunday Mass only after the homily is over, do I fulfil my Sunday obligation?"

If Christians decide to avoid the homily of the priest, one can understand how dramatic the situation is. Michael Shackleton who answered the pertinent questions of this Christian freely admits, somehow, the incompetence and mediocrity of some preachers. To his great regret he writes: "A homily is not a scholarly classroom lecture. Still less is it an example of grand oratory. Ideally, the preacher should choose one main point from the readings and use it to move the hearers' minds and hearts to an ardent commitment to the truths of the faith and how to live them out in Christian love among others." He goes on: "unfortunately, as you remark, preachers are often unskilled in moving our minds and hearts rather than lecturing us. Also, you can immediately spot a poorly constructed homily by the time it takes the preacher to get it off his chest. A well constructed homily explains the theme of the occasion, looks at it from maybe a theoretical and a practical viewpoint, and then applies it in a memorable way to the lives of those present" (*The Southern Cross*, April 17 to April 23, 2002:13).

Shackleton's answer strengthens the evaluation of our model as a *paideia* model, for his argument is not only rooted in the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, but surprisingly reflects the principles of our model (distantiation, contextualisation, appropriation by means of praxis). Furthermore, it clearly

joins Grenholm and Patte's second role in developing this model namely, "to contribute to the *paideia*, or educational training, of pastors, priests, seminarians, and other Christian believers" (2000:5). This *paideia* aspect merits a particular attention and must be emphasized strongly, especially in the case of some irresponsible and undisciplined priests. Indeed, while the laity are performing many important works and functions in the Church and the society with distinction, priests to whom "in virtue of having received the Sacrament of Holy Orders" have been entrusted the specific functions of teaching and sanctifying the people of God, do not care at all. They continue to make themselves ridiculous before Christians.

As bishop Edward Adams of Outdshoorn (South Africa) notes: "today there are many laypeople far better educated than the priest, far more knowledgeable in theology than some priests, brilliantly eloquent, involved in various pastoral ministries and administrators second to none! We see the fantastic work by laypeople in so-called 'priestless' parishes" (*The Southern Cross*, April 17 to April 23, 2002:9).

Some of them, when they cannot bother about their homily, without any embarrassment or shame before the faithful who challenge them, entrust the task of the homily to the parishioners or to a seminarian undergoing a period of training in the parish. If the practice was aimed at the formation of the future ministers, perhaps this would be acceptable. In this case the parish priest, to whom a seminarian has been entrusted, should prepare, together with the seminarian, the word that the seminarian has to say before the people of God, who come to Mass not to watch theatre but to listen to word of God as the nourishment for their lives. Unfortunately, very often it is in the sacristy, just

some time before the beginning of the Holy Mass, that some priests ask the untrained and non-authorised people to preach. When a seminarian has been informed in a reasonable time to preach, he is left alone in this very difficult and important duty. The priest does not assist him in the preparation of his sermon. Such an attitude does not honour either the priest, nor respect the faithful.

It is reasonable to assume that it is probably because such a practice, which shows the very evasion of responsibility of some priests and which throws confusion into the roles of ordained ministers and the non-ordained faithful, that the Congregation of the Clergy promulgated an *Instruction* (1997) which tackled these issues. Because the homily is an important part of the liturgy of the Word and is necessary for nourishing the Christian life of the hearers, the *Instruction* insists that during the celebration of the Holy Eucharist this activity “must be reserved to the sacred minister, Priest or Deacon to the exclusion of the non-ordained faithful, even if these should have responsibilities as ‘pastoral assistants’ or catechists in whatever type of community or group” (art.3,§1).

The document highlights that “this exclusion is not based on the preaching ability of sacred ministers or their theological preparation, but on the function which is reserved to them in virtue of having received the Sacrament of Holy Orders” (idem). Since according to the Congregation this statement “is not merely a disciplinary law but one which touches upon the closely connected functions of teaching and sanctifying”, the *Instruction* forbids the practice which, on some occasions, entrusts “the preaching of the homily to seminarians or theology students who are not clerics”, for “the homily should not be regarded as a training for some future ministry” (idem).

While recognizing that this absolute restriction of the homily at Mass to only the ordained-ministers is hard and has given rise to stormy and controversial discussions in the Church, one may, however, admit that there is a real problem of lack of discipline, irresponsibility and mediocrity among some priests. Perhaps the hardness of the document corresponds to the seriousness of the situation. For even if the *Instruction* relegates disciplinary reasons to a position of second importance, priests' abuses in the aforesaid practice really exist in the Church, and we need to face the situation. To this end, I believe that the Tri-Polar Exegetical Model is an excellent method for the *paideia*, capable of handling this crisis. It would hardly be an exaggeration to say that the *Instruction* gets priests thinking and, invites them to follow the good example of the non-ordained faithful who practice scriptural criticism and interpret the word of God better than some ordained ministers. In fact, the *Instruction* acknowledges that "according to their proper character", the non-ordained faithful "participate in the prophetic function of Christ" and "are constituted as his witnesses and afforded the 'sensus fidei' and the grace of the Word" (art.2,§2).

Referring to Hebrews 11:1, the document supports that "all are called to grow even more as heralds of faith in things to be hoped for." Furthermore, it acknowledges that "today, much depends on their commitment and generous service to the Church, especially in the work of catechesis." Thus far from excluding the laity completely from the liturgy of the Church or from the reading and interpretation of biblical texts, the document clarifies, organizes, disciplines and promotes a best participation of all Christians in the life of the Church.

2.4.1.3 A comparative and review model

In developing scriptural criticism, Grenholm and Patte did not necessarily aim at the production of a new interpretation. The main goal of their model was to serve as an “assessment of existing interpretations-including the reader-believers’ own, so that to help them to recognize that they have choice among several interpretations” (2000:30). In this way the Tripolar Model is a comparative and review model. Its advantage at this level is to help interpreters to confront and enrich their interpretations with several other existing works. By the way, the model helps to avoid duplications, monotony and poverty of the works. This particular positive aspect of the Tripolar Model responds in part to the concern of the School of Theology of the University of Natal, which expects from the students who prepare a research proposal to state, in case of any known precedents or parallel research projects in their field, why they believe that their research will not duplicate that of others.⁷

2.4.2 Limits of the model

In terms of limits, I would like to underline some derogatory overtones of the model and practical difficulties in exploring this method. I name them risks and they are three, principally.

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See the *Guidelines for the submission of a PG Research Proposal* of the School of Theology of the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg.

2.4.2.1 Risk of a retreat into pietism

Grenholm and Patte consider the Bible as a “religious text” and emphasize the “devotional reading (or reciting) of Scripture” as a means of God’s revelation in the common life of believers (cf. 2000:15). In addition, since the “Holy Scripture” represents “the interaction between scriptural text and the believers’ heteronomous religious experience, reading scripture becomes, in and of itself, a religious experience, a holy time and space (...) or a mystical experience in terms of which the text is read” (Ibid.:16).

Consequently, since the biblical text matters for believers and its interpretation determines their behaviour in important respects, Grenholm and Patte argue that the only appropriate reading of scriptural text is done within a community of faith. On the basis of these statements, Grenholm and Patte name the whole exegetical process scripture exegesis. Although they counterbalance their perspective by integrating criticism in their interpretive process, naming the whole exegetical process on the basis of the Bible as scripture seems problematic to Draper, for such a designation carries pejorative overtones and “runs the risk of a retreat into pietism” (Draper 2001:153). Therefore, Draper prefers the use of the term “sacred text” to “scripture,” because “sacred text” describes the function of a religious text in a faith community.

Draper’s remark seems relevant to me. Indeed, to hear the voice of the text, to let it speak in our context and to allow its message to affect our daily life, we must avoid all devotional and mystical reading on first contact with the text and allow it to speak to us in its own rights. Spirituality and

pietism can overshadow and veil the reality of our context, the very questions and concerns of the people. In this way, exegesis misses its original goal and becomes an opium for believers. Now, as Draper notes, the context as it is understood here “is not simply our faith context, but also our cultural, socio-economic and our class interests” (2001:154). Naming the whole exegetical process on the base of the Bible as scripture, and reducing all things to the spiritual level, runs the risk of prejudicing the interpretation of the text.

2.4.2.2 Risk of considering all readings of the text as “exegesis”

Although in making explicit the tripolar character of scriptural criticism as an interpretive practice Grenholm and Patte did not necessarily envisage the production of new interpretation but the analysis and comparison of existing interpretations (especially in the reception of Romans), the use of this model as an “exegetical” method for new interpretations remains possible. In fact, since the model originated in the practice of scriptural reading by conscientious preachers, including “ordinary people”, in developing the Tripolar Model, Grenholm and Patte gave much importance to the “exegetical” potential of this model.

Encouraging scriptural reading by believers is a beneficial initiative because it helps Christians to become acquainted with the Bible. Surely, the practice promotes popular reading of the Bible by Christians. However, as Draper (2001:154) notes, if “the word ‘exegesis’ refers to the ‘leading the meaning out of the text’ as opposed to ‘eisegesis’ which refers to ‘reading the meaning into the text’,” (which could be purely a devotional or mystical reading), one wonders if all readings of the

text are exegesis. Indeed, as West (1999) highlights, the way in which ordinary people read and interpret the Bible is just simply not the same as that of the “trained reader.” In addition, although West asserts the “presence of neo-indigenous interpretative strategies; and their patterned form,” he concedes, “however, that this patterning is not exactly the structured and systematic questioning that characterises more familiar forms of exegesis” (West 2002:78)⁸.

I think that using faith as a norm for the interpretation of biblical texts, or reading a sacred text inside the religious tradition, and doing spiritual and mystical reading of the Bible are two different things. Unfortunately, as Draper has noticed, Grenholm and Patte seem to stuff all things into the same bag, without flattening the differences. Therefore, far from underestimating the reading of the text by ordinary believers or reserving exegesis to the work of the expert, but for the sake of clarity and rigour, Draper integrates the adjective “exegetical” in his description of the Tri-Polar Model. Thus he names the method, Tri-Polar Exegetical Model, while Grenholm and Patte speak of Tripolar Model or Tripolar Interpretive Process. Basically the Model is the same in its principles and process. The note brought by Draper functions to show that the use of the word “exegesis” indicates that all readings of the text are not the same; and to “insist that the goal of the whole process of exegesis is the meaning of the text as sacred text for the faith community in its own context” (2001:154).

8

We are looking forward to reading in a soon article to be published article, the contribution of Tshela Maarman Sam (Tshela. Forthcoming) who pushes the discussion further by insisting that indigenous exegesis must be “mother tongue exegesis” (see West 2000:82, endnote 11).

2.4.2.3 Risk of interweaving the moments of the model

Grenholm and Patte, as well as Draper, have made explicit the three moments that characterize the Tri-Polar Exegetical Model. Yet, despite this clarification, it sometimes happens that the distinction between Contextualisation and Appropriation seems difficult to establish. The two moments can interweave. I have been confronted with this real practical difficulty and my supervisor, Jonathan Draper, has pointed out to me that “You seem to already begin on the ‘appropriation’ of the text in this section where you are analysing your context. Should you not hold off on that until the next chapter? Rather stick to analysis of context ” (written comments on chapter four, Contextualisation). Gerald West, who evaluated my research proposal, had the same impression as he wondered, “Above paragraph begins this stage (?)” The above paragraph was about Contextualisation while the development below described the stage of Appropriation.

I must admit that sometimes it was not easy to distinguish which data were suitable for Contextualisation and which ones corresponded to Appropriation. In addition, although in analysing the text the interpreter chooses the features more significant for his perspective, purpose and audience, the reconstruction of the text still remains an important work. Constructing the immediately preceding and following context, as well as the wider context of a text is a great work because one word only can refer to the whole gospel, if not the whole Bible. Therefore, it becomes difficult to control the research. But, to some extent, this difficulty becomes an exercise of the limitation of the research.

2.5 Conclusion

Certainly, no exegetical method, though scientific, rich and important, can claim to be totally sufficient in the interpretation of sacred texts. This is true for the Tri-Polar Exegetical Model of Draper, Grenholm and Patte. Yet, despite its limits and real practical difficulties, the model is none the less an excellent method for contextual exegesis. Its originality and relevance lie in the fact that, through the emphasis of the context of the reader and the hearing community, and the appropriation of the text, the model links together exegesis and theology. Now, generally, exegetical methods often restrict themselves to the interpretation of the text and leave the task of contextualization and appropriation to the theologians. The Tri-Polar Exegetical Model of Draper, Grenholm and Patte integrates the three poles, this giving it power and richness.

CHAPTER THREE: DISTANTIATION 1: NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

By narrative structure, we understand the foundational sense of a text's organization, contents, and its plan in its various parts; in the present case: John 11:1-44. There can be no doubt that in many ways John 11:1-44 represents the pinnacle of the twenty-one chapters of the Fourth Gospel. It is a "tale artfully structured, with colourful characters, timeless appeal, a sense of progression and suspense, and subtle use of focus" (Stibbe 1994:38). Thus in this chapter, I shall largely confine myself to the literary context, the plot, the characterisation and the structure of our pericope.

3.1 Literary context

Different titles designate the pericope of John 11:1-44: "The resurrection" or "The raising of Lazarus" (*The New Jerusalem Bible* 1990, Milne 1993, Brodie 1993); "The gift of life" or "Jesus, the giver of life" (Suggit 1993); "Seventh sign: the Resurrection of Lazarus" (*The African Bible* 1999)⁹, etc. The importance of these titles implies that the narrative of Lazarus brought to life has been rightly placed and has evident "narrative echo effects"¹⁰ within the Gospel.

9

In this work (specially in this chapter), I shall use *The African Bible* as my main source. Without neglecting other versions, I shall follow closely *The African Bible* because, as a collective work of more than thirty biblical scholars, mostly Africans from all over the continent, this Bible presents a "study-guide for prayer and reflection, according to the expressed wish of the African bishops". Furthermore, *The African Bible* is enriched by introductions, notes, comments which draw parallels with "African experience, while using the latest insights of scholars from many disciplines in interpreting the message of the Bible". In others words, "the comments, running alongside the biblical text, work as a key to open the door of understanding of a chapter or a section of the book". And also, "introductions to each book give up-date information about the book and point out the theological and pastoral relevance of the book for the contemporary world and for the church, in particular for Africa" (see Preface of Teresa Marcazzam FSP, *The African Bible* 1999:9).

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The expression, 'narrative echo effect' comes from Tannehill (1986). He is quoted by Stibbe (1994:39), who also uses

The story allows us to see textual and thematic links between chapters. Flashbacks and flashforwards unite the pericope with the immediately preceding and immediately following context, and the wider context as well. It would be impossible to exaggerate the importance of these clues in reconstructing the literary context of our text. Now, let us step back to examine more closely the narrative echoes of John 11:1-44.

3.1.1 Immediately preceding context

In terms of literary context, several issues and themes link John 11:1-44 to the immediately preceding chapter as a unit of a same section. The theme of the person and authority of Jesus is a crucial issue. Thus the immediate context of our text is concerned with the identity and the work of Jesus. Who is Jesus and what is the nature of his work? It is significant to note that three “I AM” sayings characterise this context. Evidently, Jesus’ I AM saying, Ἐγώ εἰμι ἡ ἀνάστασις καὶ ἡ ζωή (11: 25) refers to the two immediate precedents: Ἐγώ εἰμι ἡ θύρα (10:9) and Ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ποιμὴν ὁ καλός (10:14). Through the use of the powerful expression Ἐγώ εἰμι, Jesus clearly claims to share in the divine nature and to exercise divine prerogative as well. Thus Jesus’ attributes and promise in 11:25-26 relate to Jesus’ prerogative to have life (ζωή) in himself, the power to lay down his life (ψυχή) and to take it up again (10:17-18); and to give eternal life (ζωὴν αἰώνιον). At this level, it is worth defining clearly John’s concept of ζωή and ψυχή.

the terms ‘analepses’ (flashbacks) and ‘prolepses’ (flashforwards) which he takes from Culpepper, to show that the raising of Lazarus is consequently not a narrative which has been clumsily placed within John’s gospel.

3.1.1.1 John's concept of ζωή and ψυχή

Right from the Prologue, John lays the foundations of his theological view of life: “The Logos is the vital principle from whom all that lives derives its life” (Hastings, Selbie, Lambert 1906-1908:892); χωρὶς αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο οὐδὲ ἓν ὃ γέγονεν ἐν αὐτῷ ζωὴ ἦν (1:3-4). In other words, John states that “whatever life exists in the world was eternally, timelessly, in Him” and “all that appears on this fleeting scene exists, so far as it exists by participation in His life” (Ibid.:892).

Although the concept of the evangelist suggested that as life the Logos was a “cosmic principle”, his view was totally different from the classical Greek usage which considered life (ζωή) as a pure “natural phenomenon like its antithesis, death” (Kittel and Friedrich 1985:290)¹¹. According to the classical approach, ζωή denoted the physical vitality of all organic beings and involved self-movement with its source in the ψυχή. As immortal life, ζωή was only an attribute of the gods. True human life was not ζωή but ψυχή, the principle of vitality in matter and of selfhood in humans as opposed to matter. Thus, in humans ζωή closely related to manner of life or character as a means of ethos. In short, in classical Greek usage, ζωή represented both βίος and natural vitality, and belonged to this world. It was not “eschatological expectation as intermittent achievement of the blessed life of godhead” (Kittel and Friedrich 1985:290).

¹¹For the following comments, I entirely refer to this dictionary.

As in today's perspective of inculturation, John used Greek words to build his concept of life. We may quote Draper (2000:357) who clearly specifies John's concepts of ζωή and ψυχή: "In chapter 10, John has consistently worked out the difference between natural biological life, which is restored in Lazarus, in terms of ψυχή (e.g. 10:16,17-18), and the eternal life which inheres in Jesus as the Word who was with the Father from eternity and is the source of natural life, in terms of ζωή (1:4,10:10, 11:25 etc.)." One identifies ψυχή with corrupted and limited life which ends with biological death. It is also related to the "soul". However, true life, ζωή in the absolute is an indestructible reality. As an attribute of God, ζωή is incorruptible and limitless. Being the eternal Son, the Logos and creative power of God, Jesus identifies himself as ζωή, the attribute and reality which cannot be destroyed. In laying hold of ζωή in the pre-existent Logos of God, John testifies that "things of time derive whatever reality they possess from a sphere of higher reality beyond time and place" (Hastings, Selbie, Lambert 1906-1908:892). ζωή is Jesus and Jesus is ζωή, the power, the brilliant light that the world cannot comprehend and no human can control. ζωή is true life which is established and given to the disciples by Christ's work of resurrection.

Because Jesus is the only one who has ζωή inherent within him and can bear much fruit if he lays down his biological life (ψυχή), because he is the resurrection and life, those who believe in him, those who are born from above, even if they do not have ζωή inherent in themselves, are to have

eternal life (ζῶην αἰώνιον); because that is why Jesus came into the world (see Draper 2000:357). Since Christ's work has already taken place and the resurrection of the dead is simply the consummation of the replacing of the old aeon by the new, ζῶή is not just hoped for, believers have it already (cf. Kittel and Friedrich 1985:294).

3.1.1.2 Jesus' exercise of divine life-giving prerogative

Because the Father and the Son are one, Jesus exercises the same life-giving prerogative of God (10:30). Jesus lays stress on his oneness with God because the Father who has sent him into the world has invested him with all authority in heaven and earth. The full implication of this perfect unity of the Father and the Son lies in the mission of God, the Father's works that Jesus performs, always in agreement with the Father and in accordance with his will (cf. 5:30; 6:38; 8:16.18.28). Since everything of the Son is for the Father and vice versa (17:10), it is true that the sheep belong both to Jesus and to the Father and are part of their common fellowship¹². In this way, the unity becomes oneness in the leading and protection of the sheep. A claim such as this unity of persons in action has powerful meaning. It reveals the way in which the Father and the Son are related, what Schnackenburg (1979: 308) precisely calls "the metaphysical depths contained in the relationship between Jesus and his Father". In the specific context of the episode of Lazarus, Jesus' divine identity and mission become apparent through the distinctiveness of his ministry in the last section of the great central teaching of the gospel (10:1-21) and in the raising of Lazarus.

¹² For the following comments, I refer to Milne (1993), Brown (1966) and Schnackenburg (1979) as well.

As Schnackenburg (1979:292) argues, “through his use of Ἐγώ εἰμι Jesus presents himself as revealer and bringer of salvation, he who thereupon, as in the other soteriological words of revelation (cf.8:12), makes believers the promise of life”. In this respect, it is justified to establish a connection between Jesus, the Master of life in 11:1-44 and the image of the gate (θύρα) and shepherd (ποιμήν) which are developed in the preceding chapter. The Good Shepherd is the Master of life who takes care of his own and gives them life. Through his shepherding, he brings blessings to the flock, namely salvation, security, nurture and life in abundance (10:9-10).

As the image of coming and going out to find pasture suggests Jesus as guardian and liberator of the flock, provides security by protecting the sheep by night, and nurturing them by leading them to pasture by day. The sheep are under the care of the shepherd and in the Father’s hand. In this view, life in abundance is the greater gift and blessing of Jesus’ shepherding to those who believe in him. This supreme privilege is realised in the raising of Lazarus. Lazarus has salvation because he knows the shepherd and the gate, he listens to his voice when he calls him: “Lazarus, come out” (11:43). The immediate link between Jesus’ attributes and promise in 11:25-26 and Jesus’ role as a “gate” that provides access to fulness of life (10:9) is thus obvious. It sounds as though chapter 10 resumes something that occurs in chapter 11.

3.1.1.3 Jesus' shepherding

The meaningful images which are used somewhat interchangeably in the parabolic passage of chapter 10 as well as contrasts and links, enrich more and more the immediate context of chapter 11¹³. The robbers who scale the enclosure, the mercenary who is a destructive leader of people, and the wolf who catches and scatters the sheep (10:12), inform the reader of the other enemies of life s/he finds in the narrative of Lazarus, namely illness and death. These two "robbers, mercenaries and wolves", cause many trouble and trial to the flock (human life). Like a wolf, they scatter and divide families and friends, because of the trouble, sorrow and grief that they bring. Moreover, in both cases, whatever the situation, Jesus remains the Master of life, the Good Shepherd who is concerned with his sheep. He calls the living and the dead as well, and all hear his voice, precisely like Lazarus who comes out as he hears the voice of the true Shepherd calling him: "Lazarus, come out" (v.43). Because he is "the resurrection and life", Jesus gives life to all of his sheep.

Incidentally, Jesus' imagery targets specific enemies of the people of God. It illustrates firstly the differences between true leaders and false ones. The metaphor of the shepherd and flock, as expression of God's relationship with his people, is familiar from the Old Testament. Most obviously, Ezekiel 34 gives us a rich background to this essential indictment of the false leaders, the deserting

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Milne reckons that "Jesus' imagery would have been familiar in a society where sheep-farming was a staple of the economy. The 'fold' or pen was probably a large, communal enclosure where several flocks were herded for safety at night. The calling of the sheep in the morning (3) would be crucial as each shepherd assembled his own flock from the larger herd in the fold. During the night a guard would be hired (3, the *watchman*). He would remain at the only door to the enclosure. Robbers could enter only by scaling the enclosure. The guard would admit only the true shepherds by the door when they arrived in the morning" (1993:145).

shepherds of God's people¹⁴. Ezekiel portrays the kings of Israel who have betrayed their mission. They have failed to care for the sheep by not feeding them, or helping those in various sorts of need. Instead of promoting a just society of brotherhood, sisterhood, equality and peace, in accordance with the plan of God, they have made use of their authority to become richer by weighing people down. They even clothe themselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals. The result of this situation was the plundering of Israel by its enemies. For this reason, God promised to care personally for his flock as a good shepherd. Israel will not recognise kings any more: God himself will lead his people. He will rescue and re-gather his scattered flock and pass judgment on both false shepherds and, where appropriate, on his sheep. He will appoint a new shepherd, one shepherd, his servant David, who will tend them and he, the Lord, will be their God, while his servant David will be prince among them (Ez 34:23-24).

In the Lazarus story, the evangelist emphasizes the theme by highlighting the presence of "the Jews" at Bethany; those Jews who represent the Judaeen authorities, the ruling elite (see Draper 2000:357). By identifying himself as both the gate and the Good Shepherd, Jesus brings new life and new hope to Lazarus and the people of God as a whole. The novelty of his shepherding lies in the guidance, good care of the sheep, security and gift of life, which are provided, not by the walls of the enclosure or human care, but by the proximity to the shepherd - Jesus who is the Master of life. In fact, whatever the walls Israel built; physical, spiritual, social, individual or community, it could not escape from the bad treatment of the false shepherds. Whatever precautions Martha and Mary took to cure their brother or to prevent his dying, the two sisters did not succeed. Therefore, having recognized their

¹⁴ For this summary, I refer to the comments on Ezekiel 34 in *The African Bible* (1999).

powerlessness and vulnerability in the face of illness and death, they did understand that the only way out was Jesus' presence. They sent him a message to implore his powerful and healing presence. This is what one can read through the words they addressed to Jesus when he arrived in Bethany: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died" (v.21.32); and those proper to Martha, "But even now (since now you are with us here at Bethany), I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give you" (v.22). Comforted by Jesus' presence and confident in his words, Martha then ran towards her sister Mary to put her mind at ease: "The Master is here and is asking for you" (v.28); the resurrection and life has arrived; do not worry, do not mourn and do not fear any more.

Many people have trusted in their walls, in their own security and power. They have built different kinds of barriers and boundaries - social, political, economical, ethnical; they have failed. They have lost their ψυχή. But those who are "born from above" (Jn 3:3.7), those to whom Jesus gives ζωή cannot lose it any more or die but live εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα (11:25-26); they will enter the kingdom of God (3:5). Indeed, "people may wrongly think they have found life (5:39-40), but revelation leads from false life to true life" (Kittel and Friedrich 1985:296). Such is the important message of the Lazarus story: The sickness of Lazarus is not to end in death - θάνατος εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα. Even if he dies, that is to lose his ψυχή, he will live (ζήσεται); he will keep his ζωή because anyone who believes in Jesus, the resurrection and life, has life εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα. With Jesus in close proximity, there is no limit to what we can hope for. His protecting and mastering power originates in the Father's supreme protective power and both the Father and the Son have a unity of power and action (cf. 10:29-30).

This protection that the Father possess and exercises in his hand recalls Old Testament background. On one hand, the author of the book of Wisdom states that “the souls of the just are in the hand of God” (Wis 3:1). God made human beings in the image of his own nature; he protects the soul and grants it immortal life. Secondly, the prophet Isaiah lays stress on God’s protection in his hand: “I am God, yes, from eternity I am He; there is none who can deliver from my hand: who can countermand what I do?” (Is 43:12b-13). God assures his people that since he is always with them and he has engraved them on the palms of his hands (cf. Is 49:16), there is no need whatever to fear or to be dismayed. He, God, will strengthen them, help them and uphold them with his right hand of justice (cf. Is 41:10). As an emblematic figure in this climactic story of the fourth gospel which brings out the theme of life, Lazarus can be seen as the type of this “soul of the just” which God carefully protects and grants imperishable life.

The episode of the raising of Lazarus also lets us see striking contrasts which enlarge the horizons of the immediately preceding context. The tomb in the form of a cave with a stone laid across it (11:38-39), the dead man tied hand and foot with burial bands, and his face wrapped in a cloth (11:44) - the tomb with its atmosphere and devices, its power, darkness and odour, contrast with the image of the sheepfold with its enclosure and a gate, the gatekeeper, the shepherd. The first setting reflects the dead, the underworld, while the second symbolizes a world of life, security and freedom, where the shepherd looks after the sheep. In short, on one side the immediately preceding context shows us a picture which is represented by Jesus, the resurrection and life, the Master of life, both ζωή and ψυχή, the Good Shepherd, the Light of the world. Jesus stands on the side of life with his disciples, friends, believers; he shows them his love. On the other side, one finds false shepherds, the Jewish

leaders - the authorities of the world, the wolves, strangers, thieves, robbers; the opponents of Jesus, the enemies of life and all kinds of darkness powers. Their world is characterised by hostilities, clashes, violence, sickness, death, darkness, fear, unbelief. These features, which structure the Lazarus story as a whole, are present in the immediately following context and the wider context and articulate all the story. This structure will help us for the analysis of the context of Congo-Brazzaville. Before we do so, let us now examine the flashforwards of our text.

3.1.2 Immediately following context

A certain number of scholars consider, not without reason, that the raising of Lazarus from the dead is the prefiguration of the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Christ. Perhaps the first thing that justifies this statement is the identification of Mary in 11:2 with the anointing at Bethany in 12:1-8. Indeed, 11:2 anticipates what we know about her in the following chapter about the anointing of Jesus (12:3). In 12:7, Jesus clearly links Mary's anointing with the day of his burial. In addition, the evangelist establishes a direct link between the raising of Lazarus and the coming of the hour of Jesus, namely his Passion, Death and Resurrection. Following the prophecy of the high priest Caiaphas, "Jesus was going to die for the nation, and not only for the nation, but also to gather into one the dispersed children of God" (11:51-52).

In fact, in the immediately preceding context of the Lazarus story, the evangelist has emphasized this issue of Jesus laying down his life for his sheep in order to gather them into one flock, including the other sheep that do not belong to this fold (cf.10:15-16). In fulfilling this supreme mission, one cannot

In fact, in the immediately preceding context of the Lazarus story, the evangelist has emphasized this issue of Jesus laying down his life for his sheep in order to gather them into one flock, including the other sheep that do not belong to this fold (cf. 10:15-16). In fulfilling this supreme mission, one cannot exaggerate the importance of the emblematic figure of Lazarus. The beloved friend of Jesus is the principle of the unity of his family and of the scattered people of Israel. Indeed, when Lazarus got sick, his sisters Mary and Martha together sent word to Jesus (11:3); a gesture which shows the perfect unity of the family. His death was also an occasion of the gathering of close relatives and friends. Many Jews came from Jerusalem to Bethany to comfort Mary and Martha.

Incidentally, the unifying role of Lazarus becomes more evident and significant in John 12. Lazarus seems to be a magnet which draws an important number of Jews to Jesus, for at Bethany, "large crowd of the Jews came, not only because of Jesus, but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead" (12: 9). Thus Lazarus was a springboard for the Jewish people; because of him, many of the Jews were turning away and believing in Jesus (12:11). The result of this situation was, of course, the clear and final decision of the chief priests to kill Jesus and Lazarus as well. To this extent, the immediately following context of the Lazarus story recalls Jesus' rebuke and critique of the false shepherds of Israel, the thieves, the robbers and wolves, who know only to steal, to slaughter and destroy (cf. 10:7-10). Actually, Draper specifies that "the image of the sheep and the sheep-fold clearly draws on the traditional theme of the ruler as the shepherd, and the condemnation of the rulers as false shepherds who prey on the sheep, which is most clearly expressed in Ezekiel 34, where God promises that he will himself act as shepherd" (2000:356). As we shall see later, this same image reminds us of the disturbing presence of "the Jews", the representative of the ruling elite, which has

generated Jesus' outburst of anger at Bethany and next to the tomb of Lazarus (11: 31-38).

In connection with the issue of gathering, the study of Draper quoted above shows the connection between the puzzling saying concerning the terebinth and the holy seed in Isaiah 6:13 and the saying concerning the grain of wheat in John 12:24. On the basis of some versions (MT, TgIs, RSV, LXX and Vulgate), Draper states that "the author of John's gospel would have understood the image of the holy seed in Isaiah 6 to refer to the time when the calamity of the destruction of the holy land and the diaspora of its people would be reversed" (2000:352). He goes on, "The picture of the 'holy seed' falling from the terebinth to the ground and growing represents the surety and promise of the restoration of the people from their exile and the renewal of the covenant people in their land" (Ibid.:352). Following this interpretation of the image of the holy seed, we come to consider the link between the theme of the seed and the theme of life, because as Draper states "Jesus is both the seed of David and the holy seed which comes forth from the Father, having life in itself, which gives life to the world and produces much fruit" (Ibid.:353).

For Draper, John has applied the prophesy of Isaiah about the holy seed to his own situation, namely, the way that John's own relationship with the Judaeen authorities had been poisoned by the expulsion of the Johannine community from the synagogue. Therefore, "In the light of the theme of gathering, it is again likely that the primary reference would have been understood as a reference to the ingathering of the scattered sheep of Israel, so that the returning exiles would again be united with the Judaeen and other Palestinian people of Israel and the unity of Israel be restored" (Ibid.:10).

In all this, Lazarus plays a crucial role; he contributes in the coming of the “hour of Jesus”, his lifting up on the cross which, consequently, will allow the return, unity and restoration of Israel, and the fulfilment of God’s plan to save the gentiles. The hour of the glorification of the Son of Man that Lazarus anticipates will bring the condemnation and annihilation of the terrifying enemy, death, so that all sheep may have life.

3.1.3 Wider context

In view of literary difficulties¹⁵ arising from John 11 which is considered as an editorial addition to the original gospel outline (Brown 1966:414), one can wonder whether the Lazarus story does really fit into the overall plan of the Fourth Gospel, or if it is definitely disconnected from it. Yet, although this episode would be a later addition to the plan of the Gospel, it is true as Léon-Dufour (1990:404) supports that the Lazarus story is “typically Johannine.” Brown (1966:427) has also asserted that material of the Lazarus story “comes from Johannine circles and abounds in typically Johannine features.” Thus, in reconstructing the wider context of John 11:1-44, I shall lay stress specifically on the Johannine theological vocabulary and themes which link the sign of the raising of Lazarus to other various elements and signs of the fourth gospel and allow it to fit into the overall plot of John’s Gospel. Of these Johannine features, I choose to develop four important themes: signs, glory, life and the mission of Christian-disciple-apostle.

¹⁵

Numerous commentators have picked out the literary difficulties about John 11 and 12 which are considered as later additions to the first outline of the gospel. In the particular case of the Lazarus story, I refer to the work of D. Burkett (1994). I shall, in detail, tackle this issue of sources and unity of John 11:1-44 in the section dedicated specially to literary difficulties in the study of the structure our passage.

3.1.3.1 The signs theme

The theme of signs is a fundamental feature of John's Gospel. One cannot study the Lazarus story without referring to this key issue. The importance of this subject lies on the fact that signs figure prominently throughout the Fourth Gospel and constitute the theme and the title of the first part of the gospel. Must it be repeated that the raising of Lazarus from the dead is one of the seven signs and belongs to the Book of Signs? The importance of the signs theme really rests not on or only on the raising of Lazarus as a climactic sign but on Jesus who is the first and "supreme sign", to use Suggit's words (1993:6). Clearly, Suggit points out that "The fourth gospel is a book of signs, not simply because it describes the signs which Jesus performed, but because it presents Jesus as the supreme sign, the revealer of God. The whole gospel revolves around this theme" (Ibid.:6).

Suggit explains that because in his own person and activity Jesus is the sign of God, he is the manifestation of God, and the signs which he performs point to and explain the meaning of his coming. Furthermore, "as the Word of God Jesus is the sign of God's activity and revelation and declaration of his person" (Ibid.:6). Jesus' identification with a sign (though John does not call Jesus a sign), shows the complexity of the meaning of a $\sigma\eta\mu\epsilon\acute{\iota}\omicron\nu$ as well as the difficulty to define and grasp the identity of Jesus, because a sign here belongs to the category of "tensive symbols" (Perrin 1976:31). In other words, as a tensive symbol, a $\sigma\eta\mu\epsilon\acute{\iota}\omicron\nu$ always needs an interpretation and explanation of its meaning by the observer (see Suggit 1993:4).

In fact, the Johannine concept of **σημεῖον** is twofold. A sign refers to the gestures and sayings of Jesus during his public ministry. It recalls all significant and representative events of Jesus which show his authority and manifest the glory of God the Father and God the Son. This aspect of the signs is often called demonstrative, in opposition to the doctrinal level which refers to the symbolical character of events, deeds, which reveal Jesus in his deep nature and lead to faith in him as the Messiah and the Son of God (see Traets 1967:136, note 48). In short, a **σημεῖον** is “a manifestation, through the person of Jesus, of God’s work in the world” (Thompson 1992:379).

In John’s Gospel signs are properly understood in relation to God’s work through the person of Jesus, the Master of life who brings **ζωή, σωτηρία** to the world. As Thompson has noted, this salvation is “not merely symbolized by signs, but also offered through the signs inasmuch as they are tokens of the eschatological activity of God in the world” (1992:379). Indeed, as the supreme sign of God, Jesus is the true sign of true resurrection and life. Through the sign of the raising of Lazarus, the preceding works and Jesus’ own Passion, Death and Resurrection, Jesus reveals the glory of God and of the Son so that “you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life (**ζωήν**) in his name” (20:31).

Signs are a privileged way to reveal God’s glory. John recounted Jesus’ wonders not so much as miracles, but as works of the Father and signs in which the glory of the Father and the Son is manifested (cf. *The African Bible* 1999, note on 2:11). In this way, Jesus’ power to revive Lazarus (11:25. 43-44) refers to John 5:21-24; 8:51; 14:6, where , in accordance with his oneness with the

Father, Jesus exercises the same unique life-giving prerogative of God. Through signs, God authenticates the identity and authority of his Son whom he has sent into the world to act in his name. Therefore, signs and glory work together.

3.1.3.2 The glory theme

The chief feature of the Lazarus story is surely the use of the Johannine basic theological vocabulary in profusion. The narrative is a reservoir of themes. In many respects, the story looks like a platform of the gospel. As one of the seven signs of the Fourth Gospel, the episode of Lazarus brought to life is connected with the other signs through the theme of glory (δόξα). For, as “symbols of important truths”, to use the words of *The African Bible* (1999, note on 2:11), in the Fourth Gospel signs function to reveal the glory of God and of the Son. A close examination of the signs in John’s Gospel shows that the manifestation or recognition of the glory of God is almost always done in a concrete, visible and striking manner. This is the biblical concept of the glory of God (Old Testament) which has much influenced the Johannine use of δόξα. In fact, the Johannine concept of glory has much in common with the language of the books of Pentateuch, and Prophets which have described the glory of God in terms of concrete reality. The most primitive tradition conceived the glory of God as a visible manifestation of Yahweh’s presence, protection and majesty in acts of power which were represented by a cloud, smoke or a brilliant light (see McKenzie 1965, Brown 1966). The glory of God then implied striking actions in the realm of the nature or in the life of the Israelites which they could see with their physical eyes.

Basically, the concept developed by later books was also rooted in the primitive one because, the glory as a recognition of the divinity of Yahweh meant to witness his saving acts (cf. Is.35:2;40:5;59:19; 66:18). This recognition of the glory or divinity and holiness of Yahweh was the result or the recognition of his striking actions that one might see. In other words, there would be no confession, no praise, no faith in God if one had not seen God's saving actions, if God did not assist his people. This concept of the glory of God has important indices of the Johannine use in the Lazarus story. The two basic elements, namely, the performance of striking and concrete work and its visible aspect, are clearly present and emphasized in the person and action of Jesus. As Brown (1966:503) has noted, for John "since Jesus is the incarnate Word of God, he is an embodiment of divine glory (1:14)". Because the Son and the Father are one, Jesus can claim that the sickness of Lazarus is for the glory of God and the Son, for Jesus represents the visible divine presence exercising the same divine prerogatives and performing mighty visible signs during his public ministry.

To Martha who still doubted and hesitated to execute Jesus' order to take away the stone which closed the tomb of Lazarus, Jesus reminded her of his promise: "Did I not tell you that if you believe you will see the glory of God?" (11:40). As Martha came to believe, she saw the glory of God in the present through the mighty act of the raising of her brother from the dead. Together with her sister Mary, the disciples and the Jews they came to believe that Jesus was an embodiment of divine glory and he really represented the visible divine presence in the midst of his people.

If the Father receives glory from the Son (14:13), he also receives glory from the disciples of the Son (15:8) because Jesus has given the glory which he has received from the Father to the disciples

(17:22). This glory or praise that the disciples give to God is a recognition of the absolute δόξα that God possesses. Such high conception of δόξα, the only one which is worthy of God (7:18; 7:43), is beyond all human praise or honour which one can gain on a purely natural level (5:41; 7:18) and which Jesus definitely despised (cf. Brown 1966:503).

All things considered, the theme of glory extends over the fourth gospel. It looks like a driving belt or a hub. John has introduced this theme into Jesus' work (1:14; 2:11; 11:4). Furthermore¹⁶, and, in numerous passages, he has presented Jesus' death as his supreme glorification (3:14-15; 7:37-39; 8:28; 12:32). Although sometimes, paradoxically, the signs seem to be ambiguous and opaque, their prime and final role is to reveal the glory of God through the evocation of the mystery of the cross which, contrary to all appearances, is the triumph of life. This is precisely the case with the Lazarus story, for in many respects this episode is the prefiguration of the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus. The same close connection between the signs and the cross is also observed in the first sign at Cana, through the issue of the "hour" (2:4), for the hour of Jesus represents the time of open clash with the world, of a clear and definitive revelation, and of glorification; and also in the multiplication of loaves (6: 1-15). Throughout the signs, the glory and the cross are then joined in irreducible paradox (cf. *The African Bible* 1999, note on 2:18).

It is true that the glory theme widens the context of the Lazarus story. In this regard, it is justified to see in 11:4 the echo of John's witness in the Prologue: "And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory" (1:14). This glory has been revealed for the first time at

¹⁶ For the following development, I am indebted to the comment on John 2:18 in *The African Bible* (1999).

Cana in Galilee (2:11). Therefore, 11:4 recalls Jesus' first sign which marks the beginning of the revelation of the glory of God through the signs¹⁷.

Jesus' appreciation of Lazarus' illness (v.4) is also similar to the attitude he has before the blind man (9:3). In the same way that the blindness provided a platform so that the works of God might be displayed in the blind man, so, too, Lazarus' sickness afforded an opportunity for Jesus to reveal God's glory so that through it the Son of God might be glorified. The reader here is brought into John's use of polysemous terminology. For, in this context, the meaning of glory is associated not only with power to give sight and life, but with selfless generosity and love, or "the theophany of God's love" (*The African Bible* 1999, note on 2:11). On the other hand, since the verb $\delta\omicron\chi\acute{\alpha}\zeta\omega$, which we find in 11:4 and elsewhere in John's gospel (7:39; 8:54; 12:16.23.28; 13:31.32; 14:13; 15:8; 16:14; 17:1.4.5.10; 21:19), carries the same meaning, both an external (going to death) and a spiritual one, one can say that the wider context of Lazarus' story is well established (cf. *The African Bible* 1999, note on 3:14).¹⁸

Since John presents Jesus' death as his supreme glorification, and since the raising of Lazarus is the prefiguration of Jesus' Passion and Resurrection, then Jesus' allusion to God's glory (11:4) refers to Jesus' crucifixion and enthronement in 3:14; 8:28; 12:32.34. In this way, the term $\upsilon\psi\acute{\omicron}\omega$, mentioned in these texts, is connected to the theme of glory, which is underlined in 11:4, for the death of Jesus

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A parallel has also been established between Martha and Mary's plea at Bethany (11:3) and Mary's plea at Cana (2:3); and between Jesus' deliberate delay (11:3) and his answer to his mother at Cana (2:4).

¹⁸ What follows is also part of that comment.

in John's Gospel is both an exaltation and glorification (*The African Bible* 1999, note on 2:11). Eternal life is, then, the fruit of the grace and power of the lifting up of the Son of Man and faith in him.

3.1.3.3 The life theme

There is also a very important point here with the issue of life in the Lazarus story and that is that the theme runs throughout the Gospel like a creeping plant goes through a forest. The section on John's concept of ζωή and ψυχή (cf. 3.1.1.1) speaks for itself. In fact, the raising of Lazarus, true "epiphany of life" (Léon-Dufour 1990:404), echoes a number of passages and signs which bring out the theme of life and, consequently focus on Jesus as the Master of life. Accordingly, Jesus' claim: "I am the resurrection and life" (11:25) is the genuine expression of the Prologue, where John lays hold of life in the pre-existent Word, the eternal Son of God (1:1-4). As noted earlier, Jesus' exercise of the life-giving prerogative of God in the Lazarus story is based in his uniqueness with the Father. Since in a number of cases and number of ways Jesus has exercised this life-giving power, it is worth bringing these connections to light.

Jesus gives life to Lazarus because he is the one through whom God gives life (1:4) and because his power to revive the dead has its source in God (5:21.24-26). Jesus' words to Martha (11:25-26) are very similar and have the same meaning with those in 5:24 ; 6:47 and 8:51. In addition, Jesus is life in itself (11:25; 14:6) and brings Lazarus to life, because he has the power to lay down his life and to take it up again (10:17-18). Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead (v.41), because of the authority he has received from the Father over all people, to give eternal life to all he has given him (17:2). For this

reason, Jesus addresses his prayer to his Father (11:41) which recalls 17:1. The way he brings Lazarus from the dead, by calling him by his name (v.43), reminds us of Jesus' figure of speech, namely "the hour is coming and is now here when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live" (5:25); "Do not be amazed at this, because the hour is coming in which all who are in the tombs will hear his voice" (5:28), and "the sheep hear his voice, as he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out" (10:3).

Jesus' action of raising Lazarus from the dead (11:41-44) refers to God's love and sending of his Son into the world (3:16), and shows that Jesus is the one who has come to give life to the world (6:33). This activity of giving life to believers, he has exercised in different ways, such as in the form of the water of life (4:10-11), the bread of life (6:35) and the light of life (8:12), his words which are spirit and life (6:63) or the words of life (6:68). Milne (1993: 163) summarizes Jesus' ministry of giving life as follows:

Jesus has been revealed as the giver of life, in a number of ways. Materially, he gives life to water, making it wine. Spiritually, he offers the new spiritual life of the kingdom of God to Nicodemus, and life which springs up within a person satisfying all thirst, to the woman of Samaria. Physically, he imparts life to a dying boy, a long-standing physical paralytic, and a man born blind. He is the good shepherd who has come to give life 'to the full' (10:10).

That is what explains and justifies the title of my work. Jesus is the Master of life because he is life in itself and he exercises all the divine prerogatives mentioned above. He is the source of life, the author of life. He surrendered the authentic life of love for the Father and human beings, in order to

receive it back anew and to communicate it abundantly, as he did through the raising of Lazarus from the dead. This theme of life constitutes the purpose of the Fourth Gospel, since John chose various signs and wrote them so “that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life in his name” (20:31).

3.1.3.4 The mission of Christian-disciple-apostle

The last development of our wider context lies in Martha’s action of calling her sister Mary, in order to bring her to Jesus. This attitude of Martha in 11:28 recalls similar episodes of the gospel, where, in the same way, after hearing, seeing, encountering or finding Jesus, the person leaves him and goes back home to call other people to come to Jesus.

In fact, in this context, the verb $\phi\omega\nu\epsilon\omega$ means to call or to invite. This meaning refers to the verb $\kappa\alpha\lambda\acute{\epsilon}\omega$ which also means to speak to another either immediately or mediately, in order to bring him/her near, either physically or in personal relationship (cf. Brown 1971:271). This is the case in the episode of the calling of the first disciples. Having met Jesus, the Lamb of God, Andrew went to call his brother, Peter, and brought him to Jesus (1:41). In the same way, Philip informed Nathanael of his encounter with Jesus and brought him to Jesus (1:43-46). The Samaritan woman acted alike with her townspeople (4:28-30), and Mary of Magdala with the apostles (20:1.2-14-18). This pattern we call Jesus’ encounter with the disciples or the calling of the disciples and the mission of “Christian-

disciple-apostle.”¹⁹ Like the Samaritan woman who “left her water jar and went back to the city”(4:28), and the apostle-disciples in the synoptic gospel, whose leaving of nets, boats, parents, or tax stall, symbolized their abandonment of ordinary life to follow Jesus and become apostles (Schneiders 1991:192), Martha expressed and confided her sorrows and all her life trials to Jesus. She abandoned her grief at the feet of Jesus and went to call her sister so that they both could together follow Jesus, the Master of life. Following this pattern each believer is challenged to bring his/her brother, sister, friend, relative to Jesus; “chacun doit être disciple”, to use the words of Marchadour (1992:151). The unity and cohesion of the themes let us foresee the dynamic and progressive plot of the Lazarus story which I would like to examine now.

3.2 The Plot

The plot as a framework, giving shape and support to an event, is an important distinctive feature of John 11:1-44. The pericope provides various signals which help one to draw a line showing the text's intention or a curve connecting points of John's centre of interest. To reconstruct the plot of the Lazarus story, I shall refer to the helpful work of Stibbe (1994), by exploring particularly his perspective of “focalization.” From a literary point of view, focalization is an excellent device showing the plan of a text or a particular perspective on the subject. Therefore, to grasp how progressively John guides us into a particular christological understanding and correct faith in Jesus, I shall explore two

¹⁹

Sandra Schneiders particularly emphasizes the issue of the mission of the Christian-disciple-apostle, while commenting on the episode of the Samaritan Woman (4:1-42). She argues that by calling the attention of the disciples to Samaria, Jesus indicates that its conversion is part of the great missionary venture of the Church in which the disciples participate but which they did not originate and do not control. See S.M.Schneiders (1991:188).

levels of focalization, internal and external. These two aspects of focalization bear elements of theological, literary and historical emphasis.

3.2.1 Internal focalization

In terms of internal focalization, one is interested in all signals in the text that bring out interior, spiritual or invisible aspects of a subject. In Lazarus' narrative, we obviously notice a degree of internal emphasis. As Stibbe (1994:42) observes, we notice the progression from Jesus' 'feet' (v.32) to Jesus' emotions (v. 33,35,38). The narrator uses these signals to guide the reader to penetrate the interior life of Jesus. Furthermore, through the different titles given to Jesus, one after another (v.3,8,12,21,27,28,32,34,38), and the dialogues with his interlocutors, the text reveals progressively Jesus' identity, and his double nature, human and divine. The progressive nature of the interlocutors aims at the same goal: to gain christological interior understanding, confession and correct faith.

For all that, internal focalization brings out signals of theological emphasis, which is the progressive christological enlightenment, as it happens. In this way, the plot reaches the climax in Jesus' absolute I AM: "Ἐγώ εἰμι ἡ ἀνάστασις καὶ ἡ ζωὴ" (v. 25); and the end in the actual miracle of the raising of Lazarus from the dead, as the dénouement and the closure²⁰. The overall movement of

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Léon-Dufour (1990:405) notes that: "le récit est mis dans la perspective de la gloire de Dieu et que l'interprétation est donnée au cours même de la narration, et non dans un discours qui suit ou dans une déclaration qui précède. A la différence des chap. 5,6 et 9, récit et paroles de révélation sont imbriqués ici de telle sorte que la production de l'événement est retardée et que le centre de gravité se déplace en avant, sur la proclamation de Jésus: "Je suis la Résurrection et la Vie. Celui qui croit en moi... ne mourra pas pour toujours" (11,25s).

Léon-Dufour also notices that the synoptic tradition knows these kinds of stories which turn into a revelation. This is the case in Mt 9:1-8, where the healing of the paralytic of Capernaum symbolises Jesus' authority to forgive sins.

of the pericope is upward towards this happy ending. For, compared to the other healing miracles in John's gospel (9:1-41; 5:1-15), only the raising of Lazarus has the miracle as the "grand finale of the story" (Stibbe 1994:42). Jesus' claim is then the climactic statement of the plot, while the actual miracle is its consequence or proof.

As Stibbe (1994:41) argues, "what is noticeable about the plot here is the way in which the actual miracle itself is, like Jesus' journey, delayed." Actually, Jesus' delay or absence in the situation of sickness, suffering and death is an important indeterminacy in the interpretation and appropriation of the Lazarus story, as we shall examine later. For now, on the basis of the narrative features, the plot seems to indicate that Jesus' delay is justified by his statement in verse 4. Jesus delayed responding to Martha and Mary's request because he knew what he was going to do²¹; and he was glad for that. He was confident that his Father always heard him and had already granted his prayer. Following the internal focalization, Jesus performed the miracle as the *dénouement* of the plot so that those who were present at Bethany might believe that he was really the resurrection and life; and also that God sent him into the world (cf.v.42). Therefore, Jesus fulfilled his work as the result of his statement by beginning to thank his Father (v.41-42). The semiotic function of the sign was then apologetic. This art of organizing the text in such an impressive way which lets us foresee a dynamic

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Although 11:39 showed that Martha did not expect the immediate return of her brother Lazarus from the grave, it is important to note some interesting similarities established by Brown between Mary at Cana and Martha and Mary at Bethany. Brown highlighted that "the message sent by the two sisters to Jesus (v.3) was quite similar in style to the delicate suggestion offered to Jesus by his mother in the Cana scene (11:3). So also Martha's statement in 22 'Whatever you ask of God. God will give you'. has a certain resemblance to Mary's instruction to the waiters in 11:5: 'Do whatever he tells you.' In each there is the same half-expressed hope that Jesus will act despite the seeming impossibility of the situation" (1966:434).

and progressive plot may lead one to think of a rhetorical device.

While recognizing the merits of the helpful work of Stibbe (1994), one has, nevertheless, to express some objections. I find it hard to believe that “from a literary point of view, the raising of Lazarus is a predominantly comic story”, reflecting “the kind of U-shaped plot which one finds in stories which are ultimately comic”. If the resurrection of Hermione in *The Winter’s Tale* is a typical example of comedy, this could not be the case for the Lazarus story.²² One may even question whether this play is “comic” in a conventional sense. How can the episode which relates the deeper meaning of life and from which, as Brodie (1993:383) suggests, probably one receives a sense of the day -to-day human reality of coping with sickness and death, be described as pure comedy as it is usually referred to as one of Shakespeare’s “dark comedies²³”?

If, as Léon-Dufour (1990:404) suggests, “among the signs that the evangelist chose to write so that ‘you may believe’ (20:31), the raising of Lazarus, which is a mysterious epiphany of life, is the one which the narrative reflects more clearly this aim”, how can one understand that this key story could be a pure comedy? Did John write his Gospel or tell this story to play a comedy or to trivialize human life and its trials? As for me, I do think that the Lazarus story is more a tragedy than a comedy; tragedy of human life set over against, authority of Jesus, the Master of life.

²²

Stibbe bases his point of view on love as an aspect reflecting frequently a comedy and on the inability of the disciples to understand Jesus’ metaphor of sleep . According to him, these are humorous touches in the narrative. For more details, see Stibbe (1994:41).

²³

Shakespeare’s “dark comedies” explore the depths of human weakness and despite this, celebrate the triumph of life.

3.2.2 External focalization

The device of external focalization draws the attention of the reader to the visible facets of a subject. In examining this device, the key signals are particularly spatio-temporal indicators. As we come to Lazarus' story, one can focus on the location, movement, and John's chronology.

With regard to chronology, it is worth stressing that the raising of Lazarus frameworks Jesus' third and final journey toward Jerusalem. It would be impossible to exaggerate the importance of this detail. The signal signifies the crucial function of Lazarus' story in the overall plot of John's Gospel. Indeed, in John's chronology, two main settings constitute the centre of gravity of Jesus' activity, namely, Judea and Jerusalem. Jesus went up to Jerusalem several times. He participated, at least, at three Passovers (2:13; 6:4; 11:55). Actually, it is on his way to Jerusalem for the last time that Jesus performed this great miracle which is pivotal in the plot of the gospel.

The importance of the plot in relation to this chronology lies on the proximity of Bethany to Jerusalem, the setting that marks the great end, closure and grand finale of Jesus' public ministry. For once Lazarus has been brought to life, some of "the Jews" report the event to the Pharisees (11:46) who then meet formally to plot Jesus' death (11:56).

The main subjects of the narrator's attention in John 11 are Jesus and Lazarus. The narrator is concerned with Jesus' journey and the tomb of Lazarus as the ultimate destination and object which he wants Jesus to home in on. In this way, the plot of John 11:1-44 is the story of how Jesus arrives

there and does a great sign. It is presented as a progressive journey with three main phases which are: from outside Judea, outside Bethany to outside the tomb. Each phase of the plot sequence is dynamic; it includes a sense of movement from one place to another.²⁴

The following framework is then observed. At the first stage of the plot (the start of the story), “Jesus and Lazarus are at two opposite poles, far removed from one another. By the end of the narrative, the narrator has mediated this opposition. The gap in the plot sequence is bridged through the subtle and dextrous use of external focalization” (Stibbe 1992:42).

²⁴ For these comments, I am also indebted to Stibbe (1994:42-44). Léon-Dufour (1990:405) and Brodie (1993:384ss) also note the dynamic of the Lazarus story, its coherence and sense of movement.

3.2.3 Diagram

Beginning: Announcement of Lazarus' illness (v.1-16).

Jesus delays his journey to Bethany. Absence of Jesus' proximity, lack of security.

=> First Christological enlightenment

Total inability of the disciples to understand Jesus' sayings.

=> First Phase

Jesus is outside Judea

Middle: Jesus' arrival in Bethany (v. 17-37).

Dialogue with Martha and Mary, outside the village. Recognition of the necessity of Jesus' proximity.

Christological Climactic

Martha and Mary's confession.

Second Phase

Jesus is outside Bethany

End: Jesus at the tomb and the raising of Lazarus (v.38-44).

Proximity of Jesus, source of security and life.

Last Christological enlightenment

Dénouement of the plot. Faith of the crowd.

Third Phase

Jesus is outside the tomb.

Raising of Lazarus. Mediation of the opposition.

3.3 Characterization

There is much to discover, to learn from John 11:1-44 on the identity and work of Jesus through the different figures who intervene in the Lazarus story. The reader/hearer is brought into a long, progressive and deep reflection upon the person of Jesus, Son of God and the Master of life. Beginning by Jesus himself, at different stages in the story, various great characters instruct us on his identity and on the journey of faith. The goal of this section is to portray the important figures of the Lazarus story and the key role they play in the narrative. We shall alternately look at the figure of Jesus, the disciples, Thomas, Martha and Mary, Lazarus and the Jews.

3.3.1 Jesus

As noted earlier, the story of the raising of Lazarus is focussed on Jesus as its main character. In accordance with the purpose of the gospel, John is concerned with the person and work of Jesus. His symbolism and portrayal of Jesus are primarily intended to lead to faith in Jesus. Turning his Jewish background²⁵ and storytelling skills (rhetorical advice) to good account, the narrator presents us with a complete portrayal of Jesus, expounding the unfathomable mystery of the person of Jesus. He brings out both the divine and human nature of the Son of God.

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The focus on the four days that Lazarus has spent in the tomb (11:17) and Mary's seated position in the house of mourning, are elements of Jewish culture.

The first and more noticeable feature of John's portrayal of Jesus is his elusiveness. In stressing this aspect, John particularly points out the presence- absence of Jesus and the complexity of his metaphorical language (v.11-15). As Brodie (1993: 385) suggests, "the story conveys something of the impression that when death strikes, the Lord is both absent and indifferent." Jesus who has received the message of Lazarus' critical situation (a mortal danger, very likely), does not hurry to respond. He deliberately decides to remain for two more days in the place where he was, instead of going immediately to Bethany, to help his beloved friend and family. The narrator has probably organized his story in such a way, using rhetorical device, or "pedagogical genius" (Brown 1966:429), to lead people to progressively discover who Jesus is.

Although some narrative signals suggest an explanation to Jesus' attitude i.e. glory, faith (cf 11:4.15.42), his delay or absence in the situation of sickness, suffering and death of his beloved friend remains a big question, an important gap for the interpreter who seeks to lead the meaning out of this sacred text for today's believers. What is the theological importance of Jesus' delay at Bethany, in relation to the plan of the gospel as a whole and the biblical tradition? This question will hold our attention in the following chapters.

At the level of language, Jesus' elusiveness and the complexity of his identity, also occur through his genuine and unique claim in v. 25: "I AM the resurrection and life" and the calling of the dead to give him life. This particular feature precisely shows the divine nature of Jesus; for Ἐγώ εἰμι is absolutely an expression of the divine Name. Who can raise up the dead, especially before the last day, unless he is God? The focus on four days and the mention of odour serve to prove that Lazarus is

really dead, but not in a coma as can be suggested from the other stories which we find in the Synoptic Gospels (cf. Mk 5:35-43; Lk 7:11-17). In this, the raising of Lazarus is not a reanimation but a real resuscitation. As a true Jew, Martha knows very well that the resurrection of the dead will happen at the last day; that is what she really confesses before Jesus, and only God himself has the authority and power to carry it out. The portrayal of Jesus reaches a climactic point when he proves to Martha the contrary by making this eschatological expectation present. As Stibbe (1994:45) emphasizes, Jesus performs this action in “the here-and-now of his ministry”, for Jesus himself is one with God. On one hand, John portrays Jesus as the Word made flesh, the Word who was with God and who is God, as he presents him in the Prologue (1:1.14). Secondly, Jesus is the Good Shepherd because, as it is said in the immediately preceding chapter, Jesus calls his sheep, in this incident, Lazarus, by his name and gives him life in abundance.

The last aspect of Jesus’ characterization is his humanity. It is probably in this story rather than in any other preceding chapter that Jesus is obviously portrayed as a man. The features of his human nature are particularly emphasized: love for his friends Lazarus, Martha and Mary, emotion and anger. These human characteristics are expressed by appropriate and meaningful verbs, namely ἐμβριμάομαι, τaráσσειν and δακρύω.

In his study of Jesus’ mental attitude at Bethany, Story (1991:51) specifies that the “verb ἐμβριμάομαι (hereafter usual ἐμβρ.) is used of the snorting of horses chafing at the bit and, together with its nominal cognates ἐμβρίμημα and ἐμβρίμησις, conveys the meanings:

censure, to be angry, to scold or to rebuke, or to admonish severely.” Having explored the use of this verb and its congeners both in sacred and secular texts, Story (Ibid.:54-55) summarizes the results of his research as follows:

The verb ἐμβρ. and its congeners may convey, at times, a more violent expression of ‘wrath’ such as is found in the description of the persecutors of Christians in Gaul (Eusebius) or in the meaning of ‘curse’ (cf. Hermias on Empedocles) or ‘exasperation’ (Aquila in Jer 10.10) or even as a substitute for ὀργή (Symmachus and Theodotion on Ezek 21.36). At other times ἐμβρ. and its congeners shade into the meaning of ἀπειλή ‘threat’ (Basil on Ps 37) or even of ἐπιτιμάω ‘rebuke’ (cf. Symmachus on Isa 17.13).

As one can observe, all these meanings refer to human action and nature. So even while Jesus enjoyed the vision of God, he could and did have human reactions such as anger, rebuke, anxiety, amazement, pleasure, satisfaction, and exasperation. Therefore, in the face of human sorrow, grief, misunderstanding, unbelief, nastiness, vicissitudes and disasters, it was possible and understandable that Jesus could be deeply moved in spirit or let out a groan of indignation from his innermost being. The following verb, **ταράσσειν**, translated ‘troubled’, denotes a deep emotion or disturbance while the last one, **δακρύω**, suggests ‘busting into tears’. To this description, one can conclude with John Chrysostom (4th century) that the fourth gospel, no less than the other three, reveals that Jesus really

did bear our human nature.²⁶ If everyone agrees with the meaning of the verb ἐμβριμάομαι which refers to outburst of anger and, consequently, expresses the same reality in the Lazarus story, the reasons and the causes which generate the indignation of Jesus at Bethany and near to tomb of Lazarus are unspecified. This is an important gap and indeterminacy which has an excellent interpretive potential for my appropriation of this sacred text.

3.3.2 The disciples

The portrayal of the disciples reinforces our idea that John 11:1-44 is a reservoir of themes. Indeed, the main feature that characterizes the disciples is misunderstanding, which is one of the major issues of John's Gospel. Jesus' response to Martha and Mary's word raises an important discussion with the disciples, about his motivation to go to Judea. In this dialogue, the disciples manifest blatant misunderstanding, strangely similar to that of Judaeen authorities.

Like "the Jews", who very often come off the worst with Jesus' teachings, the disciples are portrayed as people who are unable to grasp Jesus' metaphorical language. They fail to grasp Jesus' allusion to Lazarus' death which he presents as a sleep²⁷, and the reference to a journey to awake him, instead of raising him. As Stibbe (1994:46) notes, they respond to Jesus' play on words with the same superficial literalism which characterizes "the Jews" and Pharisees. Although in John 4 the blindness of the disciples is contrasted with the faith of the Samaritan woman, particularly it is in this section

²⁶ For more details about patristic, medieval reformation and recent exegesis on Jesus' mental attitude in the Lazarus story, see Story (1991:55-66).

²⁷ As I noted earlier, Stibbe uses among others, this argument to describe Lazarus story as a comedy.

of the Lazarus story that they are portrayed in a very negative manner. Their fear in v.8 and their lack of intelligence anticipate their failure of nerve in the passion story and their otiose reactions in the farewell discourses.

Happy misunderstanding, at this stage, for the disciples are the subject of an important teaching from the Teacher in which he reveals himself to them. Jesus bespeaks a knowledge and confidence which he exposes to his disciples: he is the Master of life and history; with him, there is no need to fear; then, as true and humble close followers of Jesus, the disciples listen to their Teacher and Master (ἄκουσι τόν διδάσκαλον) and adhere to his program. As Thomas' words express (v.16), they follow him toward death or, as one would say, according to the language of the synoptic gospels, they 'carry their cross' (cf. Marchadour 1992:151). As a Master, Jesus is competent to teach his disciples how to live. Those who listen to him and follow him as the Good Shepherd, the way, truth and life, do not walk in darkness but they have the light of life (cf. 8:12).

3.3.3 Thomas

The episode of the calling of the first disciples provides some names of the apostles (1:40-51), yet it is only in the Lazarus story that Thomas is mentioned for the first time and distinctively singled out by name. As it is often the case in the fourth gospel to mingle a reference to a singular event, the figure of Thomas is associated with a key role in the story. Like Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, the Woman in John 8:1-11, Mary of Magdala, who played both individual and representative roles in a number of fundamental theological themes, Thomas whose name in Greek is translated by Didymas

(twin), is also portrayed in the same way. He is supposed to be the spokesman of the group (cf. 11:16; 14:5). Furthermore, he is considered as the representative of the later Christians who had not seen the risen Lord (20:24-29).

For all that, two main facets characterize his person. In the Johannine circle, Thomas is portrayed as the type of disciple who takes a long time to understand (Schnackenburg 1971:327). He is distinguished by slowness, or reluctance to believe in the testimony of the other disciples about the resurrection of the Lord (20:24-25). In addition, he seems to be a naive and careless person. His words in 11:16 in which he invites his fellow disciples to go with Jesus and to die with him, are described as unthinking, because he has not measured the consequences of his statement, nor understood the promise contained in Jesus' words. His statement is a false bravado, no more no less, like Peter's one in 13:37. Because both promised much in word but delivered little in deed (cf. Their absence at Jesus' crucifixion), they are true embodiments of a certain kind of false discipleship (cf. Stibbe 1994:46).

Yet, beyond this negative characterization, it is justifiable to see in Thomas as a typical model of a disciple. For, as Schnackenburg (1971:328) suggests, even if Thomas has understood nothing from Jesus' teaching, his loyalty to Jesus comes to the fore and he has obeyed the call in 11:9-10. The fact that he has courageously involved his fellow disciples makes him a model for those "who are under attack to retain a faith which must endure or struggle in darkness" (idem, p. 328). In addition, as I said above, his full profession of faith in Jesus (20:24) made him the representative of the later Christians, who had not seen the risen Lord but will believe from the testimony of others. His attitude of listening and following the Master illustrated the true meaning of a disciple.

2.3.4 Martha and Mary

Right from the beginning of the story, Mary and Martha are portrayed as two sisters and Lazarus is their beloved brother. They all live in the same village of Bethany. At the narrative level this is an important signal to speak of Mary, Martha and Lazarus in terms of family and to consider this reality as such. This is the family or the house (ὈΙΚΙΑ) which often, offers a very warm and traditional welcome to Jesus while in Bethany, after long and tiring missionary trips. The evangelist would emphasize this theme of the family as he refers to the house of these sisters and brother, the ὈΙΚΙΑ or the family which welcomes Jesus as one of the family members and makes him feel at home.

As Louw and Nida (1988:113) suggest, “In number language the equivalent of ὈΙΚΕΙΟΣ or ὈΙΚΙΑΚΟΣ would be ‘those who live together’ or ‘those who have the same fence’ (this being a reference to a group of huts surrounded by fence and thus constituting a single so-called ‘family unit’)”. In addition, the word ὈΙΚΟΣ or ὈΙΚΙΑ does not only refer to a building or place where one dwells but also to a family consisting of those related by blood and marriage, as well as slaves and servants (see Louw and Nida 1988; Kittel and Friedrich 1976). Inhabitants of a village can also be called a family, as well as a group of people, a tribe, an ethnic group or race.

On the basis of this definition, it would hardly be an exaggeration to consider the house of Mary, Martha and Lazarus which opens its doors to Jesus and other close relatives and friends, as an

expression of extended family. Of course, because *ὀικεῖος* or *ὀικιακός* also points out to someone “who belongs to a particular household or extended family - ‘member of a family, relative’” (Louw and Nida 1988).

A close examination of some narrative signals show that this family of Mary and Martha was a united, a welcoming and pious family. Mary, Martha and Lazarus might live in harmony in their *ὄικος* or *ὀικία*. The concerted action of the two sisters who together sent the message of the sickness of their brother to Jesus (11:3) and the dinner they gave for him after the raising of Lazarus (12:2) support our hypothesis.

The figures of Martha and Mary also recall the particular prominence of women and the key role they play in the fourth gospel. In portraying these two sisters, I would like to focus my attention, in particular, on the different personalities of the two sisters. In other words, it is important to examine how the two women who unanimously sent word to Jesus act before him in the face of the trial of death. In the early stage of the story, Martha and Mary are in the same state. Both have called on the Lord (v.3) and expressed their sorrow with identical words (v.21.32). Both are seated in the house, being comforted by “the Jews” who have come from Jerusalem. Yet, despite these common aspects, in the face of the formidable mystery of death, Martha and Mary behave differently. While Mary remains overwhelmed by the weight of sorrow, at the separation which has happened, Martha gives vent to her sorrow and dissociates herself from her sister and the group of mourners. When she heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him as he entered the village(v.20).

In considering this scene, one could wonder how Martha was aware of Jesus' arrival, but not Mary, while they were together and, even, Mary's name was mentioned first in the story. In this respect, verse 5 is meaningful: "Jesus loved Martha and her sister Mary and Lazarus." Martha has moved into a position of priority. Love moves; love alerts the heart; love sharpens spirit and intuition; a heart that really loves, feels things and sees them inwardly.

Martha and Mary's situation recalls Peter and the Beloved Disciple at the empty tomb on the day of Christ's resurrection. While the two disciples saw the same linen cloths, only the one whom Jesus loved came to believe, because of the intelligence of love (20:3-8). On the other hand, a heart which is upset about sickness or death can develop a particular sensibility, attention and genuine thirst, hunger, desire and search of God. In its poverty, such a heart is open to God's grace and help. This is the case for Martha, though not exclusively because Mary loves Jesus as well.

Overcome by Jesus' love, Martha sprang up as if propelled by a spring. Comforted and feeling at ease by Jesus' presence, a personal friend, Martha can express herself freely: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died" (v.21) . Surely, these words may express either bitterness or faith. Though Jesus is the Lord, for Martha and her family, Jesus is their close friend. To address a friend, one does not necessarily need polite phrases or formulas of protocol, especially in the context of sorrow and bitterness. Martha does not worry about words. To a friend one can express either joy, sorrow or anger, for we are sure that he/she will understand us. The Jews used to pray in this way, expressing all their feelings to God as, we see in the psalms of lament.

Indeed, the psalms of lamentation, express the real life situation of most human beings who have more occasions to lament. Very often, these psalms are in the first person. No doubt, lamentations as a genuine form of Jewish prayer, help the believer to experience God's presence in his or her particular situation and to find real hope. This is the case in Psalm 13 where a suffering believer dares to confront God, demanding immediate response for help; or Psalm 22 about a lamentation expressing the anguished prayer of a person who feels totally forsaken by God. At the end, the lamentation turns into a hymn of joyful thanksgiving as the person regains confidence in God and feels certain that his suffering will benefit the whole nation (see *The African Bible* 1999, comments on Psalms 13 and 22).

Like in the case of the Samaritan woman, the further Martha and Jesus advanced in their dialogue, the more Martha grows in faith and understanding. Dialogue becomes a device of Jesus' revealing and Martha's confession. Therefore, from an implicit faith in v. 21, she shifts to another stage in v. 22 where she now confesses her faith in Jesus as someone who has power over death by saying: "I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask." As Stibbe (1994:47) notes, "her faith does not at this point stretch to an expectation of her brother's restoration to life in the Now of Jesus' ministry." In accordance with her Jewish faith, she thinks of the resurrection of the dead at the last day (v.24).

However, as a good Teacher, Jesus corrects her faith, guiding her from a "futuristic to a realized eschatology"²⁸ by saying, "I am the resurrection and life." With this, Martha is here the figure of the believer who recognizes in Jesus the revelation of the living God among people. Thanks to open dialogue, she reaches complete faith, as she exclaims: "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of

²⁸ For further details on Realized Eschatology and Final Eschatology in John's Gospel, see Brown (1966: cxvi-cxxi).

God who was to come into the world” (v.27). As Stibbe (1994:47) expresses it, traditional Jewish theology gives way to a true Christological confession. Martha has moved from her knowledge to climactic faith. She has progressed from a propositional to a personal understanding of resurrection.

Joyous at having encountered Jesus and having been instructed by him, she cannot keep the joy of this discovery to herself any more. Like Andrew, Nathanael or the Samaritan woman who left her water jar and went to call her townspeople, Martha goes back and calls her sister Mary. She moves from confession to witness and begins to prove her discipleship mission.

Mary approaches Jesus in a different fashion. Though she is loved as well as her sister Martha, she seems to be heavy and slow to react. She has trouble ridding herself of the weight of sorrow, from the group of comforters and in putting up with the death of her brother. Her seated position in the house represents the real Jewish traditional posture of mourning. Mary becomes the symbol of people demoralized by sorrow, sickness, the separation of death, and for whom excessive mourning prevents her from welcoming in Jesus the enlightener from God (cf. Marchadou 1992:154).

However, beyond these negative features, Mary’s response to Jesus is significant. Remaining indeed, in mourning and in tears, she is also the one who responded attentively to the call Martha conveyed to her. She rose quickly and went to Jesus, at the same place where Martha had met him and left him (v.29). She fell at Jesus’ feet, a sign which expresses unquestionably the recognition of a superior being (Moloney 1998:330). She stated her unconditional trust in the power of Jesus’ proximity by saying, in the same words as Martha: “If you had been here, my brother would not have died” (v.32).

To this point in the story, having accepted Jesus' self revelation and focussing totally on Jesus, responding to the voice of the Good Shepherd, Mary shows a stronger faith than Martha who shows inconsistency and doubt (v. 39-40). The pathos of Mary's response is so intense that Jesus cannot restrain himself from bursting into tears.²⁹

In summary, the portrayal of Martha and Mary symbolises "two basic possibilities open to every one who is faced with bitter loss - to rise above the bitterness or to sink into unrestrained mourning" (Brodie 1993:386). In others words, as Stibbe (1994:47) suggests: "These two women exhibit different types of grief. The grief of Martha is one which has room for a growth in resurrection faith. The grief of Mary is a desperate, passionate and forlorn affair (...) In portraying Mary in this wild and natural way, the author shows his concern to depict characters not only as stereotypes of faith response (Martha) but in the most realist manner possible (Mary)."

The two characters follow the movement of the text: to leave one place, where one is stuck, to another place, to move toward Jesus. This is a human response to God's initiative. John presents Jesus as standing always outside, and there he waits for the reaction of the actors. As in the book of Revelation, God, the Master of history, stands at the door and knocks. If anyone hears his voice and opens the door, he will enter his house and dine with him, and he with him (Rev. 3:20).

²⁹ For this comment, I am indebted to F. Moloney (1998:330).

3.3.5 Lazarus

In the preceding sections I have already developed the key role of Lazarus in relation to the unity of his family and the coming of the “hour of Jesus” which opens the time of the gathering and unity of the scattered people of Israel; the return of the Diaspora which represents the restoration of Israel and the fulfilment of all hopes. Indeed, the hour of Jesus comes when, after the raising of Lazarus from the dead and the dinner in the Lazarus family at Bethany, Jesus enters Jerusalem where some Greeks who have come up to worship approach Philip in order to introduce them to Jesus whom they wanted to see (cf. 12:20-22). Draper (2000:357) clearly shows that “The Lazarus story continues beyond the raising of the dead, since he is one of the reasons that the crowd flock to see Jesus; they also want to see the dead man restored to life (12:9)”. If at the very moment of the coming of the Greeks who wish to Jesus, most probably “the representatives of the whole gentile world”, to use Draper’s words, “the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified” (12: 23), then Lazarus has contributed much for the imminence of this realized eschatology. Lazarus becomes a great sign. Because of him, the crowd which has witnessed his raising from the dead goes to Jerusalem to meet Jesus and continue to testify on what they have seen and heard (12:17-18). Finally, because of Lazarus, the whole world has gone after Jesus (12:19); the whole world has to witness the lifting up and to believe.

If the Johannine use of the term “world” (ΚΟΣΜΟΣ) evokes three different kinds of reality namely creation as the work of God, humanity as the object of God’s merciful love and the unbelieving human being hostile to God’s love (cf. *The African Bible* 1999, note on Jn 1:10), there is no doubt that in the particular context of Lazarus, ΚΟΣΜΟΣ refers to the last denomination. Although the world also

symbolizes darkness, that darkness which cannot comprehend true light, following the logic of the fourth gospel, definitely here ΚΌΣΜΟΣ refers to the opponents of Jesus, namely the hostile and unbelieving Judaeen ruling authorities. However, in John's Gospel the world is an ambiguous reality for the whole world has also gone after Jesus (cf.12:19). Probably, this reference alludes to "all human beings as situated 'in the world' which Jesus does not allow them to seek to be removed from (17:15)" (Draper 2000:357).

For all that, Draper specifies that "John's use of the world ΚΌΣΜΟΣ is theologically charged. It refers to the world as the place of enmity and opposition to Jesus and his disciples, the place under the domination of darkness and lies, to human beings in their disobedience and sinfulness, but nevertheless the place God wishes to save" (2000:357). Therefore, Lazarus provokes the conversion and faith of the unbelieving religious leaders of Jerusalem, for instance Nicodemus and Joseph the representative figures of these authorities who witness the lifting up of the Son of Man. I would say that Lazarus acts as an intermediary for true light to shine in darkness. Lazarus who kept silent since his raising from the dead becomes an eloquent sign; a principle of unity, restoration, peace and conversion.

However, the symbolic figure of Lazarus is interesting on more than one account. Like his sisters, Mary and Martha, or Thomas in the story, or Nathaniel and Nicodemus elsewhere, Lazarus is also named individually and constitutes one of John's distinctive characters. The name Lazarus is meaningful: "God helps". As Bohmbach (2000:39) suggests, "names are a wonderfully rich source of information about the biblical world. Their meaning, as well as the patterns of their occurrences,

can help inform our understanding of women's and men's roles in the biblical times, ancient society's respective valuation of women and men." In the particular case of the Lazarus story, we see how the name Lazarus reflects exactly what happens: God's help to this family by raising their brother.

Unlike the other characters, the Lazarus character is diffuse: he is the focus of the action, the subject of the discourse of each character and he grants them the possibility to give sense to death. His fruitful silence allows everyone to voice his opinion. He is the enlightener of everyone (see Marchadour 1992:155).

Whatever is said about how historical Lazarus is, I do agree with Manigne (1998:7.17) that history has given us personalities so that they can enlighten our lives. They keep telling us, and they still show us that we have a different destiny and, by what they point out, our pain is alleviated or at least acknowledged, our hope depends on their significance and our faith is strengthened by their example (Ibid.:7). Therefore, Lazarus now belongs to our familiar mythology and he is the figure of our hope and martyrdom (Ibid.:17). Furthermore, Lazarus is the emblem of our condition, an evident symbolic figure for us if we believe the same Word that calls and delivers him; an obscure figure if we just share his servitude and his confinement (Ibid.:12-13).

In fact, there are some people who see in Lazarus' silence a good reason to think that there is nothing else after death, no new life because Lazarus does not say anything about his experience of four days of stay in the world of the dead. This silence keeps doubt and terrifying fear on the mystery of death. Yet, believers should see in the figure of Lazarus, "the type of Christian disciples" because "what

happened to him is the experience of every Christian”, namely that the Lord loves each of us as, calls us by name from death to life as he acted with Lazarus (see Suggit 1993:95).

3.3.6 The Jews

The word “Jews” is a very complex and delicate reality in the fourth gospel. The erroneous understandings of the appellation have given rise to much confusion, controversial and disastrous interpretations with a reference to anti-Semitism. In view of this prejudicial situation and in order to better interpret and appropriate our sacred text, it is imperative to spell out the point of view which is represented in the designation “the Jews” by the author of John’s Gospel.

As Draper (1999:45) indicates, “the word usually translated ‘Jews’ is misleading and should be translated ‘Judaean’ and understood as a reference to the Judaean temple authorities.” Because in the Fourth Gospel this word does not represent the Jewish people, it is important to place the expression “the Jews”, always within quotation marks (cf. Harrington 1998:10) . Of course, in John’s Gospel all references to “the Jews” do not recall a same and unique reality. Sometimes the appellation is interchangeable and designates different categories of people. It is, therefore, the context which helps to determine the intention of the author or the people whom he refers to.

It is worth stressing that when the author of John’s Gospel speaks of “the Jews”, he does not refer at all to the Jewish people as a race. This must clearly be affirmed and definitely kept in mind. Generally, the massive layer of John’s Gospel refers to “the Jews” as those people who are hostile to Jesus and

all who would confess that Jesus is a Prophet (the greatest), the Messiah, the Son of God, the One sent by God to save the world (cf. 9:22; 12:42; 16:2). In other words, in John's Gospel the "Jews" represent a theological reality rather than a specific and distinctive geographical or racial reality. Indeed, "A critical reading of the Johannine Gospel makes it clear that 'the Jews' are those characters in the story who have made up their mind about Jesus" (Harrington 1998:10). Set rigidly in their position, they firmly believe that Jesus' claims are false (7:10-13,45-52), he is a blasphemer (5:15-18; 19:7), a mere man who makes himself God, and they want to stone him (10:33). Being always uncompromising, John portrays them as first opponents of Jesus because they always seek to disturb him, to enter into public conflict and clashes with him and systematically reject him and all those who believe and follow Jesus. These "Jews", or the ruling elite, inspire fear and mistrust. After the death of their Master, the disciples keep being "huddled behind closed doors 'for fear of the Jews' (20:19)" (cf. Harrington 1998:9).

The features of this portrayal clearly show that when John speaks of these Jews who are most strongly opposed to Jesus, he refers to religious authorities, the ruling elite of the Jewish people who eventually bring about Jesus' condemnation and death (see Okure 1998:1446). In fact, in John's Gospel "the Jews" have often a bad press and are, sometimes, interchangeable with the Pharisees who possess full official power over the Jewish society; i.e., 9:13.15.16 refer to the Pharisees and 9:18.22 to the Jews. From chapter five to chapter ten for instance, the Jews are always the subject of Johannine satire, for they always manifest misunderstanding and are opposed to Jesus' teaching. They show little concern either for the crippled man or the blind man. On the contrary, they expel the latter from the synagogue.

Following the description above, the Lazarus story gives us a clear image of “the Jews” in John’s gospel. Obviously, at Bethany “the Jews” represent two strata. Those who have voluntarily left Jerusalem with the pure and great intention to comfort Mary and Martha over the death of their brother Lazarus (see Barrett 1965:332), represent the true close relatives and friends who are among the ordinary Jews, the little and poor people. These are, certainly, the “Jews” that Schneiders represents in the term “well-disposed Jews” (1987:55). These inoffensive Jews really come to Bethany to sympathise with Mary and Martha according to their culture. They show real concern in terms of consolation and solidarity. One can see in their actions, something positive, sincere and distinctly humane. To comfort someone is a positive value, and often tears symbolise compassion, sympathy and a share in someone’s grief. These are the people who acknowledge Jesus’ authority, kindness, and love for Lazarus and appreciate Jesus’ mental attitude at its right value: “See how he loved him” (11:36). Consequently, having seen the great deed performed by Jesus in raising Lazarus from the dead, many of these Jews believe in Jesus (11:45).

The second group however is composed by those who belong or are close to the ruling elite, the eternal and fierce opponents of Jesus and life. These are “the Jews”, that is, Jewish authorities, the ruling class or “ ‘The Judaeans’, the authorities of the Judaeen temple state, the priests and their retainers, the scribes and Pharisees” (Draper 1999:44.45). As I shall show later in the appropriation of our sacred text, the presence of these Jews at Bethany provokes Jesus’ outburst of anger. According to Schneiders’ vocabulary, they are “the ill-disposed Jews” (1987:55). Evidently, they come to Bethany to spy rather than to comfort. To prove it they turn Jesus’ mental attitude into derision: “could

not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”(v.37)³⁰. Their real interest and plan become obvious when after the raising of Lazarus, some of them went to the Pharisees to report what had happened. They had fulfilled their mission.

3.4 Structure

The study of literary context and the plot above, and a glance through a certain number of works on the Lazarus story can lead one to think that the structure of the passage is clear and simple. Effectively, this has been the point of view of some scholars like Schnackenburg (1971:317), who states that “the structure of the chapter [John11] in its present form is clear and logical”; and that, despite smaller units and individual scenes, it is a coherent narrative. Stibbe (1994:38) argues that “in many ways, John’s story of the raising of Lazarus represents the pinnacle of the New Testament literature. It is a tale artfully structured”, while Schneiders speaks of “the compositional zenith of the Fourth Gospel” (1987:44).

Though, to some degree the structure of the Lazarus story is quite logical and coherent, it is worth stressing the pertinence of the literary difficulties and disagreements which relate to the composition of this text.

³⁰ Matthew reports similar mockery from the chief priests, the scribes and elders (27:41).

3.4. 1 Literary difficulties

As it is often the case in John's gospel, the pericope of the raising of Lazarus brings out literary difficulties. The text makes duplications, parallels, inconsistencies and rough connections. The source-critical study of the Fourth Gospel has provided several theories and hypotheses to explain the presence of these "aporias". If Bultmann thinks that these aporias are the fact of the combination and redaction of three different sources, namely, a narrative or sign source which relates a number of Jesus' works, a discourse source and a passion source, most of the scholars uphold the alternative theory of a single basic document commonly called *Grundschrift*. They argue that this presumed source also called *Grundevangelium*, is "a narrative signs source or even a 'signs Gospel', a complete Gospel centered around the signs performed by Jesus" (Burkett 1994:210). Disruptions and inconsistencies in the final form of this document come from the numerous successive revisions that it has undergone. The non-signs material represents only a later redaction of the original signs source (Ibid.:210).³¹

Though Burkett agrees with this widespread view for a single source of the Fourth Gospel, his study calls into question, however, the theory that the non-signs material represents a redaction of this source. It suggests instead that, at least in the Lazarus story, the non-signs material represents a distinct narrative source in its own right. He argues that the aporias in the present form of the Lazarus narrative result not from the redaction of a single source, but from the combination of two distinct accounts of the story.³² His analysis accounts for all of the duplications, inconsistencies and rough

³¹ For the following comments, I also refer to Burkett's work (1994:210ss).

³² Léon-Dufour (1990:404) also notes that the story weaves two threads.

connections in the narrative. For all that, while the two proposed accounts differ in details and emphasis, they both tell the same basic story, with numerous duplications and parallels between them. Burkett then assumes that the Lazarus story may have circulated independently in two different groups within the Johannine community. The same basic story could thus have gained two divergent forms in the two parts of the community (1994:230).

If Burkett's hypothesis suggests a response to the issue of doublets, inconsistencies and roughness, disagreement about the composition of the text, however, remains. As Brodie (1993:384) observes, a glance at a variety of studies shows considerable disagreement on the structure of the Lazarus story, including disagreement among those who say it is clear. Points of view, particularly, come up against the end of the story and the basic divisions or scenes of the text. Scholars wonder whether the story consists only of the episode of the raising of Lazarus (11:1-44), or if it includes the Sanhedrin's decision to kill Jesus (11:45-53), as a same and unique literary unity.³³ However, whatever the option taken by scholars, there is considerable disagreement about the basic divisions of the text, including disagreement among those who follow the same perspective.³⁴ In the particular case of John 11:1-44, though some small units, individual scenes and contrasts are observable (see Stibbe's structure 1994:), they do not constitute in any way a major obstacle to the coherence of the text, for, as

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Léon-Dufour (1990:403) thinks that the Lazarus story (11:1-44) and the Sanhedrin's decision (11:45-53) constitute one literary unity linked by verses 45-46. Brodie (1993:384) is in complete agreement with this perspective. He considers that the narrative deals not only with the fate of Lazarus but also with the threat to kill Jesus (the Sanhedrin's decision to kill Jesus, v.45-53). His hypothesis is based on the fact that the crisis which the story presents is twofold: it tells not only that Lazarus is sick but also that Jesus is in danger of being killed.

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Brown suggest six divisions. Schnackenburg seven divisions. Léon-Dufour and Brodie have got six scenes. When we only consider 11:1-44, we also notice that the five divisions of Marchadour (1992) are different from the ones of Stibbe (1994:43).

(1971:317) notes, the boundaries between these individual units are closely connected by linking verses (cf.5-6, 17 ff, 28, 33). Thus, according to my perspective and purpose in this work, I base my structure on the criterion of the movement. Indeed, though in John's gospel every reference to movement does not introduce a new scene, in the Lazarus story it constitutes an excellent clue to indicate the divisions in our text (see Brodie 1993:384). In addition, the idea of movement determines the main focus of the story, the central subject on whom all the attention is focussed on.

3.4.2 Basic scenes of the pericope

Considering the intention of the text, the purpose aimed at in this work and the diagram of the plot above, I propose the following structure with five basic scenes:

- 11:1-6: Setting and message of Lazarus' illness to the Master of life
- 11:7-16: The Master's teaching and self-revelation to the disciples
- 11:17-27: The Master's teaching and self-revelation to Martha
- 11:28-37: The Master's teaching and self-revelation to Mary and her companions
- 11:38-44: Fulfilment of the Master's sayings

The distinctive feature of this structure is the focalization on the central subject of the narrator: Jesus, the Master of life. The story is built around his person and all the characters are called to make choices in relation to him (cf. Marchadour 1992:149). The reader is involved in a continual movement of the succession of the scenes which follow on from one another. The narrator has organized his material

by introducing titles, teaching and self-revelation, throughout the scenes. Then the progressive understanding and confession which reaches a climax in the third scene (v.25-26) as the centrepiece of the story is observed.

3.5 Conclusion

Our study has helped us to appreciate the subtle structure of our pericope throughout its significant components. The wonderful sense of our passage's organization and the dynamic of its progressive plot have helped us to grasp the intention of the text and its centre of interest. This basic work of the reconstruction of the text is a good preparation to better consider the narrative meaning of the Lazarus story.

CHAPTER FOUR: DISTANTIATION 2: NARRATIVE MEANING

The purpose of the present chapter is to consider the meaning of the Lazarus story by examining John's specific polysemous terminology, metaphor and philology. It is worth stressing that the introduction of the Lazarus narrative (v.1-6) resembles the news headlines. For, in six verses, the narrator has carefully introduced the main themes that will later be developed in the pericope, such as, sickness and death (v.1.4), sending (v.3), love (v.3.5), hearing (v.4.6), glory (v.4). Of these themes, I shall confine my attention to the deeper meaning of sickness, death, life and some important issues arising from the narrative. I shall lay particular accent on the symbolic importance of the themes and of the story as a whole.

4.1 Sickness in Lazarus' story

Sickness, suffering, death and life are the crucial issues which are tackled in the Lazarus story. At different levels in the story, the text deals with these harsh realities which challenge the bodies and the very faith of the main characters in the narrative. Indeed, sickness, suffering and death rule over the earth and families as real troublemakers and sowers of discord. Sickness lays down the law of death which seems to be the final horizon that challenges all human hopes, dreams, faith and life. Mary, Martha, the disciples and "the Jews" could not escape from the vicissitudes of these realities. They faced them and reacted in different ways. As sickness (*ἀσθένεια*) first refers to any kind of weakness (cf. Arndt and Gingrich 1952:114), Mary, Martha, the disciples and "the Jews" coped with sickness as a manifestation of weakness. In view of the importance of these issues, the purpose of the

climactic story of Lazarus' sickness, death and resuscitation; a story which has been described as "a dramatization of the theme of Jesus as the life" (Brown 1966:430), "epiphany of life" (Léon-Dufour: 1990:404) - was to serve John's theological purpose. John was concerned with overcoming the frailty to which all human nature is heir, and to constantly strengthen the faith of the faithful which was shaken by life trials.

In fact, a close analysis of some specific narrative features such as the destruction of the temple (cf. 2:18-22), the schism within the community (6:60-71; 7:40-43; 9:16; 10:19-21), the expulsion from the synagogue (9:34), or the discussion reported in 21:20-23, let us foresee the major problems confronting the Johannine community. On the basis of these references one can affirm that the community of eternal life was facing a deeper crisis of faith in Jesus as Christ, Son of God. Although, in general, the most plausible cause of the crisis seems to be the trauma of the expulsion from the synagogue (cf. Okure 1998:1448), in some specific causes, it is not unreasonable to postulate that the Johannine community was overwhelmed by despair and grief caused by a feeling of God's absence, God's silence or indifference, and by illness and death, especially in time of persecutions. In view of these weaknesses, John focussed the attention of the members of his community on Jesus Christ as the Messiah, Son of God and Master of life who exercises full control over events, power over diseases and death, and whose presence is always effective during time of suffering, death, waiting, etc. In this context, the Lazarus story speaks for itself. In order to better grasp John's theological purpose, it is imperative first of all to determine the nature of Lazarus' sickness.

4.1.1 Nature of Lazarus' sickness

Two notable features characterise the portrayal of the sickness of Lazarus. On the one hand we note the importance of the references that allude to the reality of sickness in the six verses which constitute the introduction, and the only place and time where the narrator speaks of the sickness of Lazarus. Indeed, apart from v.5 which seems to be a later parenthetical addition, all the other verses mention Lazarus' illness: ἄσθενῶν (v.1), ἡσθένει (v.2), ἀσθενεῖ (v.3), ἀσθένεια (v.4), ἀσθενεῖ (v.6). On the other hand, one cannot but notice the predominance of the verbal forms of ἀσθένεω which occur four times (v.1.2.3.6), over the substantive ἀσθένεια which occurs only once (v.4). Of course, it would be impossible to exaggerate the major importance of the verb in Greek as it is in any language. As the most important part of speech, the verb functions to express complete ideas (cf. Jay 1994:14). In other words, the verb is a basic, a central element of speech which describes a state or an action³⁵. In view of this, one may better consider John's preference for the verb at the detriment of the substantive.

In fact, the preference for the verb or a technical word more significant than any other mere substantive is a typical Johannine stylistic device. The Fourth Gospel as a whole is full of regular frequency of the verb as a chief feature of John's style and theology. The verbal forms of πιστεύω and ὁράω are, perhaps, the most convincing examples for, in the Fourth Gospel only, these verbs respectively occur ninety-eight times (cf. Mollat 1976:105) and a hundred and twenty times (Traets

³⁵ For further details on the importance of the verb see Blass and Debrunner (1961).

1967:10)³⁶. John's use of the verbal forms is justified by the fact that the verb (sometimes a technical polysemous word) has the advantage to better and powerfully express the deep meaning of a theological reality. Thus, in the case of faith for instance, since for John faith is an act, an action, a dynamic and progressive process, it is through the verbal forms of *πιστεύειν* to the detriment of the substantive *πίστις* that almost exclusively, John expresses all the participation of a believer in God's work (see Mollat 1976). Following this Johannine perspective, the recurrence and the prominence of the verbal forms in the Lazarus story constitute an important clue in guessing the state, aspect and nature of the sickness of Lazarus, and Mary and Martha's total helplessness and grief.

The first point to note about the references which allude to Lazarus's sickness is the mood and tense used by the evangelist: periphrastic imperfect (v.1), imperfect (v.2), present (v.3), present in reported speech or direct speech (v.6). The use of the indicative mood and its specific tenses is not accidental. The evangelist has done this on purpose, precisely to state that Lazarus was truly sick. For the normal use of the indicative mood is to make a statement in its reality, whether in present, future or past tense (cf. Jay 1994:15). Furthermore, in Greek, tenses express the aspect of the subject, the state or nature of the action which is accomplished or which is about to be accomplished. Thus, right from the beginning John makes a basic statement with present tense: Ἦν δέ τις ἀσθενῶν (v.1). As a verbal adjective, ἀσθενῶν qualifies the substantive that it determines: he, someone, a man, a

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Traets (1967:10) notes that "Il est péremptoire de voir que 120 verbes "voir" johanniques sont concentrés dans quelques chapitres qui respirent une ambiance visuelle: 15 fois le verbe "voir" est employé dans Jn 1,19-51; 16 fois dans Jn 9,1-41; 13 fois dans Jn 20,1-31. A cela il faut ajouter le chapitre 6 où on note 13 termes "voir" en 71 versets et 4 verbes dans les 14 versets de l'épilogue au ministère public de Jésus (12,37-50)".

certain man, Lazarus who was sick. The periphrastic imperfect emphasises and confirms the reality of Lazarus' illness, state, nature, duration or achievement of this sickness.

In fact, "the periphrastic form of the tense (at least in the Imperfect and Future) tends to emphasise the continuity of actions" (Wenham 1965:156). In other words, the present tense expresses the idea of duration or effect. This means that the moment Mary and Martha sent word to Jesus, Lazarus was effectively sick. The imperfect tense in the following verse confirms the total accomplishment of the fact, the already accomplished act - not a potency, as the not yet realized possibilities: Λάζαρος ἠσθένει. Of course, imperfect also stresses continuous or repeated nature of an action. The sickness was in an incubation period. Several indications in the text show, what was the real aspect of Lazarus' sickness: it was a fatal state. The reference to Mary's anointing of Jesus (v.2) and the sending of a word to Jesus by the two sisters emphasize this deadly situation of Lazarus.

If to be feeble or physically weak refers to sickness or to disease, then the specific nature of Lazarus' sickness still remains unknown. To be sick is not a specific medical diagnostic. The term sickness is generic. We really do not know what Lazarus' sickness was about or what he was suffering from. These questions of modern medicine were not the concern of the evangelist. As is often the case in the Bible, the evangelist was not concerned with scientific precision. His goal was not to provide the real scientific name of Lazarus' sickness in modern ways. This would, in any case, not have been possible. John was interested in Lazarus' "being" as the Mediterranean culture or the culture reflected in the New Testament conceived the principal mode of human activity (see Pilch and Bruce 1993:xxii-xxiii). The portrayal of Lazarus tended to show that Lazarus had serious problems with his health. His

health was not good. In concrete terms, the nature of Lazarus' sickness refers to the weakening of the body and this was a progressive process, a continuous and prolonged state. The mood and tenses of the text confirm the fact. Perhaps Lazarus has been given first aid, before Mary and Martha send word to Jesus.

Incidentally, as noted earlier, literally ἀσθένεια or the verb ἀσθενῶν which are used to describe Lazarus' state of health, denotes the idea of being weak, feeble, powerless or any kind of weakness that could affect a human being (Arndt and Gingrich 1952:114-115, Louw and Nida 1988: 678-679, Abbott-Smith 1937:64). In general, ἀσθενῶν can refer to a physical, spiritual, psychological, moral or even economical weakness (cf. Arndt and Gingrich 1952:115). The first meaning of Lazarus's sickness is therefore weakness. Lazarus was weak, but not an ordinary physical weakness. The context of the story indicates that it is specifically a bodily debility which clearly means that Lazarus was suffering from a real disease as any human being can suffer from any sickness. The case of his sickness was so serious that it led him to biological death. It appears that what is more important for the evangelist is not the nature of Lazarus' sickness but the purpose, the end result of this sickness, not only for Lazarus and his family but for the disciples, "the Jews" and the later Christians, for the sake of their faith. The importance of Lazarus' sickness lies in its theological importance. As for the blind man, the sickness of Lazarus provided an opportunity for God's glory to be revealed so that Christians may believe in Jesus and that their faith may not fail when they cope with this reality in their lives. Therefore, sickness has an important symbolic meaning in the Lazarus story.

4.1.2 Symbolic meaning of sickness in Lazarus' story

The literal meaning of the verb ἀσθενῶν and the substantive ἀσθένεια which refer to bodily weakness and to any kind of human frailty allows us to better consider the wider symbolic importance of the Lazarus story. In view of this wider consideration, it is justified to see in each scene and major character of the story some kind of ἀσθένεια. In addition, since John emphasized Jesus' action of strengthening the faith of his disciples which was in danger of being shaken by human weakness in the face of life trials, and to lead them to believe in himself, Son of God and Master of life, then ἀσθένεια is a key word in the Lazarus story. Symbolically it could widely be applied at different levels of the story and could suggest some particular contextual meanings.

Firstly, if Lazarus was physically sick (ἡσθένηει), Mary and Martha were affected by the sickness of their brother. In other words, they were also sick (ἡσθένουσι) or weak, powerless, disabled. They suffered from inability to cure their brother. John emphasised how ἀσθένεια overwhelmed the two sisters, especially Mary who was disabled in the house of mourning. Furthermore, John stressed the powerlessness of the two sisters through their words which they addressed to Jesus: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died" (v.21. 32). Mary and Martha's symbolic sickness was figuratively expressed in the weakness of their faith.

Indeed, in the figurative, ἄσθενῶν denotes the idea of being weak in faith, being weak of faint-heartedness and fearfulness (cf. Arndt and Gingrich 1952:115). This is the case in Romans 4:19 where ἄσθενῶν is used to portray Abraham who did not shake (ἀσθενήσας) his faith before God's promise to give him a child in his old age, and also in reference to anyone whose faith is not strong (ἀσθενοῦντα) as Romans 14:1 indicates (see Arndt and Gingrich 1952:115). The second letter to the Corinthians refers to the same verb (ἀσθενεῖ, ἀσθενῶ) to speak of the common human weakness (2 Co 11:29).

Overwhelmed by the weight of sorrow and excessive mourning, Mary failed to stand firm in her faith before the death of her brother. She kept crying, forgetting that Jesus, their friend, was the Messiah, Son of God who had the power to revive the dead, and would do so at any time when he arrived in Bethany. Martha showed the same weakness in her faith. Her faith in Jesus as the resurrection and life (v.27) was not strong and perfect. When Jesus proceeded to put the giving of life into action in the present, Martha doubted (v.39). For her, the case of her brother was irretrievable. Lazarus was beyond redemption in the here and now. Martha could not go beyond the Jewish belief of four days which confirmed the definitive departure of the soul from the body (cf. Brown 1966:424, Milne 1993:161f), and think of the resuscitation of her brother in the here and now. She also failed to believe that Jesus, as the resurrection and life, was able to bring her brother back to life here and now. Some of "the Jews" who came from Jerusalem to comfort Mary and Martha showed similar spiritual sickness. The weakness of their faith is obvious in v.37. It is emphasised by the type of their question which is introduced by Οὐκ which, of course, expects the answer 'yes' (see Wenham 1965:75).

Secondly, this figurative meaning does not apply only to Mary, Martha and some Jews but can also describe the symbolic sickness of the disciples (v.7-16). For, in the face of the danger of death in going to Judea, the disciples show the same fear and weakness in their faith; the same timidity (ἀσθένεια) as a result of a lack of confidence or that of being fearful (see Louw and Nida 1988:318; Arndt and Gingrich 1952: 114). Although the disciples are closer to Jesus, they are not exempt from human weakness (ἀσθένεια).

If Lazarus' sickness seems to be the pinnacle of bodily weakness since it leads to death, the symbolic illness of the disciples is not less important. Like Mary and Martha's weakness, it tells us much about human frailties, powerlessness, disability and fears in the face of sickness and death. Mary and Martha are weak with the sickness and death of their brother Lazarus. The disciples are weak (ἀσθένεια) with the imminent death of their master and, perhaps, with their own, if they go to Judea, the place which threatens inevitable death. Their sickness is portrayed in terms of fear, timidity, misunderstanding. John emphasises the degree of the disciples's weakness, higher than that of Mary and Martha through the irony with which he portrays the disciples in this scene. The disciples liken Lazarus' sleep to ordinary sleep and declare that since Lazarus is just asleep, he will recover (σωθήσεται, v.12), which literally means to be saved.

By a strange irony of fate, who is weak and asleep, and needs to be awakened and saved? Is it only Lazarus? With such a play of words, John insinuates that the disciples are symbolically weak and they need to be strengthened, to be awakened so that once they recover by seeing the glory of God

manifested in the raising of Lazarus and the glorification of the Son through it, they may believe and in turn strengthen their brothers and sisters. Therefore, while the light of the world, namely Jesus himself is still with them, they have to walk with him and learn from him how to control their fear and to courageously face death and life's trials.

Schnackenburg (1971:325) may be right in suggesting that John's metaphorical image does not refer to the tradition of the biblical theology but would recall Jeremiah 13:16. Yet in view of the context of Jesus' exhortation to his disciples in this scene, it is not superfluous to interpret the verb *προσκόπτω* in a Christological sense as the means of spiritual misfortune or the loss of salvation rather than a physical stumbling and falling, or an accident³⁷. In this way, if the disciples fear and refuse to walk with the Master of life and of the day and light then they refuse their own salvation. They miss discipleship and the life that Lazarus is about to receive. Then we agree with Schnackenburg (1971:325) that in this case, the disciples run into darkness and are exposed to all kinds of "danger of a much worse sort of fall, failing to attain salvation." With this interpretation, Jesus' exhortation becomes clearer. Like the Spirit who comes to help us in our weaknesses (cf. Rom 8:26), Jesus *συναντιλαμβάνεται τῇ ἀσθενείᾳ τῶν μαθητῶν*; that is, strengthening them, making up for what is incorrect, weak, fear in them and giving to them, courage, strength, hope, earnestness, sincerity and intensity. Patiently Jesus enlightens the intelligence of the disciples, strengthens their faith in trials, doubt, lack of faith, fear and opens their heart to wisdom and intelligence of God's love.

³⁷ For further details. see Schnackenburg (1971:325).

In their weakness and powerlessness Mary and Martha could not prevent Lazarus's death, neither could the disciples persuade Jesus to give up going to Judea where he had to face his death. In this way John shows that Jesus is the Master of life; he has full control of life and earthly events. With him, there is no need to be afraid of sickness and death. Like Thomas who has invited his fellow disciples to follow Jesus to Judea and to die with him, Christians are also invited to trust in Jesus, whatever the trial. To be beside Jesus brings protection and life.

4.2 Jesus' attitude towards Lazarus' sickness

There is nothing more accurate in the Lazarus story than the fact that Jesus loved Lazarus and his two sisters Mary and Martha. Jesus' love for this family is frequently and obviously emphasised. First of all, in the word that Mary and Martha send to Jesus, Lazarus is presented as the one whom Jesus loves: Κύριε, ἴδε ὃν φιλεῖς ἀσθελεῖ (v.3). In the following verses the evangelist tells us that Lazarus is the friend of Jesus and of the disciples: Λάζαρος ὁ φίλος ἡμῶν (v.11). Later, when in the context of mourning at Bethany Jesus weeps, "the well-disposed Jews" declare: Ἰδε πῶς ἐφίλει αὐτόν (v.36).

In view of such great love, one may wonder how Jesus can receive the message of Lazarus' sickness and then delay in responding to it? How can Jesus let his friend Lazarus succumb to death and allow Mary and Martha to suffer? When he received the message, not only did he remain for a further two days in the place where he was, but he also went further by saying that Lazarus' sickness was not to

end in death, but was for the glory of God and the glorification of the Son through it. Such language of Jesus was probably theologically too high for either Mary, Martha or their messengers, or the disciples to grasp. In a very human point of view, Jesus' attitude seems inadmissible, inconceivable, no more, no less. For, as a friend and God, he seems to be indifferent, distant, dwelling far from human concerns. As Brodie (1993:383) notes, "the crisis of Lazarus' sickness is all the more dramatic because Jesus' response to it seems so measured (...) There is no immediate intervention, no painless solution. The deceased is buried. Feelings vary. The days begin to pass."

Is Jesus making a mockery of sickness and death, and trivializing Mary and Martha's grief? Certainly not, especially if we refer to Jesus' answer in similar contexts i.e., his words to the plea of the royal official at the height of his distress before the critical situation of his son: "unless you see signs and portents you will not believe! (...) 'Go home, your son will live' " (4:48. 50). Even at Cana, Jesus acted almost in the same way. He was not in a hurry in responding to the plea of Mary his mother, nor scared stiff before the catastrophic situation (2:2-4). He acted in his own time following his Father's will and not any human will. Perhaps John's arrangement of the Lazarus story echoes Jesus' previous sayings in (cf. 2:18.23), or indicates a signal of rhetorical device.

However that may be, Schneiders' analysis gives us greater understanding as she suggests that the Lazarus story weaves human experience of the death of a loved one with theology and provides a framework in which the experience of this phenomenon can be integrated with faith (cf.1987:46). Thus, what seems to be Jesus' indifference, God's silence or mockery, is exactly the unsuspected plan of God, his epiphany of love in which he gives life to his own. Of course, when

someone has been left feeling totally helpless and confused, s/he feels and thinks that God is absent, silent, but in reality this is only a mere human impression. From the beginning of time God is always present and always acts. A believer cannot imagine a time being with God and a time without God. God acts in his own ways which are not only different from our thoughts, but greater than any human expectations. Therefore, although Lazarus has succumbed to the power of the tyrant of this world, Jesus tells us that sickness can never have the final say on his beloved and valued friend. Jesus' words are absolute and bring God's life-giving spirit: 'Εγώ εἰμι ἡ ἀνάστασις καὶ ἡ ζωή; and whoever believes in him, even if he succumbs to the power of sickness and dies, will be saved, he will live. Humanly speaking these sayings of Jesus are difficult to understand, but it is a matter of faith. God always keeps his promise. Life is in the present and it is given to Lazarus. Mary, Martha, the disciples and "the Jews" have seen it in the raising of Lazarus. They have seen the glory of God and of his Son through this great deed.

On the basis of this theological interpretation of God's ways of acting, one may understand that God has never been indifferent, silent or distant. He cares, but his actions cannot be a dictation of any human will, pressure or criteria. Neither at Cana (2:1-5; 4:46-54) nor in the case of Lazarus where the message of Mary and Martha reflects Mary's (the mother of Jesus) same discreet and implicit request (2:3), Jesus never acts under pressure. Perhaps Mary and Martha had this in mind when they sent word. They might also have been aware of Jesus' second sign in Cana, where he cured the son of the royal official, only by means of his word, without his physical presence being necessary (cf. 4:48-54).

Love, patience, confidence and faith are the important attitudes needed to see God's work. It is faith as Jesus reminds Martha (v.40) that allows a person to see the glory of God. Jesus' love for Lazarus and his family is not hypocritical nor a comedy but true and deep. His delay does not contradict his love, his teachings, his divinity and his mission; it authenticates John's portrayal of Jesus and reinforces his theological perspective. In fact, a close examination of Jesus' important acts in John's gospel always let us foresee a certain delay, refusal or moment's suspense in responding to human pleas. This is the case at Cana (2:1-5), in the healing of the son of the royal official (4:46-54) or in responding to his brothers in Galilee (7:2-6). These references, including the case of the Lazarus story (11:1-7) support our hypothesis that delays are an important feature of the Johannine Jesus and theology. Actually, as Schneiders indicates, "The purpose of these refusals and/or delays in Jesus' response is to emphasize the sovereign independence of Jesus' action in relation to human initiative (1987:47). The delays of Jesus are an integral part of his acts in John's gospel. They seem to be practically inevitable and to constitute the normal way of God's acting. It is then worth hastening to grasp their theological importance and message.

4.2.1 Theological importance of Jesus' delays

The delays of Jesus convey a message of confidence, encouragement, hope, faith and love, namely, God's plans and all his works for human beings are faithful, loving and trustworthy. To shed light on our minds and better integrate Jesus' delays in the Lazarus story or God's delays in general, we may refer to Milne's edifying approach. For him, the difficulty of understanding God's delays is the fact of our human nature, and for good reason!

We are mere finite creatures. we are necessarily largely unaware of the circumstances which surround the events taking place in our lives and those of others. as well as the consequences which result from guarantee that we would choose only what was for highest good for ourselves and others. Our imperfect desires make us want immediate answers. Only God is omniscient. Further, since our desires are not fully renewed. even if we were aware of all the implications. there is no render us unprepared for the patient ripening of God's plan (Milne 1993:160).

In addition, Milne emphasises that wherever Jesus is, he loves us fully and as truly, whenever he remains in Transjordan, ministering to others' needs, as when he journeys to Bethany to minister to ours. He would insist that God has his due time and his delays are final. And also, God is the best of time-keepers. He created time; he is never late for his appointments (1993:160).

In view of the several references to time that we find in Lazarus' story: two days (v.6), twelve hours (v.9), four days (v.39), it is justifiable to imagine that the issue of Jesus' delay highly emphasised reflects some background of the crisis of faith in Jesus that the Johannine community was experiencing. This is an unquestionable fact. Jesus' delays are a crucial issue of the Lazarus story which identifies and supports the hypothesis of the existence of some major problem in the Johannine community. But, what are the nature and the meaning of the Johannine problem, and where lies the focus of the Johannine perspective in describing Jesus' delay in the Lazarus story?

As Schneiders has clearly noted, while the delay of Jesus in coming to Lazarus might suggest the concern of the early church about the delay of the parousia and the fate of Christians who die before the second coming of Christ, this problem, although real was not the primary concern of the Johannine community (cf. 1987:47). The theological nature and meaning of Jesus' delay in the Lazarus story "is not the delay of the parousia but the real meaning of death and life, of the absence and presence of Jesus" (Ibid.:48). As for Jesus' delays in the episode of Lazarus, they recall "the pattern that can be observed in his [Jesus] response to his mother in chapter 2, to the royal official in chapter 4, and to his brothers in chapter 7" (Ibid.:47).

The theological importance of Jesus' delays which emphasizes the sovereign authority and independence of Jesus' acts in relation to human will throws light on the second important theological issue which is linked to Jesus' delays, namely the presence / absence of Jesus. The message of the elusiveness of Jesus is also clear, deep and relevant for each believer: "The death of the beloved, and the absence of the Lord, are real, but they are neither ultimate nor final"(Schneiders1987:56). In other words, "Jesus' physical separation from those he loves is not to be understood as complete absence. Jesus, though physically at a distance, knows everything that concerns Lazarus: the true significance of his illness (11:4-5) and the fact of his death (11:14)" (Ibid.:51). Jesus' apparent absence or delay at Bethany which we describe as God's silence and indifference then, seems insignificant. It does not betray Jesus' love, authority and almighty power, as the parenthetical verse 5 would insinuate. The paradox maintained by this problematic verse vanishes, for it is really by the power of love that Jesus will defeat death. Thus, "not only is absence compatible with love, it can even be the expression of love" (Schneiders 1987:51). Love is more powerful than death. Without love Jesus would not be

motivated to go to Judea to perform the sign which would lead him to his own death. But because of love, he takes the initiative to go to Mary, Martha and Lazarus, despite the threat of death and the contrary opinion of his disciples.

The theological importance of Jesus' delays and his absence/presence justifies Jesus' teaching, encouragements, comfort and strengthening of the faith of the disciples in the Lazarus story. However in life's trials the disciple must stand firm, remain strong, confident and must always be ready to meet the Lord when he comes in his own time and way. In fact, following John's perspective of realized eschatology, it is in the here and now that the disciple must respond to God's active presence, love and any initiative for Jesus "has never really been absent" (Schneiders 1987:51). It is in the present, in the here and now that Jesus gives life. With this proviso, let us now see how John does portray human response to God's initiative in the Lazarus story?

4.2.2 Human response to God's initiative

Brodie (1993:386) writes, "as well as portraying the role of God, God's self-revealing in Jesus, chapter 11 is also concerned with human response, and that response is portrayed largely through the figures of Martha and Mary." In the preceding chapter I have largely commented on Martha and Mary's attitude expressed in the ways they approached the reality of sickness and death. Now I would like to tackle other aspects of their response to God's self-revealing and extend my analysis to the other characters in the story. I would like to focus my attention on the importance of movement in the story, both physical and spiritual. Human reaction is described in terms of movement. We have noticed that

in each scene of the story Jesus always stands at a certain distance. He takes the first step toward the needy person and then he stops, waiting for a human response, the reaction of the one who expects help from him. As an excellent illustration of divine solicitude in this specific context, we may refer to the paralysed man at the pool of Bethesda (5:1-9) and the blind man (9:1-12).

For thirty eight years, the paralysed man of the pool of Bethesda has been waiting in vain for healing, trying unsuccessfully to be the first into the pool when the water is troubled. When Jesus saw this man and, surely, might know the difficulties which prevented him to try his luck for a miraculous healing, Jesus first required the man's will, the clear expression of his freedom and intention to be healed. He asked him if he really wished to get well: "Do you want to be healed?" As Draper has rightly noted, in doing this Jesus "puts the emphasis on the will of the person concerned. Do you lie there blaming everyone else and waiting for someone to do something for you, or are you willing to take responsibility for your condition? Do you make yourself a victim, a passive object of the will of others, or do you make yourself the subject of your own life?" (1999:45). In sending the blind man to go and wash in the Pool of Siloam (9:7), Jesus expected the same attitude, the same move, freedom and responsibility from the blind man. In both cases Jesus challenged the beneficiaries of his work to move, to take the responsibility of their life and healing³⁸.

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The Synoptic Gospels report the same tradition where Jesus asked the sick before he cured them: "What do you want me to do for you?" (Mt 20:29-34; Mk 10:46-52; Lk 18:35-43). To confirm the quality of their faith, sometimes Jesus added this question: "Do you believe that I can do this?" (Mt 9:28). Likewise, in the Book of Revelation, God stands at the door and knocks. If any one hears his voice and opens the door he will enter his house and dine with him, and he with Jesus (Rev.3:20).

Our examples show that at the starting point of our initiatives and in all our actions and trials, God is always present and shows us his love. God's love comes before everything because he first loved us and sent his only Son into the world so that we might have life through him (1Jn 4: 9.19). In the Lazarus story, this statement finds a particular echo, for Jesus, truly, takes the initiative to go to Lazarus, to give him life. Mary and Martha understood this because they first responded to God's initiative revealed through the love he had for them, by sending word to Jesus when their brother Lazarus fell sick. This action of Mary and Martha to turn first toward Jesus was an excellent example and model of the human response to God's initiative.

Actually, what we usually see in the case of sickness and death, in some African cultures is totally different from Mary and Martha's Christian perspective. Very often when a dear one is sick, the family first looks for home-made cures, then consults doctors. When doctors can do nothing, parents and relatives turn to religion. They pray to God, being sure that if he loves them, he will certainly come to assist and maybe even work a miracle (cf. *The African Bible* 1999, comment on 11:1-16). Although in both examples there is a sense of movement, the context of the two situations is completely different. Different also is John's perspective of movement in Lazarus' story in the specific context of the early Church.

4.2.3. The symbolic importance of the movement in the Lazarus story

John's perspective of the human response is rooted in the context of the crisis of faith in Jesus that his community was experiencing. Thus, his emphasis on the importance of the movement that Christians

may make, reflects his theological perspective and purpose. In view of this theological concern, Lazarus' story is conceived as dialogue between God and human beings, a journey, as I earlier noted. The dynamic plot of the story is marked by the verbs of movement, actions directed towards Jesus who controls all events, and the recurrence of the imperative "let us go" (ἄγωμεν). In different ways, the reactions of the major characters in the story, especially Mary, Martha and the disciples, represent a human response to God's progressive revealing. All the characters in the story had to move from one stage to another, to leave from one place to another, to walk after Jesus, following his steps and movements. Having sent word, Mary and Martha had to leave their house of mourning to move towards Jesus, to meet him when he entered the village. The disciples had to give up their fear, to leave the other side of the Jordan and to go with Jesus to Judea.

ἄγωμεν... (v.7), is the first important invitation to movement. As a Teacher and Master, Jesus takes the initiative, he invites his disciples to go back to Judea. The scene let us foresee clear progression in the movement. While Jesus involves his disciples in the move to Judea, these ones relate the departure to Jesus alone: "You want to go back there?" - ὑπάγεις (v.8). Then Jesus speaks in general terms involving anyone: τις περιπατῆ (v.9-10). After saying all this, Jesus affirms his authority and full autonomy of his acts: "I am going to awaken him" - ποπέυομαι ἵνα ἐξυπνίσω αὐτόν (v.11). When the disciples realize that Jesus is speaking about Lazarus' death, they respond to the second invitation of their Master, ἄγωμεν πρὸς αὐτόν (v.15). They enter into the movement, they agree to move, to leave where they are, to give up their stage of fear and

to move to another stage. Their attitude has immediately changed and their language can be interpreted as follows: Let us move from this place, let us move from this stage where we feel comfortable, but also where we are now being overwhelmed by fear, paralysis, and let us go to Judea to give life and to receive life. Strange as it may seem, on behalf of his fellow disciples, Thomas echoes solemnly a human response which gives the true and deep meaning of a disciple: “Let us also go to die with him” - Ἔγωμεν καὶ ἡμεῖς ἵνα ἀποθάνωμεν μετ’ αὐτοῦ (v.16).

Commenting on Thomas’ answer in response to Jesus’ decision, Schneiders argues that “The grammatical antecedent of ‘with him’ is Lazarus, although the meaning is clearly ‘with Jesus’ who will surely be arrested if he returns to Judea” (1987:50). She goes on and asserts that, “In fact, of course, both meanings are intended. The disciples, like the raised Lazarus, will become targets of persecution unto death because of their relation with Jesus (cf. 12:9-11); but their resulting deaths will be death with Jesus, that is, death which glorifies them by glorifying God” (Ibid.:50). As we shall see later, this is the meaning of the death of the disciples.

When Jesus arrived (Ἐλθὼν) somewhere in Bethany and Martha heard (ἤκουσεν) that he was coming to their home (ἔρχεται), she responded to his presence. She went to meet him: ὑπήντησεν αὐτῷ (v.20). Having been freed from the weight of her sorrows and griefs, thanks to her encounter and dialogue with Jesus, in a very Johannine perspective of the mission of a disciple-apostle, Martha abandons her overwhelming life at the feet of Jesus and goes joyfully to her sister Mary to invite her to stop mourning and to move towards Jesus. Martha went and called her sister

Mary (ἀπῆλθεν καὶ ἐφώνησεν) to tell her that Jesus was asking her (v.28), to leave her mourning and to abandon that stage which destabilized her person, all her energies, and to move forward. Martha's gesture is meaningful. It appears like a sign which invites and challenges Mary to surpass herself and to overcome her distress. In other words, Martha's message challenges Mary to go beyond her sorrows and to come out of her crisis.

Of course, as soon as Mary heard (ἤκουσεν) this propelling message, she rose quickly and went to meet Jesus: ἤκουσεν ἠγέρθη ταχὺ καὶ ἦρχετο πρὸς αὐτόν (v.29). It is worth stressing that the response of the two sisters follows the same movement. John describes it with the same vocabulary. Both Martha and Mary heard (ἤκουσεν) something of Jesus. Both made the same movement, followed the same route. They moved from their house of mourning and went to meet Jesus at the same place, at the entrance of the village. Martha and Mary's response reflects John's theological perspective which considers human participation in God's work as a dynamic step, movement and action. John expresses this dynamic move by using powerful interactions such as "come and see" (v.32.34.45), "believe and see" (v.25-27), "if you believe you will see the glory of God" (v.40), "see and believe" (v.45). As well as these classical interactions, in the Lazarus story the human response is also described by the pairs of verbs "hear and go" or "hear and move" towards Jesus; or again, leave, give up and go meet Jesus. Even the dead man follows the same principle. Jesus raised Lazarus by calling him. Jesus stood out of the tomb at a certain distance and then he called the dead man to come out. When the dead man heard the voice of Jesus, he came out. He left his grave and moved towards where Jesus was. When Lazarus came out and remained tied by the world of

death , Jesus gives orders to untie him so that he may now totally be freed from the links of death and may move, act and live. .

It is interesting to see that even “the Jews,” both the Judaeen authorities, the “ill-disposed Jews,” and the ordinary people, the “well-disposed Jews,” are involved in the movement. They have left Jerusalem and have come to Bethany to comfort Mary and Martha (v.19). At Bethany, they all give way to the movement of Mary, they follow her and come to encounter Jesus. Initially engaged to give support to Mary, their movement leads them, unexpectedly to meet Jesus and to witness the glory of God and the Son through the raising of Lazarus in their presence. Since “to comfort” also refers to a kind of sympathy, the “well-disposed Jews” share a true affinity with Mary and Martha. They come to be like them, to resemble them, to suffer with them, to feel compassion and to share their feelings and sorrows. In this way, one may understand how in Bethany, the “well-disposed Jews” get mixed in the movement of Mary. Their sympathy moves them to act as one person, following Mary as she goes to meet Jesus, though they think that she was going to the tomb to cry (v.31). But there, God surprises them. Their innocent movement leads them to the unexpected event: the meeting with Jesus and the seeing of God’s glory through the raising of Lazarus. The end result of their introduction into Mary’s step is the joyful event of their faith. John concludes that “many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what he did, believed in him” (v.45).

While the Judaeen authorities (the ill-disposed Jews) are also involved in the movement after Mary, they do not follow their move; they are not open to God’s initiative. Therefore they cannot achieve their process in terms of human response to God’s initiative. Although they see the great deed that

Jesus has performed, they do not believe. To the contrary, they seek to disturb Jesus and go to the Pharisees and report what Jesus has done. This is exactly the typical attitude that characterises “the Jews” or the Judaeen authorities in John’s gospel, namely their refusal to hear, to trust Jesus and to believe in him, their retreat, rejection and hostility. This they show at Bethany and provoke Jesus’ anger.

It seems clear to me that the portrayal of “the Jews” symbolizes two different human responses to God’s initiative, in the same way we see the two different attitudes in the face of death, in the characters of Mary and Martha. The “well-disposed Jews” belong to those who symbolize the genuine human response to God’s initiative. The Judaeen authorities, the “ill-disposed Jews” represent those who do not respond to God’s initiative, the unbelievers, the opponents of Christian faith.

The last thing to signal the symbolic importance of the movement in the Lazarus story is the fact that, once Martha, Mary and “the Jews” who follow her, all move toward Jesus and see him, the move of the human response reaches its objective. Then, strangely, it is these believers who now invite Jesus to come into the village and see where Lazarus is laid. In other words, since the long and dynamic step of the human response has come to the end, Jesus can now come into the village to reveal the glory of God so that the move and the faith of these believers can become complete. Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead, and Mary, Martha, the disciples and “the Jews” see the glory of God and believe, except the Judaeen authorities who now move in the opposite direction, away from Jesus into the darkness away from life and towards death. At the spiritual level, this move has been a passage from fear to confidence, from incorrect to correct faith, from death to life.

4.3 Death in the Lazarus story

Right from the beginning and throughout the text, John surrounds the Lazarus story with elements referring to the reality of death and, particularly, points towards Jesus' death. It follows that the story as a whole deals with the issue of death at different levels and meanings: the death of Jesus, the death of Lazarus, the death of the disciples. As Brodie (1993:386) points out, in each of the major scenes of the story "there is first a sense of Jesus' power over death, then, in ways that are increasingly easier to understand, there is a sense that a hidden dimension is being revealed, and finally an increasing sense of Jesus' involvement in the full painful reality of death." In this view, one may wonder what John's purpose is in portraying Lazarus' sickness, death and raising in connection with Jesus' death? What does Jesus' death mean in the context of the Lazarus story and what light does it shed on Lazarus' death and the biblical approach to this phenomenon in order to better understand it?

4.3.1 Jesus' death in the context of the Lazarus story

The first mention of death in the Lazarus story refers to Jesus. Just after the statement which announces the sickness of Lazarus (v.1), the reader is immediately brought to a new context and subject: the anointing of Jesus' feet by Mary (v.2). The evangelist shifts one's attention from Lazarus' sickness to this new issue, as he suddenly introduces it, without a transition³⁹. Should one consider v. 2 as a later addition or Burkett's hypothesis (1994) of the combination of two distinct accounts in

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Although verse 2 seems to be an editorial insertion, in the present form of the Lazarus story, this reference constitutes an important clue that helps the reader to get the importance of the symbolic meaning of the story and John's purpose.

Lazarus' present story, the reference to Jesus' death remains, and it is connected with the threat of the stoning (v.8). The placing of this reference at the beginning of the story functions not only to indicate the deadly state of Lazarus' sickness but also to set it in its appropriate context, that of the death of Jesus, and to provide an initial intimation that the story as a whole is focussed towards Jesus' death, particularly towards the concluding plan to kill him (cf. Brodie 1993:387). Indeed, thus far, the anointing of Jesus' feet has not taken place. The event will only happen in the following chapter (12:3) after the decision of the Sanhedrin to kill Jesus (12:47-53). But as Brown (1966:454) notes, this action of Mary's anointing of Jesus is an "unconscious prophecy of Jesus' death". It prefigures the day of the true embalming of Jesus (cf. 12:7) that looms on the horizon.

This mention of Jesus' death is consequently not clumsily placed or devoid of interest within the Lazarus story. On the contrary, it has a crucial meaning. The immediately preceding and following context of the Lazarus story, the purpose of Lazarus' sickness which is expressed in verse 4 and the insight of the climactic verse of the story that brings out Jesus' saying, namely, "I am the resurrection and life"(v.25), suggest the deeper theological import of the reference to Jesus' death. In fact, Jesus' purpose in going to Judea is not first justified by the need and urgency of helping Lazarus. The discussion with his disciples (v. 7-10) allows us to foresee that Jesus is going to Judea to face his death. Even when in the second part of the debate (v.11-15) the mention of helping (awakening Lazarus) occurs, the result of this action will be the plot to kill Jesus (see Brown 1966). Judea is characterised by the hostility of "the Jews", and the image of stoning threatens the imminence of Jesus' death.

Furthermore, it is worth stressing that, although in the preceding chapters “violence and death have been in the air, and Jesus has spoken about his being ‘lifted up’ (3:14; 8:28), the inevitable end to the story of Jesus, his death by crucifixion, has been an undercurrent through the narrative thus far” (Moloney 1998:322). In this section which begins with the Lazarus story (11:1- 12:50), it moves to a centre stage because “although thinly veiled references to the death of Jesus have studded the narrative, the verb ‘to die’ (*apothneskein*) has never been associated with Jesus” (Ibid.:322). But in the Lazarus story “it appears for the first time in Thomas’s words in 11:16, and regularly from that point on (11:50-51; 12:24.33)” (Idem: 322). The following chapters will progressively and openly develop this issue. After the preparation of Jesus’ body for the day of his burial (12:1-8), Jesus enters Jerusalem (12:9-19) where, with the arrival of the Greeks wishing to see him (12:20-22), he will finally announce, for the first time, that the hour has now come, for the Son of Man to be glorified (12:23).

As Draper (2000:358) notes, “This comes at the end of a chain of pronouncements that ‘my hour has not yet come’, ‘his hour was not yet’ (2:4, 7:30, 8:20), and begins a new series of pronouncements affirming that the hour has come (12:23, 27; 13:1; 17:1) and that this hour is the hour of Jesus’ suffering/ glorification on the cross.” In other words, the hour of Jesus refers to Jesus’ own “laying down” of his life which is also a “lifting up” or glorification on the cross (12:32). Furthermore, “This ‘hour’ represents a moment of Judgement (*νῦν κρίσις ἐστὶν τοῦ κόσμου τούτου*) because the ruler of the world has been displaced by Jesus as king, which is symbolized by the coming of the ‘world’ to seek Jesus in 12:19-22” (Draper 2000:358).

In establishing a causal relationship between the raising of Lazarus and Jesus' death, John's intent is not to prove some historical reminiscence but to emphasise the symbolic importance of the miracle in the coming of the hour of Jesus - the hour of his lifting up on the cross and resurrection, in which he will draw all human beings to himself to give them life. If at Cana Jesus' hour had not come (2:4b), the hour of the lifting up of the Son of Man, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life (3:14-15), the climactic story of the raising of Lazarus which marks not only the end of the public ministry of Jesus but also the pivotal sign in the plot of the Gospel, inaugurates it. The Lazarus miracle introduces a series of events which lead to this hour of the glorification of the Son of God, so that after Lazarus, everyone may have the same life that Jesus gave to Lazarus. In this way, Jesus' death is more than a mere biological death.

Jesus' death is a substitutionary death which breaks the power of death in all its varied and complex aspects and meanings. In John's Gospel, Jesus death is introduced by the preposition *u(pe/r* followed by the genitive. In this case, *ὑπέρ* denotes the moving cause or the reason of an event and expresses the idea of benefaction (cf. Arndt and Gingrich 1952:846, Louw and Nida 1988 :802-803). In other words, *ὑπέρ* with the genitive indicates the happy beneficiary on whose behalf an event takes place.

As the parable of the Gate and the Good Shepherd (10:1-21) indicates, Jesus lays down his life not because of his self-seeking motive or fulfilment of any human will (the Jews) but only as the fulfilment of the Father's will. Jesus has the power to lay down his life on his own and the power to take it up again (10:18b). No one can take it from him unless the Father wills it so for the sake of all human beings. For it is for this reason Jesus that came, so that the sheep may know him and he may know

his sheep. He calls each by name and they listen to his voice so that they might have life and have it more abundantly (10:10). In this metaphorical language, the laying down of his life refers both to Jesus' death as the means of gaining life and bringing life to all persons (cf. 12:32). The life that Jesus lays down is his ψυχή. As for ζωή, the life that he gives to Lazarus and to the other sheep, no one can take it from him because it is an eternal attribute of the Word who is with God and is God. This death of Jesus which is expressed through the image of the lifting up and the parable of the Good Shepherd laying down his life for his sheep, has much in common with the parable of the grain of wheat or the image of the Lamb of God. Like the Good Shepherd who gives life to his sheep by laying down his life the grain of wheat produces much fruit and gives life when, once it falls to the ground, does not remain but dies (12:24).

As Draper highlights, obviously the metaphor of the grain of wheat or the "holy seed" in John 12:24 "could only apply to Jesus himself as the seed which has life in itself and which falls to ground and dies, thus bearing much fruit" (2000:357). Draper would emphasise that "The image of the seed applies only to him [Jesus], since he is the only one who has life inherent within him and can bear much fruit if he lays down his biological life" (Ibid.:357). The metaphor of death in the Lazarus story clearly locates the precise Johannine perspective of death and guides our approach of this dreadful phenomenon. It is on the death of Jesus that the reader bases the definition and understanding of death. The death of Jesus throws light on the death of Lazarus and helps the reader to get the Johannine meaning of death. Jesus' death clarifies the understanding and definition not only of Lazarus but of all the complexity and mystery which surrounds this phenomenon.

4.3.2 Lazarus' death

The second mention of death refers to Lazarus. Jesus announces the death of Lazarus in two ways: one, metaphorically (v.11) and two, clearly (v.14). Prior to these references, Jesus has alluded to death when he has indicated the purpose of Lazarus' sickness: "this sickness is not to end in death" (v.4). In the context of this verse, it is quite difficult to know if the disciples and / or the messengers of Mary and Martha have heard this first mention of death; for according to the form of the verb ($\epsilon\acute{\iota}\pi\epsilon\nu$), Jesus' saying is not addressed to the disciples, neither to the messengers, nor to Jesus himself. There is no indication to whom he addressed his words.

The misunderstanding of Jesus' metaphorical language shows that the disciples have missed the starting point of Jesus' gradual explanation of Lazarus' death in a spiritual way. As they have missed the entry into Jesus' world of thinking, the disciples understand Jesus' words literally. When Jesus speaks of Lazarus' death in terms of sleep and his resuscitation as to awake him (v.11), the disciples think of ordinary restful sleep and natural awaking. They objected, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover" (v.12). Since in all likelihood the disciples had in mind that Lazarus was sleeping and the worst stage of his sickness had passed, and now he would gradually get better, they refer straight to $\sigma\acute{\omega}\zeta\omega$ in its mere secular usage with the meaning "to recover from sickness" (cf. Newman and Nida 1980:360).

If one refers to the Hebrew and Greek worlds, the disciples' failure to grasp Jesus' metaphorical language seems quite understandable, for secular and LXX use the verb to sleep as a euphemism for

death (cf. Brown 1966:423, note on v.12). However, in Hebrew we also find some uses of this euphemism (2Kg 14:22). This way of expressing death as sleep was not common. Jesus' metaphorical language in Lazarus' story (v.11-12), as well as in the synoptic gospels (Mk5:39) set the trend for later typical Christian tradition. The verb κοιμάω which is used to announce Lazarus' death is the same that is used in other different cases of death reported in the NT, namely ἐκοιμήθη, for Stephen (Act 7:60) and David (Acts 13:36). In Mt 27:52 it is said that πολλὰ σώματα τῶν κεκοιμημένων ἁγίων ἠγέρθησαν, and 1Th 4:13f speaks of τῶν κοιωμένων (see Wescott 1908:84).

In relation to the context of these references, we come to understand Lazarus' falling asleep (κεκοίμηται) as a "continuous state" (Ibid.:85). This sleep of Lazarus was completely different from the image of sleep of the wicked man in Is 14:8; 43:17, where there was no possibility of rising. The sleep of Lazarus was a passing stage. Like many of those who sleep in the dust of earth (Dn 12:2) or Stephen who fell sleep (Acts 7:60) and the dead of 1Th 4:13, a euphemism for death is a sleep with a waking. All these people, including Lazarus, shall come back to life. This is the very expression of resurrection (see Wescott 1908).

As Milne (1993:161) has noted, a closer study of the traditional Christian background for sleeping language for death shows that the metaphor does not imply the end of all consciousness immediately after death. In the Bible, sleep as a natural fact is not a negative experience but an active one. It is a privileged moment to receive God's revelation through dreams and visions (cf. Gn 28:11-15; Dn 7:1f;

Mt 1:20). In addition, “primarily, ‘sleep’ implies the truth of the recovery of consciousness after death (Ibid.; 161). Yet, the case of Lazarus is beyond this ordinary experience. If Jesus firstly announces Lazarus’ death in metaphorical terms , in v. 14 he clearly states that “Λάζαρος ἠπέθανεν”. The aorist tense of the indicative of ἠπέθανεν indicates the total accomplishment of the action. Here, having died (ἠπέθανεν) marks the “single point of change” (Wescott 1908:85). Lazarus has passed away. He has stopped existing on this earth. He has been buried, started to decompose and to stink. Several indications show that Lazarus was truly dead biologically: four days in the tomb, burial, scent, mourning mood, tears, comfort, burial-clothes and all the vocabulary referring to death, namely the word θάνατος (v.4.13), τετελευτηκότος (v.39), τεθνηκώς (v.44) and the verb ἀποθνήσκω (v.14.21.25.26).

While the mention of four days in the tomb (v.17.39), relates to the physical decomposition, it also recalls the Jewish belief which asserts that in the three days that follows death, the soul of the deceased person continues to hover over the body with the hope to enter again. But on the fourth day, since the decomposition of the body had commenced and the body had begun to stink, all hope of rising again is gone. The soul, then, goes away, abandoning the body to its sad fate (see Brown 1966:424, Milne 1993:161f). Martha’s words echo this belief when she objects to Jesus by saying: “Lord, by now there will be a stench; he has been dead for four days” (v.39).

As Schneiders (1987:49) has noted, if in the New Testament, the metaphor of sleep is not an attempt to describe the state of the deceased in the after life but to affirm that death is temporary because,

finally, it will be overcome by the resurrection of Jesus, in John there is a somewhat different emphasis. Of course, the typically Johannine irony with which the disciples answer Jesus, “If he has fallen asleep [or died] he will get well get well [or be saved]” (11:12), let us foresee the Christian understanding of death as passage. But at this stage, one may wonder if the disciples, like Caiphas later (11: 49-50) are aware of the true meaning of their statement. The context proves the contrary as the clarification of the evangelist shows in the immediately following verses: “Now Jesus had spoken of [Lazarus’] death, but [the disciples] thought that he meant taking rest in sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, ‘Lazarus is dead’” (11:13-14). Schneiders concludes that “this almost brutal announcement serves to correct any tendency to see death as illusory or unreal. Human death is brutally real. Referring to it as sleep is not recourse to euphemism to soften or disguise its reality” (1987:49).

When Jesus said that Lazarus’ death was not to end in death (v.4), he did not deny or trivialize the reality of death but he spoke of the fatal death which refers to the definitive loss of salvation, as the means of the frequent use of *προσκόπτειν*. As a human being, Lazarus could not escape from biological death and, in this way, his sickness was not the consequence of someone else’s sin. Neither Lazarus nor his sisters or relatives could have committed such a sin that would cause bodily death. It was so and Jesus delayed so that the works of God might be made visible through his resuscitation from the dead. Lazarus’ sickness provided the opportunity to deliver human beings from everlasting death and give them life in the present. In other words, by letting Lazarus die, Christians must understand that Jesus did not come to prevent physical death or to make biological life eternal. Jesus came to give us another life, life which “becomes a symbol, standing for life in its fulness and of new

wanted to follow Jesus. The “whoever” is inclusive. It is applied to everybody without distinction, and the Twelve were the first to experience the fact. The disciples had still to understand this experience and teach the lesson to others.

Through the representative figure of Thomas, John expresses not only the fear of the Twelve in the face of death, their misunderstanding of the meaning of their discipleship but also of each disciple, each Christian. In this scene, John shows the importance and the meaning of the inevitable death of those who seek Jesus in truth, those who choose him and believe in him as the Messiah, Son of God and the Master of life. One may also notice the importance of all the titles of Jesus in the pericope of the Lazarus story as a whole: κύριε (v. 2.3.12. 21. 27. 32. 34. 39), ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ (v. 4.27), ῥαββί (v.8), ἐγὼ εἰμι ἡ ἀνάστασις (v.25), ὁ διδάσκαλος (v.28). Marchadour highlights that the skilfulness of the narrator is to mingle an available title for each reader, everyone must be a disciple and, in practice, “Let us go” illustrates that being a disciple implies listening to the Master and walking after him unto death (cf. 1992:151). All the titles show that Jesus is the Master of life, that is, the one who is and who has life inherent within him, and the one who causes believers to life again (see Newman and Nida 1980: 363). For John death is the prerequisite to life. If Jesus has accepted death in order to give us life, the disciple of Jesus cannot escape death any more than his master. On the contrary, death becomes the passage through which s/he receives eternal life.

Knowing human frailty, especially in the face of death, Jesus handles his disciples carefully. He evokes the image of light and darkness, and the power of love which helps who to face even in the most

quality” (Suggit 1993:96), that will have no end. All those who are born from above receive this life (ζωή) and will never lose it. Lazarus provides a key symbol of the power and the meaning of Christ as ‘Εγώ εἰμι ἡ ἀνάστασις καὶ ἡ ζωή and to grasp the meaning of the death of the disciples in the light of Jesus’ death.

4.3.3 The death of the disciples

The surprising statement of Thomas in which he courageously invites his fellow disciples to go with Jesus to Judea to die with him (11:16), brings us to the third aspect of death: the death of the disciples. As an expression of wishes, Thomas’ statement includes a purpose clause. This purpose clause is introduced by the particle ἵνα followed by the subjunctive: ἵνα ἀποθάνωμεν. Indeed, although ἵνα also introduces command and expresses content, its normal use is to introduce final or purpose clauses, the verb of the final clause being the subjunctive as it is here (see Jay 1994:236-238, Louw and Nida 1988:783, 785). In the Gospels, the call of Jesus to follow him denotes the idea of coming and dying. The synoptic tradition precisely teaches that whoever wishes to come after Jesus must deny himself, take up his cross and follow him (Mt 10:38-39; 16:24-27; Mk 8:34; Lk 14:26-27).

For John it is imperative for the disciple to hate his life in this world if he wishes to receive eternal life (12:25-26). The hesitation and fear of the disciples to go back to Judea and risk their lives show that the disciples did not get Jesus’ teaching that to follow him means to be ready for death. The disciples might have thought that this teaching of Jesus concerned only those in the crowd who

difficult of situations. Let us go (ἄγωμεν) to Judea where Λάζαρος ὁ φίλος ἡμῶν κεκοίμηται. Perfect love dispels fear. Death is like night and Jesus drives it away from the disciples by inviting them to walk in the day so that they may not stumble. Though the light of the world may refer to the sun, symbolically it represents Jesus, the true light of the world. In addition, as Brodie (1993:391) states, if the ordinary meaning of light refers to Jesus, the deeper one refers to the disciples, “to those who, when challenged to travel towards death, cannot meet the challenge; they stumble.” Therefore, while the disciples still have light they have to walk. Jesus’ attitude shows that “the will of his Father not human volition, controls life and death” (Schneiders 1987:49). In view of the imminent death of Jesus, this teaching looks like an initiation, a training of the disciples so that after the glorification of their Master, they may be able to face death and to strengthen those who stumble in the face of death.

By initiation of the disciples I would like to emphasize the importance of the remarkable work of Jesus in instructing and preparing his disciples to face the reality of death and take their responsibility of discipleship for the same mission of instructing, comforting, strengthening the faith of the believers, serving and loving one another. In short, Jesus whom they call “Teacher” and “Master” has given them a model to follow, so that as he has done for them, they should also do (cf.13:13-15). Indeed, preparation is the fundamental feature which characterizes any initiation, as well as the notions of instruction, stages, passage, progress, newness, joining a group or beginning a new life, following a model, maturity, responsibility, which are also present in the context of Jesus with his disciples. All things considered, I compare the particular situation of the disciples in the Lazarus story as a true stage of initiation, a passage, a beginning (*initium*) of a new life, an introduction into a new way of

living and thinking (see *Théo.1992:49.945* for basic meaning of initiation). The disciples are instructed and introduced in the secrets of hidden things, the mystery of death and life, and prepared to share in the life of the Master, in his death and glorification.

4.4 Causality of sickness and death

The issues of sickness and death are connected to the knotty and eternal question of the origin of these phenomena. Is God the source of sickness and death? Are they natural phenomena or the consequences of a human act or a curse? If in Lazarus' story these questions are not put directly, they may be suggested, at least, implicitly. Jesus' statement (11:3) recalls the episode of the blind man in chapter 9, where the disciples questioned Jesus about the cause of the infirmity of the man. Was the man born blind because of the sin of others? "Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (9:2), asked the disciples. Jesus answer was clear. The sickness of the man was not the result of human fault. Neither he, nor his parents sinned. The man was born blind so that the work of God might be made visible through him (9:3). Perhaps the disciples still had this in mind and that is why they did not ask the same question about Lazarus' sickness.

Indeed, the question of the cause or origin of death is one of the major issues of the Lazarus story. Throughout the pericope, particularly "In the opening and closing scenes death is examined in its origin or cause, its nature as human experience and spiritual reality, and its finality or purpose" (Schneiders 1987:48). Like in the episode of the blind man, the most fundamental concern about Lazarus' sickness and death falls on the author or origin of death: who or what causes death? As

Schneiders rightly notes, “Jesus’ statement, which is plainly contrary to the phenomenological facts since Lazarus’ illness will lead to his own death and eventually to Jesus’ death, opens up an ambiguity in the word ‘death’ by calling radically into question its presumed univocal reference to the end of earthly life. In some cases, what Lazarus will undergo as result of natural causes and what Jesus will undergo as a result of human malice is not death” (Ibid.:48-49).

Following Jesus’ statement and John’ theological perspective, we can suggest that, in counting the Lazarus story, John intended to emphasize that, “whatever death means, nature and human intention cannot be regarded as its ultimate causes because what they bring about is in some sense not death; and they cannot bring about death at all except according to God’s will and design” (Schneiders 1987:49). This argument is supported by the theological meaning of the Lazarus story as a whole which I would like to summarize now by way of conclusion to this chapter.

4.5 Conclusion

The raising of Lazarus from the dead is regarded as a great deed, a pivotal sign, a climactic sign or the culmination of the signs not because of the richness of John’s storytelling who artfully structured his tale (cf. Stibbe 1994:38) as the compositional zenith of the Fourth Gospel, remarkably unified within itself (Schneiders 1987:44-45), but because of its high theological meaning. Indeed, the Lazarus story is described as “*épiphanie de la vie*” (Léon-Dufour:1990:404), “a dramatization of the theme of Jesus as the life” (Brown 1966:430), etc - titles and attributes which lead me to emphasize the theme of Jesus, the Master of life. That is what makes the theological importance of the Lazarus story.

The Lazarus story teaches believers to make death part of their lives, for although eternal life conquers death, it does not abolish it. However, the raising of Lazarus from the dead proclaims a message of faith and hope, namely Jesus the Master of life, the resurrection and life, “gives eternal life to those who believe in him, whether in response to his word or in response to the sign, whether because they see or without seeing (...) Lazarus can be raised because he is one whom Jesus loves, that is, a believer. His new life speaks both of his present possession of eternal life and of the final resurrection of those who die believing. It symbolizes the coincidence of present and future eschatology: the believer who dies yet lives; the living who believe will not die the everlasting death” (Schneiders 1987:55-56).

CHAPTER FIVE: CONTEXTUALISATION

Since the evangelist's own limited meaning in John 11:1-44 did and could not achieve the final closure, I now seek to read this text anew and let it speak in the context of Congo-Brazzaville. Because the analysis and the evaluation of a particular context presuppose the knowledge of the own proper identity of the readers/ hearers, faith community and the interpreter of the Lazarus text today, and the identification of the questions that they wish to bring to this particular text, it is worth knowing the context of Congo-Brazzaville. Therefore, the questions which will guide my analysis of the context of Congo-Brazzaville are the followings: What is the context of Congo-Brazzaville? Who are the implied readers/hearers or audience or faith community of my interpretation of the Lazarus story today? What light does the Lazarus story shed into the particular context of Congo-Brazzaville to help the implied readers/hearers of this text today to come to a new insight about sickness, death and life? How does the Lazarus story allow the Church in Congo-Brazzaville to be more aware about what she should teach and do today in terms of Jesus and Lazarus?

5.1 Analysis and evaluation of the Congolese context

Analysing the context of Congo-Brazzaville is an important and complex task which requires much investigation. Such wide-ranging work cannot be done in this present chapter; that is a task which should be taken up in another research project. In the following development, I intend to confine my attention specifically to the present context of Congo-Brazzaville, namely that of crisis. Crisis to be understood in all its manifold meanings. This important issue will widen my analysis, for the causes

of the Congolese crisis are pluridimensional and complex. In dealing with the various facets of the crisis, I shall refer to different elements which recall historical, political and economical, ecclesiastical, and traditional or socio-cultural context. In order to better understand the present-day context of Congo-Brazzaville, it is important first of all to describe the overall situation of the African Continent.

5.1.1 The overall situation of the African Continent

Most of the people agree that the African Continent is in a state of crisis. The word crisis suggests the complexity and seriousness of the situation. It is a multidimensional crisis of which the numerous causes are quite difficult to sort out (see Ngoupande 1992). The Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops which was held in Rome from 10 April to 8 May 1994 had the same impression. In the *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Ecclesia in Africa* of John Paul II (1995) we read these very expressive words of the Synod Fathers: “After correctly noting that Africa is a huge Continent where very diverse situations are found, and that it is necessary to avoid generalizations both in evaluating problems and suggesting solutions, the Synodal Assembly sadly had to say: ‘One common situation, without any doubt, is that Africa is full of problems. In almost all our nations, there is abject poverty, tragic mismanagement of available scarce resources, political instability and social disorientation. The results stare us in the face: misery, wars, despair. In a world controlled by rich and powerful nations, Africa has practically become an irrelevant appendix, often forgotten and neglected’ ” (n° 40). The Synod Fathers highlighted that Africa is “a Continent full of bad news” where the tragedy of wars is tearing an important number of countries apart. It is true as the members of the Synodal Assembly have noted that “for some decades now Africa has been the theatre of fratricidal

wars which are decimating peoples and destroying their natural and cultural resources” (see n°117). John Paul II sincerely deplores such situations of “unspeakable suffering caused by so many conflicts now taking place or about to break out” (idem).

These dramatic situations in which the great majority of poor peoples “crushed and reduced to silence suffer as innocent and resigned victims” terribly dehumanize them so that the Synod Fathers have come to compare contemporary Africa to the man who fell among robbers while he was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, was beaten and left half dead by his assailants (cf. Lk 10:30-37). For many Synod Fathers, “Africa is a Continent where countless human beings - men and women, children and young people - are laying, as it was, on the edge of the road, sick, injured, disabled, marginalized and abandoned. They are in dire need of Good Samaritans who will come to their aid” (n° 41).

In view of such a distressing spectacle of a general crisis which affects all the dimensions of the life of the Continent and of the human being, it was appropriate that the Synod Fathers made themselves heard in their concern and cry of alarm that John Paul II (1995) echoed in the *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation*. “In a Continent full of bad news (ask the Synod Fathers), how is the Christian message ‘Good News’ for our people? In the midst of an all-pervading despair, where lie the hope and optimism which the Gospel brings? Evangelization stands for many of those essential values which our Continent very much lacks: hope, peace, joy, harmony, love and unity” (see n°40).

The overall picture shows that Africa lives in a period of great uncertainties, a time of unsteadiness and rupture which progressively destabilizes structures and minds. It is a period of crisis in the medical sense of the word, that is, “a decisive phase of a sickness” for, as Poucota affirms,

Une société en crise est celle qui est arrivée à un moment décisif
de son évolution: bloquée de toutes parts, elle peut soit basculer dans
la déchéance soit réaliser un saut qualitatif et s'ouvrir des chemins
inédits de renaissance (1997:9).

African societies go through a period of crisis, that is to say, that they have reached a decisive moment of their evolution: overwhelmed from all sides, they can either topple over into decay or realise a qualitative jump and open novel ways of rebirth. Furthermore, following the statement of the *Executive Comity of the Church of Christ in Zaïre* (actually D.R.C), one agrees that the very nature of the crisis which severely shakes the African Continent is basically a “crise d’hommes” (cf. Kä Mana 1993:96). This overall landscape of the Continent reflects the present-day context of Congo-Brazzaville, a country which is ravaged by deadly civil wars, a nation full of problems and bad news, people coping with abject poverty, misery, sickness, despair, death and all kinds of sufferings in their daily life. It is a context of crisis of values.

5.1.2 The context of Congo-Brazzaville: A context of crisis of values

There can be no doubt that the Congolese society has been going through a period of deep crisis. Of the multiple facets of this crisis, the chief and striking one is the massive destruction of life due to the recurrent civil wars since 1993, and the lot of sufferings and misery they have brought to the whole

Congolese people. Indeed, everybody, pastors, priests, journalists, searchers, political men and women think that the spiral of armed violence which has been tearing the whole country would be generated by the “*crise des valeurs des jeunes*” - crisis of values of young people (*see Peuples du Monde* 1999:13). According to this widely accepted point of view, present-day young people do not have any respect for human life. They kill because they have bad values, the values that they have first received from their parents, their old people, chiefs and teachers. They kill because they do not have any reference any more (Ibid.:13).

It is worth stressing that in the last ten years the Congolese nightmare started with the 1993 civil war which has killed more than three thousand people and has displaced thousands of others. Although the Congolese have not yet finished crying and burying their dead, although they have not yet got over the shock and trauma, although they have not yet finished reflecting on the meaning of death and life, another civil war breaks out in June 1997. The violence of combats, atrocities and exactions which killed more than ten thousand people deeply disrupted once more the Congolese life and shook their faith. In this context, everyday Congolese cope with suffering, sickness and death. Guns kill as well as sickness, malnutrition, anguish, fear, trauma and famine. In such an extreme tragedy, death has become for the Congolese “the ultimate form of God’s silence” (De Locht 1992).

Death has become an ultimate form of oppression which breaks hearts and challenges the very faith and hope. Fear, anguish, uncertainties overcome each heart. The Gospel as “Good News” for the poor, Jesus’ sayings in our specific text (cf. 11: 4. 24-25) and all traditional arguments which try to reconcile belief seem so trite. The tortured biblical questions about the identity, the whereabouts and

justice of God become more and more intense. The believers can express their cry of distress: where is God in the midst of our tragedy? Where is Jesus, the “resurrection and the life?”

In October 1997, the Congolese hoped that their sufferings were definitely over, for war was declared to be ended. But great were the surprise and the disappointment as the *Homily of the Bishops of Congo* shows:

Depuis cinq mois et demi le Congo est retourné à la spirale de violence armée, alors que nous espérions qu'à la fin de la guerre de 1997 les efforts des filles et fils de ce pays seraient mobilisés par les objectifs de réconciliation et de reconstruction (...)

Au sein de nos communautés diocésaines, nous souhaitons tous, que l'année 1998 nous aurait épargné le bruit des armes de toutes sortes avec leurs conséquences destructrices et meurtrières (February 25,1999).

In December 1998 hostilities erupted again. Once again the Republic of Congo plunged into darkness: darkness of violence, darkness of death and life, darkness of faith and hope. As Lindell and Dez (*see Peoples du Monde* 1999:11) have noted, fruit of a political battle between war lords, the conflict seems to have taken from the Congolese all hope of effective reconciliation. They go on and highlight that one can easily read the sufferings on the faces of everyone, just like the numerous traces of combat, indestructible, on the walls of houses. And also, they state that everybody has lost everything that s/he possessed, including hope (cf. *Ibid.*:11). Not only have whole towns and villages been completely destroyed and the national economy left in ruins but the Congolese person as a whole, all his/her being. All his/her person, his/her humanity, dignity and spirituality have been destroyed.

5.1.2.1 The sad fate of the population

Fearing reprisals, avoiding death in order to save their lives, the vast majority of people who were displaced and forced to a terrible exodus “found shelter in the giant rain forest of Congo, where they survived on roots, berries and whatever game or fish they could bag” (Tygesen 2000:2). Vulnerable and powerless, they were at mercy of false shepherds and wolves: the armed people who took them hostage and, using as human shields, massacred them like flies. A true carnage and human slaughter were accomplished in villages and in the forests which recalled the Congolese bloody past and confirmed the lack of references and the crisis of values of young people. For, as Anatole Milandou, Bishop of Kinkala (actually archbishop of Brazzaville), noted, militias liquidated numerous aged people they wrongly accused of witchcraft and sacrificed the life of so many innocent young people they arbitrary suspected of being infiltrated (*La paix à construire* 2000:4). Before this killing frenzy, life did not have any value, both on the side of those who killed without any reason and any fear or respect of human being and of God, as well as on the side of the population which everyday saw people killed before them. Death terrified and made people lose their faith. Bishop Anatole Milandou emphasises that

Si les affrontements ont fait plusieurs victimes parmi les guerriers,
ce sont surtout les paisibles populations civiles qui ont été la cible
des hommes en armes. Pire encore, beaucoup d'enfants, de vieilles
personnes sont morts de maladies, de malnutrition

(*La paix à construire* 2000:7).

If the number of dead in this war is estimated at more than ten thousand, in reality, as Tygesen has reported, “nobody knows how many of the country’s 2,6 million inhabitants were killed during the brief but vicious war, but as it drew to an end, 810.000 people were displaced, and thousands maimed for life. None more than the invisibly scarred children” (2000:1). Of course, in their homily of February 25, 1999, the Bishops of Congo highlighted this lack of respect for life when they said:

Les massacres de populations civiles innocentes,
le pillage des biens privés et publics à une échelle
ahurissante, les destructions et les incendies volon-
taires des édifices publics et des habitations et les exac-
tions de toutes sortes ont porté un coup dur à notre rêve
légitime de voir naître et se développer dans notre pays
une culture des droits humains, du respect de la vie
et de la dignité humaine.

Churches and objects of worship were desecrated and destroyed. In committing such acts, the troublemakers were erasing the traces of the Church, the roots of faith and hope. They were destroying the human person, the being of the Congolese. Therefore in their homily, the bishops challenged the Congolese to respect moral and spiritual principles of their faith about the sacred character of human life, theirs and that of others (February 25, 1999).

Indeed, in Congo-Brazzaville, thousands of peoples, mostly children are still traumatised. Memories are still alive in minds. Children still bear scars of war, their testimonies are poignant like the one of Justivel Lubata, an eleven year old boy who continues to “ see pictures at night” (Tygesen 2000:1). In fact, “for months, the little boy woke up at night, screaming from ghastly images returning to haunt

him in his sleep” (Ibid.:2). The young boy wonders why so many are dead? He “has no memory of any special reason why the Ninjas shot his uncle, but he does remember, ‘we had to leave him in the road and then we continued. I saw too many dead people.’”(Ibid.:2). The same tortured images haunts his friend Cynthia Joel Landau a nine year old girl: “they shot so many people. Sometimes we had to step over them when we walked” (Ibid.: 2000:1).

The young traumatised children still see pictures of violence, pictures of dead people, pictures which raise in them the question of the meaning and value of life, the question of their future. As children’s memory is very strong and as at the age of nine and eleven they understand and learn so many things from what they see, hear and experience, one may wonder what idea of death and life will they have. As they have seen countless killings, what taste and respect of human life will they have? Since they have seen and heard their parents crying and praying to God but without any immediate and visible answer, what idea of God will they have? How can one preach them the Gospel, convince them that God is good and Jesus is the Master of life? What future can the Congolese society and the Church expect from this sacrificed generation? These questions we bring to our sacred text as well.

In fact, in the context of war, the only experience and knowledge of life that most of the Congolese have are reduced to their bad memories of death. Life or to live refers to the course, the brief period of human existence on earth from birth to death. It is reduced to an animate existence or a condition of a person who is moving, a person who is happy. Suffering is not existing, knowing war, exodus is not living. Death is the term of life. Since a Ninja, Cobra, Cocoye (names of the militias operating in Congo) or anyone can put your life to an end by shooting you without any reason, life becomes

useless. What is life if at anytime and at any place a mortar shell or a stray bullet can kill you? For the people who have witnessed countless killings, for the people who have been traumatized and have seen the immediate result of the motto of the Cobras, life becomes like a game or a lottery.

5.1.2.2 Trivialization of death and life

The terrifying motto of the Cobras: *Kirikiri te, noki te ba bengi yo defunt* or *Kirikiri te papa mama okoya kozanga biso*. This motto which is expressed in Lingala language and which could be translated by “Remain passive in order to survive” have marked the Congolese minds and determined their view of life and death. The motto is very well known by each citizen in Congo especially in Brazzaville more than any poetry, proverb, story or word of the gospel. Children know it by heart more than any catechism teaching or lesson learnt at school. The fact is the motto has been written on the walls and gates of so many houses and musicians of most famous youth bands in the country have repeated it in their albums. All day long, everybody listens to, sings and dances it. What does this motto mean literally? What message does it convey? Nothing else than trivializing death and life.

In fact, the french word *defunt* which in English is translated by “deceased, dead, departed”⁴⁰ emphasizes the omnipresence of death and the absolute right and power of the Cobras to kill. Their rule forces one to remain passive like slaves or hostages in order to survive otherwise, one will call you dead. Death in this context means to depart from this earthly life, to cease to exist, to die like a dog. In the same way, the Lingala verb *kozanga* means to miss, to lose, to lack. In this case, the

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For the meaning of the most specific words that we use in the following development we refer to Onions (1933-1970).

motto means ceasing to have life. The person who objects or the one who is puffed up, will very soon come to the end of his/her earthly existence. S/he will fail to see and enjoy life. S/he will miss the country; parents, relatives, friends. S/he will vanish and disappear from sight and pass out of collective memory. Thus, like for animals or plants, to die or death in this specific context is synonymous of final cessation of all vital functions, deprivation of civil life, extinction, destruction (Onions 1933-1970).

For most of the Congolese death refers to the state of unconsciousness and tragic disappearance without any hope of seeing the face of the beloved one. Faith and hope in spiritual life have come out from their hearts, only fear has been left in their minds. This is an important aspect of the context of Congo-Brazzaville in which we are reading our sacred text of John 11:1-44. It is a context of **κρίσις** first of all as a means of trial. The trials of Congolese life represent a true situation of crisis.

In this way, the word **κρίσις** refers to a critical point in the course of events, the life and history of the Congolese people as well as a turning-point in the progress of a disease in which a decisive change for better or worse (death for instance) is imminent (Onions 1944/1970). It is also a context of crisis as a means of judgement or condemnation and punishment that are going against them, for some Congolese still believe that HIV-AIDS for instance, is God's punishment.

The Congolese context also refers to the Greek use of ἀσθένεια as a means of fear, powerlessness, weakness, sickness. People are really sick (malaria, HIV/AIDS) and cope with death everyday because of the aftermath of war. Fear has taken up residence in the hearts of all the Congolese: fear or anguish of sorcerers/witches, sickness. Fear of everything; the most dreaded fear being a renewed outbreak of war which implies death. Where to find the causes of this deep crisis?

5.2 Causes of the crisis of values in the Context of Congo-Brazzaville

If the crisis of values in the Congolese society is an undeniable fact and that everybody acknowledges the suffering of the Congolese people, the identification and definition of its causes and origin remain a difficult task. In this section I would like to suggest an analysis of the situation in looking at different facets of the wide and complex context of Congo-Brazzaville. I would like to begin with the point of view of the Church which relates the cause of the crisis to the twenty-seven years of Marxism-Leninism that our country went through. As I have indicated earlier, I shall support my analysis by considering the French colonial period, the role of the Church and the Congolese traditional religious belief.

5.2.1 The crisis of values of young people in Congo-Brazzaville is the consequence of the twenty- seven years of Marxism-Leninism

The statement is from Anatole Milandou, former Bishop of Kinkala, region of Pool in the south of Congo-Brazzaville, one of the dioceses and regions seriously affected by the recurrent civil wars. For

Indeed, after the independence in August 15, 1960, the Republic of Congo opted for the Marxist and Leninist political regime which was an antireligious system. Thus, in order to establish its authority and to bring victory to its ideals, the Marxist and Leninist revolution in Congo proceeded with the nationalisation of Christian schools and other structures of education and training (see Baur 1994:362.485, Coquery-Vidrovith and Moniot 1974:461-462). All Christian movements of youth apostolate such as Young Christian Workers (YCW), Young Christian Students (YCS), Boy Scouts, Willing Hearts, students' chaplaincies were completely suppressed (see Baur 1994:362.477). Young people had to be militated within "la jeunesse révolutionnaire, fer de lance" of the revolution, especially instructed to bring victory to the ideals of Marxism-Leninism (*La paix à construire* 2000:3).

Should it be reminded that Marxism stated that religion was "opium of the people" and that it constituted a danger for people, specially for the youth? In this context of Marxism, Christian virtues and maxims were replaced by revolutionary maxims, pioneer law (ten like the decalogue). As Bishop Anathole Milandou highlighted, slogans such as: "Seule la lutte libère; production, discipline, fusil; le pouvoir est au bout du fusil; nous ne laisserons les armes que lorsque la victoire sera totale!" , marked for good the life of a people as a whole (*La paix à construire* 2000:3).

Other revolutionary principles such as: " Si tu avances, nous te suivrons. Si tu t'arrêtes, nous nous arrêterons. Si tu récules, nous t'abattons" marked Congolese political life. This slogan for instance so marked people that two years ago, one Christian, a woman of the third age used it in the Church on the occasion of solemn profession of a Dominican sister to invite her to remain faithful to her engagement. I was amazed and so were the congregation in the Church.

I would add that for more than a quarter of a century, Machiavellian principles were the golden rule of the government of the people as a whole. Killing became a banal and ordinary act. There was no more fear, no more respect for the sacred value of life. The everyday population was coping with violence, exactions, summary executions with the phenomenon called “petit matin”- early hours, the act by which capital punishment was practised.

In 1977 Marien Ngouabi, president of the Republic, cardinal Emile Biayenda, archbishop of Brazzaville, Massamba Débat, former president of the Republic and many other citizens were killed in the most cowardly way. These assassinations and deaths of so many innocent citizens, without counting those who were dying every day from different illnesses, truly posed the question of the value and the meaning of life. In this context of communism, the youth in particular has known a true analgesia. Marxism-Leninism was like a “cicutine” that is, a compound obtained from a genus of a poisonous umbelliferous plant, the *cicuta* (see Onions 1933-1970), in the sense that it undermined the human, moral and religious life of each Congolese.

In an interview published by Henrik Lindell and Hervé Dez in the Catholic Magazine of Mission, *Peuples du Monde*, n° 329, November 1999, Anatole Milandou, president of the Congolese Episcopal Conference emphasises that during the twenty-seven years of Marxism, one has denied God, one has denied human being. There has been a destruction of the Congolese human being. For twenty-seven years, one has plugged one's brain (*Peuples du Monde* 1999:11).

The chief feature of this context was the language of violence, guns and war. Killing was omnipresent in all discourses and slogans, death and life were trivialized. Killing became an ordinary and legitimate act cautioned and practised by the power itself. As the Gospel and the teaching of the Church had been replaced by violent and evil instructions, people could not measure the gravity of their act and appreciate the value of life. Surely, this very situation led to depravity of behaviour and crisis of values. The positive values and priceless human qualities of our cultures which we inherited from our ancestors were progressively neglected, scorned and, finally laid aside. The more the situation was going on, the more it was affecting Congolese consciousness and printing a certain mentality and view of life and death. There developed a culture of death, a culture of negation: the negation of God and the negation of the human being. Let us hear another sound of a bell different from the Church, the analysis of Marxism-Leninism in Congo by historians and specialists of African politics.

5.2.2 Marxism-Leninism in Congo-Brazzaville

The educational work of the missionaries is quoted among the good work and merits of missionary services to Africans. Schools constituted a “barometer of development” and the benefits of these “beloved institutions” fell on the fact that the educational work of the missionaries prepared Africans for their independence, especially leadership and manpower to govern their countries (see Baur 1994:412-415). Like in Central Africa Republic with the suspended Catholic priest, Barthelemy Boganda, in Congo-Brazzaville “the power struggle at independence was won by Abbé Fulbert Youlou, a Catholic priest, suspended by his bishop for refusing to give up his political activity as a matter of principle” (Ibid.:362).

Fulbert Youlou, a Catholic priest, suspended by his bishop for refusing to give up his political activity as a matter of principle” (Ibid.:362). Fulbert Youlou had been portrayed as an anticommunist militant who publicly affirmed his options in favour of economic liberalism. He stated that communism and Islam were two serious threats for Africa, and that these two forces would fight each other. (see *Encyclopaedia Universalis France S.A.* 2000)⁴¹. Besides his antipathy for communism, Youlou’s policy had been accused of prevailing despotism and autocratic methods. His intention to impose a political regime of a unique political party before August 15, 1963 was a good pretext to eject him from power forty- four hours before time. Although he was a former priest, he could not escape the temptation of power and wealth, he soon succumbed and “together with his ministers he would enjoy the week-ends in Paris” (Baur 1994:362). It is worth stressing that his deposition in 1963 was initiated by the Catholic Trade Unions. In 1965 Youlou went into exile in Madrid where he dedicated his time to writing anticommunist pamphlets (see *Encyclopaedia Universalis France S.A.* 2000). However, although he was known as an austere man and used to disapprove of the autocratic methods of Youlou, Alphonse Massamba-Débat who succeeded the anticommunist and despotic president succumbed to the same temptations. He instituted the only political party, the famous M.N.R. (Mouvement National de la Révolution) and the Youth of M.N.R. (1964), which gave to the Congolese revolution the means to impose itself on the nation and to exclude or to arrest the opponents of the scientific socialism (see *Encyclopaedia Universalis France S.A.* 2000). Later the Youth of M.N.R. was replaced by U.J.S.C. (Union de la Jeunesse Socialiste Congolaise), while women were gathered around U.R.F.C. (Union Révolutionnaire des Femmes du Congo). Thus, Congo-Brazzaville became the “first officially communist state in Africa” (Baur 1994:362).

⁴¹ Page numbers unavailable for extract from *Encyclopaedia Universalis France S.A.* 2000.

From February 1965, Congo-Brazzaville went through a period of political assassinations, kidnapping, intimidation, exclusion. These facts and so many others like contradictions within the power, internal tensions, tribalism, despotism, the weight of the Congolese army, led to the end of the reign of president Alphonse Massamba-Débat in 1968. Two officials of the Congolese army shared the responsibility of the power, Captain Raoul as chief of the State and Captain Marien Ngouabi as president of the Conseil National de la Révolution, who became president of the Republic the following year (1969). Decraene and Quantin affirm that the coming of Marien Ngouabi marked the very triumph of the Marxism-Leninism because of his ideologic radicalisation and the association of civilians and militaries in the enterprise of domination which the regime based on coercion and propaganda according to the present prevalent communist model (*Encyclopaedia Universalis France S.A.* 2000). The same year (1969) Congo-Brazzaville became the People's Republic of Congo.

In addition, Decraene and Quantin state that the Marxist system of Marien Ngouabi lasted for so many years (1969-1977) because of his use of typically Stalinist methods which were manifested, essentially, in political trials, infiltration of mass organizations and denunciation of imaginary plots (Idem). Yet, despite these railings, the system could not avoid or control political, social, military agitations, economic difficulties, corruption, exclusions, ethno-regionalism, social inequalities. This context could not have been more serious, so that it led to the brutal assassination of Commander Marien Ngouabi in March 18, 1977 in a veiled power struggle. The reign of General Joachim Yhombi Opango who succeeded him was marked by an incomparable recourse to terror, the omnipresence of military control and a typically martial style (see *Encyclopaedia Universalis France S.A.* 2000). Two years later, on February 5, 1979, General Denis Sassou Nguesso took hold of the power and his

system was described as a “detective regime” based on the disqualification and/or manipulation of opponents, exclusions, intimidations, dominations and ethno-regionalist factions (Idem). The new strong man of the country “reduced the number of tolerated religious bodies as Zaire had done and generally professed stricter Marxist-Leninist policy” (Baur 1994:362). The twenty-seven years of Marxism-Leninism in Congo-Brazzaville ended in 1990.

It is worth stressing that political, economical, social difficulties (worsened by the crisis of the public finances because of corruption at higher level and personal interest) led the State to the abandonment of the sacred task of the education of young people. Abandoned to their sad fate, forgotten, neglected, frustrated some young people found refuge in the cult of clothing, “la Sape,” while others dreamt only to go to Europe (*Mputu, Mikili*) by all means, “Faire l’Aventure.” Hence, the so-called phenomenon “Parisien” which characterised the Congolese youth. The word “Délinquance Juvénile”- Youthful Delinquency was used to describe the situation which was acknowledged by all. Everything was ready, so that young people accepted whatever could help them getting money, assure their future, even to steal and to kill their own brothers and sisters. Politicians could easily use them, make worriers from them. Christian de La Bretèche, a French Spiritan⁴² priest portrays the weakness and failure of the Congolese school system as follows:

Tout le système scolaire, même quand il marche normalement,
n’est qu’une mauvaise copie du système français, totalement
inadapté aux réalités congolaises (...) Tous les jeunes sont élevés
dans l’idée de devenir fonctionnaire (*Peuples du Monde* 1999:13).

⁴² A Spiritan is a religious person who belongs to the Congregation of the Holy Spirit or the Holy Ghost.

In short, the twenty-seven years of Marxism-Leninism in Congo-Brazzaville were marked by authoritarian governments. The People's Republic of Congo oscillated between "intellectualism and military populism" (Coquery-Vidrovitch and Moniot 1974:461). Since the first concern of the African socialist regimes was to react against foreign domination, to come progressively to eliminate foreign capital and to set up a sector of state commerce, nationalisations were a purely "panacée universelle"(Ibid.:461). Therefore, since the African socialism was the ludicrous form of a state control badly conceived and clumsily realised, for Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch and Henri Moniot the so-called socialist experiences ended in characteristic failure (1974:462.461).

5.3 Historical background of the crisis of values in Congo-Brazzaville

Historically I would like to step back further in the search of the causes of the crisis of values in the Congolese society. If parents, the older generation, and teachers had given bad values to young people, surely they must have received, seen, learnt, or heard about them? Perhaps they have been influenced by the French colonial government, the missionaries or the Church in the immediate post-colonial period.

5.3.1 The French colonial administration

Like most of the African States, the Republic of Congo is also a product of colonization, "Made in France." Following the way out of Libreville (capital city of Gabon), and the River Ogwe where he had laboured for years, Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza, a French explorer arrived at the Pool alone as

early as 1880 (cf. Baur 1994:216). Baur asserts that de Brazza was able to make a pact of friendship with Makoko, the presumed paramount chief of the whole Pool area thanks to his amiable personality and his magical tricks. In September 10, 1880, de Brazza was cordially received by Makoko and the two men signed a treaty of friendship which officially marked the beginning of the colonial period in Congo-Brazzaville and the building of Brazzaville⁴³, the present capital city of the country (see P. Decraene and P. Quantin in *Encyclopaedia Universalis France* 2000, Baur 1994).

The underlying reason of colonization seems to be a humanitarian mission of great value: to civilize Africans, savage peoples without culture and religion, except their tribal customs and foolish superstitions and devilish cults (cf. Baur 1994:421). The “cursed sons [and daughters] of Ham” had to be saved, the “big children” had to be educated to the White civilization and resemble them. In addition, since Africa had been ravaged by the slave trade, almost universally conviction was expressed that European occupation of Africa would be the only means to suppress this shameful and dehumanizing situation and “colonization would greatly further mission work and bring to Africa the blessings of European civilization” (Baur 1994:420). Therefore, in 1884 at the Berlin Conference initiated by the German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, the balkanisation of Africa could be decided with total ignorance and exclusion of African representation or, at least, the requirement of their verbal opinion. As Baur clearly noted, definitely, “It was all a matter of European Imperialism. Empire building had become the peak of nationalism. It was a strange perversion: this nationalism had grown out of 19th century European Liberalism that proclaimed the right of ethnic groups to self-

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The country was formerly known as French Congo and its capital city Brazzaville was the headquarters of the French Equatorial Africa Region which was composed by the Republic of Congo-Brazzaville, Central Africa Republic, Tchad and Gabon (see Baur 1994:361). Brazzaville was also “La capitale de la France Libre.” At the independence in August 15. 1960. the country was known as Congo-Brazzaville.

determination; but this conviction stopped at the shores of Europe, it never went overseas. Nobody in Europe realized that this was flagrant injustice, and this led us to the underlying cause of both colonial occupation and colonial mentality: it was the white man's complex of racial superiority" (Baur 1994:421). It was "a question of prestige, sometimes of mere diplomacy" and mostly a matter of "Spheres of influence" (cf. Britain informal African empire) and political sovereignty over factual occupation of territory (cf. Bismarck).

As exclusion, power, influence, political sovereignty, prestige took over the "civilizing mission", not only colonial underlying reason changed, but the policy and methods to achieve the purpose and the manner of treating native populations. In the UNESCO's *General History of Africa VII: Africa under Colonial Domination 1880-1835*, historians report that the imposition of colonialism seriously affected the social life of African peoples (cf. Adu Boahen 1990:208 f). In concrete terms, historians allude to "superimposition" of the new social structures namely a "new class of European bureaucrats and businessmen" which was placed on top of the old political and religious elite which represented the pre-existing class structure of the continent before colonization (Ibid.:208). They affirm that except for some rare cases like in East Africa where a faction of the economic power fell into the hands of Asians, in general, in each colony Europeans had the monopoly of political, economic and educational power. Consequently, before such a context, "the Africans became the underprivileged and looked up to the Europeans, and at times to the Asians, for leadership and example (Ibid.:208).

It is also admitted that in the *French Equatorial Africa* (Congo-Brazzaville, Central Africa Republic, Gabon and Tchad), the "secluded population was living on a low level" and that, "war prisoners and

slaves too often served as food” (Baur 1994:222). In addition, one acknowledges the “heavy loss of life” due to labour movement, forced labour and “punitive expeditions, which apparently often inflicted most damage because of starvation resulting from the upsetting of the subsistence farming cycle” (Adu Boahen 1990:200). Indeed, not only the concessionaire schemes of Middle Africa or French companies supported by the militia, exploited the country ruthlessly, indulging in a truly, shameful and scandalous looting of natural resources without any concern for the future, but sometimes they multiplied exactions towards Africans (see P. Decraene and P. Quantin in *Encyclopaedia Universalis France* 2000, Baur 1994:222).

Because of their central belief that “colonies should be profitable”, colonizers trivialized, devalued, sacrificed, desecrated human life. They inflicted on indigenous populations all kinds of work which often included bad treatment and danger, i.e., tsetse fly, moving of goods by human portage, building of roads, railways, work camps, plantation of rubber, etc, which exposed African lives to several diseases, i.e., typhoid fever, malaria, blackwater, venereal disease and diarrhoea and to death (see Adu Boahen 1990:201). Furthermore, many of the African labourers who were subjected to these inhuman works were “weakened by hunger” and, in Congo-Brazzaville, a death rate of a hundred per thousand, more or less, was calculated among the indentured labourers for forced labour on the railway (C.F.C.O chemin de fer Congo Océan) from Brazzaville to the sea (Pointe- Noire, 510 km) in 1922 (see *Ibid.*:201). This happened a year after the beginning of the works (1921) which ended in 1934.

It would be a false and partial judgement if one asserted that colonization had done nothing good for the African continent. One had acknowledged positive effects of colonization occupation for instance in schools, hospitals, infrastructures. Yet, as Baur has rightly noticed, a sober impartial look at the past leads to the conclusion that “colonialism has left a deep trauma in the African soul” (1994:420). So many hearts have been wounded and keep bad memories of that period. Baur would say that “before the European reader who hears such a statement turns away with indignation, he/she should ponder how far material benefits like economic infrastructure can outweigh the loss of spiritual values. And how far the one-sided indoctrination into a foreign culture confused the soul of the African child. And how much social segregation in daily life made the African feel he belonged to an inferior race” (Ibid.: 1994:421-422).

If Africans lost their face, of course, there was nothing they could be proud of any more, if not to become stigmatized with an inferiority complex. If confronted with the European master, servility was the greatest virtue of the Africans, then “colonialism was for Africa a greater evil than slavery”, and that “colonial mentality was a sin against the human dignity of the African race; a sin against the honour the African so highly valued” (Baur 1994: 421.422).

Since people keep telling, sharing stories and history especially in an oral culture, and since people also act by imitation, perhaps the crisis of values which the Congolese society goes through has its distant causes in the loss of spiritual values, indoctrination, segregation, complex of superiority/inferiority and all kinds of violence the parents, old people, friends, chiefs, teachers of the Congolese youth went through. Perhaps these are the “values” they transmitted to them.

5.3.2 The role of the Church in the context of Congo-Brazzaville

In this section, I would like to examine the role of the Church under the colonial government and in pre-independence French Congo, as well as in the immediately post-colonial period.

5.3.2.1 The role of the Church during the colonial period

It would hardly be an exaggeration if I compare the implantation of modern Christianity in Congo-Brazzaville to the parable of the weeds among the wheat (Mt 13:24-30). Like most African countries, in Congo-Brazzaville colonization and evangelization occurred at the same time. Colonial penetration corresponded to the period of modern Christian evangelization, like twins who arrive in the world the same day. When explorers and colonial administrators convinced everybody of the imperative necessity and beneficial effects of the occupation of Africa, some missionaries seized the opportunity. They immediately followed their compatriots and cooperated with them “in order to secure the occupation of ‘their’ territory by their mother country” (Baur 1994:420). One may see in this collaboration the image of “potalon na mokaba” - a trouser and a belt, which is well known to each Congolese. Colonial administrators were for missionaries what the belt is for the trousers, a support.

Indeed, after his encounter with Makoko, de Brazza solicited the presence of missionaries in his new territory. A French priest, Father Prosper Augouard who belonged to the congregation of the Holy Ghost and who was probably “the most patriotic Spiritan”, volunteered to meet de Brazza at the Pool

(Baur 1994:216). His patriotism was manifested in his mixed colonial and missionary zeal, and in his strange motto “not quite in the line of his founder ‘For God and for France’ ” (Ibid.:216). The Reverend had a tremendous conviction “that he had found in de Brazza ‘a powerful and devoted protector’ of the Catholic Missions, and to follow him would be a marvellous opportunity to get ahead of the Protestants” (Ibid.:216). Before he came to erect the first Church which became the mother Church of the French Congo, Saint Joseph of Linzolo, fifteen miles out of Mfwa (Brazzaville) in summer of 1883, Augouard who was always carrying the French flag with him, dedicated his life to make several treaties with chiefs in the French area of Cabinda; though they were rejected by the French commander for having been negotiated by a clergyman (Ibid.:217).

Did the attitude of the French commander question and challenge the man of the Church to rediscover his true vocation and mission? Whatever that may be, it happened that Augouard’s purpose in following de Brazza changed afterwards. In exploring the untouched regions of Upper Congo and Ubangui-Shari, Augouard brought the Cross of Christ instead of the French flag; and it was a challenging task, filling his whole life till his death in 1921 (Baur 1994:222). Augouard became the close friend of the poor, prisoners and slaves and “liked to call himself ‘Bishop of the cannibals’ ” (Ibid.:222). If at the funeral of Augouard the French governor qualified him of having been a “vowed enemy of the administration”, because of his later criticism of the French policy, Rome honoured his missionary merits by making him a titular archbishop on the occasion of his episcopal jubilee in 1915 (Koren 1958: 505-506).

The evangelization of Congo-Brazzaville was then the work of the Holy Ghost Fathers who established themselves with Father Augouard since 1883. Following their charism, evangelization and foundation of missions, they spread the word of God throughout the whole country, from the coast and around Brazzaville to the north and south. Moved by the same basic aim of all missionary societies at the colonial period namely the “church building”, they approached their mission in two different way, “one civilizing, the other evangelistic” (Baur 1994: 403).

Indeed, since the Holy Ghost Fathers were concerned with the training of the indigenous priests and establishing a mission station, they built not only churches but schools and seminaries where they began to teach Latin. In Congo-Brazzaville, the priestly training in the Spiritan mission up to 1914 represented 1874 in Latin, 1886 in Philosophy and Theology, 1892 First Priests, 6 Total Priests (Baur 1994:408). Schools were also open for the education of native children. Perhaps because of Augouard’s reversal, the French colonial government was anti-clerical and did not support mission schools (cf. Ibid.:413). In these schools, the Church would emphasise the “holistic approach with sacramental and civilizatory” aspects (Ibid.:403).

However great the intention and work, civilizing Africans through education did not always make them true Christians. Curiosity, material and economic interests might have been the underlying cause of the adhesion of the Africans to the religion of the White people. Of course, the Church could only be attractive and stimulating for the Africans since “the new faith was presented together with the new skills of reading and writing, these skills provided new ways of earning money” (Baur 1994:403). Old generation, parents and young people were convinced that in order to come to terms with the

new way of good life brought by the white people, i.e., “to know the white man’s knowledge, the secret of his power and mostly, to learn in order to get a job”, to have more dignity, more prestige, and more glory, it was necessary to follow the European religion (see Baur 1994:403-414).

When we look at the third point of the Report of 1930 of the Apostolic Delegate Archbishop Hinsley reported by Baur (1994:413), namely “Not to prepare the Blacks for better serving the Whites but to raise them to a high Christian civilization, to make them ‘a bit more human’ and ‘better servants of God’”, one can imagine what “civilizing mission” really meant. It surely referred to what we noted above namely, to civilize the “savages”, to save “cursed sons [and daughters] of Ham”, to educate “big children”. In the same way one can also better consider here the negative attitude of the missionaries towards African traditional religious belief regarding their approaches to issues of sickness, death and the way traditional-doctors exercised their healing ministry.

There is no doubt that the Mission churches have made a tremendous contribution to African health care as well as to African education through mission schools, hospitals and deeds of charity, as shown by the testimony of the older generation of our parents who swear on these mission structures. However, not only did the new missionaries fail “to share the stand of life with the people and to develop it harmoniously together with them” (Baur 1994:419, note 7), but they rejected everything *en bloc*: “when it comes to a sickness caused by psychological problems, the patient has to go to the ‘witch-doctor’ in order to be cured. Neither doctor nor priest feels competent to deal with him or her” (Ibid.:472); and they estimated “that in the field of healing, inculturation would only lead to the increase of belief in magic and witchcraft.” Therefore, the missionaries could tolerate no healing

especially exorcism unless it was exercised by an ordained priest, in the true and strict respect of the Catholic faith and even more in perfect harmony with Jesus' own healing ministry of restoring hearing, sight, health and life. The specific case of Archbishop Emmanuel Milingo of Lusaka Zambia (1969-82) speaks for itself (see Baur 1994:473-474 for further details). In Congo- Brazzaville we can refer to Victor Malanda, a Catholic catechist who started in 1964, "the movement *Croix-Koma* (beating with the cross), the renouncing of witchcraft by placing the cross on the shoulder and anointing with oil; when it was condemned by the Archbishop, the movement formed its own church" (Baur 1994:361). These events happened in the post-colonial period.

5.3.2.2 The role of the Church in the post-colonial period in Congo-Brazzaville

Although "In the first phase of independence church leaders, in a genuine attitude of patriotism, were eager to lend the government of their young nations any possible moral support, to the extent of overlooking shortcomings and avoiding public criticism" (Baur 1994:487), and that, in most of the new independent African states, the Catholic Church continued to have a close and good relationship with the new governments, this was not really the case in Congo- Brazzaville. As noted earlier, not only was the French colonial administration anti-clerical (perhaps because of Augouard's reversal) they also did not support mission schools, but also Abbé Fulbert Youlou, a suspended Catholic priest who led the destiny of the new and young independent nation of Congo as its first president, did not succeed in his mission. Not only did he tarnish the image of the Church, he dashed the hopes of the Congolese people as he succumbed to the temptations of power, wealth, despotism, autocratic methods, tribalism. In addition, the disobedient priest "never took off his cassock in which

his lari tribesmen saw a symbol of religious-political authority” (Baur 1994:362). In all this, since the official “Catholic Church had never supported him, it won some credits under the following regimes” (Ibid.:362).

Yet, despite its credits the Church remained prudent and distant from the state. Before the strict profession of the Marxism-Leninism policy of the new strong men of the country, before the savage assassination of its first and only Cardinal (until now), Emile Biayenda in March 22, 1977, the Church acted discreetly but efficiently in keeping its right place in the new context and in remaining faithful to its prophetic mission: the proclamation of the word of God at time and against time, in word and deed. It is worth stressing that during his reign which was described as a “detective regime” (1979-1991), the president of the Republic, General Denis Sassou Nguesso, reduced the number of tolerated religious bodies, as his colleague Mobutu of Zaire (actually DRC) had done before him. Nevertheless, “Thanks to mutual African pragmatism, a harmonious *modus vivendi* between church and state could be maintained, reflected in the censure-free yet self-restrained publication of the catholic weekly *La Semaine Africaine*” (Baur 1994:362).

Although, generally in the Catholic Church nationalization of schools, hospitals and others structures of the Church was especially felt as an infringement of the ecclesial rights to fulfil its threefold evangelical mission of overcoming three basic enemies of human life and dignity, namely ignorance, disease and poverty, the event “was also sometimes seen as a blessing in disguise: for instance Bishop Jacobs of the Mennonite Church in Africa rejoiced that nationalization was not a loss but a gain, because it obliged the churches “to minister more to their congregations now that the props of the

school had been kicked away” (see Baur 1994:485). Thus, in Congo- Brazzaville when the schools were nationalized (sometimes given by missionaries themselves because of the lack of staff and subsidies), religious education and organizations prohibited, the “setback was for the Catholic Church a most useful experience and encouraged its school personnel to turn towards direct apostolate. Brazzaville was subdivided into a hundred quarters where religious instruction was given in private houses, the catechists being joined by Brothers and Sisters, not a few quite happy to exchange classrooms with families” (Ibid.:362).

Despite Marxist rigour, the Church never disappeared, and it has never been suspended. On the contrary, the more it went through difficulties, the stronger it became and the more aware of its mission. Bishops, the Episcopal Conference addressed the people of God through pastoral letters and visits where they strengthened the faith of the Christians, and denounced all kinds of evils which undermined the Congolese society. In all the parishes one could notice the vitality of the Church through the dynamism of the Christians gathered in different groups and apostolate movements where they received Christian formation, young people as well as old people. A diocesan pastoral commission of the youth worked in collaboration with youth parish commission. Young people were encouraged to be the light of the word and lived their faith in the most important movement of young people, namely *Bilenge ya Mwind*a (Jeunes de Lumière - Youth of the Light).

Founded by Father (later Bishop) Matondo kwa Nzambi in 1974 in Zaire (DRC) at the time when the government prohibited all private youth movements, the initiative was a wonderfully inculturated programme based on the idea of “the initiation of the youth to the Christian life, following the methods

of the traditional African initiation” (Baur 1994: 477, and for further details of the movement). Children were gathered around Yambote, also a well known children’s movement while adults joined either, *Scola Populaire*, *Légion de Marie*, *Renouveau Charismatique*, *Evangile et Santé*, etc.

One cannot forget the role of the Church in the handling of politico-economic crisis. As Baur noted, “Among the pressure groups that forced the transition of one-party dictatorships into multi-party democracies the churches played a prominent role in a great number of African states. In Benin, Burkina Faso, Gabon, Congo, and Zaire the national conferences that were to prepare the transition elected as their head a catholic bishop. This choice gave witness to the fact that after the bankruptcy of the political leadership the Church had remained the only reliable moral authority” (1994:488). In Congo-Brazzaville the choice fell on Bishop Ernest Kombo to lead the works of the Sovereign National Conference, which again elected him as the president of the supreme authority of the High Council.

Although in some cases the national conferences elected Bishops as their head, I do not think and do not agree, as Baur suggests that the Church remained “the only reliable moral authority.” If this assertion is justified in other countries, I do not think that this is the case in Congo-Brazzaville. The Church has also shown so many weaknesses, failures, errors and abuses. Priests have not always been role models in terms of moral authority, pastoral care, ecclesial and political power-leadership, or love of the neighbour.

It is true that during civil wars priests and religious have been close to the people. Living with them in the forests for many months, sharing their misery and humiliation. Some priests have even been shot, others died. This, of course, is a genuine example of good shepherds. I wonder if I could be capable of such an heroic testimony. However, some religious showed the image of false shepherds, as they abandoned the people of God at the height of their tragedy, by being the first to leave. As for the political involvement of Bishop Ernest Kombo, though the act was appreciable in this specific context of the country, it also recalled to some minds the bad memories of the 1960's with Abbé Fulbert Youlou. Thus, many were criticising the Church, because another priest was completely involved in a political party and fulfilled important responsibilities in the State administration. Somehow, Baur may be right that "The Catholic Church continued its close relationship with the government after Independence in 1960" (1994:363).

5.3.3 Traditional religious belief

Talking of the crisis of values of young people in Congo, bishop Anatole Milandou has highlighted that militias liquidated numerous aged people who were wrongly accused of witchcraft. The question of witchcraft (*kindoki*, *kundu* in Kikongo and Lari language, *uchawi* in Kiswahili) does not intervene only in the context of war or sickness and death. It is strange as Cosmas Haule has noted that "The various forms of '*uchawi*'-accusations made by different categories of people today prove in a terrifying manner how deeply embedded in the mind of the Bantu, ignorant and educated alike, is the belief in *uchawi*. Conceptions about 'power and knowledge' about 'mysterious' events that have remained firmly rooted in the popular consciousness through thousands of years even today influence

their life” (1969:13). In analysing the context of crisis of values in the Congolese society, these statements are very helpful clues. Since *kindoki, kundu* is so prevalent and makes enormous disasters in the Congolese society, it is then worth considering the role of this traditional religious belief. What is witchcraft? What is the background of these so important traditional religious beliefs and what are its consequences in the lives of the Congolese people?

5.3.3.1 Terminology and traditional background

Cosmas Haule asserts that “beliefs and practices in *uchawi* are considered as integral parts of everyday life and sometimes seem to substitute for religion” (1969:13). The word *kindoki, kundu, uchawi* as used by the Bantu in general and the Congolese in our particular case, covers such a wide range of beliefs and practices that it becomes difficult and complex to define and to grasp. The reality seems to embrace the whole life of the Bantu, their environment, their houses and their farmyards, “birth and death, sickness and health, poverty and richness, plants and animals, weather, fire and blood. It penetrates and informs every thing and every thought - dominates and orientates all their behaviour” (Haule 1969:14). In view of this, Haule affirms that *uchawi* has no equivalent in English, for according to Bantu mentality *uchawi, kindoki, kundu* “is not an art or craft but rather a power and a mysterious one” (Ibid.:21).

In short, *uchawi, kindoki, kundu* designs “the mysterious power inherent in man [woman] that, used badly, causes injury and harm even death to others. It is part of an individual being, a part of his [her] innermost self” (Ibid.:25). In this way, a witch (*Ndoki, Mchawi*) is a person who is supposed to have

the mysterious power and at the same time a will totally inclined to evil ends, causing harm and death to others by unascertained, mysterious means (Ibid.:23). Haule specifies that basically, a witch is concerned with the satisfaction of his abnormal desire for human flesh, a craving which is utterly repugnant to the normal Bantu, who cannot understand, at least on a conscious level how anyone could have such a perverted taste. Thus, since this strange hunger - the desire for human flesh - is a permanent attribute of a witch, he/she unlike a sorcerer⁴⁴, constitutes a perpetual menace to the society (Ibid.:23). That is what justifies fear and persistence of the beliefs in witchcraft and reaction to kill witches and sorcerers because "both these personages are bad and are the most dreaded of the community members. They are antisocial. They kill and bring misfortunes (Haule 1969:25).

For Haule, witches are persistent evildoers who perform their destructive acts because of their nature. They are personifications of evil while the sorcerer is a conscious and deliberate evildoer who deliberately tries to harm his/her enemies or those of his/her clients who paid him, by evil magical means (1969:24-25). In this way, sorcery is the art, the technique of utilizing the mysterious power of things to do harm to others. This art which is learnt but not inborn, "is set in motion by ordinary motives of envy, jealousy and hatred. It is activated by the events of everyday life, by social situation which give rise to feeling of ill will" (Ibid.:26).

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Len Lagerwerf notes that the main difference between a sorcerer and a witch is that the former achieves his evil end by magic, whereas the latter (often though not invariably conceived of as a woman) achieves hers by some mystical power inherent in her personality, a power that does not require the help of magic. Both witches and sorcerers incur social disapproval and generalisations about both are often made (1987:5).

Cosmas Haule also indicates that although the Bantu do not confuse the personages of a witch and a sorcerer, yet, in everyday language and practical situations and ordinary discussions, they do not always distinguish verbally between a witch and a sorcerer, nor between the activities of a witch and the acts of a sorcerer (1969:25).

The phenomena which we have described above relate to the facets of the crisis of values of young people in Congo Brazzaville. Indeed, as the biblical scholar Paulin Poucouta from Congo-Brazzaville highlights:

Des maux qui frappent un membre de la communauté ou l'ensemble du groupe: maladie, stérilité, échec, épidémie... Ces maux peuvent être attribués à Dieu. Mais, bien souvent, on les attribue soit au sorcier, soit aux ancêtres que l'on a oubliés, soit aux génies ou esprits de la création que l'on a mécontents en violant des tabous ou des lois fondamentales du clan. Ces malheurs peuvent conduire à la destruction de l'individu ou de groupe (1997:16-17).

Through the notions of forgetfulness, dissatisfaction and violation, Poucouta's statements reveal the underlying reason of the traditional beliefs in witchcraft: fear, anguish or better, collective guilt. Indeed, as Masamba ma Mpolo has noticed,

La culpabilité d'un membre du clan est portée par tous les membres de clan, surtout les anciens. Cette personnalité collective contribue à créer chez l'individu des sentiments d'évasion et de projection de la culpabilité hors de soi: La société est peut-être trop responsable de l'individu, à tel point que souvent elle ne permet pas l'épanouissement de la personne. La sorcellerie semble donc être ce sentiment général d'extériorisation de la culpabilité, ce sentiment de fatalism. La société, les femmes, les oncles, les membres vivants et morts du clan, et dieu sont souvent tenu responsables des mauvais sorts des individus ou des groupes d'individus (1973:248).

Obviously, the escapism feeling and the projection of guilt outside of oneself have much to do with the crisis of values of young people in Congo-Brazzaville. When one does not acknowledge and assume his/her responsibility, when s/he projects responsibility and guilt on others, the result is witchcraft accusations, crisis of values, the destruction of his/her life and the lives of others.

5.3.3.2 Manifestations of witchcraft and its consequences in human life

Haule has pointed out eight main sectors of the manifestation of witchcraft in human life, namely pregnancy, birth, marriage, daily activities, war, illness, death and burial (1969:12-19). To compare the particular crisis of values of the young people in Congo-Brazzaville, I would like to direct ones attention to war, illness and death.

Civil war in Congo has confirmed another important feature of the Congolese belief in the manifestation of witchcraft in human life. On the basis of the belief that some people (*Nganga*, traditional healers, witch-doctors or a person who claims to possess special powers which enable her/him to read secrets; see Haule 1969:22) who obtain the power of witchcraft from medicines, can predict a victory or a loss of war and can protect people from being hurt or killed during the war. Militias who went to the front were fumigated with medicine received from them. They either smeared it on their bodies, drank it, rubbed it into their bodies by means of incision, or simply wore it. They were subjected to strict observances and came to believe (especially the Ninjas) that these medicines made them invisible in the eyes of the enemy, and that their enemies were overcome by fear (see Haule 1969:16-17).

As for the manifestations in sickness and death, the Congolese also believe that some diseases, madness or any long-duration illness are brought on by *kindoki*, and that all deaths, all miscarriages are the result of the same reality (cf. Ibid.:17-18). Hence the use of the verbs *fin*, *loka* (in Lari) which refer to the same meaning of *Kuloga* (Kiswahili), as the means of bringing about misfortunes or death to others by of *kindoki*, *uchawi* that is inherent in human being, or by using the mysterious power of other things as is done in sorcery (Haule1964:26). In the specific case of Bakongo people J. F. Vincent writes what follows:

Comme la plupart des peuples africains, les Kongo font une distinction entre les sorciers, les *ndoki*, et les chasseurs des sorciers, les *nganga*, et donc entre magie noire et magie blanche. La croyance aux sorciers repose sur l'idée, commune en Afrique, que la maladie et la mort d'êtres jeunes sont foncièrement anormales. Elles sont provoquées, croit-on, soit par le courroux d'un esprit surnaturel (ancêtre ou génie), soit par l'action malveillante d'un humain: le sorcier (1966:529).

Eric de Rosny, a Jesuit priest who is much involved in the study of these issues and has developed a Christian ministry for the care of the "mystical sick" in Douala (Cameroon) has noticed that three major models of the causes of evil characterize the universe of cultural representations of his visitors. Some people explain the cause of their sickness, suffering and all kind of misfortune by using images and symbols derived from Scripture. This model he calls biblical. Others approach their situation (sickness, suffering and death) in a western or scientific way. This perspective recalls the "hospital model." Incidentally, most of his visitors refer to the "traditional model" which reflects the ancestral view of life and death. De Rosy highlights that the analysis of the stories of his guests has allowed him

to derive a “topology of anguish” (2001:496). He would insist that the word ‘anguish’ seems to better cover the accounts of the misfortunes of his visitors i.e., all life’s trials: sickness, failures in examinations, sexual disabilities, unemployment, professional conflicts, etc. Haule has noticed the same manifestations in cities and towns (cf. 1969:14).

For the persons Eric de Rosny speaks to and who have the obscure conviction of being “bloqués” - ‘blocked,’ an evocative word which means that nothing, truly nothing works in life, and who also have the persuasion to figure on a ‘list’ already long, of people who have died mysteriously and therefore think: ‘the next one, it is I,’ these facts recall the ‘mystical domain.’ But the high cause of anguish remains the hardship of loneliness worsened by the pandemic of AIDS, with the temptation of suicide (De Rosny 2001:497). The universe of cultural representations of this grid-group precisely reflects the Congolese mentalities, ignorant and educated alike.

Why the prevalence and the persistence of the beliefs in *kindoki*, *kundi*, *uchawi*? Haule postulates four major reasons namely the fact that *uchawi* beliefs correspond to Bantu traditional beliefs (see Haule 1969:61.64.100), the fact that *uchawi* beliefs correspond to Bantu situations of anxiety and stress (Ibid.:102-103), the fact that *uchawi* correspond to Bantu desire for individual advantages (Ibid.:103-105), and the fact that *uchawi* beliefs have social advantages (Ibid.:105-107).

If Lazarus’s sickness and death showed the unity, harmony and love of the family as well as the great solidarity of “the well-disposed Jews” who came from Jerusalem to comfort Mary and Martha about their brother, in Congo-Brazzaville, most of the time, sickness, suffering and death are the

source of division, violence, fighting and killings within families and in quarters. For death, especially the death of a young person, is never natural and innocent. It is always a case of bewitching. The person has been “eaten” by the sorcerer or the witch. We have seen how many families have been separated and destroyed because of the sickness or death of a relative. Families organize the mourning separately.

In most of the quarters and villages in Congo, the youth kill aged persons with white hair whom they accuse of being sorcerers/ witches. They kill them by putting a tyre around the neck, pouring fuel on it and lighting it. My own father would have been killed in the same way when the news spread through the quarter that I had died, while I was sick in hospital with malaria. For the youth, my death would have been caused by my father because of his white hair. My family is divided because of the issues of sickness, suffering and death.

5.3.4 My own particular context

As an African and a Congolese, of course, I am concerned with the present context of crisis of values which shakes my country. However, perhaps my own proper little history represents a particular context and determines my choice, reading and interpretation of the Lazarus story.

I was born on June 25, 1966 in Linzolo at the mission hospital of the mother Church of my country, founded in 1883 by Father (later Bishop) Augouard. Although my parents were not from Linzolo and were living in Brazzaville, my mother like many other women and patients preferred to go to this

mission hospital quite far from Brazzaville because of the quality of services and the good care of the religious sisters who were running the hospital. Mother Clothilde was very famous and loved by everyone who attended the mission hospital of Linzolo.

According to my mother, my conception was the work of Victor Malanda (see above). It was thanks to his healing ministry, through the administration of traditional medicine (*Miti*, in Lari language, that is, root, herbal teas) that my mother who, ten years after the birth of her first child, (my eldest sister) in 1956, had serious difficulties to conceive again. In addition, at the time of my birth and while I was growing up, Marxism was in full swing with its repressive policy which characterised the regime of Massamba-Débat. My mother had those bad memories where, because of the savage and blind violence and exactions of the militia (J.M.R.N., see above), they had to abandon the house at night to hide themselves in the forest.

I went to the government school in Brazzaville where I learnt how to be a good pioneer, a conscientious and respectful militant (cf. The ten laws of the pioneer). I studied at the college which bore the name of the founder of Brazzaville, the Lycée Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza. But at the time, because of the nationalization and Marxism, the college was called Lycée de la Libération- The College of Freedom. It was at this college in 1985 that I came to know the Dominican Order which I joined seven years later. In fact, during the course of Philosophy, our lecturer who was supposed to be an atheist because of the regime used to disturb two of my classmates (a boy and a girl) who were about to join religious life in the Order of Preachers (Dominicans).

Following the Catholic faith of my father, though less of a churchgoer at this time, I was baptized when I was a baby and I became a Catholic instead of being a “soldier” of the Salvation Army, the Church of my mother. When I was ten years old, after my Solemn Communion, I felt for the first time, the desire to become a priest. My parish priest, a French Spiritan encouraged me and asked me to wait until I grew up. Different events strengthened my desire, e.g. a priestly ordination at the grotto of the mother Church in Linzolo during the celebration of the centenary of the evangelization of Congo in 1983.

Although my family is Christian, it has always been torn, divided by the accusations of witchcraft because of sickness, sterility and the misfortune of some relatives. The recourse to the *Nganga* - witch-doctors and scenes of humiliation, and nights of traditional healing have been marking the life of my family as a whole; the last event occurred in October 2002. My parish (Notre Dame des Apôtres de Sangolo) and the whole village were known for this, especially after the terrible accusations, violence and death by Christians, which led to the temporary closure of the parish, twelve years ago.

Besides these memories, my own particular life is also marked by the poverty, misery and all kinds of sufferings of my family, parishioners and the Congolese people as a whole due to the recurrence of civil wars which have killed so many, people, friends and relatives. Due to the civil war which broke out in December 1998, my parents were left homeless till now, after having spent eight months in the forest. Civil wars, life's trials, excess of unmerited and senseless suffering, and death challenged my little faith as a young Catholic religious (Dominican) priest. They have revealed my

weaknesses of fear and anguish. Sometimes I wonder if my fear will not one day identify me with the false shepherds which Jesus talks about in John 10. This consciousness of my mission and my responsibility could not have been more than a challenge that, sometimes, I feel guilty.

5.4 Conclusion

The analysis of the context of crisis of values in Congo-Brazzaville confirms and joins the point of view of Nana Rosine Ngangoue and Sandrine Loubassou (1998), namely “Bloody Past, Shaky Present, Unpredictable Future.” This striking title is very evocative of the Congolese reality. Bloody, dark, sad and painful indeed is the past of the people of Congo-Brazzaville as the analysis of the historic and politic context has shown. Dramatic, preoccupant and agonizing is the present, and worrying is the future. The causes of this crisis are multidimensional, complex and beyond the only twenty-seven years of Marxism-Leninism. It is clear to me that the roots of the crisis are in the heart of each Congolese, in his/her very human nature which is conflict-provoking and ambitious. Basically, the crisis has an inner dimension which reaches the spiritual centre of each Congolese (see Kä Mana 1993:95). Of course, one has transmitted the “values” which s/he has received either by imitation or by “la force des choses.” Perhaps the incarnation and the transmission of these “values” were possible because of the lack of love and respect for ones neighbour, the country and for God. In truth, sickness, suffering and death especially during civil war have drastically disrupted all spheres of the life of the Congolese people: social, cultural, economic, human, moral and spiritual. In such a dramatic context, what are the findings of the exegesis of John 11:1-44 and how can they help the Congolese to overcome their crisis?

**CHAPTER SIX: APPROPRIATION: EXPLORATION OF FINDINGS OF EXEGESIS
IN TERMS OF AFRICAN VALUES AND PROVERBS**

As I now come to tackle the last stage of the interpretive process of our Tri-Polar Exegetical Model, namely the appropriation of the text, the purpose of my investigation is to consider the findings of the exegesis of John 11:1-44 in terms of African values and proverbs. The study of our pericope allows us to postulate that the raising of Lazarus is probably the most significant passage of the Fourth Gospel which presents Jesus as the Master of life and provides a relevant and hopeful message to those who cope day-to-day with the reality of sickness, suffering and death. The focus of my investigation will fall, in particular, on two major questions: How does the specific sacred text of John 11:1-44 matter for the Congolese and how do the findings and interpretation of this text determine their behaviour in important respects in their particular context which is marked by the pangs of deadly civil wars, fear, despair and loss of faith? And how does my interpretation help the Church in Congo-Brazzaville to be more aware about what she would teach and do today in terms of Jesus and Lazarus?

To this end, I shall give special attention to the gaps and indeterminacies of the text. I shall consider and follow the orientation of events which furnish “signs of the times” and each action which transform as privileged ways for discerning God’s active presence in the context of Congo-Brazzaville. Finally, I shall refer to the positive values of African culture and recall proverbs as precious rhetorical elements for probing the message of John 11:1-44 to my family circle and the faith community of my parish in preaching the word of God.

6.1 Findings of the exegesis of John 11:1-44

The story of Lazarus has highlighted the human experience of life in its complexity and mysteries: the mystery of sickness, suffering, death and life as well as the mystery of the identity and the whereabouts of God. It has revealed human nature with its limits, frailty, powerlessness and weakness in coping with these harsh realities and dealing with biblical questions. It has been an oppressive experience and shock of God's inactivity, God's absence, silence and delay, for as Gerstenberger (1992:11) has suggested, "where God is present, there can also be the shock of God's absence."

However, the sickness and death of Lazarus did not only show the human and spiritual weakness of Martha, Mary, the disciples and the "Jews". The Lazarus story is a key text which has brought out the points of intensity of Jesus' teaching about sickness, death and life. It has emphasized the themes of glory, unity, sympathy, solidarity, compassion, love, faith, hope, discipleship, listening and the importance of the movement - moving from one place to another, from one stage to another. The text has also shown the importance and power of the word. These themes could not have been more relevant in the context of Congo-Brazzaville and fundamental in terms of African values and proverbs. As important findings of our sacred text, they speak for themselves in many ways in the context of Congo-Brazzaville.

6.1.1 Sickness, suffering and death as a way of glory

The first lesson we may learn from the Lazarus story comes from Jesus' statement on Lazarus' sickness: "This sickness will not end in death but it is for the glory of God so that through it the

Son of God may be glorified” (11:4). In this statement Jesus has affirmed two important things which are sources of joy and hope. First of all, the sickness of Lazarus will not end in death, this implies that Lazarus will get well and continue to live. Such news can only arouse joy, comfort and confidence on the part of Mary, Martha and the disciples. Secondly, the outcome of Lazarus’ sickness, noticeably his recovery will be an occasion and a sign of the manifestation of the glory of God and of Jesus. As a result, the event will strengthen the faith and hope of Mary, Martha and the disciples of Jesus. They will come to believe in Jesus as the Son of God and the resurrection and life. Those who will see the great work of God manifested in Lazarus will believe that Jesus is the One sent by God, the Master of life.

Indeed, what does anyone who is sick and those who suffer, parents, relatives, friends of their beloved, expect if not his/ her recovery? Obviously, this is the expectation of the Congolese: to see the glory of God and to give glory to God, like in the case of Lazarus when God will cure their sickness, put an end to their suffering and civil war, will restore peace, unity and prosperity in the country. Because in the Lazarus story the glory of God was manifested in a concrete and visible manner that Mary, Martha, the disciples and “the Jews” could see, the Congolese expect the glory of God in the same way, namely as a manifestation of his presence, power, love, protection, through visible and striking action in the here and now of their daily life.

In fact, although Jesus delayed in going to Bethany, his delay lasted only four days and later on he went and performed a miracle. Lazarus who was sick and dead was restored to life. However, in their context the Congolese cannot see the same glory of God manifested in the here and now of their life. God keeps delaying, is silent and absent. These are important gaps and indeterminacies. When, where and how the Congolese will see the glory of God?

In order to better assure the appropriation and the integration of the indeterminacies and gaps of our sacred text, it is now worth considering the Congolese understanding of glory as we did for the Johannine use of δόξα (cf.3.1.3.2), and reconcile the Congolese view with Jesus' teaching and example in John's Gospel.

6.1.1.1 The Congolese understanding of glory

The concept of glory in the Bible that we have examined in connection with the Johannine use of δόξα (cf.3.1.3.2) suggests important thoughts of the Congolese understanding of this reality.

We know that in the biblical language, the Hebrew word *kabôd* signifies weight or heaviness and that, glory is importance which exhibits a person's inner worth and demands the respect of others (Mckenzie 1965:313). In this way, the glory of a human being "deals so frequently with the attainment of success in one's life and business. Glory sometimes appears to be identified with riches and possessions, which win the esteem of others" (Ibid.:313, and cf. Ec 6:2; Gn31:1; 1K3:13). This is, precisely, the way most of the Congolese understand the concept of glory: human riches, material possessions, honour, power, prestige, esteem, social rank and promotion.

In fact, in analysing the context of crisis of values in Congo-Brazzaville, we have noticed that the Congolese have been much influenced and marked by what they saw, heard and received from others. Thus, following the mentality, the life and practices of the colonizers, the underlying reason of the civilizing mission, and the life of the Congolese political men and women, and young people came to learn and to believe that glory was synonymous with prestige, material comfort (money, clothes of high quality, cars, villas, women), education (intellectualism, speak good

French), job (bureaucracy), political power or function. Since glory was associated with social promotion, everybody wanted to be a great, important personality (state functionary, minister) and this glory could be gained either by education or by other easy and/or vicious means. Therefore politicians never wanted to give up power because they did not want to lose their advantages. During civil wars, many became rich and gained glory by looting, stealing and killing.

It is worth stressing that injustices, inequalities, tribalism, superiority/inferiority complexes and all kinds of frustrations contributed much to put this view of glory in the minds of the Congolese people. Luc Ngwet reported that in an official document which he sent to the Congolese press, the spiritual chief and leader of the Ninjas asked the government to be associated with the administration of the Pool region and mostly to be elevated to the rank of army General and appointed as the spiritual guide of the Congolese army (*L'Autre Afrique* 19, du 24 avril au 7 mai 2002:24-25). In the same way, the glory of God was conceived in terms of visible manifestation through mighty acts in the present and as a manifestation of happiness, never suffering, never bearing a cross. The glory of God in someone's life was acknowledged and appreciated in terms of joy, peace, good health and earthly happiness in the present.

Now when the Congolese come to their present context of civil war, where people have lost all their belongings, power, honour, prestige, confidence, peace, life and hope, to believe in glory becomes a hard and unrealistic idea. To believe that sickness, suffering and death can be a way of glory becomes an insult. At this point, preaching the gospel becomes a difficult enterprise. Here the question of de Gruchy again resounds: "How can we justify God before an increasingly sceptical and radicalised younger generation who look elsewhere than the Christian faith for their understanding of reality?" (de Gruchy 1987:109). For, the Congolese have ignored or have

forgotten that, although the Old Testament speaks about glory in terms which refer to human riches, property, honour, these possessions are the gifts of God and that, if God does not grant power to partake of them, this human glory is vanity and a dire plague (cf. 6:2). Young people and old people alike have focussed their attention on only one aspect of the Johannine use of δόξα, namely “praise,” “honour,” that can be gained on a purely natural level, and have forgotten that Jesus has despised this kind of glory (4:41; 7:18) and has taught that the only δόξα or praise that people can give to God is a recognition of the δόξα or glory that God already possesses (see Brown1966:503).

Yet even so, indeterminacy remains: how can one praise and honour God when his/her life is miserable, full of bad news, overwhelmed with suffering, misfortune and grief? How can the Congolese in their context recognize the glory that God possesses while they do not see any evident sign of God’s presence and majesty? If we agree with Irenaeus that God’s glory is in living human beings and that full life for people is in the vision of God, how can those who cope every day with sickness, suffering and death, those who do not see the sense of life any more, give praise to God or recognize the glory that he possesses? Following the findings of the exegesis of John 11:1-44, perhaps one should refer to Jesus’ teaching and example, consider the indeterminacies and gaps of the text, make sickness, suffering, death, God’s apparent delays, silence and absence a part of their lives and turn to African values and proverbs.

6.2 Jesus' teaching and example

In examining the ways sickness, suffering and death could be an occasion for glory, we need to refer to Jesus' teaching and example first. In fact, in John's perspective, the supreme manifestation of the glory of God, the supreme manifestation of majesty and holiness of the Father and his greatest saving act are revealed in the hour, the one and whole hour of Jesus, namely his passion, death and resurrection. Jesus was glorified on the cross. Jesus knew his glory after a life troubled by difficulties, misunderstandings, hostilities, clashes and horrible suffering which led him to death.

As I noted earlier, in John's Gospel glory and the cross were joined in an irreducible paradox. Lazarus experienced the glory that Jesus communicated to his disciples only after sickness, suffering and death. Mary and Martha enjoyed the glory, the love and the goodness of God after an inexplicable moral suffering due to the sickness of their bother, the sadness and pain of their poverty, distress, powerlessness, abandonment and lowliness.

Jesus never deserved difficulties, life's trials, suffering and death, therefore however difficult, his example should inspire and guide believers. Of course, one may argue with reason that it is hard to follow this example or object that this argument is totally weak. Yet it is precisely this weakness which is at the centre of John's perspective of glory.

6.2.1 God reveals glory in the power of weakness

In the Lazarus story Jesus appeared to be weak and powerless. He was perturbed and deeply troubled (11:33 f), he wept, he felt the pain, he gave vent to his anger. He died crucified on the cross. Yet his weakness, his suffering and death revealed the power of God and glorified the Son. Bonhoeffer (1972:360 f) has put it clearly as he has written that God “is weak and powerless in the world, and that is precisely the way, the only way which he is with us and helps us (...) Christ helps us, not by virtue of his omnipotence, but by virtue of his weakness and suffering.” Bonhoeffer states that here stands the decisive difference between Christianity and all other religions and that the Bible directs people to God’s powerlessness and suffering, for only a suffering God can help.

In the same way, Moltmann (1974:229) has emphasized that a God who is not able to suffer for and with his people is not worthy of love and clearly is not the God Jesus revealed to us, the one who is love and whose power and glory are manifested through weakness. In Lazarus’ story which is the prelude of his own suffering and death, and specially on the cross, Jesus fully identified with human suffering, human distress even to the extent of the pain of absence, silence and abandonment by God. But this is the powerful and unfathomable paradox of God’s identity and way of acting. For as de Gruchy has highlighted, “God experiences in himself the ultimate suffering of his own wrath and absence; he takes upon himself the pain and suffering of the whole creation; God becomes the defenceless victim (...) On the cross God is intensely present and absent; grace and wrath are most powerfully at work” (1987:116).

God was present at Bethany and revealed his glory where no one could imagine and expect him. It is this vision of power in weakness that directs my appropriation of the Lazarus story, because as de Gruchy has suggested, "It is this vision, this power in weakness which should direct not only the pastors and prophets but the whole people of God, for it proclaims who God is and where God is to be found" (1987:124).

In appropriating our sacred text at this point, one can only refer to one of the most quoted shocking incidents which took place in a Nazi concentration camp. Elie Wiesel reported that Jews were forced by the SS to watch the hanging of a young boy. Before such an unbearable, suffering scene, many among them prayed for God to deliver him. Since nothing happened, one of the Jews terrified by such a horrible spectacle cried, "Where is God?" Spontaneously, another replied, "He is there, on the gallows" (cf. Duquoc 1992:7). Does this event not speak enough for itself to move the Congolese and discern God's active presence and power in the weakness of temporal metaphors, "signs of the times?"

The teachings and examples of Jesus challenge minds and invite us to a radical change and conversion. The stakes are high. It is a question of upsetting the African imaginative world, shaking up our traditions and cultural views; what precisely Kā Mana (1991) calls "Bousculer l'imaginaire africain." True glory, true peace, true happiness, true life is at this price: change of mentalities first. This is the first and great task of the Church in the context of Congo today: to teach, to show believers in word and deed, the true way for arriving to a deep and genuine conversion, a true *meta-noia*.

In *The African Bible* (1999), we find a relevant comment on Jesus' teaching about the origin of sickness (Jn 9:2-3) which, in connection with John 11:4, gives us an important testimony and teaching on the African cultural view of sickness, suffering, misfortune, difficulties and death. The comment says: "The answer of Jesus is also a criticism of negative aspects of African culture. We know for instance that in some areas twins were feared and had to be killed; in Rwanda girls whose breasts did not develop were put to death. In parts of Africa an infertile man or woman was despised. However the answer of Jesus tells us that these persons are not being punished by God and do not constitute a threat of life. They are rather the occasion for God to show his glory. Hence the abundant life, as Africans understand it, can be given through the weak of society. Christ has shown us what it means to have life abundantly. Suffering, and the cross, are no longer a curse but a source of life." In short, the way to overcome our crisis and to receive and enjoy the true glory that Jesus gives is in making sickness, suffering and death part of our vision of life.

6.2.2 Making sickness, suffering and death a part of our lives

Sickness, suffering and death can become a way of glory, peace, joy, happiness, the rediscovery of the meaning of life and encounter with God if, following the example and teaching of Jesus, we come to make these realities a part of our vision of life. At this point we can trust and rely on concrete examples and testimonies which speak for themselves. I would like to refer first to the experience of Father Rogelio Ponsele, a Catholic priest who went through the experience of war in El Salvador in 1981. Talking of his experience from this war-zone to Maria Lopez Vigil, Father Ponsele who, according to his own testimony, used to talk so much about Jesus' death, and his sacrifice on the cross, confessed that he was afraid of death and was always trying to

avoid it at all cost. He actually testified this: "I'm someone who feels fear. One day I thought I couldn't go on living with the anguish of thinking that I was going to die. In San Salvador, I'd already had some pretty bad moments, I suppose. And I'd made a little progress towards accepting death. But it's in Morazan that I've really had to face up to it. So many people die and I may die too" (Vigil 1989:42).

Father Ponsele acknowledged that he had learnt much from his experience of coping with death in his day to day life so that he came to understand that one of the ways to overcome death was to make it a part of life. Speaking from his own concrete experience, he could say things with conviction and persuasion: "You have to avoid death if you can, but you must learn to live with the consciousness that it might come tomorrow, and not be paralysed by that. It's difficult. When you lose the fear of death you begin to feel a tremendous calm. Then when bombing starts you can keep cool, you can make decisions and keep your nerve. You reaffirm your commitment: to be ready to give your life. And so you survive these moments. Your nerves can kill you even before a bomb does, you know" (Ibid.:42).

It is true, fear, anguish, sorrows, shame and nerves can kill and have even killed so many people before sickness or weapons have done so. To this extent, Father Ponsele has made a very important point. His testimony could not have been more relevant for the Congolese in their context of war which is quite similar to Father Ponsele's one. His testimony is also edifying at more than one point, especially in the case of HIV/AIDS.

Many HIV-positive people died earlier because they could not make their sickness and suffering an integral part of their life, and very often, there is no one to help them empower themselves.

Because of fear and shame, they do not have courage to talk, to share with others. They are disappointed with themselves, they are shattered and just give up on themselves. Yet, these people can stay healthy and live longer with the help of their attitude and the counselling of family, friends, doctors and priests.

Fear is very dangerous. It is destructive and fatal. It overwhelms and destroys every thing in us: our being, our creative capacities, faith and hope. One of the most important issues that we have much tackled in Lazarus' story is fear. We have said and learnt much from this theme of ἄσθένεια as the means of fear, anguish, powerlessness which overwhelms all the characters in the Lazarus story. This is an important finding for the appropriation of our sacred text in the context of Congo-Brazzaville. There is no glory, no life unless one overcomes his/her fear, changes his/her mentalities by making sickness, suffering and death an integral part of his/her vision of life. We may quote again father Ponsele: "I think it's important to learn to make death an integral part of our vision of life. All of us want to do something great, but not die, please!(...) Salvadoreans, the compas, our Christians, are not like that. Death is part of their vision of life. The Salvadoreans have taught me that I too must make it part of mine (...) I have learned from the Salvadoreans to make death a part of life" (Vigil 1989:42-43). For Father Ponsele, this Christian attitude to death should not only be manifested at the moment of death but in life. God is the ultimate. Our life "wouldn't be the same if God didn't exist" (Ibid.: 65).

6.2.3 Redemptive suffering

Making sickness, suffering and death an integral part of our lives is essential if the Congolese want to (re)discover the true meaning of glory and life. Suffering can become redemptive if we accept it in a very positive and Christian way, with faith, hope and courage. For as de Gruchy suggests, “Suffering becomes redemptive when it is vicarious, and in our context that only becomes possible when we accept our guilt in the suffering of others and our responsibility to be in solidarity with them. In this act of solidarity we meet God and discover not only where God is but also who God is” (1987:119). For him, “The God in whom we believe, the God revealed in the crucified Messiah, the God who is present even when he is experienced as absent, and absent when we think he is present, this God has opted to be on the side of those who suffer because of the oppression of others. God always takes this option according to Scriptures because he is the God of justice. But God suffers on their behalf in order that the rest of us may come to *metanoia* and thereby also know his grace in his wrath and experience the redemptive power of the cross” (de Gruchy 1987:123).

Now, as we have noticed in examining the context of crisis of young people in Congo-Brazzaville, most of the Congolese lack this sense of acknowledgement and acceptance of their guilt and responsibility in the crisis and suffering of people. Everyone projects guilt and responsibility to others, the Church attacks politicians with their Marxism-Leninism, young people blame old people whom they accuse of being witches and sorcerers, and so on. We are involved in a vicious circle. However, each Congolese is invited to a true *meta-noia*, each Congolese is challenged to acknowledge and accept his, her guilt in the crisis which shakes the country, and to accept his, her responsibility to be in solidarity with those who suffer.

As we shall see later, the only way out of this situation is to follow John's perspective of movement and human response to God's initiative as it is expressed in the Lazarus story (Jn 11), the healing of the paralysed man at the pool of Bethesda (Jn 5) and the blind man (Jn 9) .

The reflection of de Gruchy about coming to *metanoia* and thereby knowing the grace of God in his wrath allows us to consider another important gap and indeterminacy of the Lazarus story also relevant in the appropriation of our sacred text in the context of Congo-Brazzaville: the origin and cause of Jesus' mental attitude at Bethany and near the tomb of Lazarus.

6.3 Jesus' mental attitude in Lazarus' story

As Cullen Story has highlighted, "the mental attitude of Jesus at Bethany and near the tomb of Lazarus has been a subject of careful inquiry with interpretive results that are quite diverse" (1991:51). Scholars have tried to explain the emotion and behaviour of Jesus. Was Jesus "angry" or "deeply moved or troubled " by his sympathy for the sufferers? Does Jesus' mental attitude have any influential relevance for the Congolese in their particular context? Of course, the indeterminacy and gap about the cause and origin of Jesus' mental attitude constitute important findings which are relevant for the appropriation of our text in the context of Congo-Brazzaville. What does Jesus' attitude mean?

6.3.1 Setting aside a problematic interpretation

Following the logic, the plot and the context of the Lazarus story, one may suggest that Jesus' reaction was prompted by the act and attitude of Mary. The text says that: "When Mary came to

to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said to him, ‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died’ (11:32). The words of Mary were accompanied with tears, pain, sorrow. Consequently, “when Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who had come with her weeping, he became perturbed and deeply troubled” (ἐμβριμάομαι ἑτάραξεν ἑαυτόν). Logically, it seems that Jesus was moved by sympathy, compassion and sorrow. He felt sorry for Mary because he was touched and sad to see her in this mood. Jesus suffered with Mary, Martha and their friends, he shared their grief. That is quite usual.

However, this narrative and contextual argument does not really explain the indeterminacy nor fill the gap created by the use of the verb ἐμβριμάομαι with the curious clause ἑτάραξεν ἑαυτόν. A certain number of scholars like Cullen Story reject the translation of ἐνεβριμήσατο by “deeply moved,” “deeply troubled” or “deeply perturbed.” For as we have already noted, the verb ἐμβριμάομαι “is used of the snorting of horses chafing at the bit and, together with its nominal congeners ἐμβρίμημα and ἐμβρίμησις, conveys the meaning: to censure, to be angry, to scold or rebuke, or to admonish severely” (Story 1991:51). Following the three references to the verb ἐμβριμάομαι outside of John 11 where the RSV translated it twice as ‘sternly charged’ (Matt 9:30; Mark 1:43) and once as ‘reproached’ (Mark 14:5), Story found it strange, that in the two occurrences in John 11, the RSV rendered the same verb as ‘deeply moved.’ He wondered if the translators sensed that, in a setting distinguished by grief over Lazarus’ death, the idea of anger or reproach was not in harmony with the character of Jesus.

Although I appreciate Story's objection and agree with the strict meaning of the use of the verb ἐμβριμάομαι, I do not share his conclusion that Jesus was angry with himself because of "his delay in arriving at Bethany." Story argued that, from the context of the text, Jesus rebuked his spirit because at the moment, he regretted his delay⁴⁵. For Story, as Jesus heard tolling forth separately from each sister of Lazarus the sad words, 'If (only) you had been here (11.21,32) momentarily he regretted the course of action which he had pursued in allowing the illness of Lazarus to culminate in death (11.4-15). Story argued that the words of the sisters carried with them a rebuke that said, 'Why did you tarry when you heard that your friend Lazarus was ill? Why did you not come at once for you could have healed him? If Jesus had been at Bethany at the right moment, he would have healed Lazarus as he had healed many others.

To this extent, Story concluded that "now in the light of the sorrow over Lazarus' death expressed by friends of the family (11.19,31) and in view of the even deeper sorrow of the sisters evidenced by their rebuke of their Master (11.21,32), and keeping with the basic meaning of the verb ἐμβρ., the two occurrences of the verb in John 11 (vss. 33, 38) give the sense of self-recrimination or self-censure. The verbs translate into the meaning, 'Why did I not come sooner and save my friends their grief and the grief of their friends as well? I have only myself to blame that I did not come sooner. Why did I cause the anxiety and sadness to this family and allow the one I love to die?'" (Story 1991:64).

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Story compared Jesus' self-regret at his delay in coming to Bethany to the self-repentance of God over the choice of Saul to be Israel's king (1Sam 15:10-11) or to a similar self-repentance of deity over the decision to destroy Nineveh (Jon 3:10). This interpretation seems problematic to me, despite the asseverations of Story to the contrary. I wonder if in these two different cases the context and motivation are the same.

As a human being, it could be acceptable that Jesus had reacted in such a way, regretting his delay. But according to John he was also God and he deliberately delayed his arrival in Bethany for a supreme reason: to reveal the glory of God and of the Son so that people may come to believe that Jesus was the Son of God, the resurrection and life. Milne made this clearer as he suggested two possible reasons which could explain Jesus' delay: "Either he is unwilling to allow his movements to be determined merely by his natural desire to hurry to Bethany as soon as possible. Or Jesus waited to ensure that by the time he arrived at Bethany Lazarus would have been dead four days" (1993:158).

Since Jesus was confident that the sickness of Lazarus would not prove fatal in the long run, I share Milne's interpretation as I quoted earlier that "It is therefore better to interpret this initial reaction as setting the scene for what follows. Lazarus, a beloved and valued friend, has succumbed to the power of sickness, the emissary of the 'god of this world (...)' The final outcome (...), will be life, not death, therein manifesting the glory of the Son, the dethroning of the god of this world, and further glory of the Father through him"(Ibid.:158)

Following the principles of the Tri-Polar Exegetical Model, the distance we have taken from the text and from our own concerns, pre-understanding and first expectations, has allowed us to hear the creative voice and message of John 11:1-44 in its full and intensity. Little by little, this distantiating has been enlightening our mind to know ourselves who we are, clearing the way for the text and its message to come into our context and to speak to us by creating space, bringing out indeterminacies and gaps for us to fill and appropriate them. At this particular point, the message about Jesus' mental attitude that I am going to appropriate refers to Jesus' anger. Draper, Grenhom and Patte have shown us the major importance both of the context and the

ethical responsibility of each interpretation and appropriation of a sacred text for, because of its nature, a biblical text which is regarded as normative for faith and life for a particular faith community matters for believers and the message of this text has a considerable impact in their lives. Since the ethical responsibility of the interpretation of a sacred text has a direct knock-on effect on the life of Christians, it is imperative that the appropriation of our text remains faithful to the absolute message of the text which the analysis of our context has shown its riches and relevance for us. Therefore, in the context of Congo-Brazzaville, the meaning of Jesus' mental attitude could not be other than the original one: anger, censure, rebuke and severe admonishment.

As Schnackenburg has clearly and firmly pointed out, Jesus's mental attitude is absolutely an "outburst of anger, and any attempt to interpret it in terms of an internal emotional upset caused by grief, pain or sympathy is illegitimate" (1971:335). Likewise, it is also hard to support Story's interpretation that Jesus was angry because he would regret his delay in arriving at Bethany. In fact he had deliberately pursued the course of action of allowing the sickness of Lazarus to be the means of the manifestation of the glory of God and of the Son. This interpretation of Story seems problematic to me because it definitely conflicts not only with the evident control of events which Jesus exercises at every point in the narrative but also with God's absolute will, authority and majesty in acting. Story's conclusion calls back into question the idea of God's timing, God's plan having its due time and "the authority and power of the Father and the Son over the great human enemy, death" (Stibbe 1994:49).

Why should Jesus blame or excuse himself for his deliberate saving delay? Who, except God his Father could dictate Jesus' acts? Neither his mother at Cana could do it, nor the emergency,

grief, anxiety and sadness of his friends at Bethany could force him to act against the will of his Father and the original plan of love and salvation which he came to fulfill through his mission. The mental attitude of Jesus in the climactic story of Lazarus tells us that “the pain and anguish of the family are still of less worth than the nourishing of the faith of both the family and the attendant disciples” (Milne 1993: 161).

In fact, if Jesus had to recriminate or to excuse himself for his deliberate delay then he would make a mockery of sickness, pain, sorrow, the cries of those who suffer and those who appeal to him. He would frustrate and wound those who are suffering, coping with sickness and death nowadays and crying to him. Such an interpretation of Story would never be good news for believers but irony, mockery. It will destroy more than it will build. The little faith and hope that some believers still hold will completely vanish. Perhaps the pastor or the priest who will preach such a sermon will meet the same fate as Stephen, namely stoning.

6.3.1.1 The danger of Story’s interpretation in the context of Congo-Brazzaville

As a true human being, Jesus’ regret, self-recrimination because of his delay could be understandable. But the weakness and the danger of the interpretation of Story lie in the fact that his conclusion reflects the way the world acts nowadays, a way that is maintaining and supporting the suffering, poverty, condemnation and trivialization of Africans. Indeed, when we go deeper into the analysis of Story’s perspective, we come to see in it the way the International Community and most of the Great Powers act. They show hypocrisy, guilty silence, complicity in evil, deliberate refusal of aid and / or deliberate delay in assisting the needy, the poor, the victims. They seem to ignore events, the situations of conflicts, wars and poverty which they deliberately

create and support, financially and/or military. But when matters worsen, when matters go beyond their control, they have the audacity to present their excuses to the innocent people whom they have allowed to suffer. They do not act out of love for the good and glory of their people, but from malice, selfishness, imperialism and the protection of their interests. This was the case not only in the genocide of Rwanda but also in the civil war in Congo- Brazzaville and elsewhere.

One argues that the International Community, Belgium, France would be aware of the important risks of imminent massacres which hung over Rwanda in 1994. But it seemed that they would underestimate the fact or they did not care. Later on, when the facts put them before their responsibility, challenging their consciousness, inquiry committees were constituted to establish their responsibilities in those events. Belgium did not hesitate to say sorry to the people of Rwanda in the case of genocide, and also to the Congolese people (D.R.C.) in the case of the murder of Patrice Lumumba. As Uwe Friesecke highlights, in this particular case, "It took 40 years for the Belgian government to admit its involvement in the murder of Patrice Lumumba in Congo in January 1961 and to apologise for it" (*New African* n°412, November 2002: 30).

In fact, Uwe Friesecke a German journalist who works for the American magazine *Executive Intelligence Review*, has testified at the UN Tribunal for Rwanda based in Arusha (Tanzania) that, "The events in Rwanda in 1994 were not an internal armed conflict. There were caused by international intervention from the outside" (*New African* n°412, November 2002: 29). Friesecke goes on, "Western powers, most prominently the Anglo-American powers with the Francophone powers acting as competing junior partners, have caused the crisis in the Great Lakes region of Africa during the 1980s and 1990s in two-fold manner and are therefore responsible for the catastrophe that followed. First, they ruined the region economically, like the

responsible for the catastrophe that followed. First, they ruined the region economically, like the rest of the continent, through the IMF's structural adjustment policy. Secondly, they intervened with covert operations to manipulate simmering conflicts for the purpose of political control" (Ibid.: 29).

If the Tribunal judge, Lloyd George Williams of St Kitts and Nevis considered that the testimonies of Freisecke were "irrelevant and inadmissible," the statements of US Congresswoman Cynthia McKinney (April and May 2001), before the Subcommittee on International Operations and Human Rights Committee on International Relations on humanitarian crisis in Central Africa, speak for themselves. Freisecke refers to the upsetting words of McKinney in which she affirms that, at the heart of Africa's suffering is the West's ruthless desire to enrich itself on Africa's fabulous wealth. For McKinney, many Western nations falsely pretend to be the friends and allies of many African countries, while they relentlessly pursue their own selfish military and economic policies (see *New African* n°412, November 2002: 31).

On the basis of the above testimonies, one can better consider the danger of Story's interpretation of Jesus' delay at Bethany. Following Story's perspective, we come to understand and interpret Jesus' delay in connection with the attitude of International Community and Great Powers towards Africa as follows: we regret our delay in preventing and stopping massacres in time, while we are aware and we have at our disposal the power and means to do it. We regret the course of events which sometimes we pursue in allowing you to massacre each other. We are sorry for sometimes causing you such horrible suffering, grief and sadness.

The French people acted in the same way in the case of Congo-Brazzaville. For a long time, the French petroleum company, Elf-Aquitaine and Elf-Congo denied all implication in the civil war which killed so many people in Congo. But later on, the French government constituted a parliamentary commission to investigate the role of Elf in the Congo civil war. Today each Congolese knows the implication of Elf in the civil war in Congo. The attitude of the French government really meant nothing other than making a mockery of the Congolese. Following Story's perspective, if this is the way Jesus acts with believers, then God is no longer God, God is no longer love, and the Gospel is no longer Good News for the poor. Therefore there is no need to preach that Jesus is the Master of life, the resurrection and life, because nobody can accept such a lie and hypocrisy. In view of this, the interpretation and appropriation of Story represent a real danger for the people of Congo-Brazzaville who, in their particular context of war, suffering and death address their prayers to God. The role of the Church is to strengthen the little faith and hope of the Congolese. My ethical responsibility as a religious, priest and interpreter of the Lazarus story today in the context of Congo-Brazzaville is to spell out the difference between Jesus' delay and the irresponsible or culpable delay of the International Community.

This difference is in the the fact that the deliberate delay of Jesus is for the sake of his people, for a worthy purpose, namely to overcome suffering, sickness and death, and to give ζωή to his beloved. For less worthy motives and for evil purposes the International Community deliberately delays support to dictators from whom they received many advantages and interest. The protection of their interests is greater than the suffering, poverty, misery and death of innocents. In other words, Jesus is life, respects life, gives life while the International community and their accomplices, the ruling elite of our countries are for death, they work to maintain and to inflict

death on others. Jesus' deliberate delay is salutary, the one of the International Community is fatal. As we shall see later, this is a big challenge for the Church if she has not always been on the side of life and taken care of the poor, the needy, the marginalised, the innocent people who suffer unjustly and cope with sickness and death.

6.3.1.2 Cause and target of Jesus' outburst of anger

Obviously, in the Lazarus story Jesus really got all worked up. This I do affirm. However, as some scholars have rightly indicated, in reflecting on the cause and origin of Jesus' anger, we may set aside the hypothesis which suggests that "Jesus is moved by his sympathy for the sufferers" (Moloney 1998:341, note on v.33), or by the sorrow, hypocrisy, unbelief of "the Jews" and of Mary (cf.Barrett 1965:332; Schnackenburg 1971:335). In fact, the first reading of John 11:1-44 and the context may easily lead one to adopt this trail of sympathy; the temptation is great and legitimate. However, with distance, a close and serious narrative study of this same text and context, it becomes quite difficult to support the interpretation which postulates the hypothesis of hypocrisy. As Barrett has clearly indicated, "no ill is spoken of these Jews, who had voluntarily come out of Jerusalem to comfort the sisters (v.19); their sorrow is not contrasted with, but as it were, added to Mary's; moreover John (unlike the Synoptics does not attribute hypocrisy to the Jews (ὑποκριτής and cognates are absent from John)" (1965:332).

By setting aside this explanation, one does not deny the evidence of weakness, lack of faith of Mary and others characters in the story, even less does s/he mean that Jesus was incapable of suffering, of being moved to grief, sorrow, sympathy by the pain and agony of human beings,

especially of his close friends and sheep. Of course, there are elements of unbelief and, perhaps, “the evangelist regards the Jews present, because of their lamentation, as representatives of unbelief, who have no suspicion of Jesus’ power to help even in this disaster” (Schnackenburg 1971:336). In this particular case the Congolese would also find a way in it and would be challenged to change their mentality with regard to some negative aspects of their culture in terms of sickness, death and mourning. Of course, Jesus really feels the pain, he feels wounded and sympathises with Mary and Martha. But, was this the reason which provoked Jesus’ outburst of anger at Bethany and near the tomb of Lazarus?

When we look at John’s gospel as a whole, we notice that the Judaeen authorities and even the disciples of Jesus have behaved in quite a similar way, showing misunderstanding, weakness and lack of faith, especially in the Lazarus story; and Jesus did not vent his anger. In view of this, it is then strange and difficult to accept that before Mary and “the ill-disposed Jews” and only at this unique moment in John’s Gospel, Jesus’ anger may be justified by the lack of faith of the wailers. What evil and sin could it be to mourn a dead person? Jesus who has been patient, tolerant and understanding with his disciples in their misunderstanding, weakness and lack of their faith; Jesus who has shown the same attitude towards Martha could not do the same towards Mary and “the ill-disposed Jews”? Why does he blame and censure only Mary and these “ill-disposed Jews”? Why should only Mary’s reversal generate Jesus’ anger?

Does Jesus censure, rebuke or make mockery of those who cry and lament because of their lack of faith? This is easy to propose, especially in an academic manner and when one has never experienced the reality of sickness, death or painful loss. In raising Lazarus from the dead, if Jesus’ purpose was to strengthen the faith of the disciples and of Martha, Mary and the believers

to come, if Jesus' goal was to reveal the glory of God and of the Son so that the disciples, Martha, Mary, "the Jews" and the Christians to come may believe, then, Jesus could not be upset because of the lack of faith or the weeping of those who were wounded, sad and shocked by the painful loss of their beloved.

Since in the Lazarus story John portrays Jesus as the resurrection and life, the Master of life and history who has ability and who really exercises full control on the succession of events, and since the supreme purpose of the raising of Lazarus falls on the revelation of the glory of God and of the Son for the nourishing and strengthening of faith, it is then impossible to imagine that Jesus' indignation is directed at the power of death. For if in some New Testament literature (cf. Paul), death is regarded as personified force represented by Satan, the destroyer of life, this is not the Johannine theological perspective and in Lazarus' story there is no indication of such idea (see Schnackenburg 1971:336).

In view of this, it is therefore clear that Jesus' anger has nothing to do with Mary's weakness of faith, nor with the unbelief or hypocrisy of "the ill-disposed Jews." Jesus is not against Jewish tradition of mourning the dead, lamenting, and sympathizing with the sufferers either. But as in the case of "bad shepherds", the thieves and robbers (cf. Jn10:7 ff), Jesus is angry and rebukes those who inflict suffering and death on others, especially to the innocent; those who let them or themselves be overwhelmed by these harsh realities and disturb their faith and hope, trouble, agitate and destroy tranquility, calmness and peace of mind.

In short, Jesus' outburst of anger at Bethany was prompted by the presence of the Judaeen authorities and was entirely directed at them because, these declared opponents of Jesus, of his

disciples and enemies of life were a warning sign of subsequent events, Jesus' death. Obviously, these representatives of the ruling elite came to Bethany with the evil intention of searching for the slightest opportunity to condemn Jesus. Indeed, as Milne rightly noted, the raising of Lazarus was "the final provocation" of his enemies (1993:168). Therefore, before the Judaeen temple authorities who were always most strongly opposed to Jesus, plotted against him and "eventually brought about his condemnation and death" (Okure 1998:1446), Jesus could only find their presence threatening and as a warning, and he groaned.

Like someone who is in the face of danger (for instance a lion or a snake), Jesus moved into anger, he groaned as the expression of inner auto-defence to face and challenge his opponents. Jesus angered against these false shepherds, the true robbers and wolves who were about to inflict on him dreadful sufferings and ignominious death. But not only to him but also to other many innocents. In this way, one better grasps Jesus' weeping ($\delta\alpha\kappa\rho\acute{\upsilon}\omega$ as opposed to $\kappa\lambda\acute{\alpha}\iota\omega$), as a manifestation of inner feeling of physical suffering related to his imminent passion and death as well as a communion with physical suffering of each human being who is in Jesus and is treated in the same manner like him. Jesus "wept because of the danger that his unconditional gift of himself in love as Good Shepherd (cf. 10:11,14-15), the resurrection and life who offers life here and hereafter to all who would believe in him" (Moloney 1998:331).

What is the relevance of this interpretation in the context of crisis of values in Congo-Brazzaville? In order to better appropriate this other important finding of the exegesis of the Lazarus story in the Congolese context, I would like to deepen Jesus' indignation in rooting it in the biblical view of God's wrath as an expression of injured love and a mode of his reaction to human beings.

6.3.2 Jesus' anger as an expression of injured love and a mode of God's reaction to human beings

Jesus's anger towards the Judaeen authorities draws one's attention to the crucial issues of the Lazarus story, namely God's identity, God's love, God's concern for those who suffer. Who is God? How does God show his concern and love for the poor, the sufferers? Is God partial or impartial? Who does God defend and how? How can the Congolese believe that God loves them and therefore trust in his loving presence? Perhaps a French hymn of the French version of The Liturgy of the Hours according to the Roman Rite namely *Prière du temps présent* (PTP) may help us to grasp the deep meaning of Jesus' anger, the mystery of God's identity, God's love and the way he acts and makes himself present in the midst of his people. Let us look carefully at the words of the hymn.

Qui donc est Dieu pour nous aimer ainsi, fils de la terre?

Qui donc est Dieu si démunis, si grand, si vulnérable?

Qui donc est Dieu pour nous aimer ainsi?

Qui donc est Dieu pour se lier d'amour à part égale?

Qui donc est Dieu, s' il faut pour le trouver un coeur de pauvre?

Qui donc est Dieu, s' il vient à nos côtés prendre nos routes?

Qui donc est Dieu qui vient sans perdre coeur à notre table?

Qui donc est Dieu que nul ne peut aimer s' il n'aime l'homme?

Qui donc est Dieu qu'on peut si fort blesser en blessant l'homme?

(P.T.P. 1993&1994:720).

And also:

Qui donc est Dieu pour se livrer perdant aux mains de l'homme?

Qui donc est Dieu, qui pleure notre mal comme une mère?

Qui donc est Dieu, qui tire de sa mort notre naissance?

Qui donc est Dieu pour nous ouvrir sa joie et son royaume? (...)

Qui donc est Dieu pour appeler nos corps jusqu'à sa gloire?

Qui donc est Dieu? L'Amour est-il son nom et son visage? (Ibid.:827-828)

In a set of questions the author of this song has pointed out the most important biblical questions, the tortured questions that each human being has never ceased to ask since the dawn of time; and which we are concerned with in the Lazarus story: questions of the identity of God, the wrath of God, the ways God acts, etc. The author of the song wonders: Who then is God to love us so much? Who then is God so destitute, so great, so vulnerable? Who then is God that one can so much wound by wounding a human being? Who then is God who weeps for our suffering like a mother? Who then is God to call our bodies to his glory? Who then is God whom Love is his name and his face? Who then is the Son of God who can be moved to anger, can be frustrated, disappointed, shocked? Who then is Jesus who can censure himself, recriminate himself and rebuke his spirit? Moltmann may help us to grasp the meaning of Jesus' anger and to better consider its relevance in the context of Congo-Brazzaville.

In his influential study Moltmann has defined the wrath of God as follows: "What the Old Testament terms the wrath of God does not belong in the category of the anthropomorphic transference of lower human emotions to God, but in the category of the divine *pathos*. His wrath is injured love and therefore a mode of his reaction to men. Love is the source and the basis of the

possibility of the wrath of God. The opposite of love is not wrath, but indifference. Indifference towards justice and injustice would be a retreat on the part of God from the covenant” (1974:272).

Now, to injure signifies to hurt someone in speech or to offend in language. It also means to harm, to damage, to impair, to revile, to calumniate, to wrong or to do injustice to (cf. Onions 1933-1970). Our interpretation of Jesus’ mental attitude at Bethany and near the tomb of Lazarus has clearly shown that there has been something of the kind; that such sort of thing has happened namely, a wilful inflicting injury, a calumnious language of “the ill-disposed Jews”, a threat and warning of a harmful action which have, evidently generated Jesus’ anger.

In the context of Congo-Brazzaville we have noticed that the older generation and young people alike have been wounded, humiliated, offended, dehumanised by hurtful language such as, civilizing savage people who were without any culture or religion, educating big children, saving cursed sons and daughters of Ham. Truly, wrong speech, calumnious and harmful action such as forced labour, punitive expeditions, human portage, war prisoners and slaves serving for food, destroying, rejecting traditional healing, injustices, inequalities, hatred, exclusions, exactions, massive destruction of life during civil war, looting, rapes, trivialization of death and life, the abandonment of the people of God by the Church at the height of their distress, have injured the love of the sons and daughters of Congo-Brazzaville, and of God through it. In this way, the appropriation of Jesus’ anger in the Lazarus story represents a capital and very relevant finding for the appropriation of our text in the context of crisis of values in the Congolese society, for it challenges our consciences.

Indeed, words, attitudes, gestures that one poses, sometimes innocently or indifferently can be ambiguous and create complex situations with catastrophic unexpected effects. The way one pronounces words, the tone of the voice and gestures determine the nature of an act. Regardless of our will or without it, they can impair, damage, offend, frustrate, wound, etc.

With this proviso, let us appropriate the interpretation of Jesus' anger which challenges the consciousness of each Congolese, beginning with the Church, and then politicians, young people and parents. The relevance of this important finding of the exegesis of the Lazarus story is threefold; it is a challenge and warning with regard to shepherding mission, protection and security, and unity and peace.

6.3.2.1 Shepherding mission

As I already indicated, in appropriating the Lazarus story in the context of Congo-Brazzaville, I should pay more attention on the role of the Church. My main question was: How does my interpretation help the Church in Congo-Brazzaville to be more aware about what she would teach and do today in terms of Jesus and Lazarus? At this level of my appropriation, my reference to the Church is justified by the pertinence of the meaning and target of Jesus' anger. In fact, if Jesus was upset with the Judaeen temple authorities because of their failure in taking care of the people entrusted to them, then the Church in Congo-Brazzaville should be concerned with Jesus' anger.

In examining the immediately preceding and following context of the Lazarus story, we have considered the importance of the shepherding theme. In John 10, Jesus blamed the false shepherds

of Israel who do not care for the sheep and abandon them when they see a wolf coming. But Jesus as a Good Shepherd lays down his life for his sheep and gives them life. These false shepherds are present at Bethany and provoke Jesus' anger because of their evil project to plot against Jesus. In John 12, the same Judaeen temple authorities seek to kill not only Jesus but Lazarus as well. Consequently, the ruling elite neglects the people of God, abandons them to their sad fate and only seeks to do evil, to inflict suffering and death. That is what explains Jesus' anger. What is the situation in Congo-Brazzaville at the level of the Church?

As we have noted earlier, the Church in Congo-Brazzaville has not always fulfilled her shepherding mission properly. We have criticised the methods, work and life of the missionaries, for instance, their failure to share the stand of life with the people and to develop it harmoniously together with them; that they did not care much for the sick. Yet, nowadays this situation is even worse than at the time of the missionaries. Today the difference between Christians, the poor and religious, and priests, is big and even flagrant. While civil wars have left so many Congolese homeless, the Church is among those who have the beautiful houses and, despite the present conjecture, she keeps building. While the poor cannot afford at least one meal a day, do not have access to first aid, education, clean water, religious and priests afford three meals a day, go overseas for care, pay high school fees and receive good education, drive the more expensive cars or wear clothes, and shoes of high quality. Some priests do not care for the sick, they do not have time to visit the sick. They abandon them to their sad fate. As for the spiritual nourishment of believers, at least through sermons, we have already pointed out the laziness of some priests who heat their old homilies and abandon the important task of their priestly ministry to seminarians.

We also noted that during the civil war while some priests shared the suffering of the population in the forests, others were the first to run, leaving the sheep in the hands of wolves. In view of this, Jesus' mental attitude constitutes a true challenge, an invitation for the Church to be more aware of her shepherding mission, a true invitation to *meta-noia*.

6.3.2.2 A challenge for protection and security

The challenge which is addressed to the Church is also applied to those who have the responsibility to provide the protection and security of their citizens, namely politicians, government as the ruling elite in Congo-Brazzaville. In fact, the study of the immediate context of the Lazarus story has also emphasised the theme of protection and security. John 10 has given us the image of shepherding where the sheep are in the enclosure with a gate. Jesus has identified himself with the gate and the Good Shepherd and has shown his concern for his own by bringing so many blessings to the flock, namely protection, security, nurturing and life in abundance as Lazarus has received it.

Furthermore, the metaphors of the enclosure, the gate and the coming and going out to find pasture under the care and the guidance of the Good Shepherd have shown us Jesus as the true guardian and liberator of the flock who provides security by protecting the sheep against wolves and robbers, day and night. However, when we come to the context of Congo-Brazzaville, the government resembles the false shepherds not the good ones. Politicians, government, militias are closer to the Judaeen authorities for they do not care for the Congolese people. They have abandoned, killed and/or let their brothers and sisters suffer and die. In Congo, the sheep were enclosed in the forests with wolves, robbers. At the gate were militias, regular soldiers who

scattered and killed. The coming in and going out were synonymous at finding death for, the so-called “Couloir Humanitaire” - Humanitarian Corridor, was a true “Couloir de la Mort,” Corridor of Death, to use the word given by the Congolese themselves. Thus, the Congolese ruling authorities have failed in their mission of protecting and providing security and life to their citizens. Jesus’ anger towards the Judaeen authorities speaks to them itself and much more severely. Government, militias, soldiers, young people, old people and each Congolese are invited to give up the logic of violence and war; all are invited to respect and protect life, to love one another and to go through a deep experience of *meta-noia*.

6.3.2.3 A challenge for unity and peace

The exegesis of the Lazarus story have given us a wonderful teaching and example of unity and peace. We have noted that the sickness and death of Lazarus were an occasion and a sign of unity of the family, communion and solidarity with relatives and friends. Lazarus himself was the symbol of the unity, restoration and return of the Diaspora. However, when we look at the context of crisis of young people in Congo-Brazzaville, we notice that, sickness, suffering, misfortune and death, are a source of violence, divisions and killings because of witchcraft accusations. In these situations, like the Judaeen authorities whose presence at Bethany represented a threat and warning, so are the young people in Congo-Brazzaville in the context of sickness and mourning. Very often, the presence of young people at a mourning inspire fear and mistrust for they are described as annoying people, trouble makers and agitators. Like “the ill-disposed Jews” at Bethany, in the context of mourning young people appear likely to do some evil.

The sickness, suffering and death of a dear one are moments which are intense and critical,

particularly touching, which require silence, calm, inner peace, tranquillity, rest, privacy, comfort, sympathy and solidarity. As extreme or limiting cases which involve suspense, pain, sorrow, powerlessness, they can be a favourable time of strong unity, harmony and communion of the family, close relatives and friends. However, while this moment seems to be crucial for the suffers, close relatives and friends, some people, young people in particular, make it a time of trouble, hostilities, disputes, divisions. In this context, Jesus' anger is also a challenge.

In summary, the interpretation and appropriation of Jesus' anger represent a big challenge and warning in the context of crisis in Congo-Brazzaville. At the same time, as an expression of injured love indicates a mode of God's reaction to human beings. All along the history of salvation, God's love has always been injured, the heart of God has always been wounded by human behaviour, language, sins and infidelity. However, the more we injure his love, the stronger his love becomes for us. Thus there is a close link between anger and compassion and sympathy. Anger generates genuine love. Those who have experienced anger, those who have been wounded, shocked, frustrated, disappointed in their lives, have developed genuine love and compassion. The Congolese may be more aware of this. Indeed, however deep the disappointment, anger (v.33), and frustration (v.35) of Jesus, he proceeded with the mission that has been entrusted to him. He continued "to respond to his task to make visible the glory of God and achieve his own glorification" (Moloney 1998:331). This is the challenge for the Congolese, this is how they can discern God's active presence in their particular context.

6.4 Discerning God's active presence in the context of Congo-Brazzaville

The interpretation of Jesus' anger as an expression of injured love has brought to light the theme

of the identity of the Master of life and the ways he acts or makes visible his presence and his glory in the midst of his people. In this section, my concern is to search and suggest ways of discerning God's active presence in the context of Congo-Brazzaville. How the story of the raising of Lazarus could be good news for the Congolese and help them to overcome their crisis, (re)discover the meaning of life, the love of the neighbour, the love of their country, the love of God and perceive God's action? How could one announce Jesus to the people who have been going through an experience of absolute vacuum, abandonment and the feeling of being rejected and forgotten by God in their day-to-day reality of coping with sickness, suffering and death? The assumption I would make here consists in inviting the Congolese in general, my family circle, the faith community of my parish and myself to turn towards signs and events as ways and actions which reveal God's active presence in the midst of suffering people.

6. 4. 1 Signs and events

The twin eternal biblical questions of the identity of God and the whereabouts of God are still torturing minds. Who is God? Who is the Master of life? Where is God? Where is the Master of life, the resurrection and life? The people of Congo-Brazzaville find a way in Jeremiah's words: "If I walk out into the field, look! those slain by the sword; if I enter the city, look! those consumed by hunger. Even the prophet and the priest forage in a land they know not" (15:18); nor biblical scholars, even less the poor. All the powerful metaphors of yesteryear in which one used to locate and find God, seem outmoded. As Duquoc rightly notes, nowadays the question "Where is God?" is posed with acuteness while the question "Who is God?" seems to be secondary and finally, "the question 'Where is God?' is posed for the moment in the effort of discerning God's active presence in events" (1992:7). Since spatial metaphors already seem

outmoded and that any seizure of God is a vain enterprise, since it is no longer possible to say where God is, Duquoc suggests that perhaps his action can be perceived in a dynamic of transformation. Perhaps temporal metaphors would be more appropriate? In this way, the introduction of the category of 'signs of the times' is a response to this expectation (Ibid.:6).

Since I do share Duquoc's viewpoint, I refer to his words to affirm that "We are invited to see the action which transforms. From now on the question 'Where is God' relates to religions or ecclesiastical movements in the world which give some indication that the Spirit is working in them. There is no longer any question of locating God, there is no longer any institution which shelters God with any certainty. Events furnish signs. It is necessary to discern their meaning, follow their orientation, flow with them. There is no longer any place where God dwells, it is from events that the provisional action of the Spirit shines forth. Thus we are directed towards witnesses, the agents of these events" (Ibid.:7). This very perspective of signs of the times, "signs of hope" has guided Albert Nolan in his discernment of God's active presence and work in South Africa, and I refer to it as well (cf.1988:134-156).

6.4.2 Toward witnesses

The story of the sickness, death and raising of Lazarus stresses the elusive aspect of Jesus: presence - absence, delay, silence. The experience of Mary and Martha leads one to support Duquoc's statement that God in himself evades our experience. He does not give himself in experience but he announces himself in witnesses (1992:2). Therefore, "It is more worthwhile to discern where God acts than to know who he is" (Ibid.:4). Where does God act in the context of Congo-Brazzaville? Where is the Master of life at the height of the Congolese tragedy?

As Father Rogelio Ponsele, an agent of events in a war-zone in El Salvador in 1981 testifies, these fundamental and challenging questions do really move us. When the bombing of civilians occurred, Father Ponsele was challenged by the tortured questions of the Salvadoreans: "Father, what's God up to? Don't you say that God acts? And how does God act, Father?" (Vigil 1989:42). They went on: "But Father, if he intervenes, when is this going to end? So many years of war and so many thousands dead. What is God up to? It is true that there is no God, Father?" (Ibid.:102-103). When these questions reached his ears, touched and pierced his heart like a sword, when he saw the misery, distress, pain, anguish, anxiety, confusion, powerlessness of the *companeros* Father Ponsele was moved: "I am moved when they ask me this, because they are expressing confusion. They are demoralised, they feel weakened" (Ibid.:103).

As I already noted, at this critical moment, the only thing that the agent of this event did was to talk to the *companeros*, not to convince them, because he acknowledged that at the height of this shock, crisis, distress, he could not convince anyone (cf.Ibid.:102). Even when sometimes the *companeros* expected strength, courage, support from him by confessing his own faith with certainty, Father Ponsele refrained from doing it because that was not his understanding of faith. Christian faith does not follow this logic. It does not work in that way. The conditions for faith are present within the social group which goes through a particular experience of suffering, search of God rather than elsewhere, "in 'the learned and clever', the upholders of the system" (see Nolan 1988:137). Jesus was pointed to the signs as a manifestation that God was at work through the faith of people rather than what he was doing (cf. Ibid.136-137).

The Christian vision of faith, God's active presence and power which I also postulate in my appropriation of John 11:1-44 is the vision of power in weakness, and the will and quality of

human response to God's initiative which he manifests in the signs of the times. Invited to discern God's active presence and action in witnesses and dynamic events which transform and furnish "signs of the times", the testimony of the Salvadoreans could not have been more edifying and relevant in the context of Congo-Brazzaville. Indeed, as Father Ponsele has highlighted, because these people have suffered such a lot, they have come to believe that God does exist and act. They strengthen each other, including their priest by sharing their experiences. Thus "they always defend God! And whatever happens, God always defends them." Their testimony speaks for itself: "Yesterday there was an air raid and we weren't hit, thanks be to God." They firmly believe that God acts: "God acts, Father. God is with us, Father, because if it hadn't been for God, it would have been even worse" (Vigil 1989:42).

One may object that this attitude of Salvadoreans is merely pietism and a feature of incorrect faith. Yet, the Johannine perspective of faith as we have seen it especially with Martha is to move from incorrect faith to true and deep faith. And it is Jesus himself who patiently leads to correct faith. Therefore, perhaps the perspective of the Salvadoreans could inspire the faith community of my parish and my family circle. Perhaps the Congolese should first learn from the experiences of the Salvadoreans where at the height of tragedy, distress and shock sufferers went through a genuine and deep experience of God's active presence. The case of Congo-Brazzaville also speaks for itself. There were so many air raids with those helicopters gunship, so many incendiary bombs, so many dead. People walked unimaginable distances, lived in the forest, exposed to bad weather and sickness, eating roots and all kind of fruits. Of course many died, but many also survived. If it had not been for God, perhaps it would have been even worse. Should the survivors not thank and praise God? Should they not see in this event the traces of God's active presence and action? Should they not consider this event as a "sign of the times?"

6.5 The work of God as signs of hope and faith in God's active presence and the future of Congo-Brazzaville

One cannot over emphasize that God is where the poor, the suffering, the dying, the wounded, the abandoned, the rejected, the marginalised, the outcast, the scorned, the refugees and the homeless are to be found. God is present where one would not expect him, at Bethany, in the tomb of Lazarus, in the forest of Congo with the people who were displaced, lost their houses and all their belongings. As Duquoc has indicated, "God has no identity card, God has no home, God has no historical actions peculiar to him" (1992:7). The one who is nothing and who has nothing, God makes his dwelling in him/her and points to that person. Jesus, the Master of life is close and sympathises with those who mourn, with those who suffer the painful loss of a dear one, with those who day-to-day, cope with the reality of sickness: the terrifying HIV/AIDS and death. God is in the traumatized children and innocent victims of war.

Now more than ever the act and message of Martha to her sister Mary could not have been more eloquent and pertinent: "The teacher is here and is asking for you" (11:28). Each Congolese is challenged to hear the teacher who his calling him/her through his/her brother and sister, to rise quickly and go to meet the Master of life who is asking for him/her as he enters his/her village, house, country and life. Everyone is challenged to convey secretly the same message of life to his and her brothers and sisters, while looking deeply at the dynamics of social change in the country.

6.5.1 The dynamics of social change in Congo-Brazzaville

Despite the persistence of war in some areas of the country, violence, injustice, poverty, sickness and death which continue to make so many victims, it is a fact that today Congo-Brazzaville is full of events and signs which are source of joy, peace and hope. Almost all the populations are out from the forest, and back in their houses and living an ordinary life. Besides Brazzaville, the Dolisie, Nkayi, Kinkala which used to be ghost-cities have found their normal life style. Transport, communication, schools, hospitals seminaries, parishes are working. The Church and all people of good will are taking care of the traumatized children and other victims of war.

The government, the UNDP and the Church are working hard to help young people who used to be militias for their reinstatement in the society and professional life. In striving to find a solution for the problems of young people, namely their real desire and impatience to take part in the life of the nation and of the Church, these institutions and all persons of good will progressively restore the hope of young people(see John Paul II 1995, n° 221). In addition, today people and goods can move freely in the country. Democratic elections have been held and tentative efforts of reconciliation, unity, peace have been initiated. However, as noted above, events furnish signs, that is to say, events are meaningless if one only considers them at the merely historical level. Without any deep or spiritual reflection on events, deeds, the dynamics of social and human life changes, or even any great miracle, one cannot perceive either the relevance of actions nor grasp the message they convey. This was the case for “the Jews” who saw so many signs that Jesus performed but never believed. The dynamics of social changes are signs of hope which can only bear fruit if the Congolese consciously take the responsibility of their conditions and respond to God’s initiative who furnishes these favourable signs of the times.

6.5.2 Taking the responsibility of our conditions

As Nolan has noted, “To base one’s hopes only upon the dynamics of change would be to take a deterministic view of life. It would leave no room for human responsibility” (1988:155). Now as we have emphasised earlier, human responsibility, human response to God’s initiative, human movement are the key attitudes, the point of intensity of our interpretation of the Lazarus story. It is to this John’s perspective of human response to God’s initiative as it is expressed in the Lazarus story, the healing of the blind man and the paralysed man at the pool of Bethesda that each Congolese is invited. The Church, the government, young people, old people, my family members and the faith community of my parish, all are challenged to take responsibility of their life, their destiny and the future for their country, family and parish, which is in their hands.

Each Congolese is invited to move from one place to another, from one stage to another following the dynamic of movement highlighted in the Lazarus story. Each believer in Congo-Brazzaville is invited to be fulfil his/her mission of a disciple-apostle, taking advantage of African values and proverbs .

6.6 African values and proverbs

After carefully analysing the overall situation of the African Continent, the members of *The Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops* of 1994 wondered about the contribution, the impact of the Christian message to the African people overwhelmed by a multidimensional crisis. They were much concerned with the effects, the results of the work of evangelization in terms of values in our Continent full of bad news. In view of an-all pervading despair, the Synod

Fathers sadly had come to notice that “Evangelization stands for many of those essential values which our Continent very much lacks: hope, peace, joy, harmony, love and unity” (John Paul II 1995, n°40). To this extent, the story of the raising of Lazarus is of capital importance because the text is rich in teaching and themes which recall African values. Those essential evangelical values mentioned by the Synod Fathers and which are lacking to our Continent are found in this pericope.

Not only does the Lazarus story refer to the themes of hope, peace, joy, harmony and unity but tackles sickness, suffering, death, life, glory, love, faith, discipleship, God’s delay, absence and silence, family, house, listening, the importance and power of the word, sympathy, solidarity, etc, which have much to do with African values. In this way, the episode of the raising of Lazarus does not only offer a deeper meaning of life and a sense of day-to-day human reality of coping with sickness and death but also opens one to the riches of countless African values and allows one to appreciate the perfect compatibility, complementarity and communion between evangelical values and African values. Faith, hope, love, sympathy, solidarity, family, listening, respect of life and the word are part of African values. Beyond the crisis of values which is hitting the Congolese society hard, in particular the youth, these values survive and exercise a very positive impact in many lives, determining and transforming their behaviour in important respects.

It is worth stressing that the participants at the African Synod have acknowledged that Africa “is endowed with a wealth of cultural values and priceless human qualities which it can offer to the Churches and to humanity as a whole. The Synod Fathers highlighted some of these cultural values, which are truly a providential preparation for the transmission of the Gospel. They are values which can contribute to an effective reversal of the Continent’s dramatic situation and

facilitate that worldwide revival on which the desired development of individual nations depends” (John Paul II 1995, n°42). Of the positive values of African culture, the Synod Fathers put a particular emphasis on the African profound religious sense, their sense of the sacred, of the existence of God the Creator and of a spiritual world. The reality of sin in its individual and social forms is so much present in the consciousness of Africans as well as the need for rites of purification and expiation that the Synod Fathers could not not mention these facts among the important cultural values of African peoples (idem).

Baur (1994:361) notes that “The peoples strong belief in the creator God Nzambi, the good will created by the explorer P.S. de Brazza, and the zeal of Bishop Augouard were the foundations on which the Congolese Church was steadily built, doubling its numbers every decade until 1940.” In terms of the African religious sense of the sacred and the reality of sin, we may refer to the intervention of Felix Mkhoi, Bishop of Chikwawa (Malawi) at the Synod of Bishops in 1983 whose formulation of the African perspective on sin and reconciliation reflects that of the Congolese. Bishop Mkhoi states that “The African knows sin as a concrete existent reality. This knowledge has its foundation in the African knowledge of God, Creator of all people and all things”(see the quotation in Lagerwerf 1987:20).

The Bishop argues that in the eyes of the African God is the source of all life, and life is the basic value which, from God, reaches every individual through the ancestors, the heroes of the past and the deceased relatives; then through the traditional ruler, the head of the clan, and, finally, the head of the family (Ibid.:20). As a matter of fact, “the African values very highly such values as justice, love and cooperation, obedience, unity, and well-being in the family. Physical evil is mostly regarded as a result of moral evil or sin. Moreover, sin is an alienation from one’s

community. This is made evident by the kind of sanctions against a sinner” (Ibid.:21).⁴⁶ The members of the African Synod also emphasized the importance and role of the family as it represents “the fundamental cell of the society”, the “foundation” on which, in Africa in particular, “the social edifice is built” (Ibid., n°80). John Paul II (1981, n°75) would firmly affirm that “the future of the world and of the Church passes through the family” and that, the Christian family is “the first cell of the living ecclesial community” (1995, n°80).

The incontestable value of the family falls on the fact that “In African culture and tradition the role of the family is everywhere held to be fundamental. Open to this sense of the family, of love and respect for life, the African loves children, who are joyfully welcomed as gifts of God (1995, n° 43). In his *Homily at the opening of the Special Assembly for the Africa of the Synod of Bishops*, John Paul II recalled that “The sons and daughters of Africa love life. It is precisely this love for life that leads them to give such great importance to the veneration of their ancestors. They believe intuitively that the dead continue to live and remain in communion with them. Is this not in some way a preparation for belief in the Communion of the Saints? The peoples of Africa respect the life which is conceived and born. They rejoice in this life. They reject the idea that it can be destroyed, even when the so-called ‘progressive civilizations’ would like to lead them in this direction. And practices hostile to life are imposed on them by means of economic systems which serve the selfishness of the rich”(1994, n°43).

In addition, the pope underlines that “Africans show their respect for human life until its natural end, and keep elderly parents and relatives within the family. African cultures have an acute sense

⁴⁶ In Congo-Brazzaville, some traditional societies used to punish publically those who broke and/or disturbed the sacred order of the society and the cultural law. Criminals, robbers, those who committed incest were often buried alive at the market place.

of solidarity and community life. In Africa it is unthinkable to celebrate a feast without the participation of the whole village. Indeed, community life in African societies expresses the extended family. It is my ardent hope and prayer that Africa will always preserve this priceless cultural heritage and never succumb to the temptation to individualism, which is so alien to its best traditions” (1995, n°43).

Having created sufficient distance and allowed the sacred text of the raising of Lazarus to speak in the context of Congo- Brazzaville, one comes to appreciate the riches of this sacred text as the findings of the exegesis of this passage which recall so many positive values which are of capital importance in the Congolese society. As the Lazarus story sheds light in the context of Congo- Brazzaville, we come to (re)discover the countless cultural values of the Congolese peoples, their precious human qualities, riches, possibilities, creative power which might have fallen into disuse or which have been neglected or totally ignored.

The relevance of the Lazarus story lies in the riches of its themes, their link and compatibility with positive values of the Congolese society. The findings of the interpretation of the Lazarus story allow the people of Congo to become aware of the positive values of their culture and their compatibility with the gospel and to consider them as providential values which transform, precious qualities which effectively contribute to handle their crisis and restore their creative energies.

It cannot be denied that, estimated at their true worth, the positive values of African culture such as the family which by nature has vital and organic links with society which is its foundation and nourishes it continually through its role of service to life and the fact that, it is from the family that

citizens come to birth and it is within the family that they find the first school of the social virtues that are the animating principle of the existence and development of society itself (cf. John Paul II 1981, n°42), the positive values of Congolese society are then a chance for this society. The advantages which the family provides namely, an acute sense of solidarity, community life, love, harmony, unity, joy of living, faith and hope, truly constitute a providential grace for the appropriation of the Lazarus message, the proclamation of the gospel and a force for an effective reversal of the Congolese dramatic situation. Since the family occupies a prime place in African culture and constitutes an outstanding value in the dynamic of the transformation of the Congolese society and mentalities, it is important to emphasize its fundamental aspects.

6.6.1 Fundamental aspects and impact of the family in the context of Congo-Brazzaville

As I have already argued, Mary and her sister Martha and their brother Lazarus constitute a family, the *οἶκος* or *οἶκία*, or the *οἶκειος* or *οἶκιοκός* as an expression “a particular household or extended family - ‘member of a family, relative’ ” (Louw and Nida 1989). Thus, when we come to the appropriation of our sacred text the family represents an important finding in terms of African values, because of its fundamental aspects and impact in the search of a solution to the crisis of values which hits the society and the Church in Congo-Brazzaville.

If it is true that in Congo-Brazzaville young people no longer have the values which they inherited from their parents, old people and chiefs; if it is true that they kill because they have been taught to do so; if it is true that one can make from the young people whatever s/he wants and that one has transformed the Congolese youth into warriors; if it is true that society resembles

a brick mould, then one may understand the fundamental importance of the family. Indeed, if we want the appropriation of our sacred text to echo and produce fruits, we need to consider the fundamental role of the family as “the first cell of the society”, the “foundation of social edifice” and its educational aspect which make it the cradle of social, human, Christian virtues which preside at the destiny of all life and integral development.

From the context of his home country (D.R.C.), which context is close to the one of Congo-Brazzaville, François Kabasele Lumbala showed the essential value of the family in African society as he wrote: “The family was an important reality in yesterday’s Africa, as it is in that of today, since our societies are essentially based on marriage, community and solidarity. Certainly today the modern cities of Black Africa have created new networks of relationships, professional relationships, neighbourliness and religious relationships. But it is interesting to note how these new relationships are woven on the family pattern. It is as if through these new networks of relationships Africans were indefatigably pursuing and recovering the family relationship. Thus for example in work places there will be the ‘older ones’ (big brothers and big sisters) and the ‘younger ones’ (little brothers and little sisters), ‘fathers’ and ‘mothers’ and ‘children’, depending on age group, who meet on a factory floor, in a workshop or an office. It is no coincidence that in our local Christian communities one again finds the ‘older ones’ in the church, and that these are not addressed as ‘Mr’ or ‘Mrs’ but rather as ‘father’ or ‘mother’. In most of these communities, the diocesan priest is called ‘Father’” (Kabasele Lumbala. 1995:94).

If wherever they are and no matter their origins and differences, Africans spontaneously pursue and reproduce the family relation, one cannot consider the event as a banal fact. This natural return to basics is not a pure coincidence or pure fanciful nostalgia. The event is a true “sign of

the times” which clearly defines the true identity of African peoples. The message of the resurgence of the family pattern is clear: the family is the most essential element and value of African culture and life. The family is the purest form and manifestation of African identity. In other words, one cannot think of overcoming the Congolese crisis without paying particular attention to the family. The future of the youth, the society, and the Church in Congo passes through the consideration and the evangelization of the family. Parents who have resigned from the sacred responsibility of the education of their children, those who through their carelessness have forced their children to the street are then challenged to be converted and assume their duty.

Of course, it was with reason that the members of the African Synod “launched an explicit appeal for each African Christian family to become ‘a privileged place for evangelical witness’, a true ‘domestic church’, a community which believes and evangelizes, a community in dialogue with God and generously open to the service of humanity. Evidently, ‘It is in the heart of the family that parents are by word and example (...) the first heralds of the faith with regard to their children’. Definitely, ‘It is here that the father of the family, the mother, children, and all members of the family exercise the priesthood of the baptized in a privileged way ‘by the reception of the sacraments, prayer and thanksgiving, the witness of a holy life and selfdenial and active charity’. Thus the home is the first school of Christian life and ‘a school for human enrichment’ ” (see John Paul II 1995, n°92).

The pope would emphasize that parents are to see to the Christian education of their children. He has recommended that with the practical help offered by strong, serene and committed Christian families, Dioceses develop a programme for the family apostolate as part of their overall pastoral plan. He would also insist that “The Christian family, as a ‘domestic Church’ built on the solid

cultural pillars and noble values of the African tradition because the family, is called upon to be a powerful nucleus of Christian witness in a society undergoing rapid and profound changes (Ibid., n°92). The challenge of the Church in the Congo-Brazzaville is to develop a strong pastoral plan of the family, to visit families as regularly as possible, to listen to them, to pray with them and for them. Since many families have been divided by witchcraft accusation and ethnical problems due to civil wars, the Church has the important duty to reconcile, to restore and build unity, peace, love and confidence which have been lost. Her teaching and message must emphasise these major issues, using proverbs, if possible.

6.6.2 African values and proverbs in the context of Congo-Brazzaville

In this section, I would like to emphasize some positive African values which the context of the family offers to someone. As I have already noted, as the first cell the society and the foundation of social edifice, the family is an appropriate context for learning and practising positive African values and proverbs which represent the treasure of African wisdom. It is within the family circle that one is formed to life, faith, acquires the sense of community life, care and respect for others, listening to others and to the word of God, sharing, solidarity, sympathy, warmth in human relationships, acceptance, dialogue, trust and wisdom.

6.6.2.1 The common responsibility of the education of a child

In fact, the spirit of community and solidarity which characterises African peoples is not manifested only in time of sorrow, mourning, death and sickness but also in time of joy and in the care and education of children and the youth. In Congo-Brazzaville, people do believe that

a child belongs to every parent in the village and his/her education is a concern of all. A proverb in my mother tongue (Lari) precisely says this: “*Mwana buwuba kwa mu moyo nkuri ,wuba wa muntu mosi.*” Translated literally, this proverb says that “A child belongs to one person only when he/she is in his/her mother’s womb.”

The proverb affirms the privileged chance, happiness for each man, each woman to be parent of each child in the village and therefore to be responsible for his/her education. People seriously consider their common responsibility because they do believe that the education of a child determines the image and the future of the family, the village, the society and the nation.

In the same way, another *Lari* proverb affirms that “*Bunsonga gâ taba babakila bwo*”, that is: “wisdom is gained at the nappy.” The image of the nappy symbolizes the care of a child, his/her education to life, cultural values and wisdom at the basis, in the family cycle. In other words, a child receives his/her education while he/she still a baby, child, young in the cell of the family and the onus is on the parents and relatives to do it. From the pastoral point of view, these values and proverbs are a real challenge, given the political, economic, social and cultural difficulties which the Congolese families and country as a whole are facing as a result of civil war, crisis of values, and great changes which characterize present contemporary societies in Africa. Here I would like to refer to the African Synod as it emphasizes that, the African family must preserve its own essential values, while adopting the positive ones of modernity (cf. John Paul II 1995, n° 80). In appropriating John 11:1-44 with the hope to probe its message for the Congolese people, I do think that proverbs are relevant and efficient values of African culture. As elements of rhetorical language, they have power of persuasion. In many cases, their use has helped speakers,

musicians, preacher and writers to stress points of intensity of a climax and communicate the meaning of their message, teaching or discourse.

6.6.2.2 Relevance of the proverbs in the context of Congo-Brazzaville

For many people who are wounded, disappointed and who have become allergic to the gospel and the Church, perhaps one of the appropriate ways to approach them and progressively revive their faith, hope and love is to use African proverbs. Indeed, proverbs have the advantage of being neutral or secular. They are rich in teaching and wisdom at the same time. It is a fact that in Congo-Brazzaville people find courage, hope, confidence when they use proverbs or hear them sung by their favourite musicians. The effects of the proverbs in these cases have really shown the transformation of people's life because they listen to them and believe in what is said with greater attention than they could pay to the gospel or any theologically well-structured sermon. Therefore, in the perspective of inculturation, perhaps one should consider proverbs and other positive values of African culture. This idea is supported by the concrete example in the context of Congo-Brazzaville. Several musicians use the following proverb which is highly prized: "*Un sac vide ne tient pas debout*", which means, "an empty bag does not stand up."

The proverb could not have been more meaningful. Everybody finds way in it. A lover feels like an empty bag when suddenly a girl friend or a boyfriend has decided to interrupt all relations. The one who is left alone, shocked and wounded compares himself, herself to an empty bag which cannot stand up. Emptied from his/her contents (a girl friend, a boyfriend, a loved one), a container (a person who is disappointed, a heart which is wounded) cannot stand up. It seems like the world is collapsing before him/her. Those who feel the painful loss of a loved one caused by

Those who feel the painful loss of a loved one caused by death or divorce experience the same reality. They are like empty bags. Thus, when they listen to music which mentions this proverb and others conveying the same message of courage, hope, they feel comfort, peaceful, joyful. Perhaps the Church should not use this powerful way of touching people's hearts by contextualizing proverbs. For instance, using the same proverb of an empty bag by replacing the contents and the gap by Jesus or faith. The true thing that we miss, the true content that we lack is not really or only the person who has left us but Jesus, faith, hope. Without Jesus we cannot do anything. Unless you remain in Jesus, the Master of life, you are like empty bags, you cannot stand up.

The only person who can fill our gap, emptiness, cure our wounds is, of course, Jesus. The Fathers of the Church acted in this way, using the language, images of the people at their time and in their particular context. In the context of Congo-Brazzaville, the use of proverbs will bear abundant fruit. It is in this way that I hope to probe the message of John 11:1-44. I am confident that by using positive values of African culture and proverbs through the device of inculturation, one would touch hearts, strengthen faith and hope, revive the love of the gospel and the Church; and then, progressively contribute to handle the multidimensional crisis which shakes the Congolese society. This perspective of the contextualisation of African proverbs recalls the dynamic of inculturation.

6.6.2.3 Dynamic of Inculturation

Inculturation is one of the important tasks and challenges of the Church in Congo-Brazzaville. It is excellent and appropriate way which allows the Church to sow and to root deeply the Gospel

message in the hearts and lives of believers. It better helps them to love and to appropriate the word of God to assimilate the word of God more fully, while remaining faithful to all their authentic values. Inculturation remains a privileged way and is an urgent task in the role and life of the Church in Congo-Brazzaville (see John Paul II 1995, n° 78). Since the process of the inculturation of the faith includes the whole of Christian existence, in every area of Christian and human life, at this level of the appropriation of the Lazarus story, the dynamic of inculturation brings to light three relevant findings of the exegesis of John 11:1-44 in terms of African values, namely the importance and the creative power of the word, the importance of the healing ministry and the importance of listening.

In terms of importance and power of the word, John has highly emphasised Jesus' work through his word. Not only did Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead by the power of his word in calling him by his name, but it was also by the power of his word, his teaching that Jesus convinced his disciples to go to Judea, strengthen their faith and the faith and hope of Martha, Mary and "the well-disposed Jews." This fact reminds and reinforces the value, the importance and the power in African culture and in the life of the Church. Traditional beliefs in witchcraft and the fear it inspires are often related to the words that one pronounces, either to utter threats or to curse. Thus the word can either bless, build someone, or do damage, wound, curse and kill.

The word of God is life. The word of God is given to us as Good News, as a spiritual good which constantly creates us anew. As Kā Mana suggests, by Good News one may understand a word which, right away, fills a deep waiting, a deep expectation in us, a word which reaches us at a capital point of all our being that it releases, decontrols and blossoms, guides our lives on the way of radiance, and fullness and opens new possibilities of being (cf. 1994:46).

The word of God is our spiritual food and medicine. It feeds us, quenches our thirst and heals our sickness. The one who listens and keeps the word of God is happy and has life. As Paulin Poucouta affirms,

La force exaltante de la parole, sa douceur prophétique,
c'est d'ouvrir dans les coeurs et dans l'histoire des chemins
neufs, de mettre debout des peuples désespérés, comme l'étaient
les Judéens pendant l'exil. La parole de Dieu a ainsi une mission
thérapeutique, restauratrice" (1993.260).

The therapeutic mission of the word of God has much to teach us in the context of Congo-Brazzaville. First of all, it shows the pertinence of healing ministry by the mean of listening and counselling before the increasingly number of traumatized people. The Church will cure so many sick people by properly using the creative word of God. Second, the therapeutic dimension of the word of God challenges the Church to correct the numerous abuses of some priests in the care of the sick related to anointment, especially the anointing of women. We can cure our sisters without touching them but by praying and using the word of God properly. The Church will also educate and correct believers' mentality in matter relating to blessings, holy water because in this domain there are also excess and exaggerations. The word of God and the Holy Mass are more than holy water, blessings and prayers that believers never cease to ask the priest.

The dynamic of inculturation supposes hearing respectfully our interlocutor. No one can cure someone's representation unless he/she listen and respect a peasant's faith, however weak and incorrect it looks. A person who listens must show patience and understanding as Jesus acted

toward his disciples. These are also positive values of African cultures; because as Father Ponsele notes, “if a peasant faith is not respected, if it is struck down, this destroys what was always his source of strength and life” (Vigil 1989:103).

On the basis of the dynamic of inculturation, Eric de Rosny who deals with depressed people in Douala stresses the dimension of listening, respect of the faith and the desire of his visitors.

Mon rôle est de faire passer ces personnes d'une vision ancestrale de la vie et de la mort à une perspective décidément chrétienne. en donnant ainsi raison à leur démarche. En cela, je ne fais, il me semble, que prendre au sérieux leur désir. En termes de théologie, on dira que je les introduis dans une dynamique d'inculturation, qui revient à les aider à convertir leur manière de voir en me conformant à l'intention qu'ils ont manifestée en venant me consulter (2001:501).

The purpose of this perspective of de Rosny is to suggest what he terms a “coherent and curative behaviour” and to an appropriate word which corresponds to each rung of the terrible climbing of anguish (Ibid.:496-497).

I do believe that the starting point of this therapy of listening and sharing is the family as the first cell and the foundation of a social edifice, future of the world and the Church. Families which have been divided by ethnic violence, sickness, death, children who have been traumatized by war, feel a real and deep need of peace - inner peace, unity, reconciliation, counselling or

listening. They need to talk. They need hearing and to be heard . They thirst for the word of God, they seek God, they search the Master of life who guarantees the resurrection and full life. Is there anyone who can quench their thirst, satisfy their hunger, give them a horizon?

Of course, Jesus the Master of life who acts through his ministers, through events and “signs of the times.” And this is the very role of the Church in Congo-Brazzaville: strengthening faith and hope, consolidating unity and peace, emphasising the supreme value of the virtue of love. For as Kä Mana argues,

L’amour se dévoile ainsi comme le coeur et le ressort profond
de la strategie de Jésus. l’amour comme capacité pour chacun
de devenir à tous les niveaux et sur tous les fronts de l’homme,
celui sur qui l’autre peut compter pour commencer une vie
nouvelle, l’amour éthique de la solidarité” (1994:50).

Love is life. To love is to have life. Love builds us, builds our brothers and sisters and allows them to fulfil themselves. It is through love that Jesus has restored Lazarus to life. Love has the virtue and the power to restore each Congolese overwhelmed by sorrow, despair, life’s trials, the weight of the loss of his/her beloved to the appreciation, love and respect of life. Love is powerful enough to rob death of its spoils and restore them to us (see the Treatises of Baldwin of Canterbury, Tr 10). It is through love that the Congolese can restore, unity, peace, confidence, hope and rebuild their beautiful country. It is through love that the Congolese can overcome all kinds of fear, hatred, despair.

Listening and sharing our concerns, problems, fears, sorrows, sufferings, joy, faith and hope, lightens the burden, gives comfort, courage and hope. It is imperative therefore to promote groups of sharing and reflection in the parish and in the basic living communities. The initiative could not have been more helpful because, as Father Ponsele has rightly noted, “We are marching towards happiness, but there will always be more road ahead of us (...) There will always be failings. There are human relationships with all their problems, there is ill health. There will always be questions, dissatisfaction, we will always have limitations to overcome” (Vigil 1989:103-104).

Evidently, God invites the Congolese to go further. To this end, listening and sharing are a good way of marching together in response to God’s invitation. For the people who day-to-day cope with the harsh realities of war, sickness and death, for people who are traumatized, depressed and wounded, surely, these values of listening and sharing are privileged support and effective remedy. A word of love, courage, faith is truly a source of strength, value of hope. Sharing with one another, or with a priest, a pastor, a religious gives strength, courage and hope. Listening and sharing strengthen the link of family and friends in communion, trust, unity, love, faith and hope. I do believe that in a context of crisis such as in Congo-Brazzaville, it will always be a help and a source of happiness to share with one another. And Jesus is the true content for any empty container and faith and hope give a horizon comparable to a pearl of great value. They are the values which assure the Congolese a way of life and the strength, courage not to collapse.

The way which leads to faith and life is long and hard, especially for those who cope with the harsh realities of sickness, suffering and death. However, these people such as the Congolese

courage and strength to face any difficult situation. To this end, I would like to refer to the following meaningful African proverb which says: “Même si le chemin est long, il mène à un village”(Defour1990: 13). That is to say: “Even if the road (way) is long, it leads to a village.” This wisdom is also supported by another proverb which conveys the following message: “La chaleur du soleil ne brûle pas les maisons, elle réchauffe agréablement les pieds”(Defour 1990:151); that is: “The heat of the sun does not burn houses, it pleasantly warm the feet.” Like Jesus towards his disciples, Martha and Mary in the Lazarus story, these proverbs affirm and strengthen the faith and hope of the Congolese.

6.7 Conclusion

The appropriation of the findings of the exegesis of John 11:1-44 in terms of African values and proverbs, supports the basic statement we have brought to light in this work, namely the reading, the meditation and interpretation of a particular sacred text which is regarded as normative for faith and life for a particular faith community, have a major impact in the life of believers. In the context of Congo-Brazzaville the findings of the Lazarus story would not have been more relevant. They represent a true challenge and an appeal to a deep change of mentalities, behaviours, to the life of each believer, that is, a *meta-noia* in the perspective of John’s human response to God’s initiative. The quality of this response is a source of blessings, hope and life.

CHAPTER SEVEN: GENERAL CONCLUSION

Through this, our interpretation of John 11:1-44, we have gained more insight into the deep theological meaning of the realities of sickness, death and life as well as the whereabouts of God. This we have appreciated in examining the issues of the presence and absence of Jesus at Bethany. Our sacred text could not have been richer in that we have also learnt much about the Johannine themes of glory, signs and the importance of human response to God's initiative.

To draw meaning out of the unfathomable riches contained in our pericope, we have chosen the Tri-Polar Exegetical Model of Draper, Grenholm and Patte as the most appropriate path for arriving at the exegetical findings which we have later appropriated in the context of Congo-Brazzaville in terms of African values and proverbs. This task of introducing the narrative theory of our model has been the main purpose of our first chapter. The description has helped us to consider the potentials and limits of the method, and to the conclusion that, despite its disadvantages, the Tri-Polar Exegetical Model is an excellent method for contextual exegesis.

Following the three basic moments and the principles of the model, we have got into the heart of the matter by the pole of Distantiation or reconstruction of the text. At this first stage, we have let the text speak in its own proper context and right, we have come to appreciate the narrative structure of our pericope, its sense of progression, the subtle use of focus and the main characters who play key roles in the story. Thus the second chapter has particularly brought to light the person and work of Jesus, the identity and attitude of the characters of the story in their relation to Jesus and towards the reality of death. Two principal words have referred to their portrayal: weakness

and fear. Therefore, at this level Jesus' work as the Teacher and the Master of life has consisted in strengthening the faith and hope of his own. Having cleared the ground, we have been well positioned in the third chapter to grasp the meaning of theological concern of the Lazarus story, namely the real significance of death and life.

From the examination of death in its origin or cause, its nature as human experience, and from the metaphorical description as "falling asleep", we have progressively moved towards the spiritual approach. Although the word death as well as the experience of death itself have shown the complexity of the reality of death, at the end we have come to understand that human death and the suffering that it causes are real and yet that the phenomenon has not the final word. In a very Christian understanding, death is a passage to new and true life, eternal life that Jesus the Master of life has given to Lazarus and which he will give to those who believe in him to allow them to share in the union with the Father in the Son (cf. Schneiders 1987:51). Prior to this, we have focussed a little more deeply on the meaning of sickness as a manifestation of all kinds of weakness, the theological importance of Jesus' delay, and the importance of human response to God's initiative.

Once we have reached the profound theological meaning of the raising of Lazarus from the dead as a sign which reveals the identity and mission of Jesus, we have been more than moved and encouraged to read John 11:1-44 anew in the context of Congo-Brazzaville. Thus the analysis of our context has allowed us to discover and acknowledge that the Congolese society has been going through a deep crisis of values which has developed a culture of death and fear, especially in the cases of civil war and witchcraft accusations.

The last chapter of our paper has been the moment of appropriation of the relevant findings of our interpretation of the Lazarus story. At this level, we have given privileged attention to indeterminacies and gaps of the text and we have found way through the theological teachings of concern to the Lazarus story. This appropriation has appeared to us as a true challenge and an urgent invitation to a real and genuine *meta-noia*. The Church has been more aware of her prophetic mission and her duty to continually strengthen the faith and hope of believers, and to promote the evangelical and African values of unity, peace, love, family, education and solidarity. In this way, proverbs could not have been more helpful. Each believer has been more aware of taking responsibility of his/her conditions and responding qualitatively to God's initiative as it is manifested in "the signs of the times."

In summary, the interpretation of the Lazarus story has been a great opportunity to go deeper into the meaning of sickness, suffering, death, life and the absence and presence of God which we also experience in our daily life, and to integrate them into our faith vision (cf. Schneider 1987:56). For as Larchet (1998:56-57) suggests, when sickness, suffering and death "are experienced or envisaged in Christ, they can become ways of salvation and means of attaining divine life and blessedness." And also, "through the grace of the saving economy of Christ, these things have taken on another meaning: suffering has become a weapon against sin, and death has become the death of corruption and of death" (Ibid.:56). Finally, all things considered, I would say that the dynamic of our interpretation as a whole has introduced us to the perspective of the theology of reconstruction. Does the interpretation of the Lazarus story not invite the Congolese to rise and to build themselves and their country?

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