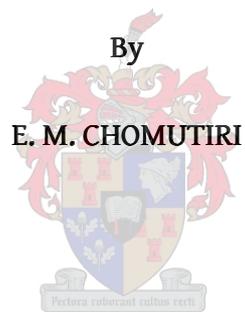


**JESUS AND SUFFERING IN JOHN 9:
A NARRATOLOGICAL READING FROM WITHIN KARANGA FAITH
COMMUNITIES**



**Dissertation presented for the degree of Doctor of Theology
University of Stellenbosch**

**Promoter:
Prof. A. E. J. Mouton**

December 2009

DECLARATION

By submitting this dissertation, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the owner of the copyright thereof (unless to the extent explicitly otherwise stated) and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

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SUMMARY

The thesis is mainly concerned with Jesus' perspective on suffering according to John 9. The dramatic events in John 9 were triggered by a question by Jesus' disciples about the cause of an unnamed blind beggar's blindness. The disciples wanted to know whether the blindness was caused by the beggar's sins or by the sins of his parents (τίς ἥμαρτεν; - 9:2). Jesus, however, instead of addressing the *cause* of the man's blindness, surprisingly and ironically shifted the focus to its *purpose*: "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him" (ἵνα φανερωθῆ τὰ ἔργα τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ - 9:3). Ultimately, it is not the man's blindness that is the issue in John 9, but how people understand Jesus as the revelation of God. This radical shift in perspective, and its implications for first and later audiences/readers of John's Gospel, is the main question to be addressed by the thesis.

Because of Jesus' response to the disciples' question, the researcher chose John 9 as a key section for understanding Jesus' perspective on suffering. The purpose of the study is to explore the nature and implications of Jesus' response to the blind beggar's condition - particularly in opening up new possibilities of experiencing God's presence in Jesus the Messiah, the giver of light and life.

Chapter 1 of the thesis is the introduction of the investigation covering the research problem, hypothesis, motivation for the study, its proposed contribution, preliminary studies undertaken and the methodology to be followed. The research was done through a narratological reading of John 9.

Chapter 2 contributes to the research question by explaining different elements of narrative theory such as implied author, implied audience or readers, narrator, characters, point of view, settings and plot development. Since these are major elements of a narrative theory, the same elements will be used in the following chapters of the thesis.

Chapter 3 analyses the narrative of John 9:1-41 according to the categories discussed in chapter 2 of the thesis. The main question to be addressed is Jesus' response to his disciples' question regarding the cause of the beggar's blindness. For Jesus it is not the cause of the man's physical blindness that is the issue, but the cause of the spiritual blindness of the Jews who do not recognise him as God's Messiah (cf 9:2, 41). The structure of John 9 takes

the form of a drama in seven scenes. The purpose of this chapter of the thesis is to explore who Jesus is – *inter alia* through the (speech) acts of different characters in the seven scenes, through different settings, and the plot development in John 9.

Chapter 4 elaborates on the research question with respect to John 9 by focusing on Jesus and suffering in the post-synagogal movement. The investigation into the relationship between Jesus and suffering in John 9 is extended to John 10-12 where the narration continues of Jesus giving light and new life to people.

The anti-language in John's Gospel reflects a new social group that upheld an alternative reality that ran counter to the social realities of society at large. In the final analysis John had a clear and explicit purpose in mind: "These miraculous signs are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that by believing you may have life in his name" (20:31).

Chapter 5 of the thesis focuses on the Karanga people's interaction with the implied narratological purpose of John 9. The traditional belief of the Karanga is that any kind of illness, misfortune or death is a consequence of sin committed by a member of the community or family, which seems to be analogous to Jewish beliefs according to the disciples' question in John 9:2. This belief is challenged fundamentally by Jesus' practical yet ironical response. Chapter 5 of the thesis discusses the anticipated response to John 9 of present-day Karanga faith communities. It concludes by suggesting new faith responses to the Karanga people's experience of illness and death, according to Jesus' perspective on suffering in John 9.

OPSOMMING

Die tesis gaan hoofsaaklik oor Jesus se perspektief op lyding volgens Johannes 9. 'n Vraag van Jesus se dissipels oor die oorsake van 'n onbekende blinde bedelaar se kondisie het gelei tot die dramatiese gebeure in Johannes 9. Die dissipels wou weet of die bedelaar se blindheid deur sy sonde of die sonde van sy ouers veroorsaak is (τίς μαρτεν; - 9:2). Jesus skuif die fokus op verrassende en ironiese wyse van die oorsaak van die blindheid na die doel daarvan (ἵνα φανερωθῆ τὰ ἔργα τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ - 9:3). Uiteindelik gaan dit in Johannes 9 nie oor die man se blindheid nie, maar oor hoe mense Jesus as die openbaring van God verstaan. Hierdie radikale skuif in perspektief, en die implikasies daarvan vir aanvanklike en latere gehore/lesers van die evangelie volgens Johannes, word die primêre vraag wat in die tesis aangespreek word.

In die lig van Jesus se reaksie op die dissipels se vraag, kies die navorser Johannes 9 as 'n sleutel-gedeelte om Jesus se perspektief op lyding te verstaan. Die doel van die studie is om die aard en implikasies van Jesus se reaksie op die blinde bedelaar se toestand te ondersoek – veral in die oopbreek van nuwe moontlikhede om God se teenwoordigheid te ervaar in Jesus, die Messias, die gewer van lig en lewe.

Hoofstuk 1 van die tesis is die inleiding tot die ondersoek en dek die navorsingsprobleemstelling, hipotese, motivering vir die ondersoek en voorgestelde bydrae daarvan, voorafgaande studies wat gedoen is, en die metodologie wat gevolg word. Die navorsing is gedoen deur middel van 'n narratologiese lees van Johannes 9.

Hoofstuk 2 van die tesis dra by tot die navorsingsvraag deur die verskillende elemente van narratiewe teorie te beskryf, soos die geïmpliseerde gehoor of lesers, verteller, karakters, standpunte, tonele, en storielyn-ontwikkelings. Aangesien hierdie die hoofelemente van 'n narratiewe teorie is, word dieselfde elemente in al die ander hoofstukke van die tesis gebruik.

Hoofstuk 3 analiseer die verhaal in Johannes 9:1-41 aan die hand van die kategorieë wat in hoofstuk 2 van die tesis bespreek is. Die hoofvraag wat aangespreek word, is Jesus se antwoord oor die oorsaak van die bedelaar se blindheid. Vir Jesus gaan dit nie oor die oorsaak van die man se fisieke blindheid nie, maar die oorsaak van die geestelike blindheid

van die Jode, wat hom nie erken as God se Messias nie (cf 9:2, 41). Die struktuur van Johannes 9 is in die vorm van 'n drama met sewe tonele. Die doel van hierdie hoofstuk van die tesis is om te ondersoek wie Jesus is – onder andere deur die optrede van verskillende karakters in die sewe tonele, deur verskillende plasings en die storielyn-ontwikkeling in Johannes 9.

Hoofstuk 4 brei verder uit op die navorsingsvraag met betrekking tot Johannes 9 deur te fokus op Jesus en lyding in die post-sinagoge beweging. Die ondersoek oor die verband tussen Jesus en lyding in Johannes 9 word uitgebrei na Johannes 10-12, waar die vertelling van Jesus wat lig en lewe gee, voortgesit word.

Die anti-taal in die Johannes-evangelie reflekteer 'n nuwe sosiale groep wat 'n alternatiewe sosiale realiteit handhaaf, teenoor die sosiale realiteite van die gemeenskap as geheel. Uiteindelik het die Johannes-evangelie 'n duidelike en eksplisiete doel gehad: “Maar hierdie wondertekens is beskrywe sodat julle kan glo dat Jesus die Christus is, die Seun van God, en sodat julle deur te glo, in sy Naam die lewe kan hê” (20:31).

Hoofstuk 5 van die tesis fokus hoofsaaklik op die Karanga mense se interaksie met die geïmpliseerde narratologiese doel van Johannes 9. Die tradisionele geloof van die Karanga is dat enige vorm van siekte, ongeluk of dood 'n gevolg is van sonde wat deur 'n lid van die gemeenskap of familie gepleeg is. Volgens die dissipels se vraag in Johannes 9:2 lyk dit of aspekte van die Joodse geloof hiermee ooreen gestem het. Dié geloof word fundamenteel uitgedaag deur Jesus se praktiese dog ironiese reaksie. Hoofstuk 5 van die tesis bespreek die verwagte reaksie op Johannes 9 van hedendaagse Karanga Christengemeenskappe. Dit sluit af deur 'n nuwe geloofs-reaksie vir die Karanga mense se ervaring van siekte en dood voor te stel volgens Jesus se reaksie op die dissipels se vraag in Johannes 9:2.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND DEDICATION

It is difficult to express or formulate gratitude openly. The writing of a thesis represents a long time commitment and collaboration on the part of both the researcher and the promoter. To reach a final success of an attempt in doing something new rests upon the encouragement, and also the involvement and advice of the promoter.

I myself would therefore want to begin by expressing my thankfulness and appreciation to my promoter, Professor Elna Mouton. The manner and motherly attitude with which she fulfilled this role of a promoter; acting as a serious constant source of encouragement, as well as a constant source of the deepest intellectual challenge and criticism which pushed me continually to sharpen up the focus of this research will always be remembered and appreciated. The study was completed in 2009 – the year in which 150 years of theological training at Stellenbosch was celebrated.

Secondly, I must express my words of thanks to professor Combrink Bernard who wrote me after I completed a Master's degree in Theology to continue with a doctoral degree.

Dr C.C. Le Bruyns of the faculty of theology at the University of Stellenbosch Faculty of Theology guided me with suggestions for clearly and correctly writing a thesis. I am most thankful for this assistance.

Mrs Maryke Hunter-Hüsselmann at the University of Stellenbosch for continually reading the developing manuscript, offering invaluable evaluation and criticism, to proofreading the thesis itself and offering academic writing suggestions and her correcting of my English grammar. Thanks must also go to the librarians of the Faculty of Theology. I appreciate very much this assistance.

To do a research work demands a lot of money and time. I am therefore grateful to all my sponsors such as the Commission for Witness, Reformed Mission League of The Netherlands, and the Reformed Church in Zimbabwe for allowing me the time and opportunity to do this research.

Lastly, I must express my deepest and most profound thankfulness to my dear wife, Margaret, and our dear children Anna, Simbarashe, Yeukai, Faraimunashe the late, Simbainashe, and Vimbainashe who remained at home and supported me unwaveringly through their prayers until the completion of this thesis.

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CHAPTER 1

JESUS AND SUFFERING IN JOHN 9:

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS TO THE RESEARCH PROJECT

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The researcher was born and bred in the Karanga family and community in the Chivi district of Zimbabwe, speaks Karanga and is at home with Karanga traditional beliefs and practices. He worked as a teacher in both primary and high schools (1977-79; 1985-86) before he became an ordained minister of religion in 1985. Besides being an ordained minister, the researcher has had the privilege of teaching Theological Education by Extension in 49 congregations of the Reformed Church in Zimbabwe and serves until now in this department of the church. In these congregations, the researcher has had a chance to engage in rigorous reflection on what God means to him as an African believer.

In the Karanga society, serious illness and disease are perceived of as primarily having their root in personal causality or caused by individuals' or their parents' sins. *Mudzimu* (ancestors) are believed to be the major cause of serious illness as they seek attention (Gelfand 1962:52; Magesa 1997:47-50). The researcher has seen fellow Karanga people grappling with the killer disease HIV and Aids (*Shuramatongo*). Explanation of the illness lies with the moral consequences of the parents' actions. Accordingly therapy necessarily entails confession of guilt committed by parents as a supplement to the herbal treatment (see Bioline International Official Site 2008 Online). The researcher has seen people suffering not only because of hunger or illness like HIV and Aids but also being accused by fellow members of the family or community. Some have committed suicide especially women after having been accused of being barren or causing sickness or death to a child or another member of the family. The accusing of each other does not exclude Christian believers since they are part of their families or communities where they live.

Besides witnessing people in conflict because someone is accused of causing suffering, the researcher has also read scholarly books, articles and African journals that deal with suffering among Karanga people.¹

The suffering the researcher has witnessed among the Karanga people influenced him to write about perspectives of Jesus and suffering in John 9. In this thesis John's Gospel will be read narratologically from within the perspective on suffering in Karanga (Christian) faith communities. John 9 comes as a radical challenge to these faith communities regarding their beliefs and practices. Karanga Christians are challenged by John 9 fundamentally to revisit their understanding about (the causes of) suffering.

The researcher chose to construct the implied purpose or rhetorical effect of John 9 first, and then allow it to engage the Karanga context.² Aspects of the Karanga culture in general and religion in particular will be explored in Chapter 5 of the thesis. An ultimate challenge to the research project is to account for the radical challenges posed to Karanga faith communities by Jesus' dynamic perspective on life – especially on suffering – according to John's Gospel.

Primarily, the study will investigate the misunderstanding of Jesus' disciples (mainly Jews) about the condition of an unnamed blind beggar. Their understanding of the man's blindness centres on the causes of his condition, which could be related to their understanding of suffering as retribution for sin according to the Torah (cf Exod 20:5; 34:7). The disciples' question (τίς ἥμαρτεν;) triggered the dramatic story in John 9. Instead of addressing the *cause* of the blindness, Jesus however dismisses their focus and dramatically shifts it to the *purpose* of the man's suffering. This makes the question at stake – not only in

¹ These include Chavhunduka (1978): *Traditional healers and the Shona patient*; Daneel (1970): *The God of the Matopohills*; Gelfand (1962): *Shona religion with special reference to the Makorekore*; Magesa (1997): *African religion: The moral traditions of abundant life*; and Shoko (2007): *Karanga indigenous religion in Zimbabwe*.

² The story of the blind beggar in John 9 presents the Jewish understanding of suffering as related to a particular cause – in this case either the sins of the blind beggar or the sins of his parents. The disciples consult Jesus as a miracle performer, anticipating that He would be able to tell whose sin had caused the blindness – a response that would serve their religious paradigm. This understanding seems to be analogous to beliefs regarding suffering among Karanga people, even Karanga Christian believers. Karanga faith communities facing serious illness regularly consult traditional healers. Like the disciples of Jesus, Karanga believers attach the cause of suffering to the sins of individuals. Further, the healing in John 9 is by spittle, mud, touching and water. Even this may be compared to Karanga ways of healing. The washing in the pool of Siloam may be compared to washing from a dish of water with Karanga herbs. Likewise, the Jewish Sabbath can be compared to the Karanga day of rest, Thursday.

Jewish communities (as part of John's audience/readers in the first century AD) and Karanga faith communities of the 21st century thus seem to have a lot in common. Jesus' response to the disciples in John 9 will therefore be allowed to interact with Karanga beliefs in Chapter 5 of thesis.

John 9, but in John's Gospel as a whole – to be about *who Jesus is*, as shall be argued in chapters 3, 4 and 5 of the thesis.

The aim of the study is thus to explore the misunderstanding that existed among the disciples of Jesus regarding the cause/purpose of the blind beggar's condition. The narrator crafted the story of Jesus with the purpose of leading the recipients of the Gospel to see the world as he saw it. There seemed to be a real need for the audience/readers (of John 9) to be reminded of who this Jesus was.

The thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 is an introduction to the research project, which includes its problem statement, hypothesis, proposed contribution, preliminary studies undertaken, and the methodology to be followed, namely a narratological reading of John 9.

Chapter 2 focuses on narratological aspects of the gospel of John, providing a narrative theory with elements such as characters, point of view, settings, and plot development. The same elements will be used in the investigation of Chapters 3, 4 and 5.

Chapter 3 discusses the radical perspective of Jesus on suffering according to John 9:1-41 as perceived by the Johannine community. John 9 is presented in the form of a drama divided into seven scenes, with characters moving from one scene to the other. The chapter discusses the question by Jesus' disciples on whose sins caused the blindness of the beggar – as a misunderstanding of the real issues at stake in Jesus' mission to the world. The narrative's movement from one scene to the other opens up a different understanding on who Jesus is. The drama shows how different opposing and supporting characters developed in the course of the narrative, and how they contributed to the plot development. The theoretical elements explained in Chapter 2 of the thesis are appropriated to the analysis of John 9 here. The chapter concludes by indicating how Jesus shifted the emphasis of the disciples' question (and frame of mind) on the *cause* of the blind man's condition to its *purpose*, namely for God's glory and power to be displayed in his life – by implication, through the life of the Messiah.

Chapter 4 focuses on the self-revelation of Jesus during the post-synagogal movement. The giving of life to the formerly blind beggar in John 9 is related to the work of Jesus in chapters 10-12 of the Gospel. Metaphors or themes to be investigated are: a) Jesus as the

door/gate for the sheep, b) Jesus as the good shepherd, and c) Jesus as the light of the world.

Chapter 5 of the thesis focuses on Karanga faith communities interacting with the implied narratological purpose of John 9. The chapter cross-refers to Chapter 3 of the thesis while possible analogies with Karanga faith communities are discussed.

The chapter is introduced by briefly exploring Karanga cultural and religious beliefs and practices. The issue of suffering among the Karanga people is also discussed – especially Karanga beliefs regarding the *causes* of illness. The aim of the chapter is to explore the tension that exists among the Karanga faith communities who believe that suffering cannot be separated from the sin of either a member of the family or an individual member of the community. Karanga Christian believers are challenged fundamentally by Jesus’ response to the disciples in John 9-12, particularly by Jesus’ practical yet ironical shift away from the issue that was at stake for them. Jesus namely moves away from the disciples’ question regarding the *cause* of the beggar’s blindness to its *purpose*, thereby moving their perspective rhetorically to the healing and caring presence of God in Jesus. The issue in John 9 is the question about Jesus’ identity and the implications thereof for the first century Johannine community. For later audiences and readers, followers of Jesus through the centuries, it remained and remains a challenge to discern the presence and identity of Jesus in the world, and the implications thereof for their practical lives.

The core identity of the Johannine community is its relationship of faith and unity with Jesus. Jesus’ relation to them is described by means of powerful metaphors such as “the good shepherd”, “the door” (John 10:1-18), and “the true vine” (John 15:1-10). For present-day readers, the ethically responsible thing to do would be to read John 9 within the context of the entire Gospel, in order to determine the sequence and internal connections in the narrative.

In this way, as Sharon Ringe (1992:13) claims, one may obtain a grasp of the Gospel as a whole:

The witnessing narration of the Gospel of John communicates to the reader that Jesus, the Son of God, brings life by his acts, his words, miracles, and conversations, and this summons the readers to an acceptance of the revelation of God by faith.

The main figure, Jesus, reveals his glory in the first twelve chapters and receives it in a special way from chapters 13-21.

In John 9:4 Jesus proclaims: “We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work.” These words express the nature and urgency of his public ministry. John 9 was chosen for this research in order to present another way of thinking about who Jesus is, not about finding answers to the disciples’ question in John 9:2.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

A question by Jesus’ disciples in John 9:2 regarding the causes of an unnamed blind beggar’s condition triggered the dramatic story in John 9. The disciples wanted to know whether his blindness was caused by his own sin or the sins of his parents (τίς ἥμαρτεν;). This question probably reveals the traditional belief of the Johannine community regarding illness and other forms of suffering. The conviction of the disciples and Pharisees that the beggar’s blindness must have been a consequence of somebody’s sin created serious tension with Jesus’ views in this regard, according to John 9.

The researcher became interested in this story because of the very question of the disciples, which in many ways seems to be analogous to the ways in which Karanga faith communities in Zimbabwe (still) think about suffering. Traditionally, the Karanga people view any kind of illness; misfortune or death as a consequence of sin committed by a member of a family. JK Olupona (1991:102) writes in this regard: “What one man did, directly or indirectly affected other members of his society or community.” A South African Johannine scholar, John Suggit, states that it is always tempting to look for a physical cause of disability or a disease, and that Christians often tend to find the cause in a person’s behaviour (Suggit 2003:77).

Jesus, however, dismisses this focus. The narrative makes it clear that there is a deeper theological reason for the man’s blindness. Instead of addressing the *cause* of the man’s blindness, Jesus surprisingly and ironically shifts the focus to its *purpose*: “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him” (ἵνα φανερωθῆ τὰ ἔργα τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ – 9:3). Ultimately, it is not the man’s blindness that is at stake (important as it was to Jesus), but how people understand Jesus as the revelation of God. This becomes the issue in John 9.

Because of Jesus' response to the disciples' question, the researcher chose John 9 as a key section for understanding Jesus' perspective on suffering. The purpose of the study is to explore the nature and implications of Jesus' response to the blind beggar's condition – particularly in opening up new possibilities of experiencing God's presence in Jesus the Messiah, the giver of light and life. This radical shift in perspective, its textual and contextual nuances, and its implications for (first and later) audiences/readers of John's Gospel, consequently becomes the main question to be addressed by the thesis. If Jesus shifted the thrust of the disciples' question about the *cause* of the blind beggar's condition in John 9:2 to the miraculous sign of his healing and a discourse on the *purpose* of his blindness and entire life in relation to Jesus, the thesis is deeply concerned with the reality that Karanga Christian communities today are faced with a similar dilemma – even 20 centuries after Jesus' earthly ministry.

1.3 HYPOTHESIS

As a response to the research question the thesis opts for a thorough analysis of the dynamic, the logic and rhetoric of the story in John 9 – not only within the immediate literary context of John 9-12, but also of the entire Johannine narrative. The logic of Jesus' profound yet ironic response to the disciples' question posed a radical challenge to the deeply rooted traditional beliefs of the Johannine community of the first century, and continues to do so to present-day Karanga Christians. The thesis takes up this challenge by carefully analysing the narrative of John 9:1-41. The main question to be addressed is Jesus' response to his disciples' question regarding the cause of the beggar's blindness. For Jesus it is not the cause of the man's physical blindness that is the issue, but the cause of the spiritual blindness of the Jews who do not recognise him as God's Messiah (cf 9:2, 41). The purpose of Chapters 3 and 4 of the thesis is to explore who Jesus is according to John 9-12 – *inter alia* through the (speech) acts of different characters in the narrative, through different temporal, spatial and social settings, as well as the plot development in the story. According to John, Jesus ultimately provides his disciples with a new lens, a new way of understanding who He is and how He is present amongst his followers.

Chapter 5 of the thesis focuses on the Karanga people's interaction with the implied narratological purpose of John 9. The traditional belief of the *Karanga* is that any kind of illness, misfortune or death is a consequence of sin committed by a member of the community or family, which seems to be analogous to Jewish beliefs according to the

disciples' question in John 9:2. This belief is challenged fundamentally by Jesus' practical yet ironical response. Chapter five of the thesis discusses the anticipated response to John 9 of present-day Karanga faith communities. It concludes by suggesting new faith responses to the Karanga people's experience of illness and death according to Jesus' perspective on suffering in John 9.

1.4 PRELIMINARY STUDIES

Besides being an ordained minister, the researcher had the privilege of teaching Theological Education by Extension in 49 congregations of the Reformed Church in Zimbabwe. In these congregations, the researcher had a chance to engage in rigorous reflection on what God means to him as an African believer. His studies at the University of Stellenbosch have been extremely useful in forming a grasp about Jesus and suffering in John 9. His mini-thesis for the Master of Theology programme: *The interrelatedness of Christology and Ecclesiology from the perspective of John 9* (1998), furnished him with what he considers to be a viable foundation for this research. The mini-thesis offered guidelines and encouragement to the researcher in order to relate biblical perspectives to some of the causes of suffering.

The researcher studied recent abstracts and journals, and consulted the *Database of the National Research Foundation* (1998) to determine whether any research has been done on this subject before, and none was found.

1.5 METHODOLOGY

When conducting research, it is of great importance for a researcher to examine the methods one would employ to facilitate the study. This will determine what will be achieved at the end of the research.

Today scholars of John's Gospel such as Culpepper (1983), Rotz (1992), Hartin (1992) and Bruce (2005) generally regard John's Gospel as belonging to the narrative genre, including other genres such as discourses and prayers. In John 9, the story of Jesus healing a blind beggar is told, challenging the audience to revisit their understanding of Jesus. Possible questions to be asked regarding the syntactic structure and rhetorical purpose of the dramatic narrative in John 9 are the following:

- What are the literary techniques John (the narrator) uses in order to move his audience to new insights?
- What kind of knowledge was the audience supposed to have in order to follow the narrator's codes towards understanding the story of the blind beggar?
- What position or conviction did the narrator anticipate to move them away from, and to what new position or insight?

With these questions in mind, and in continuation with respected Johannine scholars, the researcher chose to adopt a narrative approach to John's Gospel for the purpose of this research project. The proposed contribution of the thesis is to develop new insights in understanding Jesus' perspective on suffering according to John 9. It is precisely through *narrative* elements that John's Gospel communicates its confessed aim of moving its audience or readers to new insights. Rotz (1992:68) argues that symbolism, irony, and metaphor are some of the techniques that John employs with great effectiveness. She continues to mention elements of these techniques, such as characters, point of view, settings, plot and a created world (1992:62).

Such narrative techniques and elements will be used in the investigations of the current research. The researcher will make use of a narrative approach that will accommodate both literary and historical aspects. A narrative approach typically examines the theme, plot, functions and character development of various characters, as well as settings in a story. The researcher believes that a narrative approach will help to understand and explain how traditional units cohere and function together within the drama of John 9. The impact of the story depends on the skills that the author and narrator used, as well as the openness and ability of the audience to decode and appropriate those skills. Meaning is created through interpretation as an interactive process of the audience with the text.

1.6 SUMMARY

The research question to be investigated in the thesis is Jesus' perspective on suffering according to John 9. It is argued that both in the story of John 9 and that of present-day Karanga faith communities a strong perception existed/exists that illness and other forms of suffering in society are the direct or indirect consequence of the sins of an individual member of a family or community. Jesus, instead of addressing the *cause* of the beggar's

blindness (as requested by the disciples), dramatically shifted the focus of his (speech) acts to the *purpose* of the blind man's condition – that God's power might be revealed in his life. Ultimately, John 9 is about the identity of Jesus as the one sent to represent God.

In the next chapter, a narrative theory will be provided through a brief description of narratological elements such as characters, point of view, settings, and plot development. The basic structure and function of each of these elements will be explained as they will serve as major methodological tools towards analysing the drama of John 9 in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 2

NARRATOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

2.1 PLACE AND TIME OF ORIGIN?

Before discussing theoretical aspects regarding a narratological reading of texts in general, and the Fourth Gospel in particular, a few brief introductory remarks about possible dates and places of historical origin for the document will be made. The purpose of the discussion here is to determine the Gospel's probable socio-cultural background for a responsible understanding of its literary and rhetorical codes and signals. In other words, what is the "real" world to which the Gospel refers (as far as it can be known), in which it was anticipated to make sense and communicate new life and hope?

O'Grady (1989:149) suggests several locations for the origin of John's Gospel: Ephesus, Alexandria, and Antioch in Syria. The more traditional place of origin is Ephesus. However, he seems to prefer Antioch in Syria as the place of origin. He is skeptic about accepting the origin of all the Gospels in the same general area.

Temple (1975:9) differs from O'Grady, suggesting that the author of the Fourth Gospel was probably a Jerusalem disciple of Jesus who wrote his Gospel either in Palestine itself, or in the dispersion. The date he argues for, is around the Roman-Jewish war of AD 66-70 – probably not long after it. Brown (1971:380) suggested yet another date. He argues for 90 AD as the earliest possible date for the origin of the Fourth Gospel. He makes use of John 9:22-23, claiming that these verses probably refer to an attempt of the Jewish authorities around 90 AD to drive out of the synagogues those Jews who confessed Jesus as the Messiah.³

Milne (1993:17) comments by saying that Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons in the latter part of the second century, was the first major witness to report that John, the Lord's disciple, wrote the Gospel and published it at Ephesus, and that he lived on until the time of Emperor Trajan (AD 98). Furthermore, Eusebius reported that Irenaeus' authority for this information was the aged presbyter, Polycarp, who was a confidant of the apostles

³ According to Brown (1971:380), the parenthetical verses 22-23 of John 9 seem to represent the final development of the apologetic use of the Johannine story. These verses may well represent the hand of an editor bringing the story up to date, for they are somewhat intrusive in the narrative.

themselves, and who had conversed with John in person. Irenaeus's testimony is even more impressive when it is noted that he was in close contact with the major church in Rome during his ministry in Lyons; hence it is highly likely from the breadth of his contacts that Polycarp was not the only source of his conviction regarding the authorship of the Gospel.

De Klerk and Schnell (1987:246-247) state that the information they have is so sketchy that they cannot be sure who the author was, where and when he lived and wrote, and what his relationship with Jesus and the other disciples was. Therefore, they cannot accept the arguments of other scholars as convincing, whether based upon the Bible or on the tradition of the early church.

2.1.1 Summary

There are different views about where and when the Johannine Gospel originated, looking at various theories, each with a different appraisal of the scant information. Some place the Johannine community in Ephesus or Alexandria, and others in Syria (possibly Antioch), or even in Palestine (Jerusalem). However, the Gospel itself provides some clues to significant features of the community. The Jews expelled the Johannine circle from their synagogue on account of their faith in Jesus as the "Christ" (John 9:22; 12:42). The Jews who abandoned traditional Judaism interrelated with the expected Messiah (16:2). The narrative of John indicates that this group of believers was primarily and predominantly concerned with the confession of Jesus as the Messiah, the only begotten Son of God. The author probably wrote with the purpose to inform, affirm and encourage this rejected community of believers (cf Jn 20:30-31).

2.2 NARRATIVE THEORY

Biblical scholars increasingly recognise the importance of a narrative approach as a theory and method for examining biblical literature. The narrative approach attracted the attention of New Testament scholars such as Culpepper (1983), Stibbe (1992), and Kysar (1993). As far as the New Testament is concerned, the narrative's main field of application has been the Gospels and Acts. Tolmie (1998:59) argues that narratives in the New Testament are all dominated by an ideological perspective and that they are narrated in order to convince the implied audience/reader of (a) specific idea(s). Narratives can be

implemented in order to make a person (audience) aware of God's active presence in human history.

In this regard, Stibbe (1992:5-7) remarks:

There was a rise of interest of scholars in the narrative in the 1980s after two books were published on Mark as a story (Rhoads and Michie, 1982; Best, 1983); one of Matthew as a story (Kingsbury, 1986), one on The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts (Tannehill, 1986) and one on the Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel (Culpepper, 1983).

Stibbe wrote his book on the Johannine narrative, *John as Storyteller*, in 1992 – nine years after Alan Culpepper had published his book, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel* (1983). Stibbe regarded Culpepper's book as a primary source on John's Gospel and considered his narrative approach as very influential. Culpepper (1983:6) derives his model from the literary critic Seymour Chatman (1980:151), yet takes it further by adding narratological elements such as settings, plot, characters, irony and symbolism. Culpepper's model is based upon the transmission of a story from author to audience/readers, and highlights the relation between them (cf O'Day 1983:545; Suggit 1983:7; Stibbe 1992:10).

The topic of the thesis is about Jesus and suffering in John 9. The question at stake in John 9 is about who Jesus is. To investigate this question the researcher decided to use a narrative approach with elements such as: characters, point of view, settings, and plot. Because the Gospel of John is a narrative about Jesus, the researcher has decided to use the famous scholar Culpepper's work as the main source in the investigation of the thesis. The researcher will use the narrative elements discussed by Culpepper (1983) to investigate the subject Jesus and suffering in John 9.

Though Culpepper's work, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, is not a recent source, the researcher has chosen it for a number of reasons. The book is the first sustained effort to apply literary critical methodology to the Fourth Gospel (cf Carson 1983:122 and O'Day 1985:545 in their critical evaluation of Culpepper's book). Suggit (1983), Stibbe (1992) and Kysar (1993) also regarded this book as a primary source. The researcher was further encouraged by recent reviews on Culpepper's book, confirming its scholarly depth and significance (cf reviews by Ryan Clark and Richard Christ at 2009 Online). Ryan Clark (2007) remarks that "there cannot be a more forensic study of the book of John than Culpepper's *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*." It is a scholarly book which, according to Clark, "opens up the

world of the Gospel of John like no other in the protestant world. This book should be mandatory reading for every Doctoral student in Biblical Studies.” Richard Christ (1999) also comments on Culpepper’s work by saying that “Culpepper brings a new depth to understanding John as literature. It was this book that helped me appreciate the literary depth of this gospel.”

Stibbe (1992:20) wrote his book, *John as storyteller*, nine years later. He discusses points of view, but the researcher sees that Stibbe does not discuss inside views of what a character is thinking, feeling, or intending, which Culpepper (1983:20-34) discusses. The researcher will make use of the latter in Chapters 3, 4 and 5 of the thesis.

According to Culpepper (1983:8), the Fourth Gospel is a novelistic realistic narrative. This, however, does not mean that narrative does not have historical substance (cf Culpepper 1983:3-5; De Klerk & Schnell 1987). The *genre* through which the author of John’s Gospel interprets and narrates the story of Jesus of Nazareth is meant to carry that history in a rhetorically powerful way, so that the audience/readers would be moved and see Jesus differently.

One of the criticisms as noted by O’Day (1983:546) is that Culpepper provides an excellent introduction to literary criticism for the biblical scholar with little or no experience with contemporary literary theory, but that those readers with more experience may wish for a more selective and nuanced use of literary categories and terms than Culpepper provides.

Though there are more recent sources than Culpepper, some with valid criticism of his work, the researcher still values *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel* as an appropriate source for investigating Jesus and suffering in John 9. The narrative elements in Culpepper’s work will be discussed in this chapter of the thesis. Their significance will hopefully be clear when they are briefly appropriated to John’s Gospel. In this exercise, narrative affects theory and theory opens up the story.

One of the reasons why the researcher chose Culpepper’s work is because John 9 is a dramatic narrative about Jesus and suffering, comprising elements such as implied author, narrator, implied readers, characters, point of view, settings, and plot. The work of the narrative through its elements is to develop the story’s plot. Culpepper’s book discusses all the narrative elements needed for analysing John 9.

In this chapter the researcher will address the main elements of the narrative which are mentioned above. The work of each element in the text will be discussed. Since every text is constructed with a specific audience/readers in mind, the question arises whether heuristic devices like the “implied”, “encoded”, or model reader can help the flesh-and-blood audience/readers to follow the contours of the text presentation and to actualise the text.

The researcher has consulted various voices from different cultures and different times for the purpose of defining narrative theory. These include names such as: Chatman (1980), Domeris (1983), Culpepper (1983), Suggit (1983), Vorster (1983), Hartin (1992), Stibbe (1992), Kysar (1993), Johnson (1996), Tolmie (1998) and Baawobr (2007).⁴ These sources may have their differences but the researcher chose them to explain the dynamics of narrative theory.

The book *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel* is a study of the narrative world of the Fourth Gospel. Culpepper suggests a careful analysis of the literary design of the gospel showing how its meaning is to be found in the way by which audience/readers is drawn into a narrative. The researcher has therefore decided to use his work as the main source in the investigation of the thesis. The question about what a narrative is, and how it can be defined, can now be asked.

This chapter of the thesis will briefly describe the main elements of narrative theory, namely implied author, narrator, implied audience/readers, characters, point of view, settings, and plot. The researcher will appropriate these elements to John’s Gospel as a whole, and simultaneously narrow the focus to John 9. John’s Gospel is a narrative that rests on the emerging Christian tradition of the first century CE. Jesus is the main character. Around him appear various narrated figures as adjuvants, opponents or helpers in smaller narratives, to support the ‘plot’ of the story. The author of John’s Gospel wrote his story about Jesus from a specific point of view. It is constructed in a way that is particularly inviting to the audience/readers.

⁴ Suggit (1983), Vorster (1983), Hartin (1992), and Baawobr (2007) are scholars from Africa whose work is on narrative.

2.2.1 How can narrative be defined?

When talking about a narrative the researcher presupposes a storyteller, a story, and an audience. How the story is created will be discussed in this chapter. The evangelist John in the first century wrote his Gospel with codes, signals and shifts. The evangelist had a purpose in mind, clearly stated in John 20:31: “But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.” The words were written by the real author to the implied audience/readers. They could only become the ideal audience/readers if they accepted what the evangelist wrote. During the first century the written Gospel still mainly formed part of an oral tradition. Even today some people are rather listeners than readers. Culpepper (1983:211-223) uses readers but the researcher prefers to use audience which includes those who do not read and those who read.

The researcher, using Chatman (1980:28,146) and Hartin (1992:2), defines narrative as a communication or speech act. Communication involves at least two parties, a sender and a receiver. On the sending end are the author, the implied author, and the narrator.

2.2.2 The real author?

An author can be defined as one who writes stories, articles or books. An author can be someone who gives existence to something. Such broad inclusion as this generalisation allows, may be applied to a range of uses, from God as author to any creator of a written work on whose authority that work depends.

The author of the Gospel of John may be defined as the creator of the text. The researcher shares the view of Culpepper (1983:15-16) that the real author is neither he/she (who writes) nor the narrator (who tells), although they may overlap. Hartin (1992:4) presents a communication model, quoted from Powell, which the researcher has used to explain the role of the real author, real reader, the implied author and implied audience in the communication process. Here is Hartin’s model:

REAL AUTHOR-----TEXT-----REAL READER

In the diagram the real author and the real reader are shown, and these lie outside the text.

The question can now be asked: What is meant by implied author and implied audience or reader?

2.2.3 Implied author

The researcher, influenced by Chatman (1980:28,146), Culpepper (1983:15-16), Hartin (1992:4) and Tolmie (1998:59), holds that the implied author is he/she who anticipates and chooses, consciously or unconsciously, what the reader reads. He has no voice and never communicates directly with the audience. He is neither the real author (who writes) nor the narrator (who tells), although they may overlap.

Stibbe (1992:10) states that an implied author is the author suggested by the choice and arrangement of material, the author who is inferred from the internal narrative dynamics. This implied author may well be different in character from the actual author, just as the inferred or implied reader may be different from the real reader. The text of the Gospel of John opens up to contain the three poles of any communication act theory, namely the sender, the text and the receiver (implied author – narrative – implied audience). He/She can be inferred as an ideal, literary, created version of the real author; he/she are the sum of his/her own choices. If the implied author does not communicate directly with the audience or reader, who is to communicate with the audience or reader? To answer this question the work of the narrator can be analysed.

2.2.4 Narrator

A narrator can be defined as a person who relates or who is a storyteller. It can be a person who reads descriptive or narrative passages, as between scenes of a play. What is the narrator in the Gospel of John? According to the researcher's main source Culpepper (1983:16-17), supported by Chatman (1980:28), Minear (1984) and Hartin (1992), a narrator guides the reader through the narrative, introduces the reader to the world of the narrative and the characters which populate it, and provides the proper perspective or view from which to view the action. His/Her relation to the implied author is that the implied author prepares the story while the narrator tells the story prepared by the implied author. In the view of the researcher a narrator serves as the implied author's voice.

Narrators may be dramatised as a character in the story or left un-dramatised, Culpepper argues (1983:16-17). Narrators serve as the implied author's voice or the voice of a character whose perspective differs from the implied author's. The narrator of John's Gospel begins the narrative with an overview of the identity of the central figure and the course of action to follow (John 1:1-18). The researcher will put the work of the narrator in the Gospel of John as he/she who speaks in the prologue, tells the story of Jesus, introduces the dialogue, provides explanations, translates terms, and tells the audience or reader what various characters knew or did not know.

2.2.5 Implied audience/readers

Who then is the implied audience? The story of John has an implied author who prepares the story and a narrator who tells the story as the voice of the implied author. Motyer (1997:30) defines implied audience/readers as the affective quality of a text. It is affected by the text's strategies and moved towards the implied author's goals. Inside a text are the ideal implied audience/readers. They become the ideal audience/readers once they accept the message of the text, but if they do not, they cannot become the ideal audience/readers.

IMPLIED AUTHOR----- --NARRATIVE-----IMPLIED AUDIENCE/READERS

According to Hartin (1992:2-4), whose model has been adopted here by the researcher, the receiving party is the audience (listeners, readers, and viewers). Chatman (1980), Hartin (1992:4), and Stibbe (1992:10) argue that at the sending end are the real audience/readers, the implied audience or the narratee. A narrative presupposes a story prepared by an implied author and a storyteller who is the narrator, and the implied audience/ readers.

John's Gospel is described by Stibbe (1992:10), quoting Culpepper (1983:8), to be a realistic narrative about Jesus of Nazareth. According to him, the message should be read primarily as a story, not as history. According to Johnson (1996:107), the gospels are written from the perspective of faith, a perspective that affects not just one part of the story or another, but the entire narrative from beginning to end.

The narrative of John, as Culpepper (1983:4-7) puts it, can be defined as:

a literary creation of the evangelist, which is crafted with the purpose of leading the audience to "see" the world as the Evangelist sees it. By listening to the Evangelist, the audience/readers of the Evangelist will be forced to test their

perceptions and beliefs about the “real” world against the Evangelist’s perspective on the world they have encountered in the gospel. The text is therefore a mirror in which the Evangelist’s audience/readers can “see” the world in which they live.

2.2.6 Summary

In sum – narrative is a communication act involving at least three parties. These are a sender, the narrator and a receiver. A narrative is a story told, involving an implied author, narrator, a text and an implied audience. In this investigation the author is referred to as the “implied author”, since he/she is different from the actual author. The real author and the real listener lie outside the text.

A story consists of characters, settings, plot, point of view and a created world. The text’s meaning is produced through the experience of listening to, and interpreting, the gospel. Every story presupposes a teller, the story and audience/readers. The implied author through the narrator attempts to get the audience/readers to adopt the point of view that the narrative is expounding.

The implied author prepares, makes decisions about the narrative, constructs the story, and tells it through the narrator. The implied author is, as defined by Culpepper (1983:6-7), the sum of the choices reflected in the writing of the narrative, choices of the use of settings, irony, characterisation, the handling of time, suspense, distance, and all the problematic and potential aspects of narrative writing which must be dealt with in one way or another.

It is also argued in this chapter that the narrator serves as the implied author’s voice or the voice of a character whose perspective differs from the implied author’s. With the witnesses given about narrative by these sources, Chatman (1980:28), Culpepper (1983:6-7), Hartin (1992:4), Stibbe (1992:10) and Johnson (1996:107), the researcher is comfortable to accept that the Fourth Gospel belongs to the narrative *genre*.

A narrator has an understanding that surpasses all other characters in the story; who presents knowledge of the inner thoughts and feelings of the various characters. Therefore, the narrator facilitates the understanding of the story.

The work of the narrator of John has been discussed under narrative as communication. The narrator of John 9 tells a story that consists of characters, point of view, settings and

plot. The questions now to be addressed are: Who are the characters in the narrative? The manner in which characters are presented by the narrator should make them come alive. According to De Klerk and Schnell (1987:65) characters should make the reader feel he/she is dealing with real people who respond and act in a typical human fashion. The responses, words and actions of the characters have to be known, how each contributes to the story, and also their relationship with the main character. The significance of each character will be discussed in the following section.

2.3 CHARACTERS

The researcher, influenced by Culpepper (1983:101-106) and Stibbe (1992:24-25), is convinced that characters are the yardstick for interpreting and evaluating a story. Four basic categories of characters may typically be distinguished in narratives: the protagonist (main character), adjuvants (helpers of the protagonist), antagonist(s) and opponents (helpers of the antagonist). The helpers of the main character play the role of supporting the main character's aspirations. The antagonists and the helpers promote the development of the plot. The success of the story about Jesus in John 9 depends on whether the characters play a convincing role, and also in a general sense function in interesting ways. The function of the characters represented should be morally good, suitable and life-like. The role of the characters should be, as Culpepper (1983:101) puts it, to draw the audience or readers deeply into the perplexities of life as they are experienced by fictional characters who plan, decide, choose, react, and feel like real people. The audience or readers experience life's perplexities as they are experienced by "others" and is thereby led to try to understand with them from a different point of view.

The main character in the Gospel of John is Jesus. The Jews' dislike for Jesus can be expressed as antagonism. The Jews become Jesus' opponents because of some of his teachings and healings on the Sabbath contrary to their belief. This shall be discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 of the thesis. The helpers of the protagonist are Jesus' followers or disciples.

In the view of the researcher no story can exist without players who convincingly and interestingly draw the audience. The researcher was born and bred in a Karanga story telling community. Karanga stories have interesting characters, sometimes with animals as main characters. The role of characters is to carry the story successfully. Characters play

out the action, as shall be seen in Chapters 3, 4 and 5 of the thesis. The author can evoke the audience or readers' interest or sympathy by the way the author handles characters in a narrative. Vorster (1983:117) terms the main character in a story the protagonist, with various other characters around him/her or ranged against him/her. In John 9 Jesus is the protagonist, with various characters opposing and supporting him. These characters will subsequently be discussed. The researcher will suggest why these characters were included by the evangelist in the story of John 9.

2.3.1 God

The Gospel of John tells its audience that Jesus originated from God (1:1-14). Jesus was in the beginning with God.⁵ As argued by Culpepper (1983:113), it is difficult to describe the characterisation of God in the Gospel because God never appears and the only words God speaks are: "And I have glorified it, and I will glorify again (12:28)." God is characterised by what Jesus says about him. That the Father sent Jesus (ὁ πέμψας με πατήρ) is mentioned twenty three times, and *apostello* seventeen times. God sent Jesus to the world as the lamb to take away the sins of the world (1:29). Sending characterises God's self-revelation. God has a strong relationship with the Son as revealed by Jesus' words: "I do nothing on my own, but I speak these things as the Father instructed me; He has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him" (8:28-29).

Moses and the prophets wrote about the one who was to reveal God (John 1:45), Abraham saw his "day" (8:56); Isaiah saw his glory (Isa.6). Jesus was indeed the one sent from God to his own people – to reveal God, and to take away the sins of the world (3:17).

2.3.2 Jesus

The narrator shows Jesus as the protagonist (cf 2.3), the central figure of the story in John 9. Jesus is depicted as having enemies in all the gospels. In John, again, the Pharisees are pictured in their typical negative role. The chief priests and the high priests move against Jesus and engineer the ambush in Gethsemane. But there is no trial before the Sanhedrin in John. The narrator also shows other characters surrounding the protagonist Jesus. These players around Jesus are disciples, Jews and other minor characters that shall be seen as the

⁵ John 1:1-2 witnesses that Jesus is sent from the Father where he was as *logos*. John calls him the Lamb of God (1:29) who takes away the sin of the world. Jesus says, "Very truly I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life" (5:24).

story goes in Chapters 3 and 4 of the thesis. In John the evangelist shows Jesus functioning in full command of the situation – handling the opponent’s attacks and arguments, problems of minor characters and his disciples as well.

Culpepper (1983:113-114) and Stibbe (1992:111) discuss Jesus’ healing even on the Sabbath (5:16-17), as well as Jesus as the true judge, the good shepherd or the true king, and the elusive God. Jesus in John 9 and the Gospel as a whole is static and does not change. Jesus appears in almost every scene. He interrelates with those who believe in him. Culpepper (1983:106) argues to say that Jesus in John has a role in all five of the time periods, for example in John 3: the pre-historical past, the historical past, the narrative present, the historical future, and the eschatological future. White’s contribution (1995-2008 Online) is that Jesus in the Gospel of John is difficult to reconstruct as an historical person, because his character in the Gospel is in full voice talking deeply about his identity. An example of this is found in John 11:42: “Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.”

The researcher’s opinion is that the evangelist used the character Jesus in John 9 to make the audience/readers see that John’s story is really the story of this divine figure that came from above and that appeared to the world below. In John 9 Jesus radically shifts the issue from what his disciples asked (about whose sins had caused the blindness) to the purpose of his blindness. Jesus’ healing of the blind beggar then adds to the significance of his identity, as shall be discussed in Chapters 3, 4 and 5. The audience/readers are challenged to find who this healer is and why his opponents are searching for him. Jesus is the lamb of God sent as the light of the world (8:12; 9:5) as healer and giver of eternal life (3:15-16; 9:7).

It is also possible that the evangelist used the character Jesus as central figure to make his audience/readers see that Jesus is sovereign over the world’s power. In the John 9 story Jesus plays the role of explaining to the misunderstanding disciples why the man was born blind. As a healer Jesus plays the role of revealing who He is.

2.3.3 Disciples

The disciples that have been mentioned by name by the evangelist John are: Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, and Simon Peter (3:40-41), Philip and Nathanael (1:43-45), Thomas

(14:5), Judas, son of Simon Iscariot (13:2), and the Beloved disciple (13:23). The first disciples were appointed by Jesus himself (1:35-51). The disciples followed Jesus, forsaking their personal interest for the sake of believing in him (6:68). In some respects their relationship is analogous to that of the rabbinical learners at that time. The disciples address him as “Rabbi” (1:49; 4:31; 11:8). Their believing is based on seeing (1:36, 39, 46, and 51). According to them, Jesus is a wonder-worker. Of the twelve disciples John and Simon Peter constitute Jesus’ favourites (20:2; 21:20). Collectively and individually the disciples can be identified. As characters they carry the point of view of the story. They represent a line of thinking in the plot. As Culpepper (1983:115) claims, disciples are marked especially by their recognition of Jesus and belief in his claims. They are not exemplars of perfect faith but of positive responses and typical misunderstandings. The disciples’ faith is based on signs. De Klerk and Schnell (1987:80) identify them as the primary helpers of Jesus. Besides Jesus, Peter is the most complex character. The Beloved Disciple plays a distinctive role in John’s Gospel (13:23-25). Judas, who is subtle, betrayed his master. According to the researcher, the disciples act as tools that help bring about the success of the story.

Why does the evangelist put the disciples in the narrative story about Jesus and suffering in John 9? What is their significant role in the story of the man born blind? In the view of the researcher the disciples (mainly) function as helpers of the protagonist (cf 2.3). However, their role is more often than not complex and even ambivalent. Given the question they put to Jesus in John 9:1, it is not self-evident that they are his helpers. Through their question they expose themselves as still being ignorant about who Jesus really is. In their thinking they appear to be still very much on the side of the Jews and the Pharisees. They have been called to be Jesus’ disciples. However, they are not on Jesus’ side (yet), but rather in a period of transition (cf 3.2.1.2).

Other characters in John’s Gospel may fall in this category as well, for example Nicodemus (3:1-21; 19:39-42) and Joseph of Arimathea (19:38-42). Even the neighbours and parents referred to in John 9, as well as the young man after having received his sight, were all in a state of confusion and two-mindedness about Jesus – particularly because of Jesus’ words and healing act in 9:3-7. While they probably would have liked to acknowledge that Jesus did demonstrate messianic abilities, they were afraid of the Jews and the Pharisees (9:13,22) and feared expulsion from the synagogue.

This relates to two aspects in the Gospel of John which are consistently controversial, and very difficult to define, namely discipleship and faith. The difficulty regarding faith is particularly indicated in the post-resurrection response of Thomas (20:24-29), which directly relates to the purpose of the Gospel according to 20:30-31.

The disciples function as a trusted group whom Jesus instructs separately, who are given confidential information about Jesus' identity and mission (1:51; 9:4; 11:4, 15; 13:31-35). The disciples raise the question before Jesus: "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind (9:2)?" The question (τίς ἥμαρτεν;) triggered the dramatic story in John 9. This question, which shall be explored in Chapter 3 of the thesis, brings different characters into the drama through whom the plot around the disclosure of Jesus' identity develops. The question provokes a dialogue between Jesus and the disciples and other social groups such as neighbours, Pharisees, parents of the blind beggar and Jewish authorities.

The support of the disciples to Jesus is important in their actions and deeds since they help the development of the plot in the story. Their docile discipleship and veneration of Jesus plays a significant role in Jesus' prestige and credibility as a religious leader (11:9). On the other side of the disciples are the opponents of the protagonist, namely the Jews. What role do the Jews play in the story of the blind beggar in John 9?

2.3.4 Jews

The evangelist John describes the Jews collectively as opponents of Jesus. Culpepper (1983:125-132) associates Jews with the Pharisees and other representatives of Judaism like the chief priests, rulers, Levites and their servants. Jews closely associated with the Pharisees are opponents of Jesus – the common people or crowd. The evangelist does not attempt to distinguish and separate these groups – Pharisees, Jewish authorities, temple police and priests are all called 'Jews'. In Chapter 3 of the thesis it shall be seen how the Jews dealt with those who confessed Jesus as the Messiah. Some were receptive but others did not accept Jesus' revelation. Hostile Jews represent the response of unbelief and rejection of Jesus. The attitude of the Jews towards the main character contributes to the plot development of the story, as shall be seen in Chapter 3 and 4 of the thesis.

Jews misunderstood both Jesus' origin and destiny. In the story of the blind beggar, the Jews did not consider Jesus as the Messiah because his origin was not known. De Klerk and Schnell (1987:95-97), Culpepper (1997:62), Lindars, Edwards and Court (2000:37-38) and Stibbe (1992:110-111) claim that the Jews who were opponents of Jesus, condemned him to death. The Jews play a significant role as opponents of Jesus throughout the seven scenes in John 9. The Jews do not see or acknowledge Jesus as the one coming from God since He does not observe the Sabbath (5:18; 9:16).

2.3.5 Summary

In this section different characters that appear in the story about Jesus in John 9 have been discussed. They seek to assist the protagonist and to further the main character's interests. According to Culpepper (1987:101-148), the functions of the characters in John's Gospel are primarily twofold in nature, namely:

- To draw out various aspects of Jesus' character successively by providing a series of diverse individuals with whom Jesus can interact;
- To represent alternative responses to Jesus so that the readers can see their attendant misunderstandings and consequences.

Characters in a story have different points of view. Different points of view have the significance of making a story interesting and forcing the audience/readers to give attention to it. Chapter 3 of the thesis will analyse different points of view regarding the characters. But what is point of view, and how does it help in understanding the plot of John 9?

2.4 POINT OF VIEW

In an attempt to answer the questions above, the researcher depends on definitions given by the following scholars: Genette (1980:186), Culpepper (1983:20), and Stibbe (1992:20). Genette (1980:186) distinguishes between narrator and point of view or "focalization," which according to him is determined by whether the story is told from within by the main character or an omniscient author, or from outside by a minor character or an author who has taken the role of an observer. The researcher found the table of Genette contributory to the question about what point of view is and its usefulness.

Genette (1980:186) adopts the following table from Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren to make his point:

	Internal analysis	Outside observation of events
Narrator as character in a story	1. Main character tells his/her own story	2. Minor character tells main character story
Narrator not a character in the story	4. Analytic or omniscient author tells story	3. Author tells story as observer

Within this scheme of four terms, “vertical demarcation relates to the ‘point of view’ (inner and outer), while the horizontal bears on voice (the identity of the narrator)” (Genette 1980:186). Accordingly, 1 and 4 present a point of view within the story (internal), while 2 and 3 define an external point of view.

Culpepper (1983:19-20) and Stibbe (1992:20) see the same narrator and same voice throughout the Gospel of John. This voice is always in the third person, stands outside the action, and has a privileged view and understanding of the words of Jesus. This is what Stibbe (1992:20) argues, quoting Culpepper, the narrator sees inside Jesus’ mind. An example of this can be found in John 2:22: “After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.” In this case the narrator sees matters from an enlightened, post-resurrection stance (2:22; 12:16) which is clearly influenced by Old Testament Scripture and by the Spirit-Paraclete (14:26). More examples are found in: 4:1; 5:6; 6:6,15,61,64; 11:5,33,38; 13:1,11, 21; 16:19; 18:4; and 19:28. John’s narrator serves as an authoritative interpreter of Jesus’ words (cf 2:21; 6:6,71; 7:39; 8:27; 12:33; 13:11; 18:32; 21:19; 21:23).

Every story told or written has a point of view. Point of view then can be defined as the ability to see the inside of a character by the narrator. In the story of John 9 the significance of the narrator is his/her ability to see the mind of Jesus and other characters, and to interpret them as argued above by Culpepper and Stibbe.

This may be compared to Karanga stories, where people are asked to guess what a narrator is talking about. Karanga people, if they want the speaker to be clear, would say: ‘*Usataura chiduma*’, meaning ‘Come up clearly’. It is a challenge to say, ‘I guess what you are saying or

what you want to say, but come up clearly'. It can be described as the ability to see what is inside the person's mind you are talking to or talking about.

The point of view of John's Gospel, as argued by Stibbe (1992:28), is the enlightened post-resurrectional understanding of Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God, as expressed in John 20:31: "But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God." Culpepper (1983:21) identifies four "planes" in which point of view may be expressed: the ideological (evaluative norms), the spatial (location of the narrator), the temporal (the time of the narrator), and the psychological (internal and external to the characters). These concepts help to define the point of view of the narrator in John more clearly. It is of fundamental importance to highlight each of the different points of view as they will be used in the investigation of Chapters 3, 4, and 5 of the thesis. The following are significant points of view in John's Gospel.

2.4.1 Psychological point of view

The psychological point of view is determined by whether or not the narrator is able to provide inside views of what a character is thinking, feeling or intending. An example of this is found in John 4:1: "Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard, 'Jesus is making and baptising more disciples than John' – although it was not Jesus himself but his disciples who baptised – he left Judea and started back to Galilee." See, amongst others, 2:24-25; 6:64; 11:38; 13:1, 11; 18:4.

2.4.1.1 Psychological point of view of the disciples

After Jesus cleansed the temple, the Jews asked him for a sign to prove his authority (2:18). Jesus told them to destroy the temple and that He would raise it up in three days. For the Jews it was not possible, for it had taken them forty-six years to build the temple: "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years and will you raise it up in three days?" Jesus, however, was speaking about the temple of his body. The disciples and the Jews together did not understand what Jesus was talking about. The disciples recalled what Jesus meant when He was raised from the dead; for his disciples remembered that He had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word He had spoken (2:22; cf 2:11; 20:9).

2.4.1.2 Psychological point of view of the Jews

The Jews persecuted Jesus because He broke the Sabbath and called himself the Son of God (5:16-18; see also 8:30; 11:45; 12:11, 42). Nevertheless, even many of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees and that they might be put out of the synagogue, they did not confess Jesus as Messiah (12:42).

2.4.1.3 Psychological point of view of some minor characters

The parents of the blind beggar seemed to know that the Jews had agreed to put out of the synagogue whoever confessed Jesus as the Messiah, so they feared the Jews (9:22; see also 4:53; 5:13; 7:5; 19:38).

2.4.1.4 Ideological point of view

The Johannine narrator is reliable in that he/she speaks in accordance with the implied author's norms. The narrator of John's function is to facilitate communication of the implied author's ideological or evaluative system to the audience. The Johannine audience/readers are supposed to be persuaded by the narrator's challenge: "But these things have been written in order that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (20:31)."

Culpepper (1983:33) describes a narrator's "stereoscopic" strategy as an optical device with two eyeglasses which creates the illusion of solidity and depth by "assisting the observer to combine the images of two pictures taken from points of view a little way apart." The narrator of John's Gospel views Jesus and his ministry from the twin perspectives of his "whence" and his "whither", his origin as the pre-existent *logos* and his destiny as the exalted Son of God. Only when these two are combined, can Jesus be understood. An example of this is John 13:1-6: first it sets the time, the place, and the characters involved in the ensuing action. It sets the foot washing and the farewell discourse in the context of Jesus' awareness of his origin and destiny. He had come from the Father, and He was going to be exalted and glorified. The hour had come for him to go from this world to the Father.

What is the Johannine narrator's point of view as expressed in John 9? Can it be related to the Gospel as a whole? This will be investigated in Chapter 3 of the thesis.

2.4.2 Relationship between Jesus and the narrator within the text

The question that one can ask is whether the narrator knew Jesus. The narrator and Jesus must have known each other, since both of them knew all things. The narrator serves as an authoritative interpreter of Jesus' words. Examples of this can be found in John 2:21: "But he spoke of the temple of his body," and 6:6: "...this he said to test him, for he himself knew what he would do."

2.4.3 Summary

The researcher has discussed some of the different points of view the Gospel of John provides to its audience/readers. The narrator provides inside views of what a character is thinking, and the character's interrelation with other characters' feelings, intentions or fears. The narrator tells what various characters knew or did not know. The narrator shows that nothing escapes his eyes and that the narrator seems to be everywhere. The narrator is in a position to tell the audience/readers what will happen before it happens. The narrator's function is to facilitate communication of the implied author's ideological or evaluative system to the audience/readers. In the final analysis the audience/readers cannot escape the narrator's challenge: "But these things have been written in order that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God (20:31)."

A narrative does not only comprise of characters and point of view (cf 2.3 and 2.4), but also of different settings, which also serve to carry the implied author's perspective and purpose.

2.5 SETTINGS

Together with narratological elements such as characters, point of view and plot, settings are important semantic carriers or markers in a narrative text. Settings may refer to the *place* where someone is or where something happens, to the *time* when things happen, or to the *people* who are involved in a particular event. The significance of settings in a narrative is that they directly or indirectly display a narrator's point of view. Collins' English Mini Dictionary (1996:498) defines settings as referring to place where, or time when the events in a book or film occur. It may also refer to a general environment that can be described as beautiful, perfect, magnificent, or to a marriage or family setting, for example.

De Klerk and Schnell (1987:57) refer to settings of place (spatial settings), of time (temporal settings) and settings of people (social settings) in John's Gospel. Examples of significant spatial settings in John are Jerusalem, Galilee, and Siloam, to mention a few. An important temporal setting is the Sabbath. In John 9 the social setting will change through the movement of groups of people via seven scenes. The importance of these settings for a narratological reading of John's Gospel will be discussed in Chapters 2, 3 and 4 of the thesis.

The researcher makes use of several Johannine passages to illustrate some of the aspects mentioned here. In John 4:1-26 the features of locality (Sychar in Samaria), the concomitant natural elements (underground water of the spring), and artifacts (the well and utensil for drawing water) are so interdependent that they can be treated as integral elements.

Sometimes the evangelist gives indications of place that are either missing or vague. "Where are you staying? Come and see" (1:39) or "...where he stayed" (1:39; cf 6:1, 22; 7:1). The evangelist also shows vagueness in depicting Jesus' movements. Sometimes it seems as if he rules out any clear reconstruction of Jesus' travels. For instance, in John 14:31 ("Rise, let us be on our way"), there is no indication as to where they are going, or in what way the subsequent discourse: "I am the true vine" (15:1) resumes. This creates a realm in which events are not confined to time or place, and subtly contributes to the message that the significance of Jesus is not historically defined and completed (De Klerk & Schnell 1987:58).

The following spatial, temporal and social settings may further be singled out in John's Gospel:

2.5.1 Spatial settings

The Gospel of John opens with God (1:1), who is in heaven "above", from where the *logos* is sent (3:13; 6:32-33,38; 8:23) – in the beginning was the *logos* and the *logos* was with God. In God is life and light (1:4-5). This is where all things come from, according to John. For him it is important that the Gospel starts here. It confirms the words of Jesus in 5:19: "The Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing." In 9:4 Jesus proclaims: "We must work the works of him who sent me." The beginning of the Gospel is therefore a key section in guiding the audience/readers about the origin and purpose of Jesus' mission – Jesus is coming as the lamb of God to give light to the world (1:9,29).

From God, the *logos* came into the world, became flesh and lived among people (1:14). According to John, the “world” is the spatial setting where Jesus lived, preached, taught, healed and died. He suffered opposition, yet persuaded some people to become his followers. Ultimately, He could testify as follows about the accomplishment of his mission: “Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed. I have made your name known to those you gave me from the world” (17:5-6).

2.5.1.1 Jerusalem

Jerusalem was the capital city of Palestine, also known as the city of David. The significance of the city for the Jews was that the temple was in Jerusalem. The feast of the Passover (Lev 23 and Deut 16) and the feast of Booths (or Tabernacles – Exod 23; 34) were some of the pilgrimage festivals which the Jews celebrated in Jerusalem. These were in remembrance of their deliverance and wandering in the desert from Egypt to Canaan. Crane (1980:67) argues that the Jews, in memory of the Exodus, constructed booths, or huts (tabernacles) in which they lived for the weeklong duration of the festival, observing the prescriptions of Leviticus 23.

According to John’s Gospel, Jesus also went to Jerusalem for Jewish festivals. During these festivals, He *inter alia* cleansed the temple (2:13-20), met many people to whom He delivered his message, and healed many sick people (6:2). It is at one of these occasions when Jesus went out of the temple that He saw a man born blind and healed him (9:1ff). There were indeed many people in the *dramatis personae* of John’s Gospel who hailed from Judea.

However, Jesus’ relation to Jerusalem and the Jerusalem authorities is more of a concern. This will be discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 of the thesis. John further reports about people in Jerusalem that are not encountered anywhere else in gospel traditions, such as Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea. These are Jerusalemite non-priestly elites. Jerusalem is also the place where Jesus’ life was ended and where He proclaimed, “Father, it is finished” (John 19:30).

2.5.1.2 Galilee

Galilee is the name for the northern region of Palestine, meaning literally either a circle or district after the fall of the northern kingdom in 722 BCE. Thereafter Galilee was included

in the Assyrian province of Samaria. It was brought to stability during Antipas's rule in 4 BCE-39 CE (Metzger & Coogan 1993:240-242). Galilean life then is said to have been relatively stable politically, especially in contrast to Judea in the time of Jesus. Since the latter, Galilee and Galileans are associated with Jesus of Nazareth and his movement.

Galilee is significantly depicted in John's Gospel as the area where Jesus was welcomed, where he did much of his work and demonstrated his power. Jesus attended a wedding in Cana of Galilee and did his first sign of changing water into wine here (2:11). "When he came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him" (4:45). Jesus healed an official's son in Galilee (4:46-47). Jesus must have made a good following in Galilee. However, many of his disciples found his teaching difficult, turned back and no longer followed him (6:60-71).

After the miraculous feeding of a large crowd and a lengthy discourse on Jesus as the bread of life in John 6, the narrator continues in 7:1 - "After this Jesus went about in Galilee. He did not wish to go about in Judea because the Jews were looking for an opportunity to kill him." Even though Galilee is not mentioned in John 9, it is pictured as a significant spatial setting in John's Gospel because it became like a home for Jesus' ministry - in ironical contrast to Judea and Jerusalem, the temple city, where He was executed.

2.5.1.3 Synagogue

Another important spatial setting in the narrative of John's Gospel is the synagogue - a primary institution of Jewish life and affiliation. Angoff (1960:137-139) and Robbins (1996: 274-280) call it a house of prayer, a house of assembly, or a house of study. This is from where Jews spread the truths of Judaism to other parts of the world, also to invest the Sabbath and other festivals with deeper meaning. The Dictionary of the Later New Testament and its Developments (1997:1141) states that, in addition to being a place of prayer, a synagogue is a place where reading from the Torah was done.

The significance of the synagogue in John is that Jesus regularly appears there - that He teaches and preaches there. In John 18:20 Jesus proclaims: "I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret." The teaching of Jesus in the synagogue made other people interrelate or believe in him - even Jewish officials. John 12:42 reads: "... many, even Jewish authorities, believed in him. But because of the Pharisees, they did not confess it out

of fear that they would be put out of the synagogue” (see also 9:22). In Chapters 3 and 4 of the thesis more will be discussed about the synagogue.

2.5.1.4 River and Sea

River and sea are other spatial settings of significant symbolic value in John’s Gospel. According to Hartin (1992:10), the sea is the scene of destruction and chaos. He quotes the first appearances of the sea in the Bible related to the creation account, where the world is made out of the waters of chaos and the flood. Both are symbols of power and destruction. In John, the river Jordan and the Sea of Galilee are mentioned (1:28; 6:1). As the Israelites crossed the river Jordan when they went into the promised land, the association with the river Jordan at the beginning of John’s Gospel could also raise the association and expectation of a new beginning. At the Sea of Galilee Jesus gave a crowd of people bread and fish (6:1-2). After the feed, these people called Jesus the prophet who was to come into the world (6:14). Jesus must have won a following out of this feed because these people saw a prophet in him.

Even though neither of the categories river or sea is mentioned in John 9, this chapter refers to another life-giving spatial setting, namely “the pool of Siloam” (9:7,11). This will be discussed further under 3.3.1.2.

2.5.1.5 Spatial point of view

The Johannine narrator is moving from one place to another for it seems that nothing escapes his eyes. The narrator is not confined to a particular place or group of characters but is free to move about from place to place to provide the audience/reader with an unhampered view of action. Some examples are:

- 4:31 at the well to report Jesus’ conversation with the disciples;
- 4:51ff travels towards Capernaum with the official;
- 5:15 goes with the lame man to report to the Jews.

The spatial point of view of the narrator does however not define his/her geographical position. The issue is complicated by the ambiguity of the Greek verb (*erxesthai*), frequently used in John to mean “to come” or “to go.” It is difficult to tell where the narrator stands. The audience may take a clue from *ekeithen* which means “there” and from the repeated use

of ἐκεῖ (“there”). Ἐκεῖ appears 22 times and *ekeithen* twice in John’s Gospel. Some instances where ἐκεῖ is used are 2:1, 12; 3:22, 23; 4:6, 40; 5:5; 6:3, 22, 24; 10:40, 42; 12:2,9, 18:2,3. It seems that to the narrator of John’s Gospel “there” (ἐκεῖ) is everywhere. This leaves the impression that the narrator sees things at a distance from places mentioned in the narrative.

2.5.2 Temporal Settings

Together with spatial and social settings, temporal settings are important markers in a narrative text. Temporal settings refer to the *time* when things happen in a narrative. The significance of temporal settings is that they directly or indirectly display a narrator’s point of view. In John’s Gospel, the Sabbath, festivals, and sacraments are examples of temporal settings which display God’s alternative perspective on time as embodied in Jesus’ ministry.

2.5.2.1 Sabbath

The Sabbath has great significance in the life of the people of Israel. Rest is an element and expression of the Law in the Old Testament: “Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work” (Exod 20:9-10). This day was set aside as a holy day for the Jews. It becomes a day through which the human soul raises itself to the sphere of true being. It is a special day set apart for their God Yahweh, and a day of rest. McKnight (1989:43) mentions some activities done on the Sabbath: circumcision, temple sacrifice, and saving human life.

Baeck (1965:137) and Bacchiocchi (1998) point out that the Sabbath has guided the soul unto its mystery so that it is not a day that just interrupts, but a day that renews, a day that has its own world. The Sabbath blesses the people of Israel to whom it came. The people of Israel lived and still live in it, celebrated the harvest season of its plants and fruits year after year on this day. Jesus has a different view on the use of the Sabbath. This can be explained by what the Gospel of Mark (2:27) claims: The Sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath (RSV).

To summarise: John’s Gospel refers to the Sabbath as a significant day – for the Jewish authorities *and* for the Jesus followers. The Jews labeled Jesus’ work on the Sabbath a violation of a day holy to them. According to their tradition, to heal the sick was regarded as work forbidden on the Sabbath – even though it brought new light and life to them (5:15-

16; 9:14). In John 5:15-16 the man who was healed went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well on the Sabbath. Therefore the Jews started persecuting Jesus. In Chapter 3 of the thesis the violation of the Sabbath and subsequent conflict in John's Gospel will be explored further.

2.5.2.2 Day and night

The evangelist used day and night in John 9 as significant temporal settings related to the life of Jesus. According to Culpepper (1983:53), the audience/readers sense a passage of time when a story is read, and that the handling of time makes other characteristics of the Gospel of John to be seen clearly. In the thesis, more especially in Chapters 3 and 4, the settings of day and night in the story of the blind beggar will be investigated further. Day and night, or light and darkness, are some of the symbols the narrator uses to describe Jesus' identity and work.

2.5.2.3 Passover

The Jews honored the Passover feast because it reminded them of God liberating them from the house of bondage (Exod 12:1-32). Jesus taught and performed miracles at the Passover feast that made people believe in, or interrelate with him (John 2:13-23). The narrator informs the audience/readers in John 9 that it was after the Passover feast that Jesus healed the blind beggar. The Passover was conducted at the temple in Jerusalem.

John 19:14-18 states that Jesus' death occurred during the Passover preparation day, namely during the time and day the Passover lambs were killed. Jesus dies a paschal lamb at Golgotha. Through his sacrificial death he liberated all those who believe that he is the Messiah.

2.5.2.4 Temporal point of view

The narrator tells the story of Jesus retrospectively, as he/she is telling the audience what will happen before the event and before the characters know. He/She may employ some combination of these perspectives. An example of this is John 7:39 which talks about the Spirit which was not yet given because Jesus had not yet been glorified. Another example is 12:16: "His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written of him and had been done to

him” (see, among others, 2:22; 13:7; and 20:9). In conclusion one can say that the narrator reflects on what occurred both before and after the events he narrates.

2.5.3 Social Settings

Together with spatial and temporal settings, social settings are important literary devices in a narrative text. Social settings refer to the *people* involved in the speech acts and other events in a narrative. Like spatial and temporal settings, social settings (in)directly display a narrator’s point of view. In John’s Gospel, the role of individuals and groups of people is displayed primarily in relation to the protagonist, Jesus of Nazareth – they are either following or supporting him as the One sent by God, or they are subverting or opposing him.

The major function of all these settings in the narrative is to highlight the perspective of the protagonist, and thereby the purpose of the Gospel at large (cf John 21:30-31).

2.5.3.1 Social groups

A first, superficial reading of John 1-4 may give the impression that Jesus did not meet with serious problems or opposition. He teaches, preaches, performs miracles, and people believe the wonderworker. However, references to darkness (1:5) and to Jesus as “the lamb of God” (1:29) would indicate to a sensitive audience that trouble was lurking. Jews would probably associate “the lamb of God” with the death of the paschal lambs and anticipate conflict. From chapters 5-8, groups start to mobilise against him because of his healings on the Sabbath. In addition to this, he called himself the Son of God, which was blasphemy to the Jews. Jewish authorities were threatened by the many people who believed in Jesus: “If we let him go like this, everyone will believe in him” (11:48).

Some voices that contribute to the understanding of social groups which the evangelist addressed, are: Culpepper (1983:211), O’Grady (1989:79-82), Reinhartz (1992:99), Stibbe (1992:56), Milne (1993:24) and Segovia (1996:6). There are differences in opinion raised by these scholars about the social groups the evangelist targeted. O’Grady (1989:79-82) describes five social groups opposed to Jesus, who never forfeited the synagogue to follow Jesus. These groups are: that of the opposition, Jews who never accepted Jesus, Crypto-Christians (who chose to remain in the synagogue), Jews who accepted Jesus as miracle-worker, and Christians of other apostolic churches.

Culpepper (1983:211), Reinhartz (1992:99-101), Stibbe (1992:56-66), Milne (1993:24-25) and Segovia (1996:6-10) have a common argument that the evangelist seems to have targeted the believers in Diaspora who consisted of Jews, Samaritans, Greeks or Christian believers from diverse cultural and intellectual contexts.

The researcher appreciates the different views of the scholars mentioned above. The researcher suggests John's main social group as that which had broken away from existing Jewish institutions and had interrelated with Jesus. Stibbe's (1992:64) remark about the broken away group is:

This social group had found itself "beyond ordinary limits." The anti-language in John reflects a social group that upheld an alternative social reality that ran counter to the social reality of society at large. They were to maintain inner solidarity under pressure and to assist in the resocialization of newcomers into the reality.

The significance of the Johannine social groups is an illustration of how believing people can develop into other groups because of difference in social interest. This development into new social groups is analogous to that of the Karanga people when they develop conflict because of family matters. This shall be discussed in chapter five of the thesis.

The next narratological element to be discussed is plot development.

2.6 PLOT

In order to know what a narrative plot is the researcher used the following sources: Culpepper (1983:88) as main source, Matera (1987:235), Rotz, (1992:79), Stibbe (1992:26), Oxford Paperback Dictionary (1997:659), and Longman's Dictionary of Contemporary English (2003:1255).

Culpepper (1983:86-87), Matera (1987:235) and Stibbe (1992:26) define plot as the particular way in which a narrative is woven together, with a specific development and purpose in mind. It is the structure and sequence of events created by an author when he/she arranges incidents into a coherent narrative whole – with a beginning, a middle, and an end. Plot allows for various story lines to develop and to unfold in relation to the protagonist. Conflict can be a major element in the plot development of a narrative.

Dictionaries consulted by the researcher mainly regard plot as a form of plan to accomplish a questionable end. Oxford Paperback Dictionary (1997:659) and Longman's Dictionary of Contemporary English (2003:1255) define plot as a secret plan to accomplish some questionable purpose. What is meant by "questionable purpose" is that some secret plans have ended taking people's lives. This, however, does not mean that all secret plans have bad endings.

The researcher – with experience of the Karanga people's stories – agrees with the description of plot by Culpepper, Matera, and Stibbe, since Karanga stories typically have a beginning, middle and an end. Karanga stories are put together in many creative ways. They often entail conflict as in the case of John's Gospel.

The plot of John's Gospel develops through different story lines, such as that of disciples (who also vary in their loyalty to Jesus), and that of Jesus' opponents. Sometimes the lines meet, and the conflict widens, or is resolved. The plot of John's Gospel revolves around Jesus' fulfillment of his mission to reveal the Father and to authorise the children of God (*tekna Theou*) – Culpepper 1983:88. In John, the implied author, for example, consciously synchronises the death of Jesus with the slaughter of the Passover lambs in the temple. According to John, Jesus becomes the true paschal lamb (1:29,36). It is with this image of Jesus that John begins his narrative, after he has introduced Jesus in the prologue (1:1-18) as the incarnation of the divine *logos*.

The plot of John thus provides the rationale for the story: "Jesus, the Son of God, came to earth, died and was glorified so that he/she who believes may have life" (Rotz 1992:79). The plot of John can thus be described as suggesting the Christological idea that Jesus is the true paschal Lamb of God. In his saving relation and significance to those who believe in him He is the revelation of God as God's empowered (divine) Son. More about the plot of John will be discussed in Chapters 3, 4 and 5 of the thesis.

2.6.1 Plot development in John

Subsequently, the question to be investigated is about the plot development in John's Gospel. In the researcher's view, the audience/readers have seen the evangelist leading them to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing they become related to Jesus and have abundant life in his name (20:31). To grasp the different

characters' point of view, the audience/readers have to look at the plot development of the narrative. Through the plot development Jesus' glory is revealed, which made his disciples believe in him (2:11). Jesus is the protagonist, and those who are with him assist him, interrelate with him, and seek to further his interests (cf 2.3). A protagonist has certain aspirations and upholds certain causes (De Klerk and Schnell 1987:18).

As main character, Jesus comes into conflict with persons and circumstances. In the plot development it will be shown how the protagonist pulls along under pressure of some forces, like that of the Pharisees. It will be further discussed in this section and also in Chapter 3. The book of signs (John 1-12), the passion narration, and preparation of the disciples (John 13-21) will be under investigation in this section.

In John 1, the evangelist introduces Jesus as the incarnation of the divine *logos* that was active in creation. He/She mentions antithetical norms that will be in conflict throughout the narrative. The antithetical norms are light and darkness, belief and unbelief, grace and truth and the Law (1:15, 10 and 17). From the beginning of the Gospel, the narrator tells the audience/readers that to those who believe in his name, Jesus will give power to become children of God (1:12b). John is found baptising those people who believed (1:25). John prepared the way of the Lord. John's baptism is in preparation for the one coming (1:27).

Culpepper (1983:90) claims: "Jesus is majestically introduced, John fulfils his role as a witness, and immediately various individuals, most notably an Israelite, begin to follow him." The baptism by John in the river Jordan must have gained Jesus a number of followers.

In John 2, the plot emerges more clearly with Jesus opposed to the use of the temple (2:13ff). The disciples realise from the outset who Jesus is and accept his identity in faith (cf John 1:41,45; 2:11). As De Klerk and Schnell (1987:41) argue, Jesus came from heaven to reveal the Father (and himself) to his own, testified to the truth, and gave life to those who accepted these truths. The Jews, on the contrary, mistrusted Jesus from the outset, questioning his authority and his identity (John 2:18-20).

Jerusalem becomes the place of disbelief hardened by the Jewish festivals and misunderstanding of the Scriptures. In a passing reference the audience/readers are made aware of the fact that Jesus will die and be raised from the dead (2:17,21-22).

In John 3 the narrator is guiding the audience/readers in understanding the meaning of acceptable faith. The conflict in this chapter is with the Jews who refuse to accept the teachings of Jesus (cf 3:6,12-13,31). Jesus' influence increased and people kept coming and were being baptised (3:23).

In John 4 there is little opposition to Jesus. The narrator tells the audience/readers that Jesus is making more disciples than John the Baptist (4:1). The narrator is not confined to a particular place. This makes him to know that Jesus baptised more disciples than John. In John 6:66, it is said that many (πολλοὶ) of the disciples left him. "Many" does not necessarily mean that all of his followers deserted him.

Culpepper (1983:91) argues that the Samaritan woman hailed him as the Christ and as "the saviour of the world" (4:29,39-42). Her village recognised him as the saviour of the world (4:29,39-42). The Galileans welcome him (4:45), and Jesus brings an official to faith by the healing his son (4:46-54). This healing is the second miraculous sign that Jesus performs after turning water into wine. These first four chapters of the Gospel relate the powerful effect of Jesus' ministry. The narrator explains Jesus' identity and mission to the audience/readers – those who believe become children of God and interrelate with Jesus. In the following chapters (6-8), Jesus' conflict with opponents increases. Jesus could see that among his followers, some were not for him but for the darkness (2.24).

In John 5, the narrator brings the main character on the stage surrounded by the opposing characters, the agents of darkness. The conspiracy that has not been showing up clearly in the previous chapters, now opens up. Culpepper (1983:91) describes the conflict as "Jesus or the Law," and that – according to his opponents – Jesus had violated the Sabbath laws and had, therefore, committed blasphemy.

The violation of the Sabbath made the Jews stand against Jesus. Bruce Milne (1993:139) argues that: "From the strictest Pharisaical standpoint, Jesus had infringed the Sabbath tradition (not scripture) at two, probably three points: First, he healed on the Sabbath; second, making mud – he had worked on the Sabbath, which was forbidden; and thirdly, he had anointed the man's eyes which the stricter teachers also prohibited."

The works of healing Jesus performed on the Sabbath prevented the Jews from recognising Jesus' claims about himself. The narrator presents this issue in 5:18: "this was why the Jews

sought all the more to kill him, because he not only broke the Sabbath but also called God his own Father, making himself equal with God.” The conflict in the rest of the Gospel is built around what is said above. The Jews were very serious about keeping the Sabbath holy. The conflict about the Sabbath keeping will surface again in John 9. The conflict continues even in John 6. In the plot development, the protagonist (Jesus) and those interrelated with him pull along under pressure of some forces of the Pharisees.

In John 6 the conflict with unbelief amongst the crowd grows. The crowd, having been impressed by the sign of loaves, pursued Jesus as far as Capernaum. Jesus’ claim to provide bread of life more durable than manna provided in the time of Moses, caused division.

Culpepper’s argument (1983:92) is that the Jews ask the question that becomes typical of earthly, literal, superficial understanding: “How can this be?” (cf 3:4,9; 4:9; 6:42,52; 7:15; 8:33; 9:10-15,16,19,21,26; 12:12,34; 14:5). There is a misunderstanding between the main character and his helpers. The misunderstanding among the Jews spreads to the disciples as well. They begin to complain, and some turn away from him (6:60-61). Many of them leave him (6:66), showing a sharp change in Jesus’ fortunes. Not only are Jesus’ followers reduced, but one of them will betray him (6:64,67,70-71).

The narrator shows that the conflict which started in John 5 continues even to John 8. The conflict rises and intensifies. The disbelief spread from the crowds to the disciples, yet some among the crowds believed in him (7:12). The researcher is of the opinion that those who believed, continued to follow (and to work with) Jesus, although it is written in 7:13 that those who believed, were afraid of the Jews. The fear of the Jews is repeated in John 12:42, “Nevertheless many, even of the authorities, believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they did not confess it; for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue” (cf 7:13; 9:22; 19:38; 20:19).

The arrest of Jesus was not easy because his hour had not yet come (7:30). “His hour” is connected with his arrest – the hour is the hour of his trial and death. A summary of what will happen to him is offered in 7:33-36. Jesus says he will go to the Father where he came from and they will not find him. The crowd thinks that Jesus cannot be the Messiah because they knew from where he came (7:27) and that their Messiah will come from Bethlehem (7:42). There is a misunderstanding of Jesus’ opponents as shown in this chapter.

In John 8 the face-to-face exchange between Jesus and the Jews reaches its most hostile and harsh tones. Themes and arguments of the previous chapters are repeated and central to these being that of paternity. “Yet even if I judge, my judgment is valid; for it is not I alone who judge, but I and the Father who sent me” (8:16).

The Jews ironically charge that they do not know who Jesus’ father was (8:19). But they claim themselves to be Abraham’s children: “We are the descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone” (8:19). In 8:21-24 Suggit (1983:91) sees a contrast in the position of the Pharisees and that of Jesus for the Jews will die in their sins unless they made their faith. The chapter concludes with Jesus claiming to be older than Abraham, and the Jews attempting to stone him because of those remarks (8:59; cf 10:31). According to Jewish tradition, a person was stoned to death if found guilty of sin that deserved stoning (cf 8:5).

John 9 – the focus of the thesis’ investigation – gathers entirely around a healing sign, the giving of sight to the man born blind. The high pitch of disagreement with opponents is not the same as in chapters 7 and 8. Various narratological elements contribute to emphasise the growing conflict against the protagonist in this chapter. However, the maneuverings to arrest Jesus make little progress at this stage. More about this will be discussed in Chapter 3 of the thesis.

In John 10 the Jews get divided (10:19) and debate over whether Jesus had a demon. The claim of Jesus in 10:30 that He and the Father are one provokes another attempt to stone him (10:33). The Jews unsuccessfully attempt to arrest him (10:39). Jesus withdraws from Jerusalem. The chapter as Suggit claims (2003:83) ends up with the demand that even if they did not believe in Jesus, they had to believe his works so that they would know and believe that the Father was in him and He in the Father (cf vv 38-39).

In John 11 Jesus calls Lazarus a friend who had fallen asleep and that he was going to awaken him. There is a misunderstanding between Jesus and the disciples, when Jesus told them that Lazarus had died (11:11-14). Jesus who is the resurrection and giver of life raised Lazarus to life again (11:25-26). Time brings Jesus face to face with his death (11:13), his own grave, and the weeping women. Though disturbed in his spirit, yet because of his relationship with the Father, Jesus prevails over death. Some people believed in him but the authorities plot his death, justifying it as necessary for national security: “This man is

performing many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation” (11:48-50). Although there was fear of the authorities, it might be that they could see that Jesus’ followers were becoming unbearable.

John 12 brings Jesus’ public ministry to a close. According to Culpepper (1983:94) the chapter brings Jesus to the final preliminary steps towards Jesus’ arrest and death and a link between chapter 11 and 13 is formed. In chapter 12, Mary anoints the feet of Jesus while at a table. Judas is introduced as one about to betray him (12:4). Jesus links the anointing with the preparation of his body for burial (12:7). As he is going into Jerusalem, Jesus is hailed as king (12:13), a title that will come up at his trial and death. The Greeks’ request to see Jesus. Jesus triggers his inner sense that the hour of his death is at hand (12:23). In 12:27-28, Jesus experiences the agony of accepting his death. He accepts death to glorify the Father, overthrow the ruler of the world, and is lifted up into heaven (12:27-32).

In John 13-17 Jesus prepares his church since He is now going to the Father. He tells the disciples the purpose of his departure: Since the Paraclete was coming to be with them, they would not need to be afraid. They had to love one another (13:34). They had to bear more fruit (15:2) and abide in him. They were to be taken out of the synagogue. They were to face persecution (16:4). They were, however, prepared to resist and continue to live with Jesus. This ends up with the death of the protagonist in John’ Gospel.

Chapter 13 opens with Jesus showing that He knew that the hour for his return to the Father had come (13:1). Judas is to betray Him; the devil has singled him (13:2). Jesus washes his disciples’ feet. He is troubled in spirit again (14:21), predicts his betrayal, gives his betrayer the choice morsel, and sends him out to the dark forces that will lead Jesus to his death and final glorification. Jesus commands the disciples to love one another (13:34). This is not merely that the disciples should love one another, as Suggit argues (2003:103), but they had to love one another as a sign that they were his disciples.

Jesus promises to prepare a place for them and will return to stay with them in spirit. He will ask the Father to send the Paraclete who will teach, remind and comfort them; bear witness to him and judge the world (14:26; 15:26). The disciples will be excluded from the synagogue (16:2), persecuted, and scattered, but they will have joy and peace and their pain will turn to joy (16:20).

Jesus is then taken from Caiaphas to Pilate's headquarters. The trial of Jesus is dramatised outside the headquarters of Pilate (18:28) to avoid ritual defilement for his own sake (17:9) and those who will follow in faith later. Jesus again recognises that his hour had come (17:1; cf 12:23; 13:1; 16:32). He prays to be glorified, and for the disciples to be set apart from the dark world, to be united with the Father and sent out to reveal Jesus (17:21-23).

In John 18 events begin to move fast towards Jesus' death. Jesus is in control even while his enemies, the political and the religious forces, confront him. They are powerless in his presence (18:6). But he goes with them voluntarily after having set his disciples free (18:9). Peter, who does not understand that Jesus must die, tries to defend Jesus with a sword (18:10). It is the same Peter who rejects Jesus during his trial before Annas and Caiaphas.

At his trial, Jesus says that He has spoken openly and boldly, and challenges his accusers to ask those who heard him. While outside, Peter tries to remain unknown and denies that he was a disciple of Jesus, to evade accusations. Jesus' death makes his disciples faithful. The whole situation turns against Pilate. He is now on trial. The discussion between him and Jesus about the nature of authority and Jesus' kingship is made clear (18:33-36). Pilate finds no case and he pronounces Jesus innocent three times (18:38; 19:4; 19:6). In the end the title Pilate nails to the cross ironically proclaims: "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" (19:19). Pilate pronounced Jesus innocent. However, the glory of people finally had a stronger claim on Pilate than the glory of God (19:12-13).

When the Jews renounced their heritage by claiming: "we have no king but Caesar" (19:15), Pilate delivered Jesus to them. The Jews crucify Jesus at the eve of the Passover, the time of slaughter of the Passover lambs (cf 1:29). As the soldiers cast lots for Jesus garments, Jesus was bringing together his mother and the Beloved Disciple (19:26-27). Jesus, who promised the living water (4:14), is thirsty before He dies. His only cup is a sponge. He drinks the wine and declares: "It is finished", and hands over his spirit. Soldiers pierce his side; Jesus is given a kingly burial by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus (19:38, 39).

Early the first day of the week after his death, Mary Magdalene discovers Jesus' tomb empty. Peter and the Beloved Disciple rush to the tomb and find his clothes still there (cf 1:44). The Beloved Disciple sees and believes (20:8). Jesus rose and Mary Magdalene met him but did not recognise him until Jesus called her name. She is told that He had not ascended

to the Father yet, but that she had to go and tell his disciples who had become brothers of the unique “Son of God.”

Jesus subsequently appears to his disciples. Thomas, who at first demands physical proof, offers the Gospel of John a climactic confession: “My Lord and my God.” Jesus responds by saying: “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe” (20:29). Culpepper (1983:96) argues to say that the Gospel reaches its original ending, a conclusion which confirms that the Gospel was written to lead readers to believe in Jesus.

John 21 is an epilogue to the narrative. It resolves some of the minor conflicts (the Beloved Disciple and Peter, Jesus and Peter) and brings the development of John’s symbols to a climax. Jesus indirectly tells Peter and the Beloved Disciple their roles in the future of the story: Peter will die a martyr’s death, but the Beloved Disciple too will bear a faithful witness. The Gospel, as Culpepper indicates (1983:96), ends without Jesus’ ascension, which is probably alluded to by his being “lifted up” on the cross, and his resurrection. Jesus is with the disciples at the end; the Paraclete will come and remain with them. John 21 becomes the necessary ending of the gospel.

The researcher has up to now focused on narrative as involving characters, settings, plot and point of view. Point of view provides understanding of the general world view that the implied author considers basic for the narration of the whole story. This ultimately becomes apparent in the Gospel’s purpose statement in John 20:31: “But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.”

2.7 SYMBOLISM

Symbols, like images, metaphors, motifs, and related themes, often carry the principal burden of a narrative and provide implicit commentary and directional signals to the audience / readers. Examples of dualistic symbols in the Fourth Gospel are light and darkness (1:5), and the world from above and below (cf Kysar 1993:60). The Gospel assumes a profound dualism which is depicted in spatial terms – according to 8:23, Jesus is from above (ἐκ τῶν ἄνω); his opponents are from below (ἐκ τῶν κάτω). The “world” seems to be a symbol representing the realm of unbelief, the area in which there is total rejection of the truth of God revealed in Jesus.

John's Gospel is fond of using symbols (including imagery, metaphors, symbolic settings), which play an important role of identification in the narrative. Symbols and metaphors represent a particular idea, refer to something other than itself, and have particular meaning in specific contexts. The evangelist of the Fourth Gospel connects concrete images with abstract meanings. Water, for example, is associated with baptism or the Holy Spirit (1:26,31, 33; 9:7). John uses images such as the following:

- bread (6:33-35);
- body and blood (6:33-57);
- door, sheepfold, sheep, and thieves (10:1-16).

These will be discussed further in Chapters 4 and 5 of the thesis.

2.8 METAPHOR

The basic definition of metaphor is that it is a device which speaks of one thing (tenor) in terms which are appropriate to another (vehicle), with the vehicle serving as the source of traits to be transferred to the tenor. According to Culpepper (1983:167,181), metaphor suggests a choice between two large structures of belief, each so tightly associated, that to reject or accept any one of them may well entail rejecting or accepting a whole way of life. When Jesus says: "I am the bread of life" (6:35) in the context of a discourse on the true bread, the reader is given both the tenor ("I") and the vehicle ("the bread of life"). The evangelist is fond of using such metaphors to explain the wealth and mystery of Jesus' mission.

Wai-yee Ng (2001:5-9) refers to the standard metaphors for Jesus in John's Gospel – such as living water, bread of life, true vine. With the use of these, the spoken of ("vehicle") are daily things easily perceived in life, and things referred to ("tenor") are realities not so easily perceived. Such realities are "revealed" by Jesus, and such metaphors, as recounted in the text, were probably used by Jesus himself. The so-called "I am" (ἐγώ εἰμι) sayings or formula in John are unique literary-rhetorical traits of the Fourth Gospel. They represent Jesus' Christological claims. Although metaphors are related to symbols, symbols have a broader application (cf Wai-yee Ng 2001:5-7).

2.9 IRONY

Culpepper (1983:165-180) explains irony as a literary device using words to express one thing while intending the direct opposite, the aim being to make one's remarks forceful. Irony plays a significant role in plot development. The foundational irony of the Gospel is that the Jews rejected the Messiah they eagerly expected: "He came to his own home, and his own people received him not" (1:11).

Wai-yee Ng (2001:11) describes irony as a more complex element of ambiguous meaning. An example of this is the question, "How can the Christ come from Galilee?" (7:41), revolving around another rhetorical question: "Is he the Christ?" John is probably using irony to make his audience/readers understand that he means more than what he actually says, leaving open-ended gaps to be filled in by themselves. Irony can cause the characters in a narrative to misunderstand what is happening or what is being said (cf John 2:19 – "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up").

2.10 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER

In this chapter of the thesis elements of narrative theory were discussed namely characters, point of view, settings and plot development. "Characters" discussed represented a main character (protagonist) as well as assisting and opposing characters. Assisting characters further the main character's interests. The function of characters in John's Gospel is primarily twofold (cf Culpepper 1987:101-148):

- To draw out various aspects of Jesus, the main character, by providing a series of diverse individuals with whom Jesus can interact;
- To present alternative responses to Jesus so that the audience/readers can see their attendant misunderstandings and consequences.

"Point of view" is defined as the narrator's ability to see the inside of a character, while "setting" refers to place, time or social groups. These elements will be used in a closer investigation of John's Gospel in the following chapters of the thesis. The next chapter will focus on an exegetical analysis of John 9:1-41. The purpose of the analysis is to explore the nature of Jesus' response to the question of his disciples in John 9:2, namely that God's power and glory were meant to be displayed in the life of the blind beggar – through the self revelation of Jesus.

CHAPTER 3

JESUS AND SUFFERING IN JOHN 9: ANALYSING THE STORY OF JESUS OPENING THE EYES OF A BEGGAR BORN BLIND

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 2 of the thesis discussed the main elements of the narrative, namely characters, point of view, settings, and plot development. In this chapter the study will utilise these narrative elements to explore Jesus' perspective on suffering according to John 9:1-41 through analysing the story of Jesus opening the eyes of a beggar born blind narratologically. The purpose of the chapter is to explore *who Jesus is* as highlighted by different characters, points of view, settings, and the plot development in John 9.

John 9 will be divided into seven scenes. The structure of every scene will be: (1) characters; (2) point of view; (3) settings; (4) plot development; and (5) summary. Through the use of these narrative elements the question about who Jesus is according to John 9 will be explored. John 9 starts with Jesus' disciples asking him about the cause of an unnamed blind beggar's condition – whether it was caused by his sins or the sins of his parents (τίς ἥμαρτεν;). This question triggered the dramatic story in John 9. The question reveals the disciples' understanding of suffering as something caused by sin. Jesus, however, opens up a radically different understanding of suffering and sin to his disciples, the parents of the healed man, and the Jews who called Jesus a sinner because he healed the man on the Sabbath.

Jesus's response in John 9:3 dramatically shifts the disciples' understanding of suffering. Instead of addressing the *cause* of the man's blindness, Jesus surprisingly shifts the focus and speaks of its *purpose*: (ἵνα φανερωθῆ τὰ ἔργα τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ). For Jesus it is not the physical blindness of the beggar that is at stake, but the spiritual blindness of the Jews who do not know who He is, and who therefore “remain in their sins” (cf 9:2,41).

The researcher has *inter alia* been influenced by the following scholars who contributed to the understanding of John 9 as a dramatic story: Martyn (1979:30-36), Culpepper (1983:83),

Countryman (1987:60-70), Milne (1993:139-140), and Suggit (2003:76-80). Its division into seven scenes. This chapter will follow the dramatic structure of John 9 as it develops through seven scenes. The scenes are demarcated by different characters moving in and out of the story.⁶ The blind man appears in every scene. He resists threats of the Pharisees, and gradually comes to see Jesus as a man from God (9:33), the Son of Man (9:35-38), sent to the world as the light of the world (8:12; 9:4). He eventually accepts Jesus as a healer and as a miracle worker.

The movement from one scene to another in John 9 – the development of tension between Jesus and his opponents on the one hand, and the development of faith in him on the other hand – resembles something of the larger plot development in John's Gospel (cf 2.6.1). The researcher's analysis of the scenes will be structured according to: (1) Characters; (2) Settings; (3) Plot; and (4) Summary. It will build on the theory of these elements which has been discussed in Chapter 2 of the thesis (cf 2.3; 2.5 and 2.6).

By way of a brief introduction, one may say that the first scene comprises a dialogue between Jesus and his disciples. It is about whose sin had caused the blindness – a focus which Jesus dismisses and ironically replaces with a miraculous sign. In the second scene both Jesus and his disciples move out, while the neighbours and those who used to see the blind beggar move in and observe that the beggar has received sight. The healing of the blind man (on the Sabbath) leads to interaction with his neighbours, and further disputation with the Jews. In the third scene the blind beggar is handed over to the Pharisees who interrogate him, while the neighbours move out. In the fourth scene the blind beggar moves out of the scene. The investigation continues, and moves to the parents of the blind beggar who are required to give witness about their son. In the fifth scene the parents move out of the scene. The blind beggar is brought in, and the investigation results in his expulsion from the synagogue. Jesus appears in the sixth scene which pictures the blind beggar on the street, where he is asked if he knew the Son of Man. The chapter closes with Jesus in dialogue with the Jews (vv 35-41). Jesus now openly explains the real issue at stake, namely the blindness (sins) of the Pharisees – *ὄν δὲ λέγετε ὅτι βλέπομεν, ἡ ἁμαρτία ὑμῶν μένει* (seventh scene). While the disciples saw either the sin of the blind beggar

⁶ According to Culpepper (1998:174), John 9 is best approached as a sequence of seven scenes, each of which is marked by a change of characters. The principle of duality, namely that the narrator prefers scenes with two principal characters, is clearly evident in this chapter of John's Gospel.

(ἥμαρτεν) or the sin of his parents (ἥμαρτεν) as having caused the man's blindness, Jesus was primarily concerned about the Jews' lack of knowledge about his identity.

The main sources to be used in this chapter are Suggit's books *The sign of life* (1983) and *Down to earth and up to heaven* (2003), as well as Culpepper's *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel* (1983). Culpepper serves as major source right through the thesis. Suggit focuses on Jesus as the revealer of God, as the sacrificial lamb sent from God to reveal the Father, and to give light and life to those who believe in him.

The researcher consulted various voices – male and female – from different cultures and contexts, and from different times in history. These include names such as: Lightfoot (1957), Angoff (1960), Lampe (1961), Godet (1970), Brown (1971), Temple (1975), Painter (1975), Barrett (1978), Martyn (1979), Bruce (1983), Morris (1986), O'Day (1986), Smith (1986), Fenton (1988), McGann (1988), Kysar (1984), Milne (1993), Howard-Brook (1994), Moloney (1996), Ridderbos (1997), Dunn and Rogerson (2003), Adeyemo (2006) and Haln (2006 Online). Even though these voices may differ in perspective, they all assisted the researcher in some way or other towards a better understanding of the alternative world view of John 9.

3.2 DIVISION OF JOHN 9 INTO SEVEN SCENES

The division of John 9 into seven scenes, briefly referred to above, will now be discussed in more detail. Scholars who specifically contributed to an analysis of John 9 are: Martyn (1979:30-36), Culpepper (1983:83), Countryman (1987:60-70), Milne (1993:139-140) and Howard-Brook (1994:211-217). These scholars all divide the drama of John 9 into seven scenes, even though they do not always adequately account for the division (demarcation) of the different scenes. The researcher bases his analysis on their thinking, but will elaborate on their division of the scenes. The researcher thereby acknowledges the dramatic category of “scenes” as used by these sources. Since they refer to people moving in and out of different scenes, the researcher will also refer to these divisions as “scenes.”⁷ A scene in the researcher's view is an episode in a dramatic story. Some of the characters mentioned by the narrator in John 9 are: Pharisees (3:1), who had to see that Jewish

⁷ The social scenes show how different groups of people (probably mainly Jews) came together to deal with the case of the formerly blind beggar. John 9 specifically refers to Jesus interacting with the disciples (9:3-4), neighbours (9:8-12), Pharisees (9:13-15), and Jewish authorities (9:24-41). The researcher will also use the category of scenes in Chapter 5 of the thesis, dealing with Karanga people's interaction with John 9. The Karanga village set up typically involves “social scenes” when people deal with societal issues.

traditions were kept, including Sabbath laws; disciples (4:1), who revealed God through the work they did with Jesus; temple police (7:45), who secured the temple; and chief priests (12:10), who worked in the temple to offer sacrifices to the Lord.

From the researcher's point of view, the beggar's blindness has to be seen as a social issue, since it affected his entire life with all his relations. John 9 shows how different groups of people come together to discuss the issue of the blind beggar's healing. They investigate how he was healed. There is a movement of characters from one scene to another. Jesus and the beggar appear in almost all the scenes. The drama shows how different characters develop, and how the blind beggar eventually comes to believe in Jesus.

The researcher has divided John 9:1-41 into the following scenes: The first scene (9:1-7) represents a dialogue between Jesus and his disciples. It starts with Καὶ παράγων εἶδεν ἄνθρωπον τυφλὸν ("as they passed along they saw a blind man"). Jesus and his disciples talk about whose sin had caused the blindness of the man. Jesus dramatically shifts the discussion from the *cause* of the blindness to its *purpose* by healing the man through a miraculous sign, thereby revealing his power and glory as the One sent by God. The scene ends with καὶ ἐνίψατο καὶ ἦλθεν βλέπων ("and he washed and came back seeing"). The narrator describes the blind beggar coming back after he had washed himself – healed from his blindness.

The second scene (9:8-12) starts with Οἱ οὖν γείτονες καὶ οἱ θεωροῦντες αὐτὸν τὸ πρότερον ὅτι προσαίτης ἦν ἔλεγον ("the neighbours and those who had seen him before as a beggar"). The reference to neighbours indicates the beginning of a next scene – people are coming in while others move from the stage. The group sees the man healed. They want to know who healed him. They also remember that he was healed on the Sabbath. The scene ends its dialogue with ποῦ ἐστὶν ἐκεῖνος; λέγει· οὐκ οἶδα ("Where is he?", and he said, 'I do not know'). The narrator indicates that the blind beggar does not know where Jesus is, meaning Jesus had gone out of the scene, together with his disciples.

In the third scene (9:13-17) the blind beggar is handed over to the Pharisees and faces investigations, while the neighbours move out of the scene. This scene starts with Ἄγουσιν αὐτὸν πρὸς τοὺς Φαρισαίους ("They brought him to the Pharisees"). The blind beggar has been moved to the Pharisees, who want to know who his healer is and how he was healed. They refuse to recognise Jesus as being from God since He did not keep the Sabbath. The

scene ends with the healed man's confession about Jesus: προφήτης ἐστίν (“He is a prophet”).

In the fourth scene (9:18-23), the beggar is moved out of the scene. The investigation continues with his parents who have to give witness about their son. The fourth scene starts with Οὐκ ἐπίστευσαν οὖν οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι περὶ αὐτοῦ ὅτι ἦν τυφλὸς καὶ ἀνέβλεψεν ἕως ὅτου ἐφώνησαν τοὺς γονεῖς (“The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents”). The dialogue ends with the parents' conclusion: ἡλικίαν ἔχει, αὐτὸν ἐπερωτήσατε (“He is of age; ask him”).

In the fifth scene (9:24-34) the parents have moved out. The formerly blind beggar is brought before the Jewish authorities. The scene starts with Ἐφώνησαν οὖν τὸν ἄνθρωπον ἐκ δευτέρου (“So for the second time they called the man”). The Jewish authorities imposed an oath on him to give glory to God and declare Jesus a sinner. They did not know where Jesus came from and persisted to investigate the violation of the Sabbath. The formerly blind man is surprised that they do not know where the miracle worker had come from – if Jesus was not from God, He could not have given him his sight. The dialogue ends with καὶ ἐξέβαλον αὐτὸν ἔξω (“And they threw him out”). The investigation ends with the formerly blind man's expulsion from the synagogue.

In the sixth scene (9:35-39) Jesus moves back into the scene. It is the second time he meets the man whom He had healed. It starts with Ἦκουσεν Ἰησοῦς ὅτι ἐξέβαλον αὐτὸν ἔξω καὶ εὗρων αὐτὸν εἶπεν (“Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he asked the man if he believed in the Son of Man”). He believed him and worshipped him. The dialogue ends with Jesus' words, ἵνα οἱ μὴ βλέποντες βλέπωσιν καὶ οἱ βλέποντες τυφλοὶ γίνωνται (“so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind”).

In the seventh scene (9:40-41) Jesus meets the Pharisees for the first time. It starts with ἤκουσαν ἐκ τῶν Φαρισαίων ταῦτα (“some of the Pharisees heard him say this”). The Pharisees talking to Jesus thought about themselves as having no sin. The interaction between Jesus and the Pharisees ends with a reprimand from Jesus: ἀμαρτία ὑμῶν μένει (“Your sin remains”).

The demarcation and development of scenes will now be presented more graphically. Each character will be abbreviated by the first letter of their names. The letter “N,” for example, stands for the narrator’s words. Important Greek words or phrases will be indicated in the subsequent discussion of the different scenes – as significant literary devices that carry the message in the scenes where they appear. The different characters will be represented in tables by the following key indicators:

N	Narrator	Par	Parents
D	Disciples	Je	Jews
BB	Blind beggar	Ph	Pharisees
J	Jesus	Nei	Neighbours

The scenes in John 9:1-41 will now be discussed one by one with reference to both the Greek and English translations of the text. The English translation used is that of the New Revised Standard Version (1990).

Scene one (Jn 9:1-7)

N	Καὶ παράγων εἶδεν ἄνθρωπον τυφλὸν ἐκ γενετῆς. ² καὶ ἠρώτησαν αὐτὸν οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ λέγοντες·	N	As he walked along, he saw a man blind from his birth. ² And his disciples asked him
D	ῥαββί, τίς ἥμαρτεν, οὗτος ἢ οἱ γονεῖς αὐτοῦ, ἵνα τυφλὸς γεννηθῆι;	D	“Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind?”
N	³ ἀπεκρίθη Ἰησοῦς·	N	³ Jesus answered,
J	οὔτε οὗτος ἥμαρτεν οὔτε οἱ γονεῖς αὐτοῦ, ἀλλ’ ἵνα φανερωθῆ τὰ ἔργα τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ. ⁴ ἡμᾶς δεῖ ἐργάζεσθαι τὰ ἔργα τοῦ πέμψαντος με ἕως ἡμέρας ἐστίν· ἔρχεται νύξ ὅτε οὐδεὶς δύναται ἐργάζεσθαι. ⁵ ὅταν	J	“Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him. ⁴ We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. ⁵ As long as I am in the

	έν τῷ κόσμῳ ὦ, φῶς εἰμι τοῦ κόσμου.		world, I am the light of the world.”
N	ἔταῦτα εἰπὼν ἔπτυσεν χαμαὶ καὶ ἐποίησεν πηλὸν ἐκ τοῦ πτύσματος καὶ ἐπέχρισεν αὐτοῦ τὸν πηλὸν ἐπὶ τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς ⁷ καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ·	N	⁶ When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes , ⁷ saying to him,
J	ὑπάγε νίψαι εἰς τὴν κολυμβήθραν τοῦ Σιλωάμ	J	“Go, wash in the pool of Siloam”
N	(ὃ ἐρμηνεύεται ἀπεσταλμένος). ἀπῆλθεν οὖν καὶ ἐνίψατο καὶ ἦλθεν βλέπων.	N	(which means Sent)? Then he went and washed and came back able to see.

Scene two (Jn 9:8-12)

N	⁸ Οἱ οὖν γείτονες καὶ οἱ θεωροῦντες αὐτὸν τὸ πρότερον ὅτι προσαίτης ἦν ἔλεγον·	N	⁸ The neighbours and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask,
Nei	οὐχ οὗτος ἐστὶν ὁ καθήμενος καὶ προσαιτῶν;	Nei	“Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?”
N	⁹ ἄλλοι ἔλεγον	N	⁹ Some were saying,
Nei	ὅτι οὗτος ἐστίν,	Nei	“It is he”;
N	ἄλλοι ἔλεγον·	N	others were saying,
Nei	οὐχί, ἀλλὰ ὅμοιος αὐτῷ ἐστίν.	Nei	“No, but it is someone like him.”
N	ἐκεῖνος ἔλεγεν ὅτι	N	He kept saying,

BB	ἐγώ εἰμι.	BB	“I am the man.”
N	¹⁰ ἔλεγον οὖν αὐτῷ	N	¹⁰ But they kept asking him,
Nei	πῶς [οὖν] ἠνεώχθησαν σου οἱ ὀφθαλμοί;	Nei	“Then how were your eyes opened?”
N	¹¹ ἀπεκρίθη ἐκεῖνος·	N	¹¹ He answered,
BB	ὁ ἄνθρωπος ὁ λεγόμενος Ἰησοῦς πηλὸν ἐποίησεν καὶ ἐπέχρισεν μου τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς καὶ εἶπεν μοι ὅτι	BB	“The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me,
J	ὑπάγε εἰς τὸν Σιλωὰμ	J	‘Go to Siloam and wash’;
BB	καὶ νίψαι· ἀπελθὼν οὖν καὶ νιψάμενος ἀνέβλεψα.	BB	Then I went and washed and received my sight.”
N	¹² καὶ εἶπαν αὐτῷ·	N	¹² They said to him,
Nei	ποῦ ἐστὶν ἐκεῖνος;	Nei	“Where is he?”
N	λέγει·	N	He said,
BB	οὐκ οἶδα.	BB	“I do not know.”

Scene three (Jn 9:13-17)

N	¹³ Ἄγουσιν αὐτὸν πρὸς τοὺς Φαρισαίους τὸν ποτε τυφλόν. ¹⁴ ἦν δὲ σάββατον ἐν ἡ ἡμέρᾳ τὸν πηλὸν ἐποίησεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς καὶ ἀνέωξεν αὐτοῦ τοὺς ὀφθαλμούς. ¹⁵ πάλιν οὖν ἠρώτων αὐτὸν καὶ οἱ	N	¹³ They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. ¹⁴ Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵ The Pharisees also began to ask him
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	Φαρισαίοι πῶς ἀνέβλεψεν. ὁ δὲ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς		how he had received his sight. He said to them,
BB	πηλὸν ἐπέθηκεν μου ἐπὶ τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς καὶ ἐνιψάμην καὶ βλέπω.	BB	“He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now see.”
N	¹⁶ ἔλεγον οὖν ἐκ τῶν Φαρισαίων	N	¹⁶ Some of the Pharisees said,
Ph	τινὲς οὐκ ἔστιν οὗτος παρὰ θεοῦ ὁ ἄνθρωπος, ὅτι τὸ σάββατον οὐ τηρεῖ.	Ph	“This man is not from God, for he does not observe the Sabbath.”
N	ἄλλοι [δὲ] ἔλεγον	N	But others said,
Ph	πῶς δύναται ἄνθρωπος ἀμαρτωλὸς τοιαῦτα σημεῖα ποιεῖν;	Ph	“How can a man who is a sinner; perform such signs?”
N	καὶ σχίσμα ἦν ἐν αὐτοῖς. ¹⁷ λέγουσιν οὖν τῷ τυφλῷ πάλιν	N	And they were divided. ¹⁷ So they said again to the blind man,
Ph	τί σὺ λέγεις περὶ αὐτοῦ, ὅτι ἠνέωξεν σου τοὺς ὀφθαλμούς;	Ph	“What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened?”
N	ὁ δὲ εἶπεν ὅτι	N	He said,
BB	προφήτης ἐστίν.	BB	“He is a prophet.”

Scene four (Jn 9:18-23)

N	¹⁸ Οὐκ ἐπίστευσαν οὖν οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι περὶ αὐτοῦ ὅτι ἦν τυφλὸς καὶ ἀνέβλεψεν ἕως ὅτου ἐφώνησαν τοὺς γονεῖς αὐτοῦ τοῦ	N	¹⁸ The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight, until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight, ¹⁹ and asked
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	ἀναβλέψαντος ¹⁹ καὶ ἠρώτησαν αὐτοὺς λέγοντες· οὗτος		them,
Je	ἐστὶν ὁ υἱὸς ὑμῶν, ὃν ὑμεῖς λέγετε ὅτι τυφλὸς ἐγεννήθη; πῶς οὖν βλέπει ἄρτι;	Je	“Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?”
N	²⁰ ἀπεκρίθησαν οὖν οἱ γονεῖς αὐτοῦ καὶ εἶπαν	N	²⁰ His parents answered,
Par	οἶδαμεν ὅτι οὗτος ἐστὶν ὁ υἱὸς ἡμῶν καὶ ὅτι τυφλὸς ἐγεννήθη· ²¹ πῶς δὲ νῦν βλέπει οὐκ οἶδαμεν, ἢ τίς ἤνοιξεν αὐτοῦ τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς ἡμεῖς οὐκ οἶδαμεν· αὐτὸν ἐρωτήσατε, ἡλικίαν ἔχει, αὐτὸς περὶ ἑαυτοῦ λαλήσει.	Par	“We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; ²¹ but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age, he will speak for himself.”
N	²² ταῦτα εἶπαν οἱ γονεῖς αὐτοῦ ὅτι ἐφοβοῦντο τοὺς Ἰουδαίους· ἤδη γὰρ συνετέθειντο οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι ἵνα εἰάν τις αὐτὸν ὁμολογήσῃ χριστόν, ἀποσυνάγωγος γένηται. ²³ διὰ τοῦτο οἱ γονεῖς αὐτοῦ εἶπαν ὅτι	N	²² His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. ²³ Therefore his parents said,
Par	ἡλικίαν ἔχει, αὐτὸν ἐπερωτήσατε.	Par	“He is of age, ask him.”

Scene five (Jn 9:24-34)

N	²⁴ Ἐφώνησαν οὖν τὸν ἄνθρωπον ἐκ δευτέρου ὃς ἦν τυφλὸς καὶ εἶπαν αὐτῷ	N	²⁴ So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him,
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Je	δὸς δόξαν τῷ θεῷ· ἡμεῖς οἶδαμεν ὅτι οὗτος ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἁμαρτωλὸς ἐστίν.	Je	“Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.”
N	²⁵ ἀπεκρίθη οὖν ἐκεῖνος	N	²⁵ He answered,
BB	εἰ ἁμαρτωλὸς ἐστίν οὐκ οἶδα· ἐν οἶδα ὅτι τυφλὸς ὢν ἄρτι βλέπω.	BB	“I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.”
N	²⁶ εἶπον οὖν αὐτῷ	N	²⁶ They said to him,
Je	τί ἐποίησεν σοι; πῶς ἤνοιξεν σου τοὺς ὀφθαλμούς;	Je	“What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?”
N	²⁷ ἀπεκρίθη αὐτοῖς	N	²⁷ He answered them,
BB	εἶπον ὑμῖν ἤδη καὶ οὐκ ἠκούσατε· τί πάλιν θέλετε ἀκούειν; μὴ καὶ ὑμεῖς θέλετε αὐτοῦ μαθηταὶ γενέσθαι;	BB	“I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?”
N	²⁸ καὶ ἐλοιδόρησαν αὐτὸν καὶ εἶπον	N	²⁸ Then they reviled him, saying,
Je	σύ μαθητὴς εἶ ἐκείνου, ἡμεῖς δὲ τοῦ Μωϋσέως ἐσμὲν μαθηταί· ²⁹ ἡμεῖς οἶδαμεν ὅτι Μωϋσεὶ λελάληκεν ὁ θεός, τοῦτον δὲ οὐκ οἶδαμεν πόθεν ἐστίν.	Je	“You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. ²⁹ We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.”
N	³⁰ ἀπεκρίθη ὁ ἄνθρωπος καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς	N	³⁰ The man answered,
BB	ἐν τούτῳ γὰρ τὸ θαυμαστὸν ἐστίν, ὅτι ὑμεῖς οὐκ οἶδατε πόθεν ἐστίν,	BB	“Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet

	καὶ ἤνοιξεν μου τοὺς ὀφθαλμούς.		he opened my eyes.”
Je	³¹ οἴδαμεν ὅτι ἀμαρτωλῶν ὁ θεὸς οὐκ ἀκούει, ἀλλ’ ἐάν τις θεοσεβῆς ἦ καὶ τὸ θέλημα αὐτοῦ ποιῆ τούτου ἀκούει.	Je	³¹ We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will.
	³² ἐκ τοῦ αἰῶνος οὐκ ἠκούσθη ὅτι ἠνέωξεν τις ὀφθαλμοὺς τυφλοῦ γεγεννημένου		³² Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind.
BB	³³ εἰ μὴ ἦν οὗτος παρὰ θεοῦ, οὐκ ἠδύνατο ποιεῖν οὐδέν.	BB	³³ If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.”
N	³⁴ ἀπεκρίθησαν καὶ εἶπαν αὐτῷ	N	³⁴ They answered him,
Je	ἐν ἀμαρτίαις σὺ ἐγεννήθης ὅλος καὶ σὺ διδάσκεις ἡμᾶς; καὶ ἐξέβαλον αὐτὸν ἔξω.	Je	“You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?” And they drove him out.

Scene six (Jn 9:35-39)

N	³⁵ Ἦκουσεν Ἰησοῦς ὅτι ἐξέβαλον αὐτὸν ἔξω καὶ εὗρών αὐτὸν εἶπεν	N	³⁵ Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said,
J	σὺ πιστεύεις εἰς τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου;	J	“Do you believe in the Son of man?”
N	³⁶ ἀπεκρίθη ἐκεῖνος καὶ εἶπεν	N	He answered,
BB	καὶ τίς ἐστιν, κύριε, ἵνα πιστεύσω εἰς αὐτόν;	BB	“And who is he, sir? Tell me so that I may believe in him?”
N	³⁷ εἶπεν αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς	N	³⁷ Jesus said to him,

J	καὶ ἐώρακας αὐτὸν καὶ ὁ λαλῶν μετὰ σοῦ ἐκεῖνος ἐστίν.	J	“You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.”
N	³⁸ ὁ δὲ ἔφη	N	³⁸ He said,
BB	πιστεύω, κύριε	BB	“Lord, I believe”;
N	καὶ προσεκύνησεν αὐτῷ. ³⁹ Καὶ εἶπεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς	N	and he worshiped him. ³⁹ Jesus said,
J	εἰς κρίμα ἐγὼ εἰς τὸν κόσμον τοῦτον ἦλθον, ἵνα οἱ μὴ βλέποντες βλέπωσιν καὶ οἱ βλέποντες τυφλοὶ γένωνται.	J	“I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.”

Scene seven (Jn 9:40-41)

N	⁴⁰ ἤκουσαν ἐκ τῶν Φαρισαίων ταῦτα οἱ μετ’ αὐτοῦ ὄντες καὶ εἶπον αὐτῷ	N	⁴⁰ Some of the Pharisees near him heard this, and they said to him,
Ph	μὴ καὶ ἡμεῖς τυφλοὶ ἐσμεν;	Ph	“Surely we are not blind, are we?”
N	⁴¹ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς	N	⁴¹ Jesus said to them,
J	εἰ τυφλοὶ ἦτε, οὐκ ἂν εἴχετε ἁμαρτίαν· νῦν δὲ λέγετε ὅτι βλέπομεν, ἡ ἁμαρτία ὑμῶν μένει.	J	“If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see’, your sin remains.

Through these seven scenes, and particularly through the interaction of different characters, the plot of John 9 develops, and the identity of Jesus, the main character in John’s Gospel, is revealed. It starts with Jesus responding in an unexpected way to the question of his disciples about whose sin had caused the beggar to be blind. Jesus responded not only by shifting the emphasis to the purpose of his condition, but also by healing the man’s blindness. The beggar’s story is narrated in such a way that the real issue

in John's Gospel, namely *who Jesus is*, is foregrounded. Jesus appears in the first and the last scenes. In the second, third and fourth scenes He does not appear physically, but the conversations are about him, and about how He healed the beggar. The beggar appears physically in four scenes. In the fourth scene he is represented by his parents who interact with the authorities about him.

The disciples appear only in the first scene. For the rest of the narrative the text is silent about their whereabouts. The neighbours and those who used to see the blind beggar begging appear in the second scene. They observe that the blind beggar has been healed, and they want to know how it happened and who the healer is. Jesus is foregrounded by this group by acknowledging that the blind beggar had been healed. They appear again briefly in the third scene, bringing the healed man, and to report that he was healed on the Sabbath.

The Pharisees appear in the fourth scene – as rivals of the main character. They submit the formerly blind beggar to the higher authority of the Jews. They hear that Jesus healed on the Sabbath and thereby violated the Sabbath (cf 2.5.2.1). They are divided over his case. The Jewish authorities appear in the fourth and fifth scenes. In the fourth scene they highlight Jesus by interrogating the parents of the formerly blind beggar, asking them if the man was their son. In the fifth scene the Jewish authorities interrogate the formerly blind beggar, asking him to declare that Jesus was a sinner. When he refused to call Jesus a sinner they excommunicated him from the synagogue.

3.2.1 Scene one (9:1-7)

3.2.1.1 Jesus

In John 9 the narrator seems to tell the audience/readers that Jesus did not go into hiding after the attempt to stone him at the temple in Jerusalem (cf 2.5.1.1). The Jews attempted to stone Jesus because He told them, “Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am” (8:59). The Jews wanted to stone Jesus because He had claimed himself not only older than Abraham, but also that He was the Son of God, which was blasphemy to the Jews (5:18). As Jesus went along he encountered a man who had been born blind (9:1).

The opening scene of John 9 comprises Jesus, his disciples, and the blind beggar. The text has been silent about the disciples' activities since John 6. It is only now that the narrator speaks about them again. After the blind man receives his sight, they will disappear from the scene (again). Such gaps in a text may function as important rhetorical vehicles carrying the plot development forward. The disciples are the first people to talk about the blind beggar in the narrative. They put a moral and social question to Jesus: "Rabbi, who sinned (τίς ἥμαρτεν;), this man or his parents, in order that he was born blind (ἵνα τυφλὸς;)"⁸ This is the primary paradigm from which they thought about suffering. It may be argued that the disciples represent the Jews at large here, because the Jews typically believed that suffering was a consequence of somebody's sins (cf Lev. 26:16; Deut. 28:22; Job 1:1; 2:3). It was believed that even the parents' sin could affect their children (Exod 20:5). It is probable that the audience/readers of John 9:2 would be eagerly awaiting an answer...

The disciples of Jesus apparently connected suffering to sin – at least generally if not directly. It could further be that the memory of Jesus healing a crippled man in John 5:1-15 was still fresh in their minds. Perhaps they expected a similar response as when Jesus said to the healed man: "Do not sin again" (5:14). That the beggar's blindness was important to Jesus (and the narrator), is clear from Jesus' concern for the man, and from the way in which Jesus healed him. However, Jesus responds uniquely in every new situation, with different purposes in mind. In this case it was to emphasise the purpose of the blind man's condition, as well as his self-revelation through the man's miraculous healing. The blind beggar's condition, and how he was freed from it, dominates all the scenes in John 9.

According to Milne (1993:138), there is a grain of truth that sickness may generally have a relationship to some sinful situation in the past, which may correspondingly be a factor in the healing process. Moloney (1996:120), Dunn and Rogerson (2003:1185), Suggit (2003:27) and Adeyemo (2006:1271) reiterate that the Jewish understanding at the time of Jesus was that blindness was caused by sin. It is suggested by Suggit (1993:86) that this deliberately refers to Adam's sin, and that the blind beggar represents the human race, blind from birth because of Adam's sin (cf 2.2.1). According to Suggit (1983:86), ἄνθρωπος is used in the Septuagint (Genesis 2:15) to translate the Hebrew 'adam'. If this is the evangelist's intention

⁸ Brown (1971:371) remarks that the old theory of a direct causal relationship between sin and sickness was still alive in Jesus' time, as this question and a similar one in Luke 13:2 indicate. If an adult got sick, the blame could lie in his/her own behaviour. Some of the rabbi's held that not only could the sin of the parents leave its mark on an infant, but also the infant could sin in the mother's womb.

here, he is not really concerned to tell his audience/readers the meaning of original sin, other than to describe the human condition in its alienation from God as a life without sight and meaning. This is the general conviction of different scholars regarding the disciples' question in John 9:2.

How does Jesus respond to the question of the disciples? Ironically, Jesus does not respond to the question regarding the *cause* of the blindness, but rather shifts the focus of the discussion to the revelation of his own identity as the *purpose* of the man's blindness (9:3ff). According to Suggit (1993:86), it can be suggested that the blind man is the symbol of human beings fallen from God, and who need to be restored to their true nature by the One who was sent from God. The narrator describes the source of light as Jesus himself – “the light of the world” (1:9; 8:12). Instead of giving an explanation for the man's condition, Jesus focuses on the works of God to be revealed in him (cf 2.3.1). He thereafter restores the man's sight as a sign referring to the mighty presence of God embodied in his ministry.

Jesus as the One sent by his Father reveals to the disciples that He has to do the work that his Father sent him to do. The work of Jesus in this case, as He himself claimed, is to reveal the purpose of the man's blindness. Jesus' answer to the disciples is: “It was not that the man sinned (ἥμαρτεν), or his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him” (ἵνα φανερωθῆ τὰ ἔργα τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ – 9:3; see also 1:41,45; 2:11; 6:68-69). The disciples revealed a misunderstanding regarding the cause of the man's blindness, whereas Jesus had the bigger picture of his mission in mind, namely to reveal the work of God. He therefore shifts the emphasis from speculating about reasons for the man's blindness to a more constructive way of dealing with, namely to cure it. Jesus' perspective on the situation is that it had one purpose: that God's works might be revealed through the man's life (ἵνα φανερωθῆ τὰ ἔργα τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ).

The ἵνα clause, followed by a subjunctive, in John 9:2 (“that he should be born blind”) has the sense of *cause and effect* attached to it. In 9:3 a further ἵνα clause appears, but this time as a *purpose* clause (“so that God's works might be revealed in him”; cf Bruce 1983:209). This shift in emphasis is the focal point of John 9. God's mighty work was indeed to be revealed in what followed. The man's blindness, as Dunn and Rogerson (2003:1185) argue, provides an opportunity for God's glory to be revealed through his Son. His blindness thus has a purpose of revelation as Jesus himself claims. If this is the case, the question in this dialogue would be of interest to Jesus, since He associated sin with sickness in the case of

the paralytic at Bethzatha (Jn 5:1-18). There are several ways in which the miracle of John 9 echoes that of Bethzatha. Both take place in Jerusalem and involve a pool. In fact, the term κολυμβήθραν seems to occur only in John 5:2,7 and 9:7 in the New Testament.⁹

At Bethzatha, Jesus warns the man against sin: “Stop sinning now or something worse might happen to you” (5:14). The man is warned by Jesus that sin could separate him from God. As for the blind beggar, Jesus’ point of view is that it is not a question of sin at all (cf 2.4.1). It is simply an opportunity for God’s works to be revealed. Comparing the two incidents, the narrator seems to tell his audience/readers to be careful not to link every suffering to sin.

The first scene in John 9 continues with Jesus calling his disciples to join him do the work of the Father who sent him (9:4-7; cf Brown 1971:372-373; Painter 1975:12; Bruce 1983:210; McGann 1988:104-105; Milne 1993:138-139; Suggit 1993; Morris 1997). Jesus then spat on the ground and made clay of the spittle, anointed the man’s eyes with clay, and sent him to wash in the pool of Siloam. The narrator interprets Siloam to mean “sent” (9:7).¹⁰ The narrator likewise presents Jesus as the One sent from God, basing it upon what Jesus says about himself – that He had been sent as the light of the world (9:5).¹¹ Thus, through Jesus’ healing of the man’s blindness, through restoring his sight, the purpose of his blindness could be fulfilled: So that God’s works could be displayed in the One whom God sent to the world (9:3). In this way the blind beggar’s story provides an opportunity for God’s glory to be revealed through the ministry of Jesus (cf 11:4).

The narrative continues, as Suggit (2003:80) argues, to mark the difference between the unbelief of those who were considered to be genuine Jews and the faith of the formerly blind beggar, considered by the Jews to be a sinner. The Jews were blindfolded by their

⁹ The Johannine narrator employs κολυμβήθραν to describe the giving of life to invalids who waited to be healed by the stirred waters of the pool (Jn 5:3-7). According to Lampe (1961:766), the term κολυμβήθραν in later Christian literature referred in one way or another exclusively to the baptismal font, or to the giving of new life to believers. Suggit (2003:77) remarks that Jesus (as the One sent by God - Jn 8:42) sent the blind man to go and wash in the pool. Consequently, the man was baptised (“dipped in water”/“washed”) into Jesus, so as to share his light and life. The word κολυμβήθραν in later years always referred to the baptism.

¹⁰ According to Suggit (1983:88-89), Siloam’s interpretation as “he who has been sent” (*apestalmenos*) is intended to draw attention to Jesus, so that “to wash in (*eis*) the pool of Siloam” would be equivalent to being washed, or baptised, into (*eis*) Christ (e.g. Gal 3:27).

¹¹ According to Brown (1971), Siloam means “one who has been sent.” The name *Shiloh* in the MT of Gen.49:10 was interpreted in a Messianic sense in Jewish tradition of a later period. A mystique developed around the not too dissimilar name “Shiloah” on the basis of Isa. 8:6. *Shiloh* appears to be related to the root *slh*, “to send.” The evangelist is either following a different reading of consonants (e.g., *saluah*, “sent”) or is exercising liberty in adapting the etymology for his purpose.

traditional beliefs and were thus unable to see beyond them. In the view of the researcher, the neighbours and those who used to see him beg recognised the significance of the claim which Jesus made through the miraculous sign of giving sight to a man blind from birth. After witnessing the man they used to see blind, and who now sees, they take him from Jesus to the Pharisees. The text does not explain why the neighbours and those who used to see him beg decided to take him to the Pharisees. There could be psychological fear of victimisation by other Jews (cf 2.4.1) if the neighbours were to be found that they did not report that the man was healed on the Sabbath. The kneading and healing on the Sabbath which Jesus did, must have added to their move. More about this will be discussed under the heading 'Pharisees'.

The Pharisees, divided about Jesus' identity (9:16), continue to ask the formerly blind man about Jesus, and how he was healed. This shows that the unbelief of Jesus' opponents remain in control. The authorities once more ask the healed man what he has to say about the person who had opened his eyes. The authorities seem to want to put him off his belief in Jesus, his healer (cf 2.4.1.2). The formerly blind beggar, however, refuses to change his point of view about Jesus. Since he regards Jesus to be prophet, he refuses to call him a sinner (9:16-17).

One may ask why the formerly blind beggar calls Jesus a prophet. The title 'prophet' reminds of the Samaritan woman who gives a similar ideological point of view in the identification of Jesus. She proclaims: "Sir, I see that you are a prophet" (4:19; cf 2.4.1.4). The same identification of Jesus is found in 6:14 after Jesus had fed five thousand people with bread (see also 7:40ff). According to Brown (1971:373), the only prophets who worked notable healing miracles were Elijah and Elisha (Isa. 38:21). In the researcher's view, the blind beggar's healing may be analogous to that of Elisha having Naaman wash in the river Jordan (2 Kings 5:1-19). The formerly blind man recognises divine power in Jesus, and to him 'prophet' is the best-known category for such extraordinary people. The meaning of the formerly blind man's suffering does indeed lie in the opportunity it created of seeing God's revelation in Jesus.

Regarding scene one, it has been discussed that Jesus had to do his Father's work with his disciples. The disciples are primary helpers of Jesus, and they function as a trusted group whom Jesus instructs separately (cf 2.3.3). The narrator seems to suggest that the disciples are to witness the presence of God by working with Jesus. Verse 4 starts with "We", which

Bruce (1983:209) argues is referring primarily to Jesus himself. In view of the researcher, it can be argued that ἡμᾶς δεῖ is a pronoun plus an adjective (“we must”) which is a plural, indicating that Jesus is not referring to himself alone. “We must” is an imperative, and indicates the psychological urgency of Jesus’ work (cf 2.4.1). Jesus calls his disciples, his church, to join him. The emphasis in Jesus’ words: “so that God’s works may be revealed”, is not a theological explanation of the origin of sin, but an indication of God’s ability to deal with it. “God’s works” testify to the power of the Father who sent Jesus into the world.

When the narrator uses the phrase, “While it is day, night is coming when no one can work” (ἕως ἡμέρας ἐστὶν ἔρχεται νύξ), he uses a temporal setting metaphorically in order to emphasise the urgency of Jesus’ ministry (cf 2.5.2). The great command for Jesus is to do the works of the One who sent him. The use of an imperative indicates that the time is at hand, that it is pressing. Jesus seems to refer to ‘day’ to mean the work has to be done while he was with them. The work had to be done and not to wait until it was night (νύξ).

Light is one of the images or metaphors the narrator uses to describe Jesus’ identity as the Messiah. Earlier in the dialogue Jesus proclaimed: “I am the light of the world” (φῶς εἰμι τοῦ κόσμου). Blickenstaff and Levine (2003:37) remark that there are about 25 instances of Jesus’ words in John’s Gospel that include the emphatic “I am” (ἐγώ εἰμι) phrase. The evangelist seems to use it for the legitimisation of oracles in which Jesus claims to be an authentic revealer of his Father.

The narrator refers to the already said works in John 4:34 and 5:17, and is probably also pointing ahead to 10:32 here. According to Morris (1981:479), the works in question do not originate on earth, but are heaven-sent works that Jesus has to do. The researcher agrees with Morris’ point of view (1981:475) that Jesus as the light of the world is always in conflict with darkness. The Jews in John 9 were supposed to recognise Jesus as their Messiah, and should have welcomed the healing of the blind beggar. Instead they call Jesus a sinner. The healing of the beggar is an urgent plea to the audience to recognise the action of God in the life of Jesus (see also 1:18; 14:9f; 20:28). More about Jesus as the light of the world will be investigated in Chapter 4 of the thesis.

How did Jesus do his Father’s work before his disciples? The narrator carefully explains the process Jesus followed when healing the blind beggar. The narrator tells the audience/readers that new light (φῶς) came to the man after washing himself in the pool

of Siloam. Jesus revealed his Father by giving the blind man new sight and light. Jesus who professed to be the light of the world (8:12; 9:5) revealed not only his Father, but also himself to the blind man. Culpepper (1983:93) supports this view by saying that Jesus who announced that He is the light of the world, now gives sight to a man born in darkness.

Jesus did this by spitting on the ground, making mud with the saliva, and spreading the mud on the man's eyes (9:6). According to Temple (1975:175), Jesus adopted a traditional practice of placing spittle on the eyes of a person afflicted with sight problems. Suggit (2003:77) argues that the gesture literally refers to anointing. This is supported by the Greek verb ἐπέχρισεν (anointed), used again in verse 11.

The word πηλὸν (mud) is found twice in verse 6, and again in verses 11 and 15. It plays an important part in the healing process together with "saliva" (πτύσματος). The blind beggar was sent by Jesus to go and wash in the pool of Siloam. This can literally mean, as Suggit (2003:77) explains, that Jesus sent the man to wash or be baptised into Jesus, the One sent from God (as in 8:42), to share God's light and life. As the one sent from God, Jesus acts in his Father's name, enabling the blind beggar to share in God's work and glory.

However, the healed man was excommunicated from the synagogue by the Jewish authorities because he refused to call Jesus a sinner, and went to the streets. When Jesus heard that he had been thrown out of the synagogue, He sought and found him, and revealed his identity to him (cf 2.5.1.3). In this way Jesus displays the responsibility of a good shepherd caring for his sheep (John 10:1-21). Jesus then asked him: "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"¹² The man with the restored sight responded by asking, "Who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him" (9:36). Jesus responded by identifying himself as the Son of Man (9:37). The formerly blind beggar believed him and worshipped him.

This is one of the few places in the Fourth Gospel where Jesus directly reveals his own identity to an inquirer. Jesus identified himself to the formerly blind beggar in the same way He did to the woman of Samaria in 4:26, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you." However, there is a touching twist to Jesus' response to the healed man, having been enabled to "see" (recognise) Jesus as God's revelation (9:37). "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he" (NIV: "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking

¹² According to Brown (1971:375), some later Greek witnesses and the Latin mss. read: "son of God", but this is clearly the substitution of a more customary and complete formula of Christian faith, probably under the influence of the use of this passage in baptismal liturgy and catechesis.

with you.”) The story of the formerly blind beggar thus ends dramatically with the beggar being healed – something the authorities regarded impossible: “Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind” (9:32).

As a summary to this section, the following points can be made. Jesus is presented with a case by his disciples (mainly Jews) of a man suffering from blindness since his birth. According to the disciples’ point of view, blindness could only be caused by the sins of his parents or by the sins of the blind beggar himself (cf 2.4.1.1). Jesus, however, shifts the question from the cause of the man’s blindness to revealing who He is through healing his condition. For the Jews, it is a highly controversial issue, since they are convinced that such a thing has never happened from the time the world was created (9:32). The issues Jesus is facing is, firstly, to show the disciples the meaning or purpose of the man’s blindness, and secondly, to make himself known as the One who was sent by God.

The recovery of the blind man’s sight has fulfilled what Jesus said in 9:3: “He was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him” (RSV 1990). The question however remains: Would the Jews be convinced that Jesus is the sent One from God – *inter alia* because He had healed a blind beggar? The narratological reading of John 9 now continues with an analysis of the disciples’ response to the protagonist (cf 2.3.2).

3.2.1.2 Disciples

The disciples in John 9 appear only in the first scene, which comprises of Jesus, his disciples and the blind beggar (9:1-7). The Greek word for disciples is μαθηταί, meaning ‘learners’. The narrator talks about the disciples in John chapters 1-3, 4 and 6. The disciples were Jesus’ primary helpers who functioned as a trusted group to him. They were his followers who were to learn many things from their teacher. They are not referred to in John chapters 7 and 8 – in fact, the text does not indicate where they had gone to. In the opinion of the researcher, the confrontation with the Pharisees in John 5 – after Jesus had healed a paralytic on the Sabbath (5:9) – could have caused the narrator to be silent about the disciples, probably for security reasons. The controversy was motivated by the healing of the paralytic, and by Jesus calling God “his own Father”, making himself equal with God (5:17). This remark increased the tension against Jesus. The researcher agrees with Culpepper (1983:117) who argues that the narrator is silent about the disciples throughout

Jesus' most intense confrontation with the Jews (cf 2.3.4). The disciples are probably with Jesus, although the narrator is silent about where they are.

One may ask how Jesus as the main character is highlighted in the first scene by his disciples. In the researcher's view, it is difficult to tell why the disciples ask Jesus about the reasons for the man's blindness. The disciples asked Jesus: "Rabbi, who (τίς) sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (9:2).¹³ Whatever the reasons for the question, the audience/readers of the narrative do get some insight into the disciples' traditional belief about suffering. At the same time it creates an opportunity for Jesus to reveal himself to his disciples and to other groups of people. In that sense the disciples' question to Jesus becomes a crucial factor in the unfolding drama of who Jesus is according to John's Gospel. If the τίς ἥμαρτεν; question had not been asked, the story would probably not have been written or told by the evangelist. It seems that the narrator wants the audience/readers to realise that the beggar's suffering (blindness) cannot necessarily be connected to somebody's sin. Instead of directly answering the question, Jesus makes the disciples aware of another, more constructive way of responding to suffering (9:3).

It can be argued that the disciples knew the blind beggar since they knew that he was blind from birth (9:1). They speak from their traditional background that such a birth must have been attached to the sins of one of the family members (cf 2.3.3). For the disciples the issue is about τίς – literary, 'who of these three' of the family members caused the blindness? They particularly want their teacher to address them on the τίς issue.

Brown (1971:371), as well as Dunn and Rogerson (2003:85), argue that the disciples probably connected the man's blindness to the Old Testament understanding of suffering (Deut 5:9; Exod 20:5; Ezek 18:20), and that this view was still held by many in Jesus' day. Exodus 20:5 (cf Deut 5:9) reads as follows: "For I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of their parents, to the third and fourth generation of those who reject me."

Culpepper (1983:115) remarks that the disciples are known especially by their recognition of Jesus and their belief in his claims. They are not exemplars of perfect faith, but of positive responses and typical misunderstandings (cf 2.3.3). They assume that someone (most likely a family member) is to be suspected to have caused the blindness – that sin had

¹³ According to Stibbs and Kevan (1962), some Jews believed that, if blame was to be attached to a sufferer, sin must have been committed pre-natally either in his/her mother's womb or in some previous existence.

been committed, and that somebody was to be blamed. According to Jesus' response, there is a misunderstanding on their side as to why the man was born blind. Jesus responds by shifting the question from a possible *cause* for the man's blindness to its *purpose*, namely that it was for God's works to be revealed.

By referring to the disciples in this way (9:2), the narrator seems to emphasise that they do not understand the (complex) relation between sin and suffering. Even though they have been working with Jesus, they are still thinking in human terms. They seek Jesus' opinion on the matter, which may be an indication of their trust in his authority. Earlier Simon Peter said: "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life" (6:68).

However, Jesus answers in an unexpected way by saying that the purpose of the blindness was for God's work to be revealed (9:3). One may wonder to what an extent the disciples understood what Jesus was saying. Perhaps they started to see Jesus through a different lens after the healing of the blind beggar, since they never asked him about this again. Before the healing of the blind beggar Jesus told them that they were to do the work of the Father with him.¹⁴ Jesus is the originator of God's works (Suggit 2003:77), the One who had been sent by God, yet it is the disciples who have to do the work *with him* while it is day, that is, during their life time.

To summarise: The disciples were followers of Jesus who were to learn many things from their teacher. However, their role is more often than not complex and even ambivalent. Given the question they put to Jesus in John 9:1, it is not self-evident that they are his helpers. Through their question they expose themselves as still being ignorant about who Jesus really is. In their thinking they appear to be still very much on the side of the Jews and the Pharisees. They have been called to be Jesus' disciples. However, they are not on Jesus' side (yet), but rather in a period of transition (cf 2.3.3). They come to him with a question pertaining to sin when they were confronting a blind beggar whom they knew was born blind. Their question to Jesus is based on their traditional belief: "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind?" (9:2). To the disciples blindness could only have been caused by the parents of the blind beggar or by himself. Jesus wisely and gently shifts the focus of the question – instead of addressing the cause of blindness He speaks of its purpose (cf 3.1). The dramatic healing takes place in the presence of the

¹⁴ This will be discussed in Chapter 4 of the thesis.

disciples – they witness how Jesus heals the illness they believed could not be healed. The whole incident happens in the context of Jesus as the bringer of light. Jesus anointed (ἐπέχρισεν) the eyes of the blind beggar and sent him to go and wash (be baptised – Suggit 2003:77) in the pool of Siloam, and his eyes were opened. The man who suffered blindness since his birth, is recreated as Jesus restores not only his physical health but also his dignity. Ultimately he finds the meaning of life in Jesus.

The disciples' question leads to the dramatic story of John 9, revealing Jesus as the one sent by the Father. The disciples play a significant role in highlighting the main character as the narrative plot develops. The story subsequently moves from Jesus and his disciples to the Jews, then to the blind beggar, and finally to the neighbours. The story develops through four further stages or social scenes – interacting with the neighbours and those who used to see the blind man beg, the Pharisees, the Jewish authorities, and the parents of the formerly blind beggar.

3.2.1.3 Jews

The next cluster of characters to be investigated are probably all Jews. They belong to different social groups, namely: The blind beggar, the neighbours, the Pharisees, the parents of the blind beggar, and the Jewish authorities. These social groups appear in different scenes wanting to know how the formerly blind beggar was healed.

3.2.1.4 Blind beggar

The unnamed blind beggar referred to in John 9:1 appears in every scene of the story. The first scene that depicts him is that of the disciples and Jesus. This scene is introduced by a question raised by the disciples who knew the man from birth. This character's interaction with other characters in the story plays a significant role in the recognition of Jesus as the Messiah, as shall be seen as the scenes develop. Jesus' interpretation of the blindness differs from that of his disciples (cf 3.2.1.1 and 3.2.1.3). Jesus shifts the focus from τίς ἥμαρτεν, οὗτος ἢ οἱ γονεῖς αὐτοῦ, ἵνα τυφλὸς γεννηθῆ; addressing the cause of the man's blindness, to speaking of its purpose, ἵνα φανερωθῆ τὰ ἔργα τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ.

In 9:6-7 the narrator tells the audience/readers about the process through which Jesus healed the blind beggar, using spittle and mud. Hahn (2008 Online) explains that the use of

clay made from spittle was not unusual in biblical times as a technique used to attempt to heal blindness.¹⁵

The narrator tells the audience that after the blind beggar washed, he came back home seeing (9:7). The washing in the pool of Siloam provided healing for him. The man who had suffered from birth comes to see the light for the first time. The final aspect of the miracle story mentions the cure. According to Suggit (1983:86), the use of spittle to effect healing in this account is a symbolic act calculated to make the sufferer feel that his cure emanated from Jesus himself.

This scene serves to emphasise that a miracle has indeed occurred. Though the main function of verses 1-7 is to present the miracle, the narrator manages to work in some significant theological teaching revealing who Jesus is.

According to (2008 Online) most Jews in Jesus' time believed that most, if not all, suffering was caused by sin. A person who suffered from an illness or handicap was assumed to have brought that tragedy on by their own sin. The researcher argues that the theological problem among the Jews is to explain the cause of birth defects. The question of whether a handicapped child suffered from the sins of the parents or his/her own pre-natal sin seems to have been actively debated in Judaism.¹⁶

After he was healed, the man faced many questions about how he was healed and who had healed him. 'Who had healed him' refers to the puzzle of the Jews in 9:32 that no one could heal a born blind person. What the narrator seems to be telling his audience is that in their history no one born blind was ever healed. So to the Jewish authorities it remains a puzzle that the man was born blind, now sees. The formerly blind beggar did not hide his healer, whom he identified as a prophet (9:16). Suggit (2003:78) remarks that the man had been a beggar, entirely dependent on others, but that he now received his sight.

¹⁵ Suggit (1983:88-89) explains that the act of making spittle was an act of creation, modelled on God's act of creation in Genesis 2:7 (cf Lindars 1972:343). Through this act the beggar was restored to his true being. Clay was smeared on his eyes, and the whole incident occurred in the context of Jesus as the bringer of light. In order to be recreated by God, people have to have their eyes opened to see Jesus as the meaning of life.

¹⁶ Cf the remark of Hahn (2008 Online) about a rabbinic pronouncement from near the time of Jesus, "When a pregnant woman worships in a heathen temple the fetus also commits idolatry." (Some interesting, though unfortunate, sermons were apparently preached on this subject from the text of Genesis 25:22 that describes Jacob and Esau struggling [fighting] with each other in Rebecca's womb.) This was a standing belief among the Jews.

The formerly blind beggar has his own response to his new situation. According to the narrator, he resists threats of the Pharisees who came to tell him that his healer was not from God, because he did not keep the Sabbath holy (9:16; cf 2.5.2.1). The narrator makes his audience see how the healed man gradually comes to see Jesus as a man from God (9:33), the Son of Man (9:35-38), sent to the world as the light of the world (8:12; 9:4). He accepts Jesus as a healer and a miracle worker.

The Jewish authorities failed to convince the formerly blind man that Jesus was a sinner, even when they excommunicated him from the synagogue. This means that the man was no longer part of them; he was excluded from the community of believers in the synagogue.¹⁷ It is because the Jews had agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus as the Messiah, was to be expelled from the synagogue (9:22). Bruce (2005:46) translates this action as “being driven out”, while Ridderbos (1997:347) uses “excommunicated him or driven him out from their community”, or in the language of John, made him “extra-synagogue.”

The narrator has been silent about the whereabouts of Jesus after He had healed the blind beggar. Jesus temporarily disappeared from the scene. It is only now that the narrator brings Jesus back – after the man He had healed, was excommunicated. As the formerly blind beggar was still finding his way on the street, Jesus heard about his fate (9:35). It is difficult to say how Jesus came to know about the fate of the man since the text is silent about it. The word “heard” (ἤκουσεν) gives the impression of someone who was told. Since it was a sensitive time, Jews against Jesus, his followers probably told him secretly. It could be similar to what Nicodemus did in John 3, who, in fear of the Jews, went to Jesus in the night to find out more about him.

Ridderbos (1997:347) comments: Jesus is concerned about the excommunicate, seeks out of the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and binds him more tightly to himself. Jesus the good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep (10:1-21). He looked for him and found him. It is only then that Jesus addresses the healed man. Jesus asks him whether he believes in the Son of Man. The formerly blind man, however, does not know who this man is. The question he asks in 9:36 is, “Who is He?” (τίς ἐστίν;), which shows that he did not know who Jesus was, in spite of the fact that he was healed by him.

¹⁷ According to Appleton (1956:50-51), the Jews, recognising that they were losing the argument, drove the man out of the synagogue. This means that he was removed from the fellowship of Israel as a heretic or unbeliever. This penalty was one that later befell all Jews who became Christians.

To summarise: It has been discussed how Jesus was introduced to the blind beggar by his disciples in this scene, with the question, 'Who sinned?' This character plays a major part in the plot development of the narrator. The character appears in this scene and other scenes of John 9. The miraculous curing of the man's blindness plays a big role in revealing who Jesus is.

How the man is healed, as well as the healer himself, are presented by the narrator as unique aspects of the story since the Jews knew that no one could heal a born blind (9:32). The formerly blind beggar who had suffered, receives new light and spiritual life in Jesus – the one who took him from the street. But it does not end there. The narrator takes the healed man to his neighbors and those who used to see him beg. Will the neighbours be able to identify him? How will they respond to his healing and his healer?

3.2.2 Scene two (9:8-12)

3.2.2.1 Neighbours

The story is moved by the narrator from Jesus and his disciples to the neighbours and those who used to see the man begging. The disciples have learnt that they were to join hands with Jesus in doing the work He was sent to do. The work done already is that the man who was blind and who used to sit and beg, now sees. He has indeed undergone a radical change since his first appearance (cf Martyn 1979:30; Bruce 1983:211; McGann 1988:105). The disciples witnessed his miraculous healing – something they thought was impossible. The interpretive remarks by Jesus in verses 3 to 5 make it clear that restoring sight to the blind man (verse 7) is an act of God done through Jesus, the light of the world.

How is Jesus as the main character highlighted by the narration about the neighbours? They appear as the first group of characters after the healing of the blind beggar. The narrator introduces these new characters as neighbours and those who had seen him before (9:8). The audience/readers are left to guess whether it was wise to have this group appear first, in order to reveal Jesus as the One who performed the miraculous sign. It could be argued that the narrator thereby wishes to indicate that the blind beggar lived in a community with some calling themselves his neighbours. The word beg (προσαίτης) tells

that the man lived by begging and that the neighbours and those who used to see him knew him as a beggar.¹⁸

How did the neighbours of the formerly blind beggar react? And what is the significance of their role in developing the plot after they saw that the man's eyes were opened? The people who were accustomed to seeing him beg, knew him as a blind person. They raise a question among themselves (v 8b): "Is not this the man who used to sit and beg?" That the man has received his sight and was healed is the major point of discussion among the neighbours and those who used to see him beg. They have to investigate if he was indeed the man they had known before, or whether he was someone else. Their question in verse 8 is almost an exclamation, "This is the fellow who used to sit and beg!"

Those of the neighbours who affirm and those who deny both speak their piece and then the man is allowed to speak. The formerly blind man's response in verse 9 is literally "I am he" (ἐγώ εἰμι).¹⁹

They then ask him in verse 10, "How were your eyes opened?" / How (φῶς) were you healed? Their question refers to verses 6 and 7 where the process of healing took place. The question "how", in the researcher's view, seems to be looking for the healer. The same question is asked in other scenes where people interrogate the formerly blind beggar (vv 15,19,26). The probable goal of the dialogue is to begin a process whereby the man bears witness to Jesus. This witness begins in verse 11, "The man who is named Jesus made clay, anointed my eyes, and spoke to me." The formerly blind beggar gives witness that a man called Jesus healed him. In this way the formerly blind man plays a significant role in developing the plot of the narrative by revealing the identity of Jesus.

The neighbours in their unbelief take the man to the Pharisees (cf 2.4.1.4). The case of the formerly blind man then continues with the Pharisees. The neighbours play the role of opponents to the healing. Fenton (1988:40) argues that there is always a group of characters ready to take up the position of unbelief like the neighbours. It is probable that the neighbours would tell the Pharisees that the man had been blind but that his eyes were opened by Jesus on the Sabbath.

¹⁸ The present participle verb (προσαίτης) in verse 8 has imperfect force.

¹⁹ For Barrett (1978:341-342), the expression "I am he" (ἐγώ εἰμι) can be considered an allusion to Isaiah 43:10. Normally in John's Gospel the expression ἐγώ εἰμι is used by Jesus to identify himself (see 4:26; 6:35; 8:12; 10:7,14; 14:6; 15:1). However, the researcher does not see the 'I am he' of the formerly blind beggar (v 9) as referring to the same identity as that of Jesus.

In sum: The group of neighbours and those who used to see him notice that the man has been healed. The neighbours had difficulty in identifying him since they were used to seeing him blind. The neighbours investigated who had healed him. They also asked how he was healed. They could not believe it was the formerly blind beggar, because they held to their unbelief. When the neighbours learnt that he was healed on the Sabbath, they took the healed man to the Pharisees (scene three). It is probable that they took him for further questioning since he was healed on the Sabbath day.

The neighbours of the formerly blind man seem to be in a state of confusion and two-mindedness about Jesus' identity. While they probably would have liked to acknowledge that Jesus did demonstrate messianic abilities, they were afraid of the Jews and the Pharisees (9:13,22) and feared expulsion from the synagogue (cf 2.3.3).

3.2.3 Scene three (9:13-17)

3.2.3.1 Pharisees

The narrator subsequently moves the story to yet another social group. The neighbours and observers who have been debating about the blind man's identity bring him to the Pharisees (Φαρισαίους). The text, however, is silent about the reasons for this move.

The Pharisees are closely associated with the Jews (cf 2.3.4). Culpepper (1983:125) argues in this regard: "Closely associated with the Jews are the Pharisees and other representatives of Judaism, the chief priests, rulers, Levites, and their servants." They were admired for their piety, their simple lifestyle and their strict observance of the Torah (McKnight 1989:32). The Pharisees were the custodians of the Sabbath laws, and titled anybody who did not keep the Sabbath day holy, a sinner. The Pharisees also believed in the resurrection of the dead. How is Jesus as the main character highlighted by their part in the narrative of John 9?

There is a probability that the neighbours and those who used to see the formerly blind beggar would have naturally sought religious help in their interaction with the Pharisees in understanding this unusual event. It remains unclear why the narrator does not provide the audience/readers with more information on why the neighbours took the man to the Pharisees.

The narrator continues to be interested in the result and purpose of the blind man's suffering, not in its causes (9:2). In the previous scene the blind beggar was asked by the neighbours how his eyes had been opened (φῶς 9:10). The Pharisees ask him a similar question in verse 15. The formerly blind beggar then repeats before the Pharisees the process Jesus followed to heal him, that Jesus put clay on his eyes (Ἰησοῦς πηλὸν ἐποίησεν καὶ ἐπέχρισεν μου τοὺς ὀφθαλμούς), and that He commanded him to go and wash (ὑπάγε νίψαι εἰς). In verse 15b the man repeats what he said to the neighbours in verse 11, "Then I washed, and now I see" (καὶ βλέπω). The act of healing is in fact a fulfilment of God's creative plan which is opposed to the Pharisees' thought of violation of the Torah.²⁰

The narrator remarks that the blind man's healing took place on the Sabbath (v 14; cf 2.5.2.1; 2.5.3.1). Fenton (1988:41) argues that the Pharisees could now appeal to the law and condemn Jesus and his followers for disobeying the will of God. Jesus has performed an act the Pharisees considered forbidden on the Sabbath. The narrator then tells his audience/readers about a division (σχίσμα) among the Pharisees (v 16). Some were not convinced that Jesus was from God, because he healed on the Sabbath (cf 2.5.2.1). Others asked: How can a sinner perform signs of this sort? This division among the Pharisees would probably have reminded the audience of 7:43. It is as if the narrator deliberately emphasises the division among Jesus' opponents in order to bear witness to his identity as the light of the world.

For the researcher this is important for two reasons: First, it becomes the point in the interaction where the Pharisees reject both the healing and the healer, "This man is not from God, because he does not observe the Sabbath" (v 16). The second reason why the Sabbath context is important, is related to the Jewish debate about the Sabbath. From the Pharisees' ideological point of view, the Sabbath is a day holy to their God (cf 2.4.1.4). Several things Jesus did in the healing process the Pharisees regarded as a violation of the rabbinic law. The violation of the Sabbath is the background for the ensuing discussion about whether Jesus was a sinner or not (vv 16,24,25,3). In this way the question about Jesus' origin and identity is brought back into the debate.

²⁰ Cf John 9:21-24 which contrasts the position of the Pharisees with that of Jesus. The narrative continues to mark the difference between the unbelief of those who considered themselves to be Pharisees and the faith of the blind man now restored to sight. It could be that in the minds of the Pharisees, blindness was a direct punishment for sin.

To make the matter worse, the narrator explains that Jesus spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes (9:6).²¹ The word mud (πηλόν) occurs twice here – in verse 6 and again in verses 11 and 15. This plays an important part in the healing process, together with “saliva” (ἐκ τοῦ πτύσματος). However, that the man has been healed is not taken care of by the Pharisees, but the violation of the Sabbath.

This sets the stage for the next question by the Pharisees to the formerly blind man: “What do you say about him, your healer?” (v 17) The man does not hesitate to say that his healer is a prophet (v 17). He must have heard somewhere about prophets performing miracles. For Brown (1971:373), the only prophets who performed notable healing miracles were Elijah and Elisha (cf Isa. 38:21).

According to Suggit (2003:78-79), the question, “What do you say about him?”, emphasises the anxiety of the Pharisees in their interaction with the formerly blind man. In the context it is a heavy handed way of saying to him, “Agree with us; say that he is a violator of the Sabbath and therefore a sinner.”

However, all that matters to the formerly blind beggar now, is that he sees. To him this is more important than any legal objections. When forced to decide, his statement is an improvement on his witness in verse 11. He believes that Jesus has divine power, and places Jesus in a category of such extraordinary people as prophets. His witness is growing in the truth about who Jesus is.

In sum: The neighbours and those who used to see the blind beggar and debated about his identity, bring him to the Pharisees. The neighbours and those who used to see him probably sought for religious help in understanding this unusual event. The Pharisees ask him how he was healed, and who healed him. A miraculous healing, which they thought impossible, has indeed taken place (9:32). Moreover, it took place on the Sabbath (9:14) – similar to the healing of the man who had been ill for thirty-eight years (5:9). The argument that runs through John 8:12-59 is demonstrated in the healing of the blind beggar in John 9. The Torah which was the light for Israel (Ps 119:105), has now been replaced by the person of Jesus. In the interaction between the Pharisees and the formerly blind man Jesus is seen as the light of the world coming from above.

²¹ Culpepper (1998:176) explains that making clay, anointing, healing chronic conditions, and washing were all considered work that violated the Sabbath.

The Pharisees, like the neighbours, raise the same question of how the formerly blind beggar was healed (9:15). They receive an abbreviated description for an answer. The narrator shows the division of the Pharisees on the violation of the Sabbath. Some said Jesus could not be God's agent, while others recognised the miracle as a sign that pointed to his godly origin.

In the final scene of John 9, the dramatic story of the blind beggar ends with the Pharisees who claim to "see." Yet, in Jesus' eyes they remain sinners (9:41). The Pharisees, just like the neighbours, fail to conclude their discussion with the formerly blind beggar. They then refer the case to the higher Jewish authorities.

3.2.4 Scene four (9:18-23)

3.2.4.1 Parents of the blind beggar

In their interaction with the formerly blind beggar, the Pharisees pressurised him to declare Jesus a sinner (ἀμαρτωλὸς – 9:16) since he did not observe the Sabbath. However, the man refused to do so (9:25). According to Brown (1971:377), the final interrogation by the Pharisees made the man become an ardent defender of Jesus' cause – what Jesus has done shows that He is from God (9:33). Though Jesus has been off stage since verse 6, the Jewish leaders are working with fervour to make their case against him through the parents of the blind beggar. As a healer of blindness, which the Jews believed could never be healed (9:32), Jesus had to be sought for.

The narrator informs his audience/readers about the failure of the authorities in getting what they wanted from the formerly blind beggar, and how they want to use the parents as a next source of information. The narrator tells the audience that the Jewish authorities wanted to interact with the parents of the formerly blind beggar to determine whether their son was born blind (cf 2.4.1.4). The audience/readers are prepared for what will unfold: "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" After failing to manipulate the man born blind they decided to approach his parents. They now work through the parents to obtain legal evidence that the breaking of the Sabbath has actually taken place. The man born blind had suffered since his birth. The significance of the parents in the story is to confirm that their son was born blind.

The Jewish authorities put a question to the parents of the formerly blind beggar as to whether he was their son born blind. There is a degree of sarcasm in this narrative technique of John. Verse 18 states that the Jews did not believe in the man's testimony that he had been born blind and that he had been given his sight by Jesus. One could therefore ask why the parents of the blind beggar were called. Were they called to support his witness, or was it for something else?

The authorities believed that no one could open the eyes of a person born blind (9:32). The Jewish authorities are collecting evidence for a purpose known by them – probably to punish Jesus for performing an act of healing on the Sabbath, or because they still believed that blindness could not be healed by anybody.

The parents are well qualified to answer both the questions pertaining to his sonship and blindness. They affirm both in verse 20. The second question, “How is it that now he sees?” (v 19) was more difficult for the parents. This question is an attempt to reveal the healer. The narrator evaluates the parents and tells the audience/readers that the parents feared (ἐφοβοῦντο) the Jews who had agreed to excommunicate those who confessed Jesus as the Christ (cf 2.3.3).

The calling of witnesses one after the other shows the plot development. The real issue of this section is the fear of the parents. According to Hahn (2008 Online) synagogue discipline had three levels, though it is not known if all three were in use at the time of Jesus. The first was a brief expulsion of about a week. The second was a thirty-day suspension with no contact allowed with Jews except with one's wife and family. This punishment could be repeated two more times. The third was a total excommunication from the synagogue for life. The exact punishment alluded to here must have caused greater fear to the parents of the formerly blind beggar.

To summarise: In this scene the Jewish authorities failed to manipulate the formerly blind beggar and decided to ask his parents if their son had been born blind. They now work through the parents to obtain legal evidence that the breaking of the Sabbath has actually taken place. There is a degree of sarcasm in this narrative technique of the evangelist. Verse 18 states that the Jews did not believe the man's own testimony – that he had been born blind and had been given his sight by Jesus. The fear of the Jews by the parents (οἱ γονεῖς αὐτοῦ ὅτι ἐφοβοῦντο τοὺς Ἰουδαίους) caused the investigation of the authorities to

be unsuccessful. The dialogue with the parents ends when they declare that their son could answer for himself since he was of age.

3.2.5 Scene five (9:24-34)

3.2.5.1 Jewish authorities

The narrator moves from the Pharisees and introduces a new scene with people called οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι – the Jews. The story about the blind beggar, suffering because of sin according to the Jews, now continues with the Jewish authorities interacting with the formerly blind beggar. They do not believe the miraculous healing of the man until they call his parents to tell if the one who was healed, was indeed the formerly blind beggar. The narrator subsequently describes the parents of the man entering into dialogue with the authorities. The authorities differ from the Pharisees in their responsibilities even though both groups are Jews. The difference in power between them will be recognised when the verdict of the formerly blind beggar is reached.

The interaction between the authorities and the formerly blind beggar marks the difference between the unbelief of those considered to be genuine Jewish authorities, and the faith of the formerly blind beggar. The researcher does not only believe that the tension between the formerly blind beggar and the authorities was because of the violation of the Sabbath, but that of unwillingness to recognise that the man was healed from blindness. The Jewish authorities' investigation about the healing of the blind beggar involved the parents of the formerly blind man.

The interrogation between the Jewish authorities and the formerly blind beggar in this scene reminds of the three questions raised in the interaction between the Jewish authorities and his parents in the previous scene (9:19). The first two questions are: “Is this your son?”, and “Is this the one you say was born blind?” (οὗτος ἐστὶν ὁ υἱὸς ὑμῶν, ὃν ὑμεῖς λέγετε ὅτι τυφλὸς ἐγεννήθη; πῶς οὖν βλέπει ἄρτι;). The third question is: “How then does he now see?” Verses 18 to 19 can be connected to verse 32 where the same authorities are described to believe that blindness cannot be healed. They are also the people who agreed to excommunicate those who confess Jesus as the Messiah (9:22). Morris (1997:340-341) and Ridderbos (1997:34) argue that the development of the case is now totally in the hands of those (Jews) who do not believe.

The first two questions above concern the identity and history of the formerly blind beggar. The third question seeks to reveal who Jesus is as the one who healed their son. To find out about the healer, the parents are asked for proper evidence. However, they refuse to answer the question: “Who healed your son?”

During the second investigation (scene 5 – vv 24-34) into how the formerly blind beggar was healed, the Jewish authorities command him: “Give glory to God! We know this man is a sinner” (δὸς δόξαν τῷ θεῷ – 9:24). The authorities seem to turn against his healing. They seem to be saying to him, ‘Confess that you are lying’. Stringer (1990:77) explains that the Hebrew word for “glory” is related to a word meaning “to be heavy.” According to Stringer, Hebrew people connected “glory” with things that are big or important. For Godet (1970:133) and Ridderbos (1997:344) “give glory to God” means the homage rendered to one of the divine perfections momentarily obscured by a word or an act that seems to be derogatory.

In the view of the researcher, the authorities’ command to the formerly blind beggar, “Give God glory”, can be regarded as an excellent piece of irony by the narrator. It is similar to that of the Jewish oath or cultural formula for a confession of guilt. Joshua 7:19 provides an example: “Then Joshua said to Achan, ‘My son, give glory to the Lord God of Israel and make confession to him. Tell me now what you have done; do not hide it from me’” (cf 1 Samuel 6:5).

The subsequent question by the Jewish authorities in 9:26, “How were you healed?”, also appears in verses 10b, 15, and 19. The question does not only focus on *how* the man was healed, but also on *who* performed the healing. The repeated question seems to indicate that previous evidence provided has not been enough. The authorities want more information because they believe that Jesus and the formerly blind beggar are related. The fact that the man defends the position of Jesus cause the authorities to focus on a possible relation between the two.

The formerly blind beggar, however, refuses to be drawn into their condemnation of his healer. In his conversation with the authorities he sticks to his testimony of what Jesus had done to him. Hahn (2008 Online) observes that from the beginning of verse 30 the formerly blind beggar begins to instruct the Jews. His logic is simple: “Surely God does not answer

the prayers of sinners.” The formerly blind beggar seems to convey to the authorities that God answered Jesus’ appeal and therefore Jesus could not be a sinner.

The authorities, however, do not find the man’s teaching acceptable. They respond by saying, “You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us (9:34)?” In verses 28 and 29 they reviled him by saying: “You are his disciple (σὺ μαθητῆς), but we are disciples of Moses.”

The Jewish authorities then expelled the formerly blind beggar from the synagogue. According to Ridderbos (1997:347), excommunication can mean that the authorities thrust the man from their community, or, in the language of John, made him ‘extra-synagogue’. In so doing, they rejected the Light from God, and plunged further into their darkness (cf v 41). The healed man, on the contrary, who had lived until now with the knowledge that there is no cure for congenital blindness, now sees the Light.

To summarise: The narrative marks the difference between unbelief of those considered to be genuine Jewish authorities and the faith of the formerly blind beggar whom the authorities considered to be a sinner. Jesus healed the formerly blind beggar after making it clear that his condition was not a consequence of his sin or that of his parents, but that its purpose was for God to be revealed in his life. Although the authorities persuaded the parents to confess that the man was their son and that he was born blind, they could not answer as to how their son received his sight (9:21). It is probable that they knew the healer but feared (ἐφοβοῦντο) to be excommunicated from the synagogue.

Scene five of the narrative in John 9 shows that the authorities had the power to deal with offenders. The question, “How were you healed?”, has been asked in all the other scenes as well (cf verses 10b, 15, 19, and 26). The Jewish authorities tried to persuade the formerly blind beggar to confess that his healer was a sinner. They were not successful, for the man refused to be drawn into their condemnation of Jesus. He stuck to his testimony of what Jesus had done for him. The story of the authorities ends as they refuse to accept the Messiahship of Jesus.

3.2.6 Scene Six (9:35-38)

3.2.6.1 The blind beggar on the street

In the previous scene, the formerly blind beggar was thrown out of the synagogue. The narrator shows that nothing escapes his eyes and that he knows what will happen. He tells the audience that Jesus heard that they had cast the formerly blind beggar out, and found him. The text does not tell who told Jesus about the excommunication of the healed man.

Where the formerly blind beggar went is also not told by the text. Ironically he had to move out of the synagogue to find those welcoming him. He must have believed that not all of the synagogue followers were enemies of Jesus. John 12:42 gives an indication of this: “Nevertheless many, even of the authorities, believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they did not confess it; for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue.” It can thus be argued that the formerly blind beggar probably found his way to the new community of Jesus believers (cf 2.3.3).

The way Jesus reappears in scene six is analogous to the description of Jesus’ response after the healing of a lame man in John 5:14: “Later Jesus found him in the temple.” In his interaction with the healed man Jesus says, “See, you have been made well! Do not sin any more, so that nothing worse happens to you.” In John 9:35 the narrator reports: “Jesus heard that they had driven him out and he went and found him.” In both these incidents Jesus disappears from the scene after the healing, and meets the healed person again afterwards. It is only then that He communicates something about their life styles. In John 5 the man is warned not to sin again (cf Jn 8:11). This differs from the born blind, where Jesus says nothing about sin. In the interaction with the formerly blind beggar Jesus shifts the discussion to the issue of believing: “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”(v 35).

The formerly blind beggar was on the street. He was probably willing to accept Jesus as a spokesman for God, but did not yet know who the Messiah was. He behaved differently from the paralytic in John 5. When Jesus revealed himself to the former paralytic, the man went to report Jesus to his enemies – he told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well (5:15).

After having been cast out of the synagogue, the born blind man has to find his way on the street. Jesus heard (ἤκουσεν) about his fate, and shows that He is the good shepherd who

lays down his life for his sheep (10:1-21) – He looked for him and found him. The word “heard” (ἤκουσεν) gives the impression that someone told Jesus about his whereabouts. Since it was a sensitive time (Jewish authorities plotting against Jesus), his followers could have told him secretly. According to Ridderbos (1997: 347), “Jesus is concerned about the excommunicate, seeks out of the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and binds him more tightly to himself.” The situation reminds of Nicodemus who went to Jesus in the night (3:1-21), in fear of other Jews.

How do Jesus and the formerly blind beggar interact when Jesus finds him? According to the narrator, Jesus asks him, σὺ πιστεύεις εἰς τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου; (“Do you believe in the Son of Man?”). The question probably refers to 9:17 where the beggar declared Jesus a prophet, or 9:33 where the same man says: “If this man were not from God, he could not open my eyes.” In the conversation with Jesus, he now asks τίς ἐστίν, κύριε; (“Who is he Lord?”). The question posed by the formerly blind beggar shows that he had not truly known who Jesus was, in spite of the fact that he was healed by him.

In the conversation between Jesus and the formerly blind beggar Jesus’ answer is: “You have seen him; in fact, the one speaking to you is He” (9:37; cf John 4:26). ‘You have seen him’ seems to indicate that the formerly blind beggar now knows who Jesus is.

The man then says to Jesus, πιστεύω, κύριε (“Lord, I believe” – 9:38). In the view of the researcher, it is as if the man is saying, ‘Lord I submit myself to you, you are my Lord. Or I empty myself unto you.’ The word “lord” is a sign of great respect. The interaction between Jesus and the formerly blind beggar thus allowed him to recognise Jesus as the Son of Man.

Some references to the “Son of Man” title for Jesus in John are the following:

- 1:51 the angels of God ascend and descend upon the Son of Man;
- 3:13ff no one has ascended into heaven except he who descended – the Son of Man;
- 6:27 the Son of Man gives food for eternal life;
- 6:62 the Son of Man will ascend to where he came from;
- 8:28 when the Son of Man is lifted you will realise him.

In each of these references some duties of the Son of Man are identified. Jesus is He who has come as the revealer of the Father, the light of the world, the bringer of life. After having

recognised Jesus as the Son of Man, the formerly blind beggar fell before him and worshipped him (καὶ προσεκύνησεν αὐτῷ – 9:38).

3.2.6.2 Summary

In this scene the narrator tells the audience that the formerly blind beggar is on the street after the authorities had cast him out of their courtroom and the synagogue. Jesus subsequently found him, and asked if he believed in the Son of Man. The man asked who the Son of Man is so that he could believe in him. Jesus revealed himself to him by saying that the one talking to him is he. The formerly blind beggar then confessed his faith in Jesus, and worshipped him. The interaction between them ends with the formerly blind beggar defending the identity of Jesus against the Jewish authorities.

3.2.7 Scene Seven (9:39-41)

3.2.7.1 Jesus and the Pharisees

The Pharisees, who disappeared from the picture after scene three, now re-enter the stage for the dramatic ending of the narrative. It seems as if the narrator is interested in bringing them back into the story to show their unbelief (cf 9:13-17, 40-41). Jesus and the Pharisees come face to face with each other for the first time in John 9. Jesus introduces their conversation by proclaiming, “I came into the world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind” (v 39). The message seems to be clear. Yet, the Pharisees respond by asking, “Surely, we are not blind, are we?” (v 40). To this Jesus replies: “If you were blind, you would have no sin. But now that you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains” (v 41). Jesus’ answer seems puzzling but cuts to the heart of the matter – the blindness of the Pharisees is their failure to recognise the Messiah. Ironically, the interaction between them and Jesus is about sin and seeing, not about sin and blindness (cf 9:2).

According to John’s Gospel, “blindness” does not only refer to the failure to see physically. One can be blind when you are unable to see your sins (cf 5:14). According to Ridderbos (1997:350), “not seeing” here describes the general state of a person before the light of the world has illumined her or him. The Pharisees who do not “see” the true light imagine themselves to see when they are in darkness.

The physically blind who have never seen are not responsible for choosing darkness. As in the case of the blind beggar, they may well choose to obey and receive their sight (and the Light). However, those who are so confident that they know everything and believe that they have all possible spiritual light, cut themselves off from receiving more light. In that sense they are blind. The conflict and debate of John 9 that carried on directly and indirectly through the man born blind, is now summarised. Jesus states his purpose as the light of the world (cf 8:12). His light is to accomplish two things: to make the blind see and the seeing blind (9:41).

Thus, Jesus' coming to the world does not mean that He only made physically blind people to see. Through such miraculous signs He particularly came to reveal God the Father who sent him as light to a world of darkness. In John 17:6 Jesus witnesses about his mission to the world, "I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me and they have kept your word" (cf 20:30-31).

In John 9:39 Jesus proclaims that He came into the world for judgment. This reminds of his discussion with the disciples in 3:36: "Whoever believes in the son has eternal life; whoever disobeys the son will not see life, but must endure God's wrath" (cf 5:14; 8:24). This may refer to the ironical question of the Pharisees by which they denied their blindness (v 40).

The dialogue of the final scene in John 9 ends on a deeply ironical note. The Pharisees turn out to be the actual blind people the narrator has in mind. However, they do not recognise themselves as being blind. On the contrary, they are caught by surprise when they realise that Jesus might be referring to them as well in verse 39. Their blindness is exposed by their claim that they indeed can see (the truth about Jesus). Jesus' reprimand to them in verse 41 indirectly also seems to serve as an open invitation. If they were to believe in Jesus as the one sent by God, they would – like the formerly blind beggar – receive sight and become his disciples, thereby shifting their role from being opponents to becoming adjuncts of the protagonist in John's narrative. The invitation to the Pharisees is also addressed to the implied audience/readers of the Gospel.

3.3 SETTINGS

The narrator of John 9 uses spatial, temporal and social settings to highlight the significance of Jesus' ministry. Places such as Jerusalem (in Judea), Siloam, and the

synagogue highlight the work of Jesus, often ironically contrasting it to his work in places such as Cana (Galilee – Jn 2:1-11), and Sychar (Samaria – 4:1-26). In this way spatial settings contribute towards the narrative’s emphasis on revealing Jesus as the Son of God. Temporal settings such as Sabbath and day and night are used to express significant times in the story. They highlight Jesus’ actions in doing the work of his Father. Likewise, different social settings, scenes or groups in John 9 function as important literary devices guiding the audience/readers in recognising the protagonist as the one who was sent to reveal God.

3.3.1 Spatial Settings

In the previous chapter of the thesis (2.5.1) the narratological category of “spatial settings” was discussed. Spatial setting refers to a place where something is or where something happens.

3.3.1.1 Jerusalem

Jerusalem is a central place in the narrative of John’s Gospel. It is the city where the temple of the Jews was situated. To them, Jerusalem was the dwelling place of their God, and therefore a significant place for worship and sacrifices (cf 2.5.1.1).

According to John’s Gospel, Jesus often attends Jewish festivals in Jerusalem (2:13; 5:1; 7:2,14; 10:22). It is the place where He reveals himself through extraordinary signs, discourses and teachings (cf 2:13-24; 3:1-21; 5:1-9; 7:14-39,46; 8:12-59). His relation to the Jerusalem authorities is of great concern right through the narrative. In the end, the city of Jerusalem becomes the venue where the main character in the Gospel is executed on a cross (Jn 18-19).

The Passover feast and other important festivals took place in the temple in Jerusalem. Beggars came to the temple to ask for gifts in order to survive. In the researcher’s view, the story of the blind beggar in John 9 is used by the narrator to illustrate two things: firstly, that Jesus, through healing the sick, revealed the glory and power of God, and secondly, to make the Jews understand that their spiritual blindness could be healed. The immediate context of the story in John indicates that Jesus was on his way from the temple grounds when He came across the blind beggar. A discussion arose between him and his disciples about the cause of the man’s blindness. It is in the temple environment that Jesus told his disciples that neither the man nor his parents sinned, but that God’s work had to be made

manifest in his life (9:3; cf Suggit 2003:74). Jesus then healed the blind man by sending him to go and wash in the pool of Siloam.

3.3.1.2 Pool of Siloam

The pool of Siloam is located in the city of Jerusalem. During biblical times Siloam was popular for its healing waters. It is referred to in John 9:7 as the place to which Jesus sent the blind beggar to wash himself. He obeyed Jesus' request and came back seeing (9:7).

The narrator of John's Gospel tells his audience/readers that Siloam, known in Hebrew as *Shiloh*, is situated in Jerusalem.²² The name of the pool is carefully explained in 9:7 as meaning "having been sent" (ὁ ἐρμηνεύεται ἀπεσταλμένος – 9:7).²³ Milne (1993:139) and Suggit (1993:89-90) argue that Σιλωάμ means "he who has been sent." The interpretation of Siloam as "he who has been sent" in 9:7 is probably intended to draw attention to Jesus as the one sent from God. Jesus is frequently referred to in John as "the one who had been sent" by God. This expression is especially common in John 7 and 8 (7:16, 18, 28, 29, 33; 8:16, 18, 26, 29, 42).

Jesus spat on the ground, made mud of the saliva, and spread it on the blind beggar's eyes (9:6). He then commanded him to go and wash in the pool of Siloam (9:7). The blind beggar received his sight after he had washed in the pool of Siloam. The significance of Siloam in the story of the blind beggar adds credibility to it as the place where the blind beggar washed and received his sight. In the researcher's view, the narrator is alluding here to Jesus as the metaphorical "pool of life" for the Johannine community.

3.3.1.3 Synagogue

The synagogue is yet another important spatial setting in the story of John 9. The significance of the synagogue for Jewish religious and social life was explained briefly in the previous chapter of the thesis (cf 2.5.1.3).

²²According to Brown (1971:372), the pool of Siloam, known in Hebrew as *Shiloh*, was situated at the southern extremity of the eastern hill of Jerusalem, near the conjunction of the Kidron and Tyropean valleys. It was a repository for the waters from the spring of Gihon which were conducted to the pool by a canal mentioned in Isa. 8:6. The water of Siloam was used in the water ceremonies and processions of the feast of Tabernacles. Rabbinic sources mention it as a place of purification.

²³Culpepper (1983:218-219) remarks that the narrator of John is fond of translating names in order to convey their meaning (cf Cephas in 1:42; Siloam in 9:7).

The synagogue is the most logical and all-embracing form of Jewish community expression. It is a place of prayer, where people would seek divine guidance through readings and teachings from the Torah (cf 2.5.1.3). Angoff (1960:137) writes in this regard: “Remove the synagogue from the center of the Jewish communal life and you reduce Jewish life.”

During his trial before the high priest in Jerusalem, Jesus refers as follows to the spatial settings of his ministry: “I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together” (Jn 18:20). The blind beggar of John 9 was known to people who formed part of this community (9:8). It is from this community of the synagogue that the formerly blind beggar is expelled after the Jewish authorities failed to convince him that Jesus was a sinner (cf 3.2.5.1). Ironically, the place of learning and communal life has become a place of alienation – not only for the formerly blind beggar, but also for Jesus.

3.3.2 Temporal Settings

3.3.2.1 Day and night

The temporal setting of “day and night” has been briefly referred to in the discussion on Jesus’ mission as the protagonist in John 9 (cf 3.2.1.1). Jesus calls his disciples to do the work of God his Father “while it is day” (9:4). However, He does not tell them what He means by the expression.²⁴ The researcher has suggested that it refers to Jesus’ time on earth – before his death. According to Jesus, it will be difficult to do God’s work when “night is coming” (9:4).²⁵ At this stage there is no response from the disciples to Jesus’ utterance – probably because they are still troubled by their own misunderstanding (cf 2.3.3). It is only later in the narrative, in John 16:18, that they want to know from Jesus what He meant by saying, “A little while, and you will no longer see me, and again a little while, and you will see me.”

Discussion of the temporal setting “day and night” will be continued in Chapter 4 of the thesis.

²⁴ Suggit (2003:77) comments on the expression “while it is day” by saying that it refers to a person’s life-time – just as the effective work of Jesus was accomplished during his historical life. As He brought light to the world during his physical life on earth, his disciples were to display that very light during their life time.

²⁵ According to Guthrie (1970:949), the contrast between day and night is used symbolically if the reference is to the mission of Jesus, for night would represent the close of the mission. Some, however, have understood “night” to refer to the spiritual blindness of Jesus’ enemies. The former seems to be preferable.

3.3.2.2 Sabbath

Sabbath is an important temporal setting in John's Gospel (cf 2.5.2.1). For the Jews, it was set aside as a holy day. It was not only a day of rest, but also a day to attend the synagogue, and for Jewish families to get together for a common meal. Other activities which were typically done on the Sabbath were circumcision, temple sacrifice, and saving human life from death (McKnight 1989:43).

That the narrator of John 9 specifically mentions that the blind beggar was healed on the *Sabbath*, is an indication of its significance as a temporal setting in the drama. Jesus' healings on the Sabbath disturbed the Jewish authorities (cf 5:9-10; 9:14-16). To them they were a direct violation of the Torah. That is why the formerly blind beggar's neighbours took him to the Pharisees after they discovered that he had been healed on the Sabbath (9:13-16; cf 2.4.1.2). The main character Jesus consequently came into conflict with his opponents.

Jesus' healing of the blind beggar on the Sabbath caused division (σχίσμα) among the Pharisees (9:16). Some of them said: "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath" (ὅτι τὸ σάββατον οὐ τηρεῖ). Others said, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" (πῶς δύναται ἄνθρωπος ἁμαρτωλὸς τοιαῦτα σημεῖα ποιεῖν;).

Bruce (1983:212) and Milne (1993:139) remark that making mud or clay on the Sabbath with simple ingredients as earth and saliva was regarded by the Jews as a form of kneading. According to them, Jesus infringed the Sabbath tradition by making mud and kneading, which was specifically forbidden.

One may ask why the Jews considered the Sabbath of such great importance. The Torah which was read on the Sabbath, gave existence and hope to the children of Israel. Suggit (2003:74-75) quotes the view of a certain rabbi (about 100 AD) recorded in the Talmud: "If circumcision, which concerns one of a man's 248 members, overrides the Sabbath, how much more must his whole body override the Sabbath?" Although this rabbinic opinion referred to those in danger of death, Jesus seems to reinterpret and extend this understanding to giving new life to a cripple and a blind man on the Sabbath (Jn 5:1-9; 9:1-6).

3.3.3 Social settings

3.3.3.1 Social groups

In John 9 different social groups appear as characters in seven scenes. The social group appearing in the first scene comprised of Jesus the protagonist, his disciples, and the blind beggar. Because of the blind beggar's cooperation with, and faith in Jesus (9:7,38), his role develops into becoming Jesus' helper in doing the work God sent Jesus to do (cf 3.2.1). In scene two the neighbours investigate how the man was healed, and take him to the Pharisees for further investigations (cf 3.2.2). The role of the Pharisees was to ensure that the Sabbath laws were kept. Breakers of the law were sent to them as higher authorities (cf 3.2.3). Another social group before the authorities is the parents of the formerly blind beggar, who feared for their lives and could not admit that Jesus was the healer of their son (cf 3.2.4). The final social group in John 9 is the Jewish authorities who excommunicated the formerly blind beggar. They refused to accept Jesus as the Messiah, so they remained in their sins (cf 3.2.5). All these social groups played a significant role in the development of the narrative's plot.

3.4 PLOT

It has been discussed that "plot" is the particular way in which a narrator weaves a story together – with its beginning, middle, and end. Plot involves the development of a story through its characters (what they do and say), and through various spatial, temporal and social settings. Conflict (resolution) often plays an important role in the development of a narrative's plot. In the final analysis different characters and settings serve to highlight the role of the protagonist or main character in the story (cf 2.6).

3.4.1 Plot development

In the previous chapter of the thesis the plot of John's Gospel has been described as that which revolves around Jesus' fulfilment of his mission to reveal God, whom Jesus refers to as "his Father." Jesus is the central figure in the narrative of John's Gospel (cf Suggit 2003:25). He is the revelation of YHWH to the world (cf Jn 3:16-17). The relation between God and his people was no longer to be confined to Israel. Jesus the Son of God came into the world as "the light of the world" (8:12).

When Jesus healed the blind beggar on the Sabbath, the Jewish opposition against him increased. The conflict between Jesus and the Jews regarding the interpretation of Sabbath did not start here. According to the researcher, the particular development of the plot of John's Gospel according to John 9 was already triggered in John 5. John 5:18 reports: "The Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because he was not only breaking the Sabbath, but was also calling God his Father, thereby making himself equal to God." In John 6:41 the Jews also complained because Jesus called himself the bread that came down from heaven. Because of this claim the chief priests and the Pharisees sent temple police to arrest him (7:32). The plot subsequently develops in John 8 with the Jews picking up stones to throw at Jesus after He claimed that He had been there before Abraham (v 58), but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple (8:59; cf the discourse of 8:12-58).

The conflict between Jesus and the Jews is now growing. In John 9 the plot develops further as the disciples ask Jesus who caused the blindness of the beggar in their midst (9:2). Their interpretation of the Torah is that there is a causal relationship between sin and suffering (cf Exod 20:5; Deut 5:9; Brown 1971:371). Jesus surprisingly shifts the question to the outcome or purpose of the man's blindness – God's works had to be revealed, had to be made manifest in him (9:3). The major issue, in Jesus' view, is not the cause of the man's blindness, but (a) who Jesus is as the revelation of God, and (b) whether the implied audience was able to recognise and "see" him as such. By responding in this way, Jesus runs the risk of being misunderstood further, and of the tension between him and his opponents deepening.

The narrator does not tell if the disciples were satisfied with Jesus' answer. The text only reports that the disciples were called to cooperate with Jesus in doing the work the Father had sent him to do. Jesus' case is subsequently taken to the neighbours. The plot is further developed through the interaction between them and the formerly blind beggar. The neighbours doubt as to whether he was the blind man who used to sit and beg (cf 2.4.1.3). According to traditional Jewish belief, a man born blind could not be healed (9:32). The neighbours are therefore caught by surprise when the formerly blind man tells them that it was he indeed (ἐγώ εἰμι).

The plot of the drama deepens as the neighbours act as "eye witnesses" of the man who used to be blind and who now sees, yet ironically remain in darkness because of their disbelief. They take Jesus to the Pharisees, thereby deepening the conflict – the narrator

immediately comments that the healing was done on the Sabbath (9:13-16). According to the Torah, the Sabbath is a day of rest dedicated to God. The neighbours deemed it appropriate to bring the man to the authorities to report that the Torah had been violated. Perhaps they also feared to be punished on discovery if they did not report the case to the authorities.

The Pharisees subsequently surround the formerly blind beggar. They are bitter about Jesus' violation of the Sabbath. For this reason, the Jewish authorities refused to say that Jesus was from God, or that He was any divine miracle (cf Ridderbos 1997:339). The narrator does not hide the interest and suspicion of the Pharisees who wanted to know how the blind man received his sight. They were in actual fact looking for the violator of the Sabbath (9:15-16).

The plot against Jesus continues to revolve around the fulfilment of his mission to reveal the Father. Lightfoot (1957:202) comments that Jesus, like his Father, never ceases from their life-giving work – even on the Sabbath. Jesus therefore seems to be facing two challenges as He encounters the blind beggar – that of healing not only the man's blindness, but also the Jews' understanding of the Sabbath. Healing on the Sabbath brought continued conflict between him and the Jews.

The Pharisees put Jesus on trial together with the blind man. In the dialogue of 9:13-34 it appears as if it is the blind man who is accused. The issue, however, is about healing on the Sabbath. The neighbours' question in 9:10, "How (φῶς) were you healed?", is repeated by the Pharisees in 9:15. The repetition emphasises the Pharisees' attempt to criticise the process Jesus followed in healing the beggar on the Sabbath.

According to Fenton (1988:41), the Pharisees could now appeal to the law and condemn Jesus and those with him for disobeying the will of God. The evidence provided by the formerly blind beggar in 9:17, however, does not satisfy them. He refuses to be put off. For him, the fact that he can see, is the most important thing. In spite of the fact that they are divided about his witness, the Pharisees do not want to drop their investigation. The narrator reports that the Pharisees took his case to another court of the Jewish authorities (9:24). According to Culpepper (1983), the latter formed one group with the Pharisees, but could have differed in their responsibilities to the communities they served.

The parents of the formerly blind beggar, like their son, stuck to the facts during the Pharisees' interrogation: They were his parents; he had been born blind; yet, he has been healed miraculously (cf Fenton 1988:41). In the interaction with the authorities, they behave like any loving parent would do. They give witness to the fact that he is their son. However, when confronted with the question as to how he had been healed, they responded by saying that they do not know, but that he could speak for himself since he was of age (9:21,23). The narrator comments by saying that they responded in this way because they were afraid of the Jews (9:22).

The narrator continues to show how the plot develops by bringing several witnesses on the stage, one after the other. The narrator tells the audience/readers that the formerly blind beggar has been called a second time to witness about himself. The intention of the authorities is to discredit Jesus as the Messiah, the one sent from God. They assume that Jesus is a law-breaker. However, from the formerly blind beggar's point of view, Jesus could not be called a sinner or a law-breaker if he was liberating people from their physical darkness – even on the Sabbath. The man does not directly tell who Jesus is when confronted with the authorities' perspective on him. His response in 9:25 is rather ironic: "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." And even more so in 9:27: "I have told you already (how He opened my eyes), and you would not listen." According to Codet (1970:134), the character of the formerly blind beggar develops during the course of the drama by becoming more and more bold, increasingly defending the protagonist. He first calls Jesus a prophet (9:17), later even ridicules the knowledge of the Jewish authorities (9:30), and finally acknowledges Jesus as the Son of Man (9:38). According to the Jewish authorities, Jesus could not be called a prophet or any other divine title since he violated the Sabbath.

When the authorities failed to convince the formerly blind man that Jesus was a sinner, they excommunicated him from the synagogue (9:34). The narrator tells the audience/readers that he went to the streets, where Jesus found him afterwards. Only then Jesus asked him, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" (9:35). To which the man answered, "Who is he, sir?" (9:36). When Jesus told him that the one speaking with him is he, the man responded by confessing his faith in him, "Lord I believe" (9:38).

The plot of John 9 ends with the formerly blind beggar receiving not only his physical sight, but also his spiritual sight. The narrative ends with the healed man becoming a follower, a

helper of the protagonist. At the same time the drama ends ironically as Jesus refers to the lasting spiritual blindness of the Pharisees (9:39-41). They ironically remain opponents to the protagonist, and to the revelation of God through him, even though they studied the Torah and other scriptures about the one who was to come from God.

3.5 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER

John 9 can be regarded as a dramatic narration. Scholars such as Martyn (1979:30), Culpepper (1983:73), Ridderbos (1987:332-347), Moloney (1996:120) and Suggit (2003:76-80) divided it into seven dramatic scenes. The researcher has described these scenes by showing how the role of Jesus is highlighted by several characters and settings through the drama of the plot. Active characters have been discussed. Jesus is the protagonist or main character. His role is that of a healer, a bringer of life – the revealer of his Father in action. The narrator presents the story with the implicit purpose that the audience would “see” and recognise Jesus as the one sent from God (cf 20:30-31).

Around Jesus appear various narrated figures – some as opponents, some as supporters. The blind beggar’s neighbours, the Pharisees and Jewish authorities remain Jesus’ opponents right through. The position of the blind beggar’s parents and the disciples remains unresolved and open-ended. The character of the blind beggar, however, develops through different scenes and discourses, and is in the end presented as a helper of the protagonist.

The first scene of the drama in John 9 is a dialogue between Jesus, his disciples and the blind beggar. It is about whose sin had caused the blindness of the beggar – his sin or that of his parents. Instead of addressing the cause of the man’s blindness, Jesus speaks of its purpose in 9:3 – ἵνα φανερωθῇ τὰ ἔργα τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ (“he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him”). In the second scene, both Jesus and his disciples leave the stage, while the neighbours and those who used to see the blind beggar appear, seeing that he has received his sight. In the third scene, the blind beggar is surrendered to the Pharisees and faces investigations, while the neighbours move out of the scene. In the fourth scene the blind beggar moves out of the scene. The investigation continues, and moves to the parents of the blind beggar, who are requested to give witness about their son. In the fifth scene the parents move out of the scene. The blind beggar is brought in

again, and the investigation continues with the Jewish authorities. The result of the investigation is the expulsion of the formerly blind beggar from the synagogue.

The theme discussed in the first scene is about whose sin had caused the blindness of the man. There are mixed thoughts about the question posed by the disciples. The disciples looked at the blindness from the perspective of their traditional belief based on the Old Testament. For Jesus, the blindness was neither because of the sins of the parents of the blind beggar, nor because of his own sins, but for God's work to be revealed in him (9:3).

The theme of the second scene is about how the man was healed, and who had healed him. The man's healer is portrayed as a prophet. The neighbours and those who used to see him beg understand that his eyes were opened by someone he called a prophet.

The second scene (with the neighbours) links up with scene three where the Pharisees continue with the theme of how the man was healed. The audience learns from the narrator's comments that the day on which Jesus made the clay, was the Sabbath (9:14). The Pharisees want to know "how" the miracle occurred, and the formerly blind beggar explains (9:15). The "how" of the Pharisees reminds about the "how" of the neighbours (9:10). From the man's explanation the Pharisees learn of Jesus' offence against the Sabbath law: Jesus made clay on the Sabbath. In their interaction with the formerly blind beggar, the Pharisees do not raise the question (yet) of the person of Jesus – at this stage they are more concerned about the preservation of their legal tradition (cf 9:16-17). Jesus' action of healing brings them into a discussion that leads to a schism (σχίσμα). Some claim that Jesus cannot be from God since He does not keep the Sabbath (9:16a). Others point to the signs He performs as an indication that He could not be a sinner (9:16b). There is a debate between the Pharisees about who Jesus is. The Pharisees ironically seem to have forgotten their earlier discussions with Jesus (cf 5:19-30). Jesus' origin "from God" is denied by some of them (9:16a), while it remains an open question to others (9:16b). The schism is about the healing of the formerly blind beggar, which is an indication that the Pharisees at least must have accepted that a miracle had taken place.

Yet again, the third scene (of the Pharisees) links with the following one (of the parents), and then with the Jewish authorities who hold to their unbelief: The Jews still did not believe that the man had been blind and that he had received his sight (9:18a). In order to prove that, they called his parents (9:18b). Moloney (1996:124) remarks in this regard that

as the cured man moved towards the light, “the Jews” moved away from it by denying that Jesus, the light of the world, ever gave sight to a man born blind. Since the parents were afraid that anyone who confessed that Jesus was the Messiah would be expelled from the synagogue (9:22), they avoided the debate about his identity with the Jewish authorities. The narrator reports that the parents sent the authorities to their son to answer for himself since he was grown up (9:23).

The Jewish authorities subsequently summon the formerly blind beggar a second time. According to Moloney (1996:126), the man – in his ignorance – moves towards the light, while “the Jews” – in their knowledge – move towards the darkness. The Jewish authorities accused him of being a disciple of Jesus while they proudly claimed to be disciples of Moses (9:28).

According to Hahn (2008 Online), the formerly blind beggar begins to instruct the Jews in a bold way from the beginning of verse 30. His logic is simple: Surely God does not answer the prayers of sinners. This seems to indicate that if Jesus was not from God, He would not be able to perform any miracle. The Jews, however, do not find his argument acceptable. Regardless of his logic, the result of it contradicted their opinion. They furiously respond by ridiculing him, “You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?” (9:34). The authorities, after failing to convince the man to declare Jesus a sinner, then drove him out of the synagogue. In so doing, they rejected not only the formerly blind man, but also the miracle and the one through whom God wrought it. According to the perspective of John’s Gospel, they rejected God’s light for them, and plunged further into darkness.

For the first time in the story of John 9, Jesus and the Pharisees meet each other face to face in scene seven. The debate about the man born blind is now summarised and brought to a conclusion. Jesus once again reveals his mission as the light of the world. The narrator’s purpose with the drama has been to explain Jesus’ response to the question of his disciples in 9:2. Jesus radically and surprisingly responded by saying that it was not the sin of the man or of his parents that caused the suffering, but that his blindness was for God’s works to be revealed in him. Typical of John’s unique literary style, God is revealed in this part of the narrative through a strategic combination of a miraculous sign (9:6-7), a discourse to clarify its meaning and intended effect (9:8-41), and direct and indirect “I am” sayings (9:5,9,37; cf Jn 6 and 11).

The drama of John 9 ends with the formerly blind beggar believing that Jesus, the central figure in the narrative, is the light of the world (9:4-5,27), the Son of Man (9:38), the one sent by God (9:3), the giver of new life (20:31). He has been healed from both his physical suffering and spiritual blindness. In all seven scenes the formerly blind beggar is confessed by the Jews as having been healed. The Jews, on the contrary, are still caught up in their disbelief and darkness.

In the next chapter of the thesis, a description of the story about Jesus as the revelation of God will continue – with particular reference to John 10-12. It will be done against the background of people suffering expulsion from the synagogue because they confessed Jesus as the Messiah, the one sent by God. Special attention will be given to metaphorical expressions for Jesus' self revelation such as “the door”, “the good shepherd”, and “the light of the world.”

CHAPTER 4

JESUS AND SUFFERING IN JOHN 9-12: THE POST-SYNAGOGAL MOVEMENT

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter of the thesis it has been discussed how the narrator of John 9 explored the issue of suffering through his story of the blind beggar. The blind beggar endured living in darkness since his birth, and it was suspected by Jesus' disciples that either his or his parents' sins had caused the blindness (9:2). It has become clear how Jesus turned their question around by focusing on God's revelation through a miraculous healing and discourse. This chapter of the thesis will continue with a further description of this process by focusing on the "post-synagogal" period – the period after the Jesus followers were banned from the synagogue.

The problem Jesus is facing from his disciples' side, was due to an old tradition of the Jews that suffering was a consequence of sin (cf Exod 20:5; Ezek 18:20). Jesus does not answer the "who" question, but instead guides the disciples towards experiencing God's presence amidst the reality of the blindness (cf 3.2.1.1). For Jesus, it is not the blindness that is the issue, but who He is as the one sent by God. The main theme of the thesis – Jesus' perspective on suffering according to John 9 – will be developed further in this chapter of the thesis by focusing on the continuation of the narrative in the following chapters of John's Gospel. The characters acting as Jesus' helpers and opponents in John 9 continue to support or to fight him and his followers in John 10-12.

John 9 narrates how the blind beggar suffered physically and spiritually since his birth. The narrator creates a dramatic story around the main character Jesus Christ, to allow his audience/readers to become involved with this Jesus, as the Son of God. Around Jesus appear various narrated figures as opponents or helpers.

The neighbours of the blind beggar and those who used to see him beg, the Pharisees and the authorities, are three social groups who want to know "how" the man was healed – how he came to have his sight (9:8-10, 15-23). Four times the narrator recounts what had happened to the formerly blind beggar (9:6-7, 9-11, 15, 25), thereby stressing that some-

thing highly unusual had taken place, something the world of this community could not explain (9:32).

In the story of John 9, the eyes of the blind beggar who previously suffered from living in darkness, were gradually opened to the truth about Jesus, while the Jewish authorities became more obdurate in their failure to see the truth as presented by the narrator. Three times the formerly blind beggar, who is gaining knowledge, humbly confesses his ignorance (9:12, 25, 36). Three times the Pharisees, who are descending deeper into abysmal ignorance, make confident statements about what they know of Jesus (9:16, 24, 29). The narrator describes the Pharisees as people who do not believe that Jesus came from God. According to them, He did not keep the Sabbath and was a sinner. Where He came from they did not know. The story remains unsolved, for the Jews continue in their darkness.

The narrative of John 9 ends with the Jews (Jesus' opponents) ironically remaining spiritually blind (9:41). They excommunicate the formerly blind beggar from the synagogue because he confessed Jesus as his healer, and as the Messiah (9:34; cf 3.2.5.1). After he has been marginalised and alienated by the authorities, he now actually suffers excommunication for a second time. According to Appleton (1956:50-51), Brown (1979:41), Suggit (1983: 90), Ridderbos (1997:347) and Culpepper (1998:180), people who confessed Jesus as Messiah were increasingly excommunicated from the synagogue during the first century AD.

The excommunication of Jesus followers from the synagogue in this period was based on the confession of Jesus being the Messiah while He was violating the Sabbath, and calling God "his Father", thereby making himself equal to God (5:18). The focus of the analysis in this chapter of the thesis will be on how the formerly blind beggar and others who confessed Jesus as Messiah were influenced by this decision. How did the opponents of Jesus treat those who confessed him as the Messiah?

As the gulf between followers of Jesus and the synagogue widened, the harshest form of exclusion came into force (Bible Gateway Commentaries:2008 Online). According to Martyn (1979:59), the Jewish authorities used eighteen Benedictions, of which the twelfth Benediction was employed to detect heretics. That is to say that if a member falters on number twelve, that member would be expelled from the synagogue worship (ἀποσυνάγωγος – cf 9:22; 12:42; 16:2).

Appleton (1956:50-51) and Suggit (1983:90) argue that the penalty of excommunication befell all Jews who became confessors of Jesus as Messiah and who started a new life as his followers. The blind beggar and other confessors of Jesus driven out of the synagogue now existed in a new way of life associated with Jesus, and no longer with the synagogue.²⁶ The Jesus followers had a new identity and a new lifestyle.

In this chapter of the thesis, the study will focus on Jesus' claim that He came to do the work of his Father, and that He is the light of the world (9:4-5). The metaphorical expression used by Jesus, "I am the light of the world" (φῶς εἰμι τοῦ κόσμου – 9:5), is developed further by the narrator in John 10-12. How will Jesus as the light of the world help the believers during the post-synagogal period?

Another theme that will be investigated here is the functioning of the sacraments of baptism and eucharist in this period. The meaning of baptism and eucharist will be explored, and how references to it function as symbolic signs illuminating the role of the protagonist in John's Gospel.

Suggit (1983, 2003) and Culpepper (1983) will continue to be used as main resources in this chapter of the thesis. They will *inter alia* assist in exploring the relation between John 9 and 10-12 – both regarding Jesus' self-revelation as the one sent from God, and in his encounter with the Jewish leaders.

The Greek word Ἀμὴν (10:1) indicates that the story does not start here, but that it is a continuation of what has gone before. The narrator seems to be familiar with the audience/readers. The researcher bases the connection between John 9 and 10 using the Greek word Ἀμὴν ἀμὴν (verily, truly). Scholars who have contributed significantly to the researcher's understanding of the connection between John 9 and 10 are Brown (1971:385-388), Mayfield (1969:122), Moloney (1996:145-146), Bruce (1983:223) and Suggit (2003:82). What is observed by these voices is that the opening, 'Verily, verily' (Ἀμὴν), is characteristically used to introduce a shift in argument rather than a new episode.²⁷ Another thought is that the

²⁶ Brown (1979:41) explains that the Johannine Christians were expelled from the synagogues and told that they could no longer worship with other Jews; and so they no longer considered themselves as Jews despite the fact that many were of Jewish ancestry. The Jesus who speaks of "the Jews" (13:33) and of what is written in "their Law" (15:25; cf 10:34) is speaking the language of the Johannine believing community for whom the Law is no longer their own, but is the hallmark of another religion.

²⁷ Adeyemo (2006:1273) explains that Jesus is still talking to the same group of Pharisees as at the end of chapter nine.

double form Ἀμὴν ἀμὴν is never used abruptly to introduce a new topic. It only represents a new stage in Jesus' comments on what has preceded. It follows directly on the preceding narrative (9:41), where Jesus was talking to the Pharisees, saying: "If you were blind, you could have no sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains."²⁸

The *Greek-English Lexicon* (Louw & Nida 1988) explains that the word Ἀμὴν is used at the end of the liturgy, spoken by a congregation. In this case Ἀμὴν is a declarative particle which Jesus uses at the beginning of a discourse to establish the authority of his words. The researcher therefore finds it necessary not to separate John 10 from 9 in the investigation of the post-synagogal movement.

4.2 THE WORK OF THE SON OF MAN (Jn 9:4)

4.2.1 Jesus

In Chapter 3 of the thesis it has been discussed that Jesus called his disciples to join him in doing the work the Father sent him to do. Before examining the work Jesus had to do with his disciples, it is important to note that this narrative introduces the main personages: Jesus who is the main character, the disciples, and the Jews. In the narrative the narrator has made the disciples' to support Jesus in giving life and light. However, they still need to learn a lot about the nature of Jesus' identity and the work they have to do with him as his followers.

According to John 9:4, Jesus proclaims: "We must do the work of him who sent me" (cf 3.2.1.1). Temple (1975:44-47) comments that, according to this utterance of Jesus, the core source of the gospel is "works", not "miraculous signs." Some of the passages in which the narrator gives references to "works" are 4:34; 5:36; 6:27a,29; 7:7,21,23; 8:39; 10:25,37-38; 14:10,12. The narrator creates a dramatic narrative about the work of God through Jesus – in order to get his disciples involved in Jesus' mission. Jesus does not explicitly tell the disciples what kind of work they were to do. Since the healing of the blind beggar, they would probably understand better what Jesus meant by this. As Jesus restored the sight and dignity of the blind man, so other Jesus followers also seemed to be in need of light and

²⁸ Brown (1971:388) reiterates that no new audience is suggested here. As the Gospel now stands, there is, according to him, no reason to believe that Jesus is not continuing his remarks to the Pharisees to whom He was speaking in 9:41. Indeed, in 10:21, after Jesus has spoken about the sheep gate and the shepherd, his audience recalls the example of the blind man, while others repeat the charges of madness that they have heard hurled at Jesus during the Tabernacles discourse (8:12-58).

encouragement under the circumstances of being rejected by a society of which they once had been part. In joining Jesus and working with him, He would show them the work they had to do. In 9:4 Jesus uses the imperative ‘we must’ (ἡμᾶς δεῖ) – probably to emphasise the agency of the work to be done to his disciples. In that way the works of God would be made manifest in the world (9:3). For Jesus, this is the issue at stake in John 9-12 – the *purpose* of people’s suffering on earth, not the *cause* of it (9:2-3).

4.2.1.1 Jesus the light of the world

Jesus, the main character in the narrative, does not only say, “We must do the works of him who sent me” (ἡμᾶς δεῖ ἐργάζεσθαι τὰ ἔργα τοῦ πέμψαντος με), but also mentions the time when they have to work together: “.. while it is day; night is coming when no one can work” (9:4). Jesus confirms this with a parallel saying in 9:5: “While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” The narrator tells the audience that true light could only come through the work of Jesus’ action. Through his ministry the light of the world, the work of the Father, would be revealed.

Suggit (2003:77) comments by saying that the expression “while it is still day” refers to a person’s life-time. According to him (1983:87), “day” can also be interpreted as a sign of God’s presence, and “night” as a sign of God’s absence (cf Rev 21:25). The emphasis in Jesus’ words is that work has to be done while it is day, so that God’s works, God’s presence, may be revealed (9:3). In this way Jesus radically shifts the discussion from an explanation of the cause of suffering to God’s ability to be present amidst suffering.

Petersen (1993:76) comments on John 9:4 by saying that if any one walks in “the night,” he/she stumbles, because the light is not in them. However, since the disciples of Jesus have the light, they are called children of God.²⁹ The statement “night is coming” could have been puzzling to the audience. Later in the narrative the narrator elaborates on this:

The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light (Jn 12:35-36).

²⁹ Brown (1971) explains Jesus’ insistence on “we” having to work while it is day (12:36) to mean that the disciples have God’s light in them. Like Jesus, they have become children of God and therefore co-bearers of God’s light (cf Jn 1:12-13; 3:19-21).

It is as if Jesus is saying that the work has to be done before He dies, and not to wait until it is night (νύξ). The work had to be done urgently, as indicated by the expression “we must.” Night is the limit set to do God’s works. The narrator seems to be referring to the beginning of Jesus’ passion, and to the time of Jesus’ absence, by using these words. Since Jesus knew where He came from and what was lying ahead of him, He spoke with a sense of urgency regarding his work to the excommunicated and those believing in him.³⁰ The narrator uses a plural imperative, “We must work” (ἡμᾶς δεῖ). In Chapter 3 of the thesis it has been argued that the pronoun plus adjective used in this expression shows that Jesus is not referring to himself alone (cf 3.2.1.1). He probably refers to his first disciples here, but, by extension, also to all Christian believers (cf Walvoord 1966). The narrator seems to say that the work that Jesus did to the blind beggar, bringing him physical and spiritual light, has to continue. Jesus’ disciples were to do such works that they have been doing with Jesus also in the future. In fact, Jesus promised that they would even do greater works than those done by Jesus himself (14:12).³¹

Martyn (2003:39), in commenting on 9:4, argues that Jesus is preparing his disciples for a time of his physical absence. They are reminded of their identity as followers of Jesus through his encouragement and warning. As the light of the world Jesus’ physical presence would not be limited to his historical presence, but would continue through his associates (cf 20:21). His words has a strong sense of urgency. On the one hand, Jesus invites them to join him in doing God’s works: “We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day” (9:4a), which is followed up later in 14:12: “Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and in fact greater works than these because I am going to the Father.” On the other hand, He warns them by saying: “Night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world” (9:4b-5).

³⁰ The narrator of John 10 seems to anticipate that his audience/readers would no longer be members of the synagogue worship. Appleton (1956:50-51) and Suggit (1983:90) argue that the Jesus followers had started a new life, entailing a break with the past, marked by the confession of Christ as the Messiah. Those were the reasons why they faced the penalty of excommunication. Jesus could have had this break in mind when He said, “I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also” (10:16).

³¹ Suggit (2003:77) argues that the statement, “We must perform the works of him who sent me while it is day” (9:4), includes the work of Jesus’ disciples, the church. Jesus is the originator, the one who was sent, but it is the church that must carry out the work of God. What Suggit means is that the church has the responsibility of doing such works as caring for suffering people – particularly those who are marginalised like the blind beggar.

The narrator thus informs the audience/readers of the Gospel that Jesus' disciples are to share in God's glory by doing God's work with Jesus – even under difficult circumstances.³² The narrator earlier explained why God sent God's Son into the world: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (Jn 3:16). Accordingly, eternal life can only be obtained by believing in Jesus, the giver of light and life. The audience/readers are invited to know and believe that God's Son was sent for the purpose of revealing God's light and life (5:24, 36; cf Labahn 1983-c1985 Online; Ashton 1986:68; O'Day 1986:35; Moloney 1996:22).

The "word", "life" and "light" systems in John have already been established in the prologue, where they are identified as agents of creation (1:3, 10). They all "enter" the world (1:4, 9-10, 14). The "word" and the "light" are synonymous with the "life" which is said to have been in the word and to be "the light of all people" (1:3-4). Jesus claims to be the light that has come into the world (3:19; 8:12; 9:5; 12:46), to give the light of life to those who follow him and believe in the light (8:12), enabling them to become "children of light" (12:36; cf 12:49-50). According to the narrator, "the light of life" is synonymous not only to being children of light, but also to being "children of God" (1:12-13). All these are synonymous to having eternal life (cf 3:16-21; 12:44-50).

In Chapter three of the thesis it has been discussed how the blind beggar suffered a life of physical darkness since his birth (cf 3.2.1.4). Jesus, before healing the blind beggar, told his disciples: "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (9:5). He then healed the man born blind. This seems to be recalling 8:12 where Jesus proclaimed: "I am the light of the world." It is probably in the context of one of the Jewish feasts that Jesus announced that He is the light of the world (8:12; 9:5) – the feast of Booths or Tabernacles (7:2), linked to the sojourn of the Israelites in the wilderness, or, more probably, at the feast of Dedication or Hanukkah (10:22), commemorating the restoration of the temple in Jerusalem in 165 BC (Deist 1990:94). The latter was also called the feast of Lights – a context which would emphasise Jesus' self-revelation as the light of the world significantly. According to John's narrative, Jesus healed the blind man after He revealed himself as the light of the world (9:6-7). The combination of miraculous signs and "I am" sayings is a powerful trait of the Johannine narrator's literary style.

³² The following authors commented on Jesus' association with his disciples in doing the work the Father sent him to do: Brown (1971:372), Mayfield (1969:114), Walvoord (1966), Moloney (1996:121), Labahn (1999:178-2003). Mayfield suggests that the blind man was part of the group.

It has also been discussed how Jesus' disciples were persuaded to know and believe that He is the light (φῶς) of the world (cf 3.2.1.1). Jesus identified darkness in the world through the behaviour of the authorities towards him and his followers (7:32; 8:59; 10:10). The disciples had to keep close to him – He who had the light.

In the researcher's view, specific light was needed at the time of the post-synagogal movement. People suffered as they were banned from the synagogue by the Jewish authorities (cf 3.2.5.1). The probable socio-political context of the addressees of John 10 was that they had been rejected by the society of which they previously formed a part – because they confessed Jesus as the Messiah. Followers of the rejected Jesus were also rejected. Ironically, however, they became “children of light” (12:36) while their opponents loved the darkness rather than the light (3:19), and therefore their sins remained (9:41).

Suggit (2003:76) argues that the giving of sight to the blind beggar may be regarded not only as an act of physical healing but also as a symbolic account of the healing of those who found light and meaning in life through the action of Jesus, the light of the world. God's work was indeed made manifest in Jesus' ministry. Jesus' identity as the light of the world is revealed by the very act of his healing a man born blind. This reminds of the prophetic utterance in Isaiah 35:5: “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened.”

The Pharisees, however, struggled to accept Jesus as the revelation of God because He healed a man born blind on the Sabbath (cf 3.2.3.1). People in fact lived in darkness before Jesus came into the world. Jesus brought the revelation of God, which revealed the world for what it is (1:9; 12:46). Those who saw the light also recognised God who sent the light (12:45; cf Johnson 1999:534-547). According to Bruce (1983:122), the narrator of John views life lived outside a relationship with God as immoral. When the light shines in the darkness, those who are evil avoid the light because it exposes their deeds (3:19-20). They love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil.

4.2.1.2 Jesus the door for the sheep

It has been mentioned earlier in this chapter that the work which Jesus did according to John 9 continues in John 10 (cf 4.1).³³ In John 10 the narrator introduces smaller narratives

³³ According to Maloney (1976:145), John 10 is very closely linked to what has gone before in Jesus' encounter with the leaders in both chapters 8 and 9. Attempts to separate chapter 9 from either chapter 8 or chapter 10 lose sight of this fact.

around metaphors such as door, gate, sheep and good shepherd.³⁴ With the aid of these metaphors the narrator develops themes around Jesus as the leading character – to emphasise his identity and work. The tension between Jesus and his opponents which was generated by the healing of the blind beggar on the Sabbath has probably made Jesus to protect those who believed in him. They were to be protected from his enemies, who are called “thieves and robbers” in John 10. This chapter of the thesis will explore the significance of the “door” metaphor for Jesus in relation to his and his followers’ suffering, and how it highlights Jesus’ work as the main character in the story.

The theme of Jesus and suffering in John 9 is thus developed in another way in the shepherd sheep figure of speech. After a shepherd’s flock has been separated from the other sheep, he takes them to pasture through a door. Near the pasture is an enclosure for the sheep. The shepherd takes his place in the doorway or entrance and functions as a door or gate. According to the narrator, the sheep can go out to the pasture near the enclosure, or they can retreat into the security of the enclosure.

Dallas (1983-c1985 Online) comments that comparing people to a shepherd and his sheep was common in the Middle East. Kings and priests called themselves shepherds and their subjects sheep. The Bible makes frequent use of this analogy. Many of the great men of the Old Testament were called “shepherds” (cf Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David). As national leaders, Moses and David were both “shepherds” over Israel. Some of the most famous passages in the Bible employ this motif (cf Ps 23; Isa 53:6; Lk 15:1-7). It is possible that the narrator of John 10 borrowed the metaphor from the Middle East context. What was the probable significance of these metaphors in the first century Mediterranean world (cf 2.8)?

Jesus developed the shepherd analogy in several ways. The connection with the preceding chapter is seen in the contrast between the viewpoint of Jesus and the Pharisees because of the man born blind (cf 3.2.3.1). Jesus’ work during this period is to shepherd the

³⁴ The Gospel of John is particularly rich in metaphors referring to the agrarian setting of sheep and shepherds. Jesus is called the “good shepherd” and “the door/gate for the sheep”, and his followers are referred to as “his sheep” (10:1-42). Jesus invites his followers to be likewise – also to act like good shepherds for God’s flock (cf 21:15-17). In their shepherding role to others they were called to guide and teach others as they had been guided and taught by Jesus the good shepherd. As a good shepherd Jesus “lays down his life for the sheep” (10:11,15), thereby becoming the paschal lamb to be slaughtered during the preparation for the Passover of the Jews (19:14). At the beginning of John’s Gospel, John the Baptist refers to Jesus as the “lamb of God”, setting the tone for the protagonist’s role in the drama of the Gospel (1:29,36). In the book of Revelation, associated with the Johannine literature of the New Testament (cf Rev 1:1,9), Jesus is often referred to as the lamb who was slain, but who is now standing in the centre of God’s throne of glory (cf Rev 5:6,12; 7:9,14; 19:7,9; 21:22-23; 22:1-3).

excommunicated and other believers. As “sheep” they would have enemies (“thieves and robbers”) who would leave them with no rest (10:10a). This could be one of the reasons why Jesus treated his work as urgent (cf 4.2.1).

The narrator informs the audience/readers that the “sheep” are called by name (πρόβατα φωνεῖ κατ’ ὄνομα – 10:3b). The “good shepherd” leads his sheep out through the door (10:3b).³⁵ In the course of John 10 it becomes clear that the metaphors of shepherd and door refer to the protagonist, Jesus. Two “I am” sayings in 10:7,9 (“I am the gate for the sheep”) and 10:11,14 (“I am the good shepherd”) function to explain the nature and purpose of Jesus’ ministry.³⁶ The narrator continues in 10:5 by describing the type of “sheep” that followed Jesus: They would not follow a stranger. The pronoun ‘they’ is governed by the verb ‘to follow’ (ἀκολουθήσουσιν, third person plural of ἀκολουθέω). That Jesus calls his sheep, and that they recognise his voice, show an intimate relation between them.³⁷ The listening and hearing remind of John 9:7 where the blind beggar heard the voice of Jesus and obeyed his command to go and wash in the pool of Siloam.

The narrator emphasises that Jesus is the only door by which people can enter into God’s provision for them. Jesus as the door for the sheep works to give them life, so that they may have it in abundance (10:10). The New Application Study Bible (1993:1925) explains that in this context sheep were often gathered by the door to protect them from thieves, weather, or wild animals. The narrator’s description can be linked to the caves, sheds, or areas surrounded by walls made of stone or branches which were used for sheep. The way sheep were kept, particularly during the night, tells that they are vulnerable animals that easily suffer danger from their enemies. The sheep and shepherds in this case both suffered from attacks of their enemies – the narrator calls them “thieves and bandits” (10:1,10; cf 10:12). The shepherds often slept in the folds to protect the sheep (cf Ezek 34:23).

Moloney (1996:135) comments on this image explaining what it means to be the door of the sheep. He sees Jesus as the mediator who provides all that the sheep need. The narrator

³⁵ According to Culpepper (1998:180), the statement that the shepherd calls his sheep by name resonates with various other passages in John (1:42; 5:25, 28-29; 11:43; 20:16). The Greek verb translated with “leads out” in verse 4 is the same as that in 9:35, “cast out.” The blind man may therefore serve as a representative of those who have been led out of the sheepfold by the shepherd.

³⁶ According to Kysar (1993:47-49), ἐγώ εἰμι is used in several instances in the Hebrew Bible (cf Isaiah 41:4, 45:18; Hosea 13:4; Joel 2:27). In some passages in Isaiah where the Hebrew reads, “I am he”, the LXX translates it with “I am I am.” All these passages are related in some way or other to metaphorical speaking about God.

³⁷ His “sheep” are those who hear Jesus’ voice. He knows them, and they follow him.

seems to be connecting the “I am the door” saying of Jesus with the “I am he” confession of the blind beggar in John 9:9, thereby indicating how Jesus’ saving ministry develops through the narrative. Jesus’ doing the work of his Father is compared to a door giving protection and life to the sheep.

The careful description of “the door” of the sheepfold indicates how much security was needed for the sheep. The sheep would obviously suffer insecurity from their enemies without the door. This briefly explains why the narrator refers to Jesus as the door and good shepherd. Amidst the reality of Jesus’ opponents, who are called thieves and bandits, the narrator tells a parable about Jesus working as the door for his sheep. It seems to be a crucial utterance at the moment when confessors of Christ are driven out of the synagogue to find a new life in Jesus Christ. The audience/readers must have understood why the narrator uses the term “door” (θύρα). It is probable that Jesus is referring back to John 9:4 by explaining how He is doing the work of the Father – in this case as the metaphorical door leading to life, and protecting life.

The Greek word for door is θύρα. Mounce (1993:248) and Farmer (1998:1480) describe door as a means of entrance. According to *The Greek-English Lexicon* (Louw & Nida 1988:87), θύρα is used metaphorically to mean door for the sheep as in John 10:7 and 9.³⁸ The narrator of John 10 uses the two figures of speech (shepherd and door) which both symbolise Jesus’s role, yet which cannot be combined easily. Jesus appears as both the door and shepherd of the sheep (10:7-18). As different images they both describe his role as protagonist in John’s Gospel. As “door”, He acts as the way to salvation (10:9). Jesus seems to be encouraging his threatened followers by reassuring them, paradoxically, that He is a life-giving door amidst their suffering. The following passages indicate different functions of the “door” image in John 10:

- The door is for entrance in and out of the sheepfold (10:1);
- The door is for the shepherd (10:2);
- The door is for the sheep (10:7);
- The door is for saving the sheep (10:9).

³⁸ According to Nicoll (1897:788-789), θύρα is not a hurdle or gate, but a solid door heavily barred and capable of resisting attack.

In each of these cases it can be argued that the door metaphor refers to Jesus' saving activities on behalf of his suffering sheep. Brown (1971:393-396) and Kysar (1993:113-122) comment on the metaphor by saying that Jesus is presented here as the gate leading to salvation – a gate not for the shepherd, but for the sheep. Jesus is said to resemble Eleazar at whose word the Israelites were to go out and come in (cf Nu 27:21). In Bultmann's words (1971:138), Jesus is the leader of his church, and He particularly leads them to salvation. The researcher agrees with this view – as the door Jesus is the leader of his followers. He is the originator of the work of his Father who sent him.

To summarise: The work of Jesus according to John 10 is compared metaphorically to that of a “door” or “gate” to a sheepfold. Jesus is like a door for the sheep – He stops them from being killed (10:10). According to John 10, Jesus' work is to give life and protection to those excommunicated from the synagogue (9:34), as well as other believers. The narrator uses this metaphor to contribute to the report about Jesus and his disciples in John 20:30-31. They did many works and signs so that unbelievers would believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that, through believing, they would have life in his name (20:31).

Through these metaphorical “I am” (ἐγώ εἰμι) expressions the narrator of John's Gospel thus claims that Jesus is the true revealer of God, the giver of light and life, the one sent from God. These expressions can be seen as a strategic reinterpretation of similar claims for divine status in the Hellenistic world (Kysar 1993:47-49; Brown 1971:393).

4.2.1.3 Jesus the good shepherd

The question to be attended to in this section is how the “shepherd” metaphor in John 10 contributes to highlighting Jesus' role as main character in the Gospel. This theme has been briefly referred to in Chapter 3 of the thesis (3.2.1.1). After being expelled from the synagogue, Jesus sought the formerly blind beggar (9:35). In the following chapter Jesus calls himself twice “the good shepherd” (10:11, 14). It may initially seem strange that Jesus first calls himself the door and then the good shepherd. This surprise would be justified if 10:1-5 was dealt with as an allegory. In that case it would be difficult first to apply the door to Jesus, then the shepherd. What happens here, however, is something else: Jesus makes free use of the metaphors “door” and “good shepherd.” The second application of the comparison seems to flow naturally from the first. The narrator tells the audience/readers that Jesus is the door through whom the sheep move in and out of the fold. Jesus also has

enemies who are called “thieves and bandits.” These images will be discussed later in the chapter.

As mentioned, Jesus’ mission is that of doing his Father’s work as a door (θύρα) that gives life and security to the sheep. The giving of life by the good shepherd has already been expressed when Jesus brought light to the blind beggar (9:1-7). By revealing himself to the formerly blind beggar Jesus brought himself closer to him. The beggar, after he had been excommunicated from the synagogue, had to find his way on the street when Jesus the good shepherd (ὁ ποιμὴν ὁ καλός) found him.³⁹ In John 10 the narrator elaborates on some of the good shepherd’s works:

- The good shepherd (ὁ ποιμὴν ὁ καλός) lays down his life for the sheep (10:11);
- the good shepherd knows his own and his own know him. They know his voice and he makes them one flock (10:14);
- the good shepherd’s sheep hear his voice and he knows them and they follow him (10:27);
- the good shepherd gives his sheep eternal life (10:28).

According to Morris (1989:115-116), the word καλός in ὁ ποιμὴν ὁ καλός should be translated as “beautiful.” The expression in 10:11, 14 should thus read as follows: “I am the shepherd, the shepherd beautiful.” The adjective καλός can also be translated to mean good, useful or praiseworthy. The researcher finds it difficult to accept Morris’ translation since there is goodness in what Jesus did to the blind beggar, and in what He is promising his suffering sheep, namely to lay down his life for them. To give life cannot be treated as something beautiful only, because there is suffering that Jesus is promising that would be more than pleasing to the eye.

Jesus’ goodness can be seen in his promise to die for his sheep. Perschbacher (1989:384) translates the Greek word (ποιμνη) to mean flock. The *Greek-English Lexicon* (Louw & Nida 1988) translates the same word to mean shepherd, sheep-herder, one who protects the

³⁹ According to Ridderbos (1997:347), Jesus is concerned about the excommunicate, seeks the lost sheep of Israel, and binds them more tightly to himself. That the parable of the good shepherd comes immediately after this story, is certainly no accident.

Bruce (1983:223) argues that it can be deduced from the parable of the good shepherd (10:1-21) that the blind man who had been healed also became a member of the flock of the good shepherd. What was true of him, is true of the whole flock.

sheep, or someone leading a Christian church. The researcher prefers to interpret the shepherd as a protector of sheep who gives the excommunicated and other believers life, than to call Jesus “flock.” Flock means a group of sheep, birds or goats. The word “shepherd” as explained by the *Life Application Study Bible* (1993:1925), refers to people who slept in the fold in order to protect the sheep from being killed (cf 4.2.1.1). The narrator must have found this name fitting for Jesus’ work for the sheep, referring back to what Jesus did to the formerly blind beggar who was expelled from the synagogue.

Jesus as the shepherd cares for those who follow him. The narrator uses “I am” sayings, which, according to Wai-yee Ng (2001:6), consist of metaphorical symbols used with the “I am” (ἐγώ εἰμι) formula. They represent Jesus’ Christological claims (cf also 1:29; 6:35; 8:12; 10:7,11,14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1). In short: the narrator probably uses this metaphor to express Jesus’ identity as the Son of God – the one who was sent as the light of the world, the one who gives life (9:5).

The sheep know the good shepherd (ὁ ποιμὴν ὁ καλός) by his voice, and he knows them and they follow him. That the sheep (προβάτων) hear his voice and follow him, explains how sheep and shepherd are closely linked through the voice of the shepherd. This reminds of 9:7 where Jesus uses his voice to command the blind beggar to go and wash in the pool of Siloam (cf 3.2.1.2).

Jesus who is the “I am” claims himself to be the good shepherd. It is claimed by the narrator that Jesus as the good shepherd is prepared to lay down his life for the sheep – “I lay down my life for the sheep” (10:11). This expression is repeated three times in 10:15-18, thereby emphasising Jesus’ giving his life for the sheep (cf 12:24). Jesus distinguishes his work as a good shepherd from that of the hired hand who does not own the sheep (10:12). The narrator makes Jesus unique through the giving of his life to the formerly blind beggar and to the sheep. What Jesus seems to be emphasising here is that leadership involves a sacrifice of one’s life. The Greek word τίθησιν means to give away, which implies that Jesus is ready to give away his life for his sheep (ὁ ποιμὴν ὁ καλὸς τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ τίθησιν ὑπὲρ τῶν προβάτων). Jesus is probably referring to his work on the cross here (Jn 18-19).

To summarise: Through describing Jesus’ work as that of a good shepherd, the narrator shows that Jesus is connected to his followers. There is an intimate relationship between Jesus and his sheep. The narrator tells the audience/readers that when the sheep

(προβάτων) hear his voice, they follow him (cf 4.2.1.1). The shepherd is closely linked to the excommunicated and other believers through the work the Father had sent his Son to do. The narrator explains why Jesus does this: “I must do the works of him that sent me” (9:4). Firstly, the good shepherd was sent into the world to fulfil a specific task. Secondly, the works the good shepherd has to do are the works of God who had sent him. Jesus was not only appointed by God, but worked for him – He was a worker together with God. Thirdly, as the narrator says, Jesus is ready to die for his sheep (10:11). He is pleased to lay down his life under the strongest obligations to do the work He was sent to do. He fulfils the works He has to do (ἐργάζεσθαι τὰ ἔργα) as a good shepherd for his sheep.

In Chapter 3 of the thesis it has been discussed how Jesus physically healed the blind beggar, and how He revealed himself to the man. This formed part of Jesus’ strange yet surprising answer to his disciples when they asked him about the cause of the man’s blindness (9:2-3). In this section of Chapter 4 of the thesis it has been discussed how Jesus revealed himself as the “light” of the world, as the “door” providing security for the sheep, and as the good “shepherd.” The sheep sought refuge in him after they were expelled from the synagogue. As a good shepherd Jesus protects the lives of those who were isolated because of their faith in him. The believers have become part of Jesus – He knew his sheep by name and they also knew his voice. Those who believed that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, received abundant, eternal life in his name (cf 10:10; 20:31). They would never perish (10:27-28). They shared in the baptism of Jesus Christ. They had a new identity in Christ, different from their previous association with the synagogue. They witnessed about Jesus giving his life for them: “I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to take it up again” (10:11, 17-18).⁴⁰

4.2.2 Disciples

It has already been discussed in Chapter 3 of the thesis that, according to John’s Gospel, the disciples were called to be part of the work Jesus was sent to do (cf 3.2.1.1; cf Suggit (2003:77). This work had to be carried out by them while it was still day (Jn 9:4).

⁴⁰ In another New Testament writing associated with John, I John 3:16, the author proclaims as follows: “We know love by this, that (Christ) laid down his life for us – and we ought to lay down our lives for one another.”

The disciples are Jesus' primary helpers who were called to support him in his life- and light-giving ministry to the world (cf 2.3.3). In Jesus' invitation to them, "We must work...", the personal pronoun "we" indicates Jesus' identification with his disciples. That Jesus desires this close association with them can be seen from 4:35-38 where Jesus says:

Do you not say, "Four months more, then comes the harvest?" But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you did not labour. Others have laboured, and you have entered into their labour.

According to John, Jesus is the living God's revelation in the human story (1:18), and his disciples are associated with him in the fulfilment of this task (see also 1:4-9). However, they are typically known for their misunderstanding of Jesus' intentions (cf 2.3.3). One of their misunderstandings referred to by the narrator of John is their interpretation of Jesus' words: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it again" (2:19). The narrator later reports about them: "After He was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that He had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken" (2:22).

In the researcher's view, Jesus wants to fully equip his disciples in doing God's work while it is day. There is a termination of time expressed by the narrator's use of the concept 'night'. If Jesus used this language to refer to his death, then the disciples – in order to continue God's revelation in Jesus also after his death – were supposed to work closely with him while it was still 'day.' They needed his support and enablement while He was still with them.

In 9:4-5, Jesus speaks about working with his disciples while it is day because when night comes, no one can work. Jesus uses the contrasting language of "light" and "darkness" – probably to prepare his disciples for what was lying ahead for them. They are warned to walk while they have the light, lest the darkness overtakes them. Jesus probably uses the experience of light and darkness here as a metaphor for his presence and absence respectively (12:35a, 36). The narrator repeatedly informs the disciples about the light that came into the world, thereby also disclosing those who came to the light and those who did not (1:11; 8:12; 12:35-36, 46). According to John 11, the disciples experienced Jesus' self-revealing work in his raising Lazarus from the dead.

Jesus thus commissioned and literally inspired his disciples to fulfil their task as his followers and apostles (20:21-23; cf Culpepper 1983:117).

4.2.3 Jews

It has been indicated how the narrator of John uses metaphorical language (such as light, door, shepherd) to highlight the identity and role of the protagonist. In John 10:1,8 he uses yet another set of metaphors, namely “thieves and bandits” (κλέπτης ἐστὶν καὶ ληστής). He uses these terms to characterise a specific group of people – Jesus’ opponents (cf 2.3.4). According to them, Jesus could not be the Messiah because his origin was known to them.

After the healing of the formerly blind beggar in John 9, the Pharisees and Jewish authorities refused to give God glory by acknowledging Jesus as his healer. On the contrary, they declared Jesus a sinner, and applied the law of excommunication to the formerly blind man (cf 3.2.5.1).⁴¹ According to their perspective, no one could heal a born blind person (9:34). Could these be the people Jesus refers to as “thieves and bandits” (10:1,8).

What follows, are some of the author’s suggestions as to who these thieves and bandits could be. A long-standing biblical tradition presents the unfaithful leaders of Israel as bad shepherds who consign their flock to wolves (cf Jer 23:1-8; Ezek 22:27; 34; Zep 3:3; Zec 10:2-3, 11:4-17). Bruce (1983:223) also argues that the people called thieves and bandits were the shepherds of God’s flock, the religious leaders of Israel. He motivates this by saying that they were the most determined opponents of Jesus, his message, and his works (cf 5:18; 6:30-31; 7:30,43-45; 8:59; 10:31,39; 11:47-48,54,57). These were the people who always pressed Jesus to know who He was. They even attempted to stone him to death.⁴²

One may thus argue that the reference to thieves and bandits in John 10:1,8 suggests the Pharisees as Jesus’ direct opponents (cf 9:40). This is however not stated directly – the text leaves the appropriation of the image open – as a gap to be filled by the audience/readers.

⁴¹ Bruce (1983:223) comments by saying that the man cured of his blindness looked in vain to these authorities for the care that shepherds were supposed to give; in fact, they expelled him from the flock for which they were responsible. But, having been expelled by them, he found a true shepherd, Jesus. In this context, it is difficult to avoid identifying them with thieves and robbers, the false shepherds, who sought by some unauthorised means to “creep and intrude and climb into the fold.”

⁴² Brown (1971:404) comments that at the feast of Dedication Jesus is in the temple precincts much as He was at the feast of Tabernacles (7:14,28). “The Jews” press him to tell who He is much as they did at Tabernacles (8:25,53). The question of the Messiah comes up again (7:26,31,41-42; 9:22), and, of course, the attempt to arrest Jesus and to stone him, the charge of blasphemy, the triumphant answers in terms of his unique relationship with the Father - all these are echoes of what happened at Tabernacles.

If the imagery refers to persons known to Jesus' followers, particularly in the community to whom John writes, the Pharisees or the Jewish leaders are the prime candidates. In the researcher's view, the Jews are the people who almost robbed the formerly blind beggar of his newly found dignity and identity by making him declare that Jesus was a sinner (9:25; cf 3.2.5.1).

Since light is always in conflict with darkness, Jesus as the light of the world (φῶς εἰμι τοῦ κόσμου) would always be in conflict with those who oppose God's light (Morris 1981:475). In the post-synagogal movement, people were rejected by the Jewish leaders in an attempt to make them powerless. They were hated because they now claimed to be children of light, associating with Jesus as the light of the world (8:12; 9:4; 12:36; cf 2.3.4).

In their encounter with Jesus according to John 9:40-41, the Pharisees – who claim to be “seeing” – are exposed as stuck in their spiritual blindness (9:39). The narrator comments on how they interfere with Jesus' work – just as the thief comes to steal and kill and destroy. When Jesus' opponents destroy his sheep, they literally destroy his work.

The narrator describes some of the acts of these thieves and bandits. They enter by another way (10:1); the sheep (προβάτων) do not know their voice, because they are strangers (10:5); the sheep run away from them (10:5); they come to steal and kill and destroy (10:5,10); they do not care for the sheep (10:13). In Jesus' eyes, these Jews do not only steal, but they also attack his sheep. They do not belong to his flock (10:16). All they do, is to frustrate the mission of the protagonist. Their work is in sharp contrast to Jesus' healing and life-giving work of which He proclaims: “I came that they may have life” (10:10). This could be the reason why Jesus spoke the way He did, using such strong images as thieves and bandits.

In this context, Brown (1971:392) argues that the explanation of the parable of the “door” in John 9:7-10 may indicate that the real point in the parable is that of entering through Jesus as the door (θύρα). If this is indeed the case, the attack on the Pharisees is not so much in terms of them not being watchful gatekeepers (ὁ θυρωρός), but in terms of them being thieves and bandits who do not approach the sheep through the proper gate (10:1).

The Jews' treatment of the formerly blind man in John 9:34 can thus be interpreted as an expression of their spiritual blindness. “Give glory to God! We know that this man is a

sinner” (9:24b), they demanded from the formerly blind man. By asking him to give glory to God, they tried to rob him of believing in Jesus, his healer and light. The formerly blind beggar, full of new life, joined hands with Jesus in doing his Father’s work against the thieves and bandits. Their activities could not separate the sheep from the shepherd. As their shepherd, Jesus promised to protect them from his and their opponents: “I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand” (10:27-28).

In the story of the blind beggar in John 9 the narrator brings together different themes related to the metaphor of light, such as spiritual blindness and sight, and reception/nonreception of light – all in the context of the expulsion of believers from the synagogues by Jewish authorities. Jesus and his disciples have to do the work Jesus was sent to do (9:4). This work is disturbed by his opponents, who Jesus calls thieves and bandits (κλέπτης ἐστὶν καὶ ληστής - 10:1). These metaphors seem to refer to the Jews who continually attacked Jesus and his followers. The narrator describes them as Jesus’ strongest opponents. For them, Jesus was not the Messiah they were waiting for. They refused to recognise who Jesus is, and therefore remained in darkness (9:40-41). In their doubt, some confronted him directly: “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly (10:24).” When Jesus’ hour came, they executed him for his view points by nailing him to a cross (19:15-16).

It has been discussed in Chapter 3 of the thesis how different social groups repeatedly asked how the formerly blind beggar had been healed. In the view of the researcher, these authorities were actually looking for the healer. They indirectly attacked Jesus’ work through the blind beggar. They did not so much harass the formerly blind man for his case – it was not he who broke the Sabbath law, but Jesus (cf 3.2.5.1).

Ridderbos (1997:352-355) rightly argues that the theme of thieves and bandits in John 10 follows directly after the story of the blind beggar in 9:1-41 – in a sharply antithetical form. This should not have surprised the audience, for nowhere in the Gospel of John is the antithesis between good and bad shepherds clearer than in the conflict between the formerly blind beggar and the Jewish authorities who abused and cast him out of the synagogue (cf 3.2.5.1). This antithesis is expressed by the statement, “You were born entirely in sins, and now you are trying to teach us” (9:34). Such statements indicate that (some of) the Jews were not prepared to accept the authority of a formerly blind beggar

that Jesus was the Messiah. A blind beggar was probably so marginalised in that society, that his witness did not impress these authorities.

At the festival of the Dedication, Jesus aroused the Jews' anger when he told them that they did not believe the works that He did in his Father's name (10:25). They attempted to stone him after He told them that He had been there before Abraham (8:59; cf 8:5; 10:31). They did not accept Jesus' claim that He and the Father are one" (ὁ πατήρ ἕν ἔσμεν; 10:30). The narrator reports that the Jews saw Jesus perform many miraculous signs, but that they did not believe that He was doing the work in his Father's name. They refused to accept the light He brought to the world. "He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who believed him, he gave power to become children of God" (1:11-12).

The researcher agrees with Mayfield (1969:150-152) that even though the Jews rejected Jesus as a nation (cf 1:11), and in turn were rejected by many through the course of history, there were always some who did receive the light of the Messiah. The narrator remarks that, even among the leaders, many believed in him and yet did not confess that Jesus was the Messiah, for fear of being expelled from the synagogue (12:42). Bruce (1983:270-277) and Mayfield (1969:150-152) refer to them as secret believers who feared to be banned from the synagogue (9:22,34). They refused to express their faith openly, for they preferred the favourable opinion of people to the glory of God (12:43; cf Mayfield 1969:150-152). In the researcher's view, they did not believe like the blind beggar who fully gave himself to the light. His role developed into that of a helper of the protagonist, thereby presenting to the implied audience an example to be followed and a new role to be adopted.

4.3 SETTINGS

4.3.1 Spatial Settings

4.3.1.1 Bethany

Lazarus and his two sisters, Martha and Mary, lived in the city of Bethany. Bratcher (1975: 401-409) describes Bethany as a province of Judea or a suburb of Jerusalem.⁴³ According to

⁴³ Brown (1971:422) explains that the Bethany near Jerusalem is well attested as the place where Jesus resided when visiting Jerusalem (Mark 11:11; 14:3); and therefore Bethany as the locale of John's story is plausible enough without a resort to symbolism. Bethany is probably to be identified with the Ananyanah mentioned in Neh 11:32. The sequence of towns mentioned before Ananyah (Anathoth and Nob) suggests that it should be localised just east of Jerusalem. Today the town is called Azariyeh – a name derived from "Lazarus."

Bratcher (1975:401-409), the Jews who lived here represented both followers and opponents of Jesus. Because of the uniqueness of John 11's story of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus in the gospel narratives generally, Bethany in Judea is an important spatial setting in the gospel tradition – particularly in John's Gospel. It is also narrated as the place where Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard and anointed Jesus' feet in preparation for his death (12:1-3). Theologically it may be connected to another place called Bethany on the other side of the river Jordan, where John first baptised people (1:28; 10:40). Both these centres are presented as life-giving spaces in the context of the narrative.

Jesus' journey to Bethany in Judea was to wake Lazarus from what Jesus calls "sleep" (11:11-13). The use of the aorist subjunctive in 11:15 (ἵνα πιστεύσητε) indicates the purpose of the miraculous sign that was to take place in 11:38-44: that the disciples might believe. The narrator reports that, after Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, many of the Jews who witnessed the miracle believed in Jesus (11:45). However, some went to tell the Pharisees about it (11:46-48). Jesus once again revealed the power and glory of God by raising Lazarus to life, thereby affirming his identity as the one sent by the Father (cf Suggit 2003:84). Consequently, Bethany becomes a place of which John's Gospel witnesses that many Jews came to believe in Jesus because of what He did there (11:45).

4.3.2 Temporal Settings

4.3.2.1 Day and night

As temporal settings, the expressions "day" and "night" according to John 9:4-5, have been discussed in Chapter 3 of the thesis (cf 2.5.2.2; 3.3.2.1). Jesus calls his disciples to join him in doing the work of his Father "while it is day", for "night is coming when no one can work." The latter probably refers to Jesus' suffering and death, as discussed in Chapter 3 (cf 4.3.3.1). "Night" may also symbolise Jesus' physical departure from the world.

In John 10 the narrator reports how Jesus and his disciples were doing God's work "while it is day" by protecting the believers who suffered excommunication from those "robbers and thieves." As their good shepherd, Jesus would protect them – literally and metaphorically by day and by night. Jesus' promise would remind the audience of a shepherd taking his sheep to the pastures by day, and bringing them safely to the fold. By night the sheep would be closed up as the door of the fold closes them in.

The functioning of the temporal settings of “day” and “night” in John 9-12 thus serves as both a warning and encouragement to Jesus’ followers in the post-synagogal period.

4.3.3 Social Settings

4.3.3.1 Jewish feasts

According to John’s Gospel, Jesus frequently attended Jewish festivals in the temple in Jerusalem (2:13,23; 4:45; 5:1; 6:4; 7:2,14,37; 8:59; 10:22; 12:1,12; 13:1). The feast of the Passover (Lev 23 and Deut 16) and the feast of Booths (or Tabernacles – Exod 23; 34) were some of the pilgrimage festivals which the Jews celebrated in Jerusalem. These were in remembrance of their deliverance and wandering in the desert from Egypt to Canaan.

One can anticipate that the settings in which Jesus taught, or made utterances about himself, would be of significance to the narrator of John’s Gospel. The *where* and *when* it happened, would emphasise the *what* He was saying and doing. It is probably in the context of one of the Jewish feasts that Jesus announced that He is the light of the world (8:12; 9:5). This probably happened at either the feast of Booths or Tabernacles (7:2), or at the feast of Dedication or Hanukkah (10:22). The former was linked to the sojourn of the Israelites in the wilderness, and the latter commemorated the restoration of the temple in Jerusalem in 165 BC (Deist 1990:94). The Hanukkah feast was also called the feast of Lights – a context which would emphasise Jesus’ self-revelation as the “light of the world” significantly.

The discussion on Jesus being the shepherd of his flock (John 10:1-21) continues in John 10:22-42. The narrator remarks in 10:22-23, “At that time the festival of Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple in the portico of Solomon.” Winter would typically be a time for shepherds to look carefully after the sheep. It seems as if the narrator describes this as a meaningful setting for Jesus to reveal himself as the good shepherd and the door for the sheep.

The passion and death of Jesus is narrated in John 18-19. Jesus, earlier referred to as “the lamb of God” (Jn 1:29,36), is metaphorically slaughtered during the Passover feast of the Jews. In 19:14 the narrator gives an indication of the temporal setting in which Jesus’ trial takes place: “Now it was the day of Preparation (of the lambs) for the Passover; and it was about noon.”

This idea brings the researcher to the role of sacraments in John's Gospel.

4.3.3.2 Sacraments

Scholars hold different opinions about the role of the sacraments in the Fourth Gospel. Both Wai-yee (2001:14-15) and Suggit (1993:15) warn that it is dangerous to talk about "sacraments" when dealing with the Fourth Gospel, since the word sacrament does not occur in the New Testament. This view is also supported by scholars like Bultmann (1971:138) and (Kysar 1993:123-124), who argue that the Fourth Gospel is actually anti-sacramental.

According to Kysar (1993:113-122), the Gospel of John does not directly refer to sacraments. The researcher agrees with Kysar by saying that undertones of sacramental activities however do appear in the Gospel.⁴⁴ The early Christian sacraments of baptism and eucharist are treated here as implied social settings in the Gospel of John. It may be argued that this category should rather be discussed as a spatial or temporal setting. However, the researcher discusses it as "social settings", since it brought the Jesus followers together as groups of believers.

According to the researcher, a discussion of indirect references to baptism and eucharist in the context of John 9-12 can illuminate the main research question of the thesis in a number of ways. During the period subsequent to the banning of the formerly blind man (and other Jesus followers) from the synagogue, members of the Johannine community seem to have suffered significantly. They faced excommunication from, and rejection by a society of which they once had been a part. As a result, they were alienated and powerless. Petersen (1993:81) describes them as people who were denied their identity by the synagogue officials. They now had a new identity. Jesus later consoled them by reminding them that the world hated them as his followers, because they were not of this world, even as He was not of this world (17:14-15).

The early Christian rituals of baptism and eucharist were *inter alia* meant to fulfil in this need. The new self-identity of the Jesus-followers was affirmed and strengthened through the rituals of baptism and eucharist. Being reminded of the death and glorification of Jesus

⁴⁴ Probable baptismal references mentioned by the narrator are: John 3:5-6; 13:4-12.

through baptism and eucharist established their new fellowship, and bound them together in new ways. In the view of the researcher, the sacraments represented moments in which the suffering disciples expressed their oneness in faith, as well as their solidarity with other believers. In the eucharist the believers are fed with the bread of life and are thus united not only with Jesus, but also with one another – a theme clearly expressed in the discourse of the last supper, and in the commandment, “Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another” (13:34).

According to Brown (1979:88), the sacraments represent the ultimate sphere in which believers experienced their new life in Christ. It has been discussed that Jesus was doing the work his Father sent him to do. In the researcher’s view, giving new light and life through baptism and eucharist formed part of this work. The inner solidarity of the Jesus followers was nurtured through the sacraments. In this way newcomers were re-socialised into the new reality of their existence with Jesus.

The Jews celebrated the Passover (πάσχα) feast because it reminded them of God liberating them from the house of Egyptian bondage (Exod 12:1-32). At the Passover feast Jesus taught and performed miracles that resulted in people believing in him and following him (Jn 2:23).

In the view of the researcher, the Jesus followers – after having seen his signs and having listened to his teachings – would not live as individuals as some scholars like Kysar believe (1993:112-122). John’s narrative witnesses about their strong interdependence and social cohesion (cf 13-17). It is likely that they regularly came together to celebrate their belief in Jesus the Messiah. Kysar (1993:112-122) argues that John was not confronted with the kind of issues that could arouse interest in institutional authority and structure. The researcher has a different view on this, namely that it is not only controversial issues that cause people to come together, as Kysar claims. People also come together when they have a common interest. An example is that of the Jews coming together to celebrate. The Jews are well-known for their religious festivals, commemorating various aspects of their history. Passover, for example, was celebrated in remembrance of their liberation from Egypt. In the view of the researcher, the confessors of Jesus as Messiah who were expelled from the synagogue must have had many reasons for coming together regularly. Some of those reasons are discussed under the following headings of “baptism” and “eucharist.”

(a) Baptism

People who were excommunicated from the synagogue, as well as others who believed in Jesus, had to search for a new identity and develop a new relation with him and one another. One such an opportunity for creating a new bond among the believers would be the ritual of baptism (βαπτίσμα). *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Arndt & Gingrich 1958:132) describes baptism as Jewish ritual washings, or, in special instances, to baptise. It also refers to baptism as “repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” The researcher prefers to connect baptism, as Brown (1979:88) does, to the sphere of church life. As a mark of identity it builds up the church of Christ. In the researcher’s view, the purpose of baptism for the church is to identify with Jesus Christ as their new life and their light.

For the Johannine narrator, the baptism of Jesus signifies the beginning of his ministry, which includes baptising others with the Spirit: “He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptises with the Holy Spirit (1:33b).” Believers were metaphorically born again through the gift of God’s Holy Spirit (3:5). The narrator later remarks that it was not Jesus himself but his disciples who baptised (4:1-2). In this sense the baptism by Jesus’ disciples can be seen as a continuation of the power that He manifested during his ministry. This would include the washing and opening of the eyes of the beggar born blind. In this sense baptism can be associated with enlightenment.⁴⁵

The washing done by the blind beggar at the pool seems to refer to his baptism.⁴⁶ The researcher understands baptism as Suggit (1993:89-94) puts it, a “baptismal allusion” – the start of a new life, entailing a break with the past. It is marked by the confession of Jesus as the Christ (9:22). The baptismal allusion is continued and made more explicit by the command to go and wash in the pool of Siloam (cf 3.2.1.1). Christian baptism, like the eucharist, primarily refers to the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ as a confession of faith. The Christian baptism, as the evangelist puts it, is always associated with the gift of the Holy Spirit (3:5).

⁴⁵ Culpepper (1983:193) claims that baptism remains in a somewhat equivocal position. Jesus baptises alongside John (3:22-23,26; 4:1), while the narrator insists, rather unconvincingly, that Jesus himself did not baptise (4:2). Although baptism seems to remain the normative practice for those entering the new life, the fourth evangelist qualifies its importance by tying it to the wider symbolic value of water, belief, and the work of the Spirit.

⁴⁶ According to Suggit (2003:77), the sending of the formerly blind beggar to “wash” in the pool of Siloam (9:7), suggests his baptism into Jesus, the one sent from God (8:42), so as to share his light and his life. According to him, the Greek word for pool (*kolumbethra*) in later years always referred to the baptismal font (cf 3.2.1.1).

Scholars like Kysar (1993:115-117) and Bultmann (1971:133-183) may not regard the washing of the blind beggar in the pool of Siloam as a sacrament. The researcher sides with Milne (1993:139) and Suggit (1993:89-90) who base their argument on the meaning of Siloam – “he who has been sent” (9:7). His “washing” in Siloam serves as his identification with Jesus, the one sent by God. The narrator reports that, after the blind man was baptised and healed, he increased in faith. Even the Jewish officials could see the difference and failed to separate him from Jesus (cf 3.2.1.4).

The rest of the narrative in John 9 continues with baptismal allusions in direct reference to the start of a new life in relation to Jesus, as argued by Suggit (1993:89). In 9:35 the baptismal account proceeds with Jesus asking the formerly blind man, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” (σὺ πιστεύεις εἰς τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου;). The sacrament of baptism in the context of the early Jesus followers would typically be associated with an expression of faith – hence the importance of the aorist subjunctive in 9:36.

(b) Eucharist

According to John 10:11, Jesus assures his followers that He as their shepherd lays down his life for his sheep (ὁ ποιμὴν ὁ καλὸς τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ τίθησιν ὑπὲρ τῶν προβάτων - 10:11). This utterance probably refers to Jesus’ death, for which He prepares his disciples in John 12, as part of their preparation for the Jewish Passover feast (cf 12:1; 13:1).⁴⁷

A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (Arndt & Gingrich 1958:328) describes eucharist to mean “thankfulness” or elements of the Lord’s Supper. Suggit (1993:25) explains that eucharist (ευχαριστία), like baptism, is a reminder of Jesus’ cross and resurrection. It represents the heart of the confession of Christian faith. Its meaning, though modelled on the Passover, therefore lies in making present the act of God’s love in Christ, which was the basis of the believers’ life.

However, like baptism, eucharist is not mentioned often in the New Testament (cf Suggit 1993:25). The researcher agrees with Suggit (1993:25) that there probably was no need to do

⁴⁷ Earlier, in John 6:11-26, Jesus took bread, broke it and after He gave thanks, He distributed it. Then He said: “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh” (6:51). Together with this “I am” saying (cf 6:35,48) and a long discourse on its meaning (6:25-59), Jesus performed yet another miraculous sign by multiplying bread and fish for more than five thousand people (6:1-15). After the people were fed, the gathering of left-over fragments was done so that nothing would be wasted. Until today, this resembles what is typically done at an orderly Christian eucharist.

so, since it was a regular part of the Christian life. For the early Jesus followers, eucharist was a celebration of God's love as expressed in John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." Such is the quality of the relationship between the Father and the Son (Jesus), and between God and the world (3:16), of which the Johannine community was called to be a part (Kysar 1993:115). Eucharist was therefore meant to keep Jesus and his followers in close relationship. In the eucharist, bread and wine become the sensory experience through which the ultimate reality of God's presence is communicated to believers (Kysar 1993:126-127).

The Christian eucharist is closely connected to the Jewish Passover as a feast of deliverance, an occasion for experiencing God's blessings. Because Jesus "lays down his life" for his followers, as the sacrificial lamb on their behalf (Jn 19), the eucharist is a reinterpretation of the Passover. Through tasting and eating bread and wine, the signs of God's love in the body and blood of Jesus, the believers identify with Jesus their deliverer, and with one another. According to Jesus' prayer in John 17:21, "that they may all be one", the disciples are called to become one body in Christ.

For the Jesus followers who were banned from the synagogue, the sacraments functioned as instruments of healing and togetherness. Through their worship, teaching, preaching, prayers, singing and sharing of the sacraments they were meant to be consoled and encouraged (cf Johnson 1999:125-149). As a reinterpretation of the Passover feast, it would remind them of the roots of this tradition – their deliverance from the house of bondage by God's grace (Exod 12:1-32).

To summarise: According to John 9-12, the narrative makes allusions to baptism and eucharist related to the new identity awareness of the Jesus followers – some of whom were banned from the synagogue by the Jewish authorities. The people who were excommunicated and those who believed in Jesus had to search for new expressions of their identity and unity as disciples of Jesus – the one sent by God to call and equip them also to be bearers of light and life. The sacraments were meant to fulfil this need – as reminders of God's love and provision in and through the Messiah.

4.4 PLOT

This chapter of the thesis briefly describes the plot development in John's Gospel according to chapters 9-12. Jesus is increasingly revealed as the one sent by God – through growing opposition and suffering. On the one hand, the characters acting as Jesus' opponents in John 9 continue to fight Jesus and his followers in 10-12. On the other hand, the narrator presents Jesus as the protagonist in the story as the good shepherd protecting and caring for his sheep. Jesus is seen in sharp contrast to the Pharisees on their different view points regarding the man born blind. The tension between them develops in John 10 as Jesus denounces them as thieves and the bandits robbing and stealing life and light from the sheep. Jesus came so that they may have life (10:10).

The narrator creates a dramatic narrative about who Jesus is, and about his disciples in doing the works of him who sent Jesus, amidst opposition. The Jews accuse him of being demon-possessed (10:19), and attempt to stone him to death on several occasions (8:59; 10:31). Jesus' disciples, as a result of being associated with him, are increasingly hated and rejected – to the point where they face persecution and expulsion from the synagogue (9:34). Jesus is aware that He has limited time available: "While it is day; night is coming when no one can work" (ἔρχεται νύξ ὅτε οὐδεὶς δύναται ἐργάζεσθαι – 9:4-5). For Guthrie (1970:949), night refers to the close of Jesus' mission. Other scholars regard this as referring to his passion and death.⁴⁸

The plot of John 9-12 develops in small themes as Jesus and his disciples do their work. Jesus is revealed as He is acts as the door for the sheep, providing the highest possible security against their enemies. The narrator shows that the sheep know the shepherd's voice, and that He call them by name (10:3). The sheep do not know the stranger's voice, they run away from strangers (10:5). The function of the door is literally to save the life of the sheep (10:10).

Thieves do not use the door, but climb in by another way (10:2). The narrator tells of the danger they pose to the sheep – they only come to kill and destroy. The thieves and robbers in the parable are equated with the Jews or Jewish authorities. They are characterised as

⁴⁸ Bruce (1983:208-209) argues that the coming "night" was the period of Jesus' withdrawal from the world. It may also refer to the deepening tension between Jesus and his disciples according to John – in 13:30 Judas goes out into the night, while the other disciples remain in the circle of the true light (cf John 12:35ff).

Jesus' main opponents. The narrator tells the audience/readers why Jesus complains about them: they steal and kill his sheep.

Jesus addresses the thieves and bandits using aggressive language and strong warnings. The tone seems to be that of someone who is angry with the group he/she is addressing. "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy" (10:10). The way the thieves and bandits are portrayed by the narrator highlights the mission of Jesus as the direct opposite. Thieves and bandits come to destroy, while Jesus is described as one who gives life and protection to the victimised. Jesus expresses no relationship with those who come to destroy his sheep. But his attack on the thieves and robbers indicates that He does not want to be separated from his sheep. The synagogue authorities decisively dealt with those who confessed Jesus as their Messiah – they were moved out of the synagogue, rejected by the society of which they had been a part. The authorities' way of dealing with the sheep ironically made more people to join Jesus the good shepherd (11:45,48).

As the plot develops, the disciples misunderstand their purpose of going to Bethany. For Jesus, the purpose of going to Bethany is to give life to Lazarus, and to be glorified. When the Jewish authorities heard about what happened to Lazarus, they were disturbed: "What are we to do? This man is performing many signs" (11:47). The members of the Sanhedrin were desperately afraid that Jesus' presence and activity in and around Jerusalem would attract a large following. "If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him (11:47-48)."

The subjunctive τί ποιούμεν can be translated as "what in the world are we to do?" Or, "what shall we do?" (11:47). The authorities use the word πάντες ("everybody"), which may be interpreted that they feared that the whole nation would move out of the synagogue under the leadership of Jesus. The narrator continues: "Many, even of the authorities, believed in him although they were afraid to confess it, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue" (πολλοὶ ἐπίστευσαν εἰς αὐτόν, ἀλλὰ διὰ τοὺς Φαρισαίους οὐχ ὡμολόγουν ἵνα μὴ ἀποσυνάγωγοι γένωνται). Their question, "What shall we do?" (τί ποιούμεν), indicates the embarrassment prompted by the "many signs" Jesus was doing. The Sanhedrin which was the central court of the Jewish people at that time, that operated under Roman jurisdiction (Milne 1993:172-174), feared that, if they did not intervene, everyone would believe in Jesus. Another fear of the Sanhedrin was that such a movement could prompt the Romans to "take" both the place or temple and the nation from them

(11:48). Earlier, it was always Jesus' claim that He is the Son of God, which was regarded as blasphemous and caused them to act against him (cf 5:18f; 10:33; see also 19:7).

The puzzle of the Jewish officials may be connected to the puzzle of the neighbours in the story of the blind beggar, after he was healed. They find their way to the authorities because the formerly blind man has been healed on the Sabbath (cf 3.2.2.1). At the time of Jesus, the delicate balance of power between Rome and the local religious and political authorities lay behind the Sanhedrin's conclusion that such popular messianic, miracle-working figures would create problems if left unchecked.

In the view of the researcher, the Jews are now facing a difficult problem of not knowing what to do with the giver of light, who is leading a new sect. The authorities' fear of Jesus seem to grow. This deepens the tension between them. If they let him carry on like that, "everyone would believe in him" (πάντες πιστεύουσιν – 11:48). The positive part of the crowd coming to believe in Jesus ironically adds more tension to their relationship (11:45-47). Meanwhile, many people are leaving the synagogue to follow Jesus. According to John 11, many of the Jews who had come to console Mary and Martha, witnessed what Jesus was doing, and believed in him. Some of them, the narrator remarks, went to report to the Pharisees what Jesus had done (11:45-46).

Jesus' opponents continue to seek to kill him. They do not believe the works that He and his disciples have been doing in his Father's name. They classify him as one with a demon (10:20). The dialogue of 12:37-50 once again ends in tension (cf 9:40-41). The plot of John's Gospel finally unfolds when the protagonist is executed by his opponents (Jn 18-19).

4.5 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER

In this chapter special attention has been given to Jesus as the revealer of the Father during the post-synagogal period. According to John 9-12, Jesus protected, supported, encouraged, and consoled his followers during their suffering of rejection and alienation by the Jewish authorities – by being the light of the world, the door for the sheep, the good shepherd.

The narrative of John 9-12 further contains allusions to sacramental practices typical of such a newly formed group's ethos. Implied activities related to baptism and eucharist indicate the early Jesus followers' sense of identity and unity – the start of the new life in close association with Jesus, entailing a break with the past, with the traditional synagogue.

Their new identity awareness is marked by the confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the one sent by God (9:22; cf Suggit 1993:90). The tension and conflict with the Jews that surrounded the healing of the blind beggar, as part of Jesus' revealing of God's work (9:1-41), led to further disputation with the Jews in the following discourses of John 10-12. Jesus reveals God, according to these chapters, by being the door and the good shepherd for the sheep.

God's work is subsequently made manifest through Jesus' surprising response to the death of Lazarus (11:1-37). When Jesus heard that Lazarus was sick, He went to Bethany with his disciples. He then dramatically raises Lazarus from the dead! (11:38-42). Lazarus' resurrection infuriated the opposition, while those who believed in Jesus, openly as well as secretly, increased in numbers (12:42-43). The resurrection of Lazarus may be seen as foreshadowing the cross and resurrection of Jesus himself. At the same time it may be linked backward to the opening of the formerly blind beggar's eyes. Both incidents reveal Jesus as a giver of life and light. Once again, the narrator of John uses a strategical combination of miraculous signs, "I am" sayings, and clarifying discourses to focus the audience's attention on the presence and work of the protagonist (9:4). This is the explicit purpose of John's Gospel, as echoed in 20:30-31: : "These (signs) are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name." This is also what it is about in their celebration of baptism and eucharist – that the work of God could be made manifest in their lives.

The researcher has argued that John 9-12 formed part of Jesus' response to the question of the disciples in John 9:2 regarding the cause of the blind beggar's suffering. The narrator repeatedly confirms that the issue at stake was not the cause of the man's physical blindness, but the audience's ability to recognise God's presence in Jesus – particularly under circumstances of suffering, albeit sickness, rejection or alienation.

The post-synagogal movement is characterised by Jesus and his disciples sharing God's presence – God's abundant light and life – with the suffering believers (10:10). Jesus' ultimate concern for his sheep is indicated by his willingness to lay down his life for them. The narrator reports that many people believed in Jesus and followed him (cf 4:53-54; 7:31; 10:41-42; 11:45). Those who received the light are identified by Jesus himself. He is the shepherd of the believers. He knows them by name and by voice – a sign of intimate relationship. They belong to him, and to one another (cf 13:34-35; 17:11, 20-21).

This chapter of the thesis has also dealt with the opponents of the protagonist in John's Gospel. After the healing of the formerly blind beggar, they still refuse to recognise God's presence in Jesus' works. Jesus ironically declares that their blindness and sin remain (9:41). The narrator metaphorically refers to them as bandits and robbers (10:1, 8), strangers (10:5), a hired hand (10:12). Scholars such as Bruce (1983:223) and Moloney (1976:145-146) identify Jesus' opponents as Israel's religious leaders. The Jewish leaders were Jesus' most determined opponents and deterred the sheep from believing in him (cf 2.3.4). They did not allow Jesus and his followers to rest. They consistently opposed Jesus in all He said and did. They revealed themselves as enemies of the light from above, as people belonging to this world (cf 3:31-36; 9:41; 10:25-27; 15:19). In the end, they put him to death – God's Messiah, the good shepherd, the light of the world (19:1-42).

The narrator consistently highlights Jesus as the central figure in the drama of John's Gospel – particularly in his revelation of God, and in his calling of disciples to continue God's work on earth. Those who believe in him as the one sent by God, are assured of his loving care and power under trying circumstances. After Jesus was raised from death, He commissions his followers in 20:21-23: "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you. When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'" Those who became his followers were inspired literally for their work as representatives of God in the world (cf Culpepper 1983:119).

In the final chapter of the thesis the discussion of the main topic, Jesus and suffering in John 9, continues. The question of the disciples in John 9:2, which triggered Jesus' response in 9:3-10:42 and further), will now be brought into interaction with similar questions among the Karanga faith communities of Zimbabwe. They also believe that suffering cannot be separated from either the sin of a member of the family or an individual member of the community. The main question to be attended to here is how the narratological purpose of John's Gospel in general, and John 9 in particular, may be appropriated to their particular circumstances of suffering.

CHAPTER 5

KARANGA FAITH COMMUNITIES ENGAGING THE IMPLIED NARRATOLOGICAL PURPOSE OF JOHN 9

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 3 of the thesis the Johannine narrative of Jesus healing a born blind beggar was discussed. According to the belief system of Jesus' disciples, such a person's condition could only have been caused by somebody's sin (9:2). This view was probably rooted in an old tradition from the Torah that suffering was a consequence of sin (Exod 20:5; Ezek 18:20). Jesus, however, surprisingly and dramatically shifts the focus of the disciples' question by explaining how God's grace is supposed to work amidst people's suffering. The purpose of the man's blindness was that God's work may be made manifest in his life ἵνα φανερωθῆ τὰ ἔργα τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ (cf 3.2.1.1). Chapter 3 of the thesis concluded that, according to John 9, neither the sins of the man nor his parents caused his blindness, but that it was for God's works to be revealed in him. Faith in the healer of the blind beggar subsequently resulted in the confessors' excommunication from the synagogue.

Chapter 4 of the thesis continued the discussion on Jesus as God's revelation by focusing on Jesus as the one who cares for those who confessed him as the Messiah – particularly those who have been excommunicated from the synagogue because of their identification with him. The latter have been discussed as suffering sheep under the protection of Jesus the light giver, the door, and the good shepherd (4.2.1.2). Their excommunication highlights Jesus' identity as the revealer of God.

John the evangelist wrote his Gospel with a specific purpose in mind: “so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name” (20:31). The Gospel was written with a real, historical audience of the first century AD in mind. Little is known about them today (cf 2.1). Audiences/readers of today are challenged to reach out to the so-called “implied audience” in the text – the audience the author anticipated his addressees to become. The signals and clues provided in the text were supposed to guide them towards fulfilling the purpose of the narrative (20:30-31). The researcher calls this the “narratological purpose of John's Gospel.”

As a canonised book of the church, John has continued through the centuries to invite and challenge Christian audiences and readers – across times and cultures.

One such a present-day audience who is particularly challenged by the narratological purpose of John's Gospel, is extended the Karanga Christian community of Zimbabwe. They still function to a large extent in the Jewish paradigm reflected in John 9:2. In general, Karanga faith communities still believe that any kind of illness, misfortune or death is a consequence of sin committed by a member of the community or family (cf 1.2). As already indicated, the researcher is a born Karanga and a Karanga Christian believer who is ministering among the Karanga today. The researcher is thus familiar with what is causing fear and suffering among Karanga faith communities (cf 1.1).

This chapter of the thesis will focus on the Karanga people's (supposed) interaction with the implied narratological purpose of John 9. The researcher is concerned with the implied effect of John 9 on Karanga Christian communities of faith today. Their traditional belief regarding the cause of suffering seems to be analogous to the Jewish belief reflected in the question raised by the disciples in John 9:2. Many Karanga Christians (still) believe that suffering is the direct or indirect consequence of the sins of an individual family or community member. "Suffering" in the Karanga context can mean to suffer pain, or to be made to suffer (*kurwadziwa kana kurwadziwa*). The pain can be caused by illness, by someone who is jealous, or by revenge for an evil deed.⁴⁹ Instances of severe illness, misfortunes, and mysterious experiences in families have made some Karanga believers worship both God and their ancestors, as shall be seen under the section on *n'anga* (herbalist).⁵⁰ Appropriate analogies with Karanga faith communities will be discussed while cross-referring to Chapter 3 of the thesis.

The researcher's point of departure is John 9 – particularly the shift in emphasis brought about by Jesus' response to the disciples' question. The chapter will focus on how the faith of Karanga Christians is affected by their traditional belief that suffering is caused by sin, and more specifically on how John 9 challenges their belief system. The researcher is

⁴⁹ An essay called "Utility and suffering in culture" (2008 Online) explains that suffering or pain in this sense is a basic affective experience of unpleasantness and aversion associated with harm or threat of harm in an individual. It constitutes the negative basis of affective states (emotions, feelings, moods, sentiments). The term suffering necessarily includes the term pain.

⁵⁰ Magesa (1997:47) says it has to be kept in mind that the ancestors consist of the founders of the clan. These are the pristine men and women who originated the lineage, clan or ethnic group, and who provide people with their name(s).

convinced that John 9 is supposed to act as a powerful lens towards their transformation – towards seeing Jesus differently according to the story of the blind beggar, and thereby responding in new ways towards their own suffering.

The chapter is introduced by exploring the Karanga religion and culture. It briefly gives a background of the Karanga people; the god they worship, and the culture that continually influence their belief in Jesus Christ. Their view on suffering is discussed – particularly their view on the causes of illness. Jesus’ response to the disciples’ question in John 9:2 challenges Karanga faith communities radically to rethink their understanding of suffering. The expected response of Karanga Christians to John 9 will therefore be explored, accounting for its ongoing relevance as a life-changing and life-giving canonised text far beyond its own time and historical context.

It will be argued how John 9 is supposed to function as a lens through which Karanga faith communities may learn to approach suffering in more constructive ways. Instead of asking about the causes of their suffering, and relating it to the sins of individuals, John 9 may help them to be (more) open to God’s surprising presence, care and consolation amidst their pain. In this way, their suffering may serve as an opportunity for God to be revealed in their lives, in ways similar to that of the Jesus followers in John 9 (cf Chapters 3 and 4 of thesis).

Even though the majority of Karanga people believe in the God of the Bible, many of them still believe that their ancestral spirits are their supernatural protectors.⁵¹ About seventy to seventy five percent of Zimbabweans attend Christian churches. However, Christianity is often mixed with indigenous beliefs. Besides Christianity, the Mwari cult is the most practised non-Christian religion in Zimbabwe, which involves ancestral worship and spiritual intercession. Mwari is an unknown supreme being that communicates with humans through a cave dwelling oracle known as the “voice of Mwari.” For them, the God of the Bible is the God of the universe, while the Mwari of the Karanga is the one found in the *Matonjeni* cave. As was the case with the early Jesus followers, it is certainly painful for Karanga Christian believers radically to reinterpret their traditional beliefs, and where necessary, even to abandon them.

⁵¹ Mbiti (1977:13) claims that even if Africans are converted to another religion like Christianity, they do not completely abandon their traditional religion (immediately). It remains with them for several generations and sometimes centuries.

Narrative elements, such as characters, point of view, settings, and plot, that were used in Chapters 3 and 4 of the thesis, will be used as literary techniques in this chapter as well. The main sources to be used in this chapter are Culpepper (1983), Suggit (2003), and Shoko (2007). Culpepper and Suggit serve as major sources right through the thesis. Shoko, a Karanga by tribe and birth, has recently done an empirical study on the belief systems of Karanga people in Zimbabwe. His book is titled, *Karanga indigenous religion in Zimbabwe* (2007). Shoko analyses traditional Karanga views on the causes of illness and disease, mechanisms and their disposal, as well as the methods they use to restore health. The researcher will make use of some of these concepts, albeit critically. Since the empirical study done by Shoko in 2007 still accounts sufficiently for the beliefs and fears of Karanga people (for the purpose of the thesis), the researcher has not undertaken an empirical research.

The evidence of other scholars, such as Gelfand (1966), who wrote about Karanga (Shona) spirits and power, Daneel (1970) who wrote about the Karanga God, Chavhunduka (1978), who wrote about traditional healers, and Bucher (1980) who wrote about Shona spirits, will also be used. Daneel and Gelfand are white people who worked among the Karanga, and Chavhunduka and Shoko are both Shona people born in Zimbabwe, and well versed with the Karanga culture. Most of these authors have also written about suffering among the Karanga.

The following themes will be discussed in this chapter of the thesis:

- Who the Karanga are (as a community of faith), and who the God is they traditionally worshipped and still worship;
- Karanga culture (*tsika*): marriage, child birth, sickness, death, ancestral spirits (*mudzimu*), avenging spirits (*ngozi*), and witchcraft (*uroyi*);
- Sex related causes (*upobwe*) and general causes for suffering (*zvirwere zvokungonyuka*);
- Diagnosis of suffering: herbalists (*n'anga*) and elders (*vanhu vabva zero*);
- The expected response of Karanga Christian communities to the implied narratological purpose of John 9 under the following subheadings: Characters, settings, and plot.

Some of the questions to be discussed in this chapter are: How does John 9 challenge the belief system of Karanga Christian communities? How can they, who to a large extent still function in the Jewish paradigm reflected in John 9:2, become the audience/readers the narrator had in mind? Thus: How can Karanga Christians move away from asking questions about the *causes* of their suffering, towards asking questions about the *purpose* of their suffering? In sum, how can Karanga Christian communities fulfil the implied narratological purpose of John's Gospel?

The chapter is not meant to deal with all religious beliefs and practices of the Karanga in Zimbabwe, but rather to focus on primary cultural traditions regarding the causes of sickness. Against this background, Christianity in general, and the legacy of John's Gospel in particular, has to be viewed as a new religion to the Karanga traditional belief system.

5.2 KARANGA RELIGION AND CULTURE

5.2.1 Karanga religion

Zimbabwe's largest indigenous group is the Shona. Their tribal language is Shona. Representing over 80% of the population, the Shona tribe is the most dominant and culturally influential tribe in Zimbabwe. There are five main Shona language groups: Korekore, Zezuru, Manyika, Ndau, and Karanga. The traditional Karanga God is called Mwari. The story of Mwari will be dealt with briefly in the following section.

5.2.1.1 God (Mwari)

Before the era of colonialism, Mwari was the ultimate authority for the people of Zimbabwe (cf Daneel 1970:15; Bhebhe 1979:19). The worship of Mwari was handed down from generation to generation. Besides Christianity, the Mwari cult is still the most practised non-Christian religion in Zimbabwe today. It involves ancestor veneration (even worship) and spiritual intercession.

The Mwari of the Karanga is an unknown supreme being who traditionally dwells in the *Matonjeni* caves, south of Bulawayo (Zimbabwe). Mwari communicates with humans through an oracle known as the "voice of Mwari." Sources such as Bhebhe (1979:47-162), Daneel (1970:19) and Aschwanden (1989:200-201) refer to Mwari as the God of Matonjeni. Aschwanden (1989:16-204) calls him the God who lives in the sky.

To the Karanga people Mwari is almighty, as some sources like Van der Merwe (1981:3-15) and Aschwanden (1989:16-204) indicate. Mwari was and is still a God of national interest to Zimbabwean people. Mwari was/is less involved in the affairs of individuals, choosing to concentrate on national interests such as providing rain to the people. Mwari gives his people rain in times of drought, and advice on the course of action in times of a national crisis (Daneel 1970:15).

Mwari is also the God of the ancestral spirits. Mwari uses the ancestors (*mudzimu*) as his messengers. The ancestors are spirits of the forebearers of families. These ancestors are normally spirits of men or women who haunt families if they are begrudged in their demands (cf Gelfand 1962:52-53).⁵² A visit to their families is either by sickness or by death. However, not every sickness is caused by ancestors. This aspect shall be dealt with further in this chapter.

In the olden days Mwari had messengers called *manyusa*, who represented chiefs of different tribes in Zimbabwe. These messengers carried problems of the tribes they represented to Mwari, and each messenger received the response of Mwari in his/her own language. Mwari's response was transmitted to the different tribes through these messengers. The Karanga people respected and feared the messengers of Mwari because they carried messages from Mwari, and also from people. The *manyusa*'s also took gifts to thank Mwari for rain and other tribal provisions.

Until today, some of the Karanga people worship their Mwari through their ancestors. The same Mwari's rituals for rain are still performed. Beer is brewed and taken to the ritual place and as the elderly worship him, they give their God beer by pouring it on the ground with the spokesperson uttering words to their God.

5.2.1.2 Herbalists (*n'anga*)

In the medical world of today people use sophisticated machines. Diagnosis is made by means of diagnostic tools, mostly found at hospitals or clinics. Some Karanga faith communities, when under pressure of illnesses, have their way of diagnosing people by

⁵² Magesa (1997:47) says it has to be kept in mind that the ancestors consist of the founders of the clan. These are the pristine men and women who originated the lineage, clan or ethnic group and who provide people with their name(s).

using *n'angas*.⁵³ The causes of illness and disease, the mechanisms of diagnosis at their disposal, and the methods and resources which the Karanga use to restore health, make them not to abandon their traditional beliefs. When a family wants to consult a *n'anga*, they will consult more than one to ensure that they do the right thing. One *n'anga* is said not to be enough for an accurate indication of the cause of illness.

Shoko (2007:71) defines a *n'anga* as a “diviner-herbalist” (*munhu anotauroa zvakavanzika*). There are Karanga *n'angas* who heal people while being guided by the spirits of ancestors, while people with knowledge of healing herbs are also called *n'angas*. Those who know herbs, collect the herbs and treat their patients just as medical doctors do. However, *n'angas* who consult their ancestors, use different methods. They have their way of invoking the ancestral spirits. They sing to invoke the spirits to possess them. Before they are possessed by the spirits, they cannot do any work of diagnosing their patients. As the singing goes, the *n'anga* takes the snuff into his/her nose, and some snuff is thrown down. The *n'anga* will start to shake his/her body or head, and make noises. The face is changed to show that the person is possessed. If the voice is that of a male spirit, the people present greet the spirit by saying, “Greetings, uncle” (*moroi sekuru*), or, in the case of a female spirit, “Greetings, grandmother” (*moroi mbuya*). Sometimes the spirit will respond, pretending to laugh.

N'angas are regularly visited even by Karanga Christians who struggle with prolonged illness. They may hide from coming to church for some time, and later come back when they are through with their rituals to satisfy their ancestors, as instructed by the *n'anga*. Some are discovered by the elders and undergo church discipline. Others backslide, and when visited by members of the faith community, will tell why it has happened: *Ndakanga ndanyanya kurwarirwa ndikaenda kun'anga* (“Illness in my family overpowered me, I went to consult a herbalist for help because I could not stand the illness any more”).⁵⁴

⁵³ Daneel (1974:194) remarks that many Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) members worship the ancestors and consult the *n'anga*, or run to the hospitals in cases of emergency. Daneel refers to a DRC member who once said, “If you ask my mother about her church, she will tell you that she is a member of the Dutch Reformed Church. But we know that she is at the same time a practising *n'anga* with a *shavi* spirit.”

⁵⁴ Daneel (1974:134) writes about a man who found himself in the difficult situation of either having to backslide (*heduka*) as a church official and accept his role as future ritual officiate in the traditional sense of the word, or to maintain an unblemished position in the church. If he shirked the ritual, thus endangering his younger sister, he would run the risk of being branded the scapegoat by his relatives. In the end he succumbed to the pressure of his relatives. The ritual did take place - an ox was ritually slaughtered. After the ceremony, a delegation consisting of the church official's aunt and uncle (*vatete, babamunini*), and several of his younger relatives, went to a *n'anga* nearby to find out if the spirit was favourably disposed towards their efforts to appease it.

Patients are diagnosed by a *n'anga* – either by just looking at the patient, or by throwing bones of animals, or small shaped pieces of wood, called *hakata*. The *n'anga* uses the *hakata* or the bones to diagnose the cause of the illness.

N'angas, when on duty, wear their colourfully decorated white and red, or black and white cloth (*mucheka unamavara matsvuku namachena, kana kuti mavara machena namatema*). Some *n'angas* dress animal skins or bird feathers (*mambava ehwatya*) around their waist or shoulders. *N'angas* also wear charms and ornaments on their ankles, wrists, and sometimes on their necks – especially women. Those who come to consult a *n'anga* remove their shoes and enter the room while leaving their shoes outside the hut or house. It is traditionally unacceptable to enter the consulting room with your shoes on.

5.2.1.3 Elders (*vanhu vakura*)

The Karanga people admit, or unwillingly agree, that those suffering as a result of illness or disease in a family, can only be diagnosed by people who are designated as diviners or “elders.” The main qualification for people to become elders is that they normally have to be fully grown-up people (*vabvazero*), who may sometimes be spiritually possessed. There are, however, people in the Karanga faith communities who can treat illnesses of different kinds without using ancestral spirits. Some of them have been discouraged to come up clearly because of the name *n'anga*. The work they do may be the same, but the methodology differs. Some are called “witches” or “wizards” because of their knowledge of healing herbs. The researcher classifies this as a disadvantage to the Karanga faith communities. Further study on this has to be encouraged because not everything that these herbs are used for is for evil.

Among the elders are those who diagnose through dreams and observation. They diagnose illness through dreams and interpretation of the foreseeable future. The elders, as Shoko (2007:78) claims, are believed to be able to do so without the expressed aid of the ancestors. The dreams of the elders work only in their family members – so they are not consulted by everybody like *n'angas*. Sometimes these dreamers miss the point in their diagnosis, and turn out to be “liars.”

Elderly Karanga women are known to be most useful in diagnosing by observation – especially by observing their young children and unmarried girls who fall pregnant.

Accordingly, knowledge about the symptoms and nature of common illness is imparted to girls by the grandmothers, the reservoirs of tradition, at the time of puberty. Different illnesses have characteristic symptoms, and the elderly women easily know what a child, or even a grown-up girl, is suffering from. Sometimes the diagnosis of an illness is assisted by the action of the child. Urine and waste products may serve as a guide to the mother about what her child is suffering from. Such symptoms can tell a mother that the child suffers from, for example, stomach-ache (*kurwara mudumbu*). There are also diseases such as measles (*gwirikwiti*) – a dangerous disease to children. It causes skin rash on the child's skin, and can be deadly.

The elderly people of the Karanga can diagnose quite a number of minor illnesses or diseases themselves, which they do not refer to the *n'anga* or herbalist. So their being advanced in age is an asset in diagnosing illnesses and diseases.

5.2.1.4 Summary

The traditional God of the Karanga people is Mwari who lives in a *Matonjeni* cave. Mwari has messengers who carry messages from the people to Mwari, and from Mwari to the people. These messengers are the ancestral spirits of the fathers, mothers, grandfathers, grandmothers, and aunts. The Karanga believe that their ancestors are their guardians against enemies. When they wrong these ancestors and raise their anger, the result is suffering with illnesses of all kinds. Consequently, they are forced to consult the *n'angas* – to be told what to do to appease the ancestors. *N'angas* have the ability to diagnose the cause of misfortune or illness. Even members of Karanga Christian communities live in fear of raising the anger of their ancestors.

To know more about how Karanga people react when illness or other forms of suffering occurs in their families, the researcher will now discuss different settings related to the Karanga experience of suffering (cf 2.5), namely culture (*tsika*), marriage, mysterious sickness (*mudzimu*), witchcraft (*uroyi*), avenging spirits (*ngozi*) and natural sickness (*zvirwere zvapasi*).

5.2.2 Karanga culture (*tsika*)

Culture comprises language, habits, ideas, beliefs, marriages, customs, social organisation, inherited artifacts, technical processes and values. It encompasses the total process of

human activity. Niebuhr (1952:46) describes culture as an artificial secondary environment which people superimpose on the natural.

Likewise, the Karanga culture (*tsika*) consists of social, economic, spiritual, and educational aspects. Karanga people received a social heritage of traditional beliefs, family values and customs, which have been transmitted from generation to generation. The Karanga culture is concerned with what is good for male and female, child and adult. It *inter alia* concerns their diet, which primarily consists of *sadza* (maize or corn). Maize is grounded into a fine meal, which is then cooked with water until it is the consistency of mashed potato. Although eaten plain, *sadza* is often served with a vegetable or meat sauce to give it flavour. The Karanga are further known for their stone sculpture. This tribe of Zimbabwe has a rich artistic heritage, which includes decorative fabric painting.

As far as cultural practices regarding illness are concerned, Karanga people firmly believe that behind every illness is a cause for it. Deeply rooted in the Karanga culture is a perspective that illness only comes when a family member does what is evil, or when you are bewitched by your enemy or enemies (*ngozi*). This belief has been transmitted orally from generation to generation, and it still lives among people today – even among Christian believers (cf 5.2.1.2). In the case of Christian believers, family members may consult traditional means to look for confirmation of their suspicion.

The Karanga people are well organised socially. They organise national social issues and family issues separately. The tribal issues fall under the chief as the head of the tribe. The tribal issues are run by the headmen, who control the villages on behalf of the chief. Suppose there is no rain in the chief's area, the chief invites the headmen to discuss when they can come together to call their gods for rain. The chief orders the tribe to brew beer and kill animals as sacrifice to Mwari. The beer to be offered to Mwari is not brewed by young or averagely old women, but by old women who no longer enter into sexual intercourse with their husbands. After the beer has been brewed, it is taken to a place where ceremonies of such nature are held. Beer is poured on the ground, and the chief will speak to the ancestors as the people clap their hands in respect of the offering (cf 5.2.1.2).

The same process is followed with family issues related to the ancestors. The clapping of hands is ended by the women's ululation. The clapping of hands and gapped ululation are done until the ritual offering is finished. The preparations for the sacrifices for the gods

have caused some Christian women to raise their eyebrows as they are forced to brew beer for the sacrifices, against their faith.

However, it is not only in brewing beer for *Karanga* sacrifices that Christian women experience suffering, working against their conscience, but also in marriages.

5.2.2.1 Marriage (*wanano*)

Marriage, according to the *Karanga* culture, is a means to attain full humanity. Marriage is seen by this ethnic group as a step-by-step, progressive development undertaken within the framework of the community. *Karanga* marriages involve the transferral (“payment”) of *lobola*. The daughter of a family cannot be taken away without the payment of *lobola*. She may get married by elopement, yet her parents will still demand that *lobola* be paid. While *lobola* is not meant to enslave a woman, some *Karanga* families have abused it and have caused women to suffer because of it.

What is *lobola* as a *Karanga* concept, and how is it conducted? The *Karanga* word *roora* is generally rendered into English as meaning either “bride-price” or “dowry.” The bride’s “price” in the *Karanga* culture is the paying of cattle. Goats and chickens are also important during the payment of *lobola*, because they are slaughtered to feed the son-in-law’s relatives who come to negotiate for *lobola*. *Lobola* is done at the girl’s home – her family charges the bridegroom for the *lobola* of their daughter. Cattle and money are used as means of payment. However, *lobola* is not to be regarded literally as “payment.” It should rather be seen as a token of gratitude to the parents for rearing the girl.⁵⁵ It is like compensating for the loss of their daughter, in honour of her status, and as an assurance that she will be treated well. A *lobola*-regulated marriage is recognised as legal by the Zimbabwean law.

After the *lobola* has been paid, the married girl is allowed to go to her husband’s home. Ceremonies are made to welcome the bride in the home of the bridegroom, with much rejoicing. (Nowadays church ceremonies are held, but in *Karanga* culture that will not be the end.) The bride is finally and traditionally surrendered by her parents’ relatives to the bridegroom at the bridegroom’s home. She receives many gifts, from relatives and friends

⁵⁵ According to Hand (2008 Online), *Karanga roora* should not be seen as payment for the bride. Valuables are given to the girl’s family to legitimate or seal the marriage. It is also important to recognise that this is not something which can be understood in isolation. *Roora* is but one component of the rich fabric of Shona custom, which defines and regulates the complex relationships between tribe, family and individual.

of the bridegroom. From now on she no longer frequents her father's home; she only goes back after some months. After staying with her mother-in-law for a while, she asks for permission to cook for her husband in her own hut or house. The woman has less power in decision-making. Many of the decisions are made by the husband who is the head of the family. Today, human right laws are causing some noise in certain families because of this philosophy.

Marriage is not complete in the Karanga culture until a child is born.⁵⁶ The family of the husband expects the married woman to bear children for the family. The in-laws expect the same. There is a general belief among the Karanga, Karanga faith communities included, that the family will grow when children are born into it. Some family members, even Christians, regard it as a problem when a woman cannot get pregnant and bear children. The bridegroom's family and the in-laws rest their eyes on the woman and not on the man. After the marriage ceremony, there comes a time when the two families will expect the young married woman to fall pregnant. When that time passes, suspicion starts to rise that either the man or the woman may be sterile. The blame normally is rested on the woman. This has caused much suffering, particularly on the side of Karanga women, including Christian women.

In some families, when the bride fails to get pregnant, certain steps are followed. A ritual or a series of rituals are performed after divination, with the view to rectifying the problem, and ensuring the victim and her kin's welfare (Shoko 2007:84). The researcher has witnessed some marriages breaking up because no child was born to the family. Married women suffer socially and psychologically when they do not bear children (cf 2.4.1). Some women who get divorced because of barrenness, remarry. Some of these get children after remarrying.

When a newly married woman gets pregnant, she knows that she is married to stay. After the birth of a child, marriage should not in any circumstances be broken. Now the marriage makes a binding demand that extends beyond present life. If the wife dies, she ought to be replaced by her young sister, according to traditional Karanga belief. Alternatively, it is believed that if the husband dies, one of his younger brothers should take the widow to

⁵⁶ Magesa (1997:127) says that marriage is not complete until a child is born. After the birth of a child, preferably a male child, marriage "should not in any circumstances be broken." The marriage bond even extends beyond the present life.

raise the offspring for the deceased. Through the birth of a child, husband and wife completely belong to one another, and the bond between the two families is sealed. The woman and the man gain a new status, a certain elderhood, among the people where they live.

Marriage in the Karanga culture can be a frustration if the married woman does not get pregnant. To illustrate this, the researcher tells a story here about a married Christian couple – as a paradigm of suffering at the lack of pregnancy.

The story is about a certain woman who could not fall pregnant, and who faked pregnancy for nine months, with the backing of her husband. Both of them were from Christian families. The man's parents did not want to have a childless daughter-in-law (*muroora*). The in-laws had made it clear to the couple that their customary marriage would have to be annulled if she could not bear a child. The parents of the husband emphasised that they would chase the *muroora* away from their home if she could not bear them a child. The couple, though going to church, tried the traditional way to bring the pregnancy on, but all they tried, failed. The two stayed together until the time of the expected pregnancy was almost over. The husband and the wife decided to run away because the family began to trouble them.

The wife came up with a fake plan. She tucked some sponges in her clothes to make the parents of the husband believe that she had conceived, and that a child was on the way. When they saw this, they kept quiet. They had been haunting her since her marriage to their son. The plan kept them going until the relatives of her husband discovered that the pregnancy was a fake. The husband stood by her because they loved each other. It was a pity that their secret plan was known before they could run away. The husband said to his parents, "I am standing by her because I love her – it's a pity that you happen to know about this before we could leave the home. We do not want to separate, for we have a Christian marriage with a vow not to separate but by death." The couple planned to flee to another place where they could stay peacefully. "We planned to lie that my wife had a miscarriage," he said.

Their secret was laid bare by a relative who told the family of the husband about the couple's plan. The in-laws were also told of the plan, and the father-in-law said, "I did not believe what I was told. But after asking female relatives to check my daughter, I discovered that she had indeed faked the pregnancy by tucking sponges in her clothes to

look pregnant.” In this family custom, it is compulsory for a married woman to bear children in order for the clan to grow. The woman and her husband admitted to the family that they had faked the pregnancy by tucking sponges in her clothes. The two understood the pressure culture exerts on married women. She said: “That is why I tried everything, and I mean anything, to fall pregnant. But when nothing happened, I was left without any alternative but to fake it to make them happy.” The pressure of the family on the husband eventually made the marriage break.

Meanwhile, a woman from another village was sentenced to three and half year’s imprisonment after stealing a child from a hospital. She had also faked her pregnancy, and wanted to prove her point by bringing home a newborn baby.

Should Christian couples break their marriages because they cannot get a child? Should cultural demands go that far? This is one of the difficulties women come across in a Karanga marriage. Karanga people typically look at the woman for a solution – not at both the bride and the bridegroom. Some families will start investigating the cause that blocks the pregnancy. Some women end up at their parents’ home to perform some rituals for their ancestors.

This, however, does not mean that men are never investigated to find if they are sterile. In cases where families discovered that the problem was with the man, some private arrangement was done for the young brother to raise children for his brother. Yet, women generally suffer more than men in the process of getting a child. Examples of this nature do happen in Karanga faith communities. Some marriages are caused to break if they do not have children, particularly because of the pressure from family members. To them, it is shameful to stay with a wife who does not bear children for the clan.

Besides circumstances related to marriage, there are other causes for suffering that the researcher selected for the purpose of the thesis. *Mudzimu* is one such example that causes suffering in many Karanga families.

5.2.2.2 Mysterious sickness (*mudzimu*)

The word ancestor (*mudzimu*) refers to the “spirit of a dead person.” It denotes both the spirits of the dead and the tribal guardian spirits (*mhondoro*). Some voices such as Gelfand (1962:51), Shoko (2007:33-38), and Amanze (2002:142-143) talk of *mudzimu* as spirits of the

dead that exist in a spiritual form. As a born and bred Karanga, the researcher agrees that the ancestors are the spirits of grandfathers, grandmothers, uncles, fathers, mothers, and aunts. The plural of *mudzimu* (singular) is either *mudzimu* or *vadzimu*.⁵⁷ Shoko (2007:33) argues that *vadzimu* are generally spirits of the patrilineal and matrilineal ancestors. Whenever the Karanga people are in trouble, they look back to the past, with the help of *mudzimu* and *ngozi* (cf 5.2.2.4). The general belief is that the spirit of a man or woman who dies with grandchildren, is important since those alive receive their protection from these ancestral spirits. How do the families feel about the treatment of *mudzimu*? Does *mudzimu* give full protection to their descendents?

Many Karanga Christians claim to have suffered illness at some stage because they have refused *mudzimu*'s demands. Normally it is said that they suffer because *mudzimu* would like to be invited home by them, and also to be worshipped by its descendants. The worship of the *mudzimu* has caused a stumbling block to some Karanga Christian community members. For the Karanga people, the remedy for suffering or affliction caused by the grieved ancestral spirits, is to pay their demands (*kuripa zvinodikanwa*). Their worship has caused backsliding in many Christian families where *mudzimu* is said to have visited them causing illness.

What is the function of *mudzimu* or *vadzimu* in the Karanga clan or family? *Mudzimu*'s function is believed to be protective. As guardian spirits their duty is to protect the family. In this regard *Colonization and Christianity in Zimbabwe* (2008 Online) remarks

that the dead are not dead. They are always around us, protecting us. There is no living person who is stronger than the departed. When the whole village prays together, they pray to the ancestral *Mudzimu* of the clan. When we pray to *mhondoro* for rain, we are praying to the guardian that unites the whole clan. This is one of the strongest spirits of the land.

Mudzimu is believed to protect their descendants against dangers such as diseases of all kinds, sorcery, witchcraft, accidents and others. *Mudzimu* is limited to the immediate perimeter of the family members from where they came. They are believed not to affect anyone else outside their clan or family. Though *mudzimu* is a protective spirit, according to

⁵⁷ According to *Shona and Ndebele Religions* (2008 Online), the *vadzimu* are believed to constitute an invisible community of the living, always around their descendants, caring for them, and participating in their joys and sorrows.

Karanga belief, it is said that in some cases (even in most cases) they have brought more suffering to their families than protection.

What does *mudzimu* do to the family if allegiance is not given to them? If prolonged illness is experienced in a family after either the father or mother had died, the first suspicion for that will be on the deceased father or mother. It may be that the ancestors are angry and are punishing their descendants for neglecting them. It may be that the spirit of a parent wants to be welcomed back to the family where he/she came from.⁵⁸ When allegiance is not given to *mudzimu*, it can arouse anger causing suffering of individual family members. It is believed that *mudzimu* can cause a child or elderly family member to be continually ill and not respond to treatment. Some of the mysterious illnesses caused by *mudzimu* are said to cause mental problems. *Mudzimu's* demands do not depend on whether you are rich or poor. *Mudzimu's* demands have to be met irrespective of material means. If you do not have what the spirit wants, you have to run around to borrow it from other relatives (*kucheneka kunedzimwe hama*). Individual "wondering spirits" refer to the spirits of parents and grandparents, and these are said to be mainly protective in function.

Chavunduka, a Shona by birth, agrees that Shona ancestors may bring sickness to those who disregard or forget them (1978:24-65).⁵⁹ Among the spirits of the dead are also spirits of those who died without children. Spirits without children or grandchildren, Gelfand (1962: 52) argues, have no one to talk to and no one to reveal to what they want. These spirits are said to haunt no one, but are harmless spirits.

Cases such as sickness or death bring family members, and sometimes extended families, together in order to discuss what to do. Cases such as serious sickness are normally attended to by grown-up people. Young people who are not yet married are not invited to participate. For serious sickness or death, family members will tell each other that such

⁵⁸ *Shona Culture Resource Guide* (2008 Online) reports that, at the grave site, Karanga people pour beer over the grave and place other items on it. An elderly person, maybe the deceased's son, will kneel and say a prayer of welcome to the deceased name, "We are calling you back home to be with us. Please guide and protect your family. If there is anything you need please let us know. Be kind to us." These words mark the incorporation of the wandering spirit back into the family circle.

⁵⁹ Also Magesa (1997:175) claims that the ancestors may cause illness and suffering. This is often diagnosed by religious specialists (diviners) to be the case. On being consulted about the cause of a person's illness, the diviner (*n'anga*) of the Shona people, for example, might say: "I have seen your one in trouble. Your trouble is serious. The cause of your illness, I have seen, is due to his dead father, whose spirit is complaining that he did not brew beer for him and no longer remembers him." Kayode (1984:18) confirms this by saying that ancestors punish the neglectful and disobedient, and are particularly severe on breaches of discipline and of the duties which each member of the family owes to one another and their head.

illness cannot be solved by prayer alone – *n'angas* have to help. The tradition is that if there is illness in the family, it must be investigated within the family, or through consultation with a traditional healer (*n'anga*) who is able to reveal its cause. Traditional healers are spirit-possessed people.

During trying times such as serious illness or death, some Christian believers may decide to suspend going to church – often becoming back-sliders because of it. The family members will then consult traditional healers for guidance. They consult more than one healer to make sure the traditional healers speak the same thing. Banana (1991:61) argues that traditional healers only heal those physical bodies that are classified as in immediate need of help.

If the family is told what the cause of the illness is and that beer, meat and other things are wanted by the ancestor, all members of the family are demanded to participate – even against their will. Refusing to cooperate with other members of the family may create family disputes or separation. If death takes place under such circumstances, the blame will be on the one who refused to take part in the rituals.

Why do families force their members to participate in ancestor worship if they do not wish to do so? Gelfand (1962:52-53) and Magesa (1997:47-50) argue that ancestors are the founders of the clan, and that they have a high influence on the living generation. Ancestors' claim is that they should not be begrudged in their demands to the living they left behind. If it is found that the ancestors are begrudged, the family suffers illnesses or misfortune. The spirit of the ancestor has to be pleased to stop it from causing sickness. The traditional healer has to be consulted. He/she will always tell the family to brew beer and kill an animal as an offering to the dead's demand. Thus, according to some Karanga Christians, the ancestors are feared because their spirits bring terror to the families, including those of Christian believers. Their belief suffers in their trying to survive, or to save the life of their children and themselves.

The Karanga culture demands unity from the family, whenever there is sickness or death in a family. If no member of the family confesses to have caused the illness, they talk about a way forward. The Karanga people believe that behind any suffering there must be a person responsible for it. At the same time the Karanga believe that a causer can be discovered through consulting a witchdoctor (*n'anga*), or by consulting members of the family.

Karanga people use the term *n'anga* to designate a diviner-herbalist, or anyone who is able to cure a disease. A *n'anga* is consulted to diagnose the responsible cause, and may prescribe a ritual remedy which, in this case, focuses on appeasing the spirit and eradicating evil. If the illness is caused by the ancestors, the family is told what the consequences will be. a Shona by birth says, that illness in families can be caused by ancestors when they are not pleased by the families from where they came. Karanga faith communities, that include members of these families, become part of the suffering because of their ancestors' demands.

The Karanga believe that when they perform rituals as complete families, their ancestors accept these ritual offers. If, therefore, a part of the family will offer rituals to the ancestors in the absence of others, illness will continue. The family ritual directly affects some members of the faith communities, who fear blame from other family members when there is illness in the house. They fear to be held responsible for the illness if they do not participate in the ceremony. Some families have ended up hating each other or fighting.

5.2.2.3 Witchcraft sickness (*uroyi*)

Karanga people believe that suffering can be caused either by ritual impurity, the breaking of a taboo, or a curse. Suffering may even in some cases be sent by the supreme being Mwari. Generally, many Karanga Christians think about suffering as being caused by the ancestors, or by witchcraft and sorcery (*uroyi*). What is *uroyi*? According to Karanga culture, a *muroyi* is someone who travels naked by night, sometimes on the back of animals such as hyenas or bere (wild animal like a dog). Gelfand (1966:73) owes a definition from a Karanga *n'anga* (one Chikweti) who confirms that *muroyi* (witch) is a person who walks about in the night, without clothes. Karanga people believe that *muroyi* uses *chidoma* (a form of a puppy), which is used by the witch or wizard to cause fear and illness. A *muroyi* or witch refers to women, and a wizard to men.

Karanga Christian believers, like Karanga traditional believers, are extremely afraid of the dead, whom they believe hold more power after their death than what they did during their life time. They thus have the potential to cause danger in the form of illness, misfortune and death. The researcher has heard and seen people in agony because of illnesses claimed to have been caused by spirits of the dead. Suffering being sent by the ancestors is regarded as punishment for wrong doing, for being forgotten, for some breach

of tradition or custom. It is believed that dishonour to the ancestors can create space for witches to cause suffering to their descendants.

Witchcraft (*uroyi*) and sorcery are both regarded as entirely evil. According to Karanga people, both can cause death. Many Karanga Christians have suffered complicated illnesses in their families, which also affected their belief in Christ. When Karanga believers face illnesses they believe is generated by witchcraft, their final resort is to go to *n'angas* or to the said prophets. Very often members of these faith communities mix their traditional belief with Christianity when it comes to suffering and illness, because of fear. In that way they feel satisfied that they are not losing something valuable, but that they actually benefit from both religious systems. They still cling to the traditional belief and express their common view that sin causes their suffering, while others hold a belief in ancestral sin they inherited.

When facing illness in the family, there is always a tendency among the Karanga to sit together in their gender groups. If there is a sick child, women ask the mother of the child if she can tell of any sin related to the cause of her child's sickness. Men do likewise, until these social groups discover which of the two parents should confess before the child the sin he/she committed. These confessions are believed to save children's lives. This, however, does not mean that all children's lives are saved in this way since some children die in spite of the exercise. Family ties are very strong among the Karanga people, especially in times of illness. Their coming together in social groups when there is a problem, is very common. When there is illness in a family, Christian and other believers typically come together, share their pain and wisdom, and decide together what to do.

Karanga people also believe that some diseases that affect the lives of their families are the consequence of an evil spirit, or an evil curse from a witch doctor (*n'anga*). They also believe that only a traditional healer (*sangoma*) can diagnose and remove such evil affliction. This is only done when a young woman and man cannot find out for themselves why their child is ill, and fear of losing their child if the illness is caused by the ancestors. In such cases the advice of elderly groups may be particularly helpful and persuasive.

However, would they follow the advice of members of the family to honour their ancestors? If the family believes that the sickness or suffering is not a result of *uroyi*, but of a dead parent whose spirit wants to come home, relatives will pressurise the young couple

to meet the demands of the deceased parent. Family members will explain the advantage of respecting and doing what they are asked to do to please the dead parent.⁶⁰

Some of the illnesses that affect Karanga families are: avenging spirits (*ngozi*), natural sickness (a child refusing to suck milk from the mother, and diseases such as measles), mysterious sickness and death. These are not issues for an individual member of the family to take care of, but for the whole group of family members. Some Karanga followers of Christ find it difficult to separate themselves from worshipping their ancestors, even though they have committed themselves to Christ. *Ngozi* is another serious sickness that causes a lot of suffering among the Karanga believers. What is it, and is there a way to avoid it or drive it away?

5.2.2.4 Avenging spirits (*ngozi*)

Ngozi (avenging spirit) is another spiritual agent, one of the most feared by Karanga people – also by Karanga Christians. The reason for this is that *ngozi* is a source of illness, disease and death. It is called an avenging spirit (*kumukira munhu akakuuraya*). Karanga people are afraid to commit murder because of fear of the avenging spirits. It is the spirit of the dead person wronged by being killed. It causes a lot of suffering. It may be a spirit of a woman or a man.

He or she dies with the feeling of having been wronged by the offender, and is said to come back seeking justice against the living.⁶¹ Shoko (2007:9) calls *ngozi* spirits the most dreaded, while Bucher (1980:69) and Hirmer (2001:11-14) call their attacks to be sudden and extraordinarily harsh, involving the death of several persons of a family grouped in quick succession. If one member of the family gets involved in killing, *ngozi* is even thought to visit the whole family in order to cause misfortune.

Justice for the evil done to a deceased person happens through illness or death to the family of the wrongdoer. *Ngozi* is understood by the Karanga people as *chirango* (punishment for the wrong done). The punishment ranges from minor illnesses to death.

⁶⁰ According to the *Shona Culture Resources Guide* (2008 Online), it is believed that, when a grown-up Shona person dies, his/her spirit wanders about. It is a homeless spirit. Only until the surviving relatives of the deceased “welcome that spirit back” does it become a legitimate ancestral or family spirit.

⁶¹ According to *Shona and Ndebele Religions* (2008 Online), the *ngozi* are, briefly, the spirits of deceased individuals who were greatly wronged, neglected by a spouse, murdered, or otherwise neglected. They attack through sudden death of several members of the same family, or through ill people who fail to respond to treatment.

The anger of *ngozi* causes people to be even more angry and upset. Amnesty International released a report that shows the danger of *ngozi*, and that it will not perish but rise.⁶² If a *ngozi* or *mudzimu* spirit is detected, the *n'anga* advises that the only way out is to accede or agree to the demands of the spirit. If the demand of a *ngozi* spirit is to be compensated, payment happens by giving away a young girl and cattle to the family of the deceased. The young girl compensates for the loss of the deceased by bearing children. Shoko (2007:59) argues that

the cure for *ngozi* is compensation ... In this case of murder, *mombe* (head of cattle) and *soro* (a virgin girl) was eventually paid to the bereaved family as a compensation, on the understanding that the girl would be married to one of the family members and anticipated to give birth to a son who would replace the murdered victim and perpetuate the genealogy.

That is why *ngozi* is feared by people – because their demand is payment for the sin committed by giving away an innocent young girl. What happens after the payment has been done? Once the demands of *ngozi* (the avenging spirit) is met, a truce is observed and the avenging spirit of the dead may rest in peace. If the demands of the avenging spirit is ignored, the punishment on the wrongdoer's family becomes regrettable.⁶³ *Ngozi* is feared by the Karanga – if it takes revenge against you because you delayed to pay its demands, it is claimed that it can sweep the family with death.

There is a story of a certain woman who was killed by a certain man, who concealed the killing to his family. It is said that the spirit of the murdered woman was raised from the grave, and sent by the bereaved family to attack the victim through the process called (*kumutsa ivhu*), in order to raise the soil or the dead. The spirit of the murdered woman descended upon the wrongdoer's family, seeking severe punishment inflicted as revenge. It is said that children and elderly people were killed but that the killer was left alive. It is a belief of the Karanga people that the avenging spirit normally attacks other members of the family, letting the wrongdoer alive to suffer his/her pain. Sometimes the wrongdoer ends up by becoming mad. It is believed that the *ngozi* of a woman is more disastrous than

⁶² According to *Zimbabwe: New Report Reveals Deep Misery as Crisis Persists* (2008 Online), the author reports, "I think very soon Zimbabweans who have committed offences through Zanu PF prompts might wish to know that *nyaya hayirove, ngozi ingozi chete*, the bones of those who have perished, will rise." This information about *ngozi* and suffering is taken via the world wide web to the international world because of avenging spirits.

⁶³ Shoko (2007:59) argues that if the demands of the avenging spirit are regarded as illegitimate and are ignored, illness will continue to beset the family of the wrongdoer and it may be wiped out.

that of a man. Because of these encounters, it is understandable why Karanga Christian communities hold suspicion about mysterious illnesses, and why they believe that such illnesses must have a root cause.

5.2.2.5 HIV and Aids

HIV and Aids started to attack the Karanga communities in the early 1980s. People suffered from these as prolonged illnesses – like the illnesses caused by ancestors (cf 5.2.2.2) and *ngozi* (cf 5.2.2.4). The Karanga believe that it is either their ancestors or the avenging spirits causing this type of suffering. It thus took the Karanga people time to accept that HIV and Aids is a sexually transmitted disease. Even today there are people who still believe that the cause of HIV and Aids comes from the ancestors or evil spirits – not that it is a sexually transmitted disease. They try to treat it at home, but without success. Witchdoctors still continue to cheat people. A lot of resources are being wasted, yet people still die. Karanga people who associate the disease with sexual misconduct, nicknamed it *runyoka*, meaning “caused by witchcraft.”

From the researcher’s view, Karanga Christian communities in Zimbabwe are facing – like the audience of John 9 – the radical challenge of shifting from the causes of their suffering to how Christ may be glorified through their suffering. To witness about the presence of Jesus in the midst of suffering is not easy. However, that is what John 9 is all about.

5.3 SOCIAL AND MORAL CAUSES FOR SICKNESS

5.3.1 Natural sickness (*zvirwere zvinongonyuka*)

In the experience of the Karanga people not every illness is caused by personal forces. There are diseases that develop from the earth, called “sicknesses from nowhere” (*zvirwere zvokungonyuka*). These are illnesses such as scabies (*mhizi*), flu or colds (*dzibwa*), coughs (*kukosora*) and measles (*biribiri*). The main characteristic of these conditions is that they are mild and disappear with little or no medication. However, when such illness resist treatment and last a long time, then the Karanga search for alternative causal explanations.

Karanga people believe that measles can cause blindness or death of a child due to sin committed by parents. The researcher had a talk with one elderly mother about the causes of illness. The elderly mother told the researcher that a sick child who suffered from

measles had to be taken out of the home into the bush during the day, and brought back home in the night. This was done to avoid getting in touch with the married people of the community, it is said. The suspicion is that the shadow or sinful acts of those with sexual contact cause death to a child sick with measles. Thus, isolation from the community until the child is healed serves to safeguard the child's life.

5.3.2 Baby and mother's milk (*kuramba mukaka*)

Karanga culture typically describes types of suffering in terms of its causes, for example, suffering as a proof for, or testing of moral behaviour. If a newly born child refuses to suck milk from the mother's breasts and continues to cry, then the moral conduct of the parents has to be proven. The Karanga people would first suspect a sin committed either by the mother or the father. The family will sit down with the parents of the child and ask them to confess their sins. Some children are said to have died after the parents refused to confess their sins. This traditional belief has resulted in children's death when the parents claimed nothing to confess. It has been said that some fathers confessed lying with other women. It is believed that some children's lives were saved after confession of sins committed by the parents.

5.3.3 Ordinal sickness (*kurwara*)

If illness is not suspected to have been caused by the ancestors, Karanga people use simple medicines which are administered to the sick by anyone who knows about it, such as herbs for curing headaches and the common cold. Magesa (1997:209) argues that specialists in medicine, known as herbalists or medicine doctors, are people with knowledge of herbs, roots, or even fruits with the power to prevent or cure disease or other afflictions. This type of people exists among the Karanga – they are known to be in possession of different herbs that cure different diseases. They are not traditional healers.

Chavunduka (1978:26) argues that some common methods of treatment include sucking where foreign bodies are believed to be in the patient's body. The healer sucks with his mouth and spits out any such foreign bodies. Another method used by traditional healers who are not *n'angas*, is to treat severe headache or hidden in the flesh (*chiposo*) by using traditional herbs or sucking instruments called cupping horn (*chirumiko*).

5.3.4 Death (*rufu*)

The deceased of the Karanga people are buried with their close relatives, and one of the family members will be on the fore-front. The Karanga believe that death is a movement away from this earth to the ancestors – a kind of existence within another world with the ancestors. The deceased is buried together with some belongings like a plate and a cup, and if you were using a walking stick, you are also buried with it. These belongings are broken first or holed to express that the deceased has departed from this world. Relatives (men and women) will come to throw a hand of soil over the coffin, saying words such as *Usakanganwa mhuri yawasiya*, meaning, “Do not forget the family you left behind,” or *Famba zvakanaka*, meaning, “Have a nice journey.” The relatives do not see the deceased as gone for ever, but will come again and will be welcomed by the family. The family has the task of preparing to welcome the deceased as wandering spirits waiting to be welcomed back home (cf 5.2.2.2).⁶⁴ The deceased is expected to take care of the living of his/her family. He/she joins the spirits of the ancestors.⁶⁵

Karanga people value the words of the deceased. A seriously sick person with no hope to live can tell his/her relatives where he/she wants to be buried, and this will be respected. The last words of the deceased are taken seriously. When a Karanga person dies, the next of kin and the headman are informed immediately. The next of kin will inspect the deceased body and also see if his/her eyes are closed. If not, they will close the eyes. It is a taboo to bury a Karanga person with his/her eyes open.

All people, including neighbours of relatives and friends, come on the burial day to give their last respect to the deceased. Before the corpse is put into a coffin, it is washed and anointed with oil, and perfumed to chase away flies. The body is dressed and laid properly in a coffin. After this is done, the body viewing is done outside the house. It is the duty of the community to console the bereaved family. Karanga people believe that when a person dies, he/she joins the ancestors and also becomes a *mudzimu* ancestor.

⁶⁴ According to *Shona Culture Resources Guide* (2008 Online), when a grown up Shona person dies, it is believed that his spirit wanders about. It is a homeless spirit. Only until the surviving relatives of the deceased “welcome back” his or her spirit, does it become a legitimate ancestral or family spirit. At the burial of a grown up person, one who has left a wife or husband and children, special arrangements are made to enable the living to welcome back the spirit of the deceased. The deceased is believed to have two shadows – a black shadow representing his flesh and a white shadow representing his soul or spirit.

⁶⁵ Magesa (1997:48) says ancestors, though dead, are present and continue to influence life in their erstwhile communities on earth; indeed, they are expected to do so. It is through reality of their presence that the ancestral spirits come to be the co-guardians of the mores of the family, the clan and the tribe.

To summarise: Karanga Christian communities have generations that have travelled a long way under mixed belief in God and the ancestors. The worship of ancestors has been orally transmitted from generation to generation. The influence of the ancestors (*mudzimu*) has gone deeper – in such a way that some families fear to do without them.

The story about the Karanga people has shown how suffering in Karanga Christian communities can weaken their faith in Jesus. The Karanga people deeply believe that those who die as elderly people will come back as ancestors, and can cause misfortune and illness to the family where they came from.⁶⁶ Beer is brewed and animals like goats or cows are killed on their ritual day. It, however, does not mean that after doing all this, suffering stops – in some cases suffering does not stop.

This also does not mean that all Karanga dead people come back to cause suffering to the descendents (cf 5.3.3). There is always high fear of the threats of ancestors who come back to haunt the living and cause catastrophe to their families if their families do not pay allegiance to them. Some devoted Christians have travelled a long way under those sufferings. The Karanga culture is concerned with what is good for male and female, child and adult.

The spirit of the ancestors is not the only spirit that makes the Karanga faith communities suffer. There is also the spirit of *ngozi* which has been described as the worst in causing suffering, since it can kill the whole family if its demands are not met (cf 5.2.2.4). The way these spirits claim instils fear to those targeted.

It has been discussed that any of these spirits can cause suffering if their demands are not met. The punishment is either death, or prolonged illness of one of the family members. In this chapter of the thesis, the researcher has indicated some of the sufferings Karanga faith communities experience, and how the Karanga respond because of fear and suffering. A marriage can break up if a child is not born, since the Karanga believe that marriage is made complete when a child is born. If a young married woman cannot conceive, something has to be done to stop the marriage from breaking up due to pressure from members of the family. Stories have been told of how some women fake pregnancy to secure their marriages. Some women die of heartbreak after failing pregnancy. In a

⁶⁶ Gelfand (1962) remarks that the spirits of the father and the mother cause sickness in the grandchildren if their sons and daughters have neglected the ritual of *kutamba guva* after their parents' death.

complete marriage, on the other hand, a child can become ill because of the sin of either of the parents. It has been discussed what a parent is supposed to do if he or she commits sin which causes a child to be ill. Confession of sin committed is believed to have saved many children. It is medicine by itself. The Karanga people sit in their gender social groups whenever they face suffering to discuss and find a way forward to protect the living.

The Karanga story is also about ordinary illnesses and how people cure them. There is a lot of suffering because of illnesses and mysterious death among Karanga people. Karanga Christian communities also suffer a lot of tension because of their mixed beliefs in the God of the Bible and their ancestors.

The researcher sees suffering of this kind as a huge challenge to the church today. There is a serious need for further investigation about the ancestors and how they cause fear, so as to assist members of these faith communities more effectively. The disciples who had known the blind beggar before, wanted to find out from Jesus about who had caused the blindness. Jesus' response to them in John 9:3 gives an entirely different perspective on the situation: "He was born blind for God to be revealed," (ἵνα φανερωθῆ τὰ ἔργα τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ). Likewise, Karanga Christian communities are challenged to think differently about the causes of their suffering, and to allow God's Spirit to inform them with more life-giving perspectives on it. In the context of John 9, Karanga Christians are particularly challenged to make room for the revelation of God amidst their suffering, rather than to spend so much time and energy on trying to find out about the causes of their suffering.

5.4 KARANGA FAITH COMMUNITIES ENGAGING THE IMPLIED NARRA- TOLOGICAL PURPOSE OF JOHN 9

At the beginning of the thesis the researcher indicated that he was born and bred in the Karanga community, that he speaks Karanga, and that he is at home with traditional Karanga beliefs and practices in the Chivi district (cf 1.1). Chapter 3 of the thesis, which is the main chapter, emphasised that – according to John 9:3 – neither the sins of the blind man nor the sins of his parents caused the blindness, but that it was for God's works to be revealed in Jesus (ἵνα φανερωθῆ). In this chapter of the thesis, it has been discussed how many Karanga Christian believers are still bound by their traditional religious practices. HIV/AIDS, *mudzimu* (ancestors), and *ngozi* have been discussed to be the major causes of serious illnesses and fear among Karanga faith communities as they seek attention from

their descendants (cf 5.2.2.2). As a result, there are Karanga Christians who believe in both Christianity and the ancestral spirits until today.

This chapter has been introduced by exploring the Karanga religion and culture, briefly giving background of the Karanga people, the God they worshipped, and their culture – particularly cultural practices regarding their suffering and its causes (cf 5.2.2.3). The chapter now proceeds by asking how Karanga Christian communities are supposed to respond to Jesus’ perspective on suffering according to John 9 – in other words, what the implied rhetorical effect of John 9 would be in their lives. It would obviously have radical implications for the thinking and practices of these communities as followers of Jesus Christ.

It will now be explored how these communities of faith are supposed to interact with, and respond to John 9. The format will be that of a dialogue between the different characters of John 9 and the Karanga faith communities.

5.4.1 Regarding the characters of John 9

5.4.1.1 Jesus

Jesus is the main character in the story of John 9, highlighted by other characters that are either his opponents or helpers. In 9:2 Jesus is challenged by a question of his disciples: “Rabbi, who sinned (ῥαββί, τίς ἥμαρτεν;), this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” To the Jews, suffering could not be thought of apart from being associated with somebody’s sin.

As an ancient canonised text, John’s Gospel forms part of the authoritative texts of Karanga Christians in Zimbabwe today. When hearing/reading John 9:2, many Karanga Christians would be in agreement with the question raised by the disciples. Like the disciples, the Karanga traditionally believe that illness is caused by the sins of an individual member of the family or community (cf 1.1). Until today, even some Karanga Christians, who suffer from prolonged illnesses, live from this conviction (cf 5.3.6). Whereas the Jewish belief is taken from the Old Testament (cf Exod 20:5; Lev 26:16; Deut 28:22), the Karanga belief rests on the authority of either the ancestors or avenging spirits (cf 5.2.2.2; 5.2.2.4).

The answer Jesus gives to his disciples in John 9:3 seems to contrast Jesus's response to the healed paralytic in John 5:1-9. On the one hand, Jesus surprisingly dismisses the disciples' question in John 9:3 – instead of addressing the cause of the man's sins, He speaks of its purpose: “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him” (ἵνα φανερωθῆ τὰ ἔργα τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ - cf 2.4).⁶⁷ On the other hand, after healing the paralysed man in John 5, Jesus told him that he was made well and that he should not sin again (5:14). According to the researcher, the contrast between John 5:1-9 and John 9:1-7 indicates that not every form of suffering is necessarily (directly) related to sin. The researcher believes that many Karanga Christians would rather go for the paradigm associated with John 5:14, “Do not sin any more, so that nothing worse happens to you” (μηκέτι ἀμάρτανε/*Usatadzazve* or *usapamazve*), than Jesus' thinking in John 9:3. Jesus' words according to 5:14 is a strong warning that if he continued to sin, he might suffer even more severely. This kind of thinking goes along with the Karanga traditional belief, which many Karanga Christian believers still cling to. As the Jews of old, they therefore remain in darkness (cf 9:41).

Though the Karanga believers have accepted Christ as their saviour, they are still asking questions pertaining to the causes of their suffering. They have therefore not yet become the implied or ideal audience/readers of John 9. They have not yet fulfilled the narrator's purpose with the story of the formerly blind beggar. They still do not know who Jesus is according to John 9.

How then can the Karanga believers move away from asking questions about the causes of their suffering, to asking questions about the purpose of their suffering, seeing it as an opportunity for God's presence and God's glory to be revealed amidst their suffering? In the researcher's view, Karanga believers have to be challenged by the difference between what Jesus says in John 5:4 and John 9:3. They have to learn that not all suffering is necessarily the consequence of an individual's sin, and be liberated from the tension caused by that conviction. In his response to the disciples in John 9:3, Jesus seems to be saying that He is present in their midst.

In the view of the researcher, the response of Jesus in 9:3 offers a challenge to the Karanga believers who accepted Jesus as their Messiah. They are particularly challenged to see their

⁶⁷ Dunn and Rogerson (2003:1185) also stress that the man's blindness provided an opportunity for God's glory to be revealed through his Son.

suffering through the new lens of the text, understanding that some sufferings are for God's Son to be revealed through it. Jesus rejects a direct connection between sin and suffering and offers creative alternative ways of dealing with suffering (9:3). However, He does not thereby entirely reject the connection between sin and suffering (5:14). Karanga people who claim to be followers of Jesus should accept this challenge, and not think that a prolonged illness is necessarily sent by God, or as punishment by the ancestors or avenging spirits.⁶⁸

In their interaction with the text of John 9, and therefore with Jesus as the revelation of God, Karanga believers are challenged by Jesus' invitation to his disciples: "We must work the works of him who sent me" (9:4). Since the Karanga Christian believers accepted Jesus as their savior, they cannot escape the voice of Jesus through the narrator, inviting them to join him. Accepting this challenge means to be part of Jesus' ministry by "seeing" themselves in the act of healing the blind beggar together with Jesus. They are challenged to associate with his identity as the one sent from God, and with his actions as the light of the world. It also means that Karanga believers, still functioning to a larger extent in the Jewish paradigm reflected in John 9:2, have to move away from mainly asking questions pertaining to the causes of their suffering to accepting God's revelation in Jesus under their particular circumstances. The questions for them then become: 'Who is Jesus amidst our suffering?', 'How can God's works be revealed under the circumstances?', and 'How may God be glorified through our suffering?' In this way they will act in accordance with the implied audience/readers of John 9, embodying the narratological purpose of the Gospel.

If Jesus' response brought the disciples back to reality by the words, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him" (ἵνα φανερωθῆ - 9:3), then Karanga believers are likewise challenged to recognise the presence of God in their midst. The text serves as an invitation to later audiences/readers to search for the purpose of suffering rather than its causes. According to John 9, the purpose of the blind beggar's suffering was for God's works to be revealed in his life. As Jesus called his disciples to "see" differently, to view life from God's perspective, so are the Karanga believers who still cling to their traditional belief. Karanga believers should radically rethink their understanding of suffering since they accepted Jesus as their saviour.

⁶⁸ Barrett (1978:354) argues that the divisive, critical effect of the ministry of Jesus upon his contemporaries is also deeply rooted in the earlier tradition. His disciples were challenged radically to reinterpret their tradition in the light of the Jesus event.

5.4.1.2 Disciples

According to John 9, the disciples appear only in the first scene comprised of Jesus, themselves, and the blind beggar (9:1-7). The narrator never mentions them again in John 9. Culpepper (1983:117) comments that the narrator is silent about the disciples throughout Jesus' most intense confrontation with the Jews (cf 3.2.1.2).

In John 9:2 the narrator addresses a common (Jewish) belief that suffering is caused by sin. Jesus' response to the disciples' question in 9:2 challenges the implied audience/readers of the Gospel, and through them also the historical Karanga faith communities of today. Both the Jewish and Karanga cultures – bound by their traditional beliefs – are brought into interaction with the implied purpose of John's narrative by the word “sin” (ἥμαρτεν / *kutadza*) which they believe is responsible for every form of suffering. The Jews believed that God punishes children for the iniquity of their parents (Deut 5:9; Exod 20:5; Ezek 18:20; cf 3.2.1.2). Karanga believers until today believe that their suffering is because of the sins committed by a member of the family.

According to the Karanga, explanation of illness lies with the moral consequences of the parents' actions. Bioline International (2008 Online) reports that therapy for a prolonged disease in this context necessarily entails confession of guilt committed by parents as a supplement to the herbal treatment. The Karanga believers struggle to accept what Jesus is saying in John 9:3, and to turn away from their belief in the ancestors (cf 5.2.2.2). They are challenged to acknowledge that suffering viewed in this way – as in the case of Jesus' disciples – is the result of traditional thinking through the ages. In both instances, the authoritative voice of Jewish and Karanga culture and religion, determined people's identity and thinking regarding suffering in powerful ways.⁶⁹

The Jewish understanding of suffering thus seems to be analogous to the Karanga who connect their suffering to sin committed to the ancestors and *ngozi*, until today (cf 5.2.2.2; 5.2.2.4). Behind the disciples' question, “who sinned – this man or his parents?” (τίς ἥμαρτεν, οὗτος ἢ οἱ γονεῖς αὐτοῦ; - cf 2.2.1), lies the Jewish traditional belief that suffering is the consequence of an individual's sin. Karanga faith communities seem to share the

⁶⁹ Brown (1971:371) remarks that despite the book of Job, the old theory was that if an adult got sick, the blame could lie in his own behaviour.

same point of view, and would ask the same question when looking at a suffering person (cf 2.4). They would thus be able to identify with the disciples' view on suffering.

Karanga Christian communities are, likewise, invited to adopt Jesus' alternative point of view, according to the narrative of John 9. As believers, they are challenged to play a new role in highlighting the main character in God's ongoing narrative, Jesus. Jesus did not have time to probe into the specific cause of the blind beggar's suffering – his mission was to do the work God had sent him to do. By accepting his identity as the one sent by God, and by joining him in doing God's work (9:4), the disciples would receive a new identity and lifestyle.⁷⁰ Karanga Christian believers are challenged to join the main character in John's Gospel by supporting him through his aspirations to fulfil God's work, and by so doing, become the implied receivers of John's Gospel (cf 2.3.3).

The beliefs of the disciples on suffering and its causes seek for guidance. In dialogue with Jesus, the Karanga believers would probably hold the same ignorance. The disciples were looking for an answer from Jesus. They somehow believed that He was not just an ordinary man. The situation reminds of Simon Peter who confessed to Jesus in John 6:68-69, "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God" (καὶ ἡμεῖς πεπιστεύκαμεν καὶ ἐγνώκαμεν ὅτι σὺ εἶ ὁ ἅγιος τοῦ θεοῦ). Since the Karanga believers have become disciples of Jesus, they are challenged to acknowledge that they have nowhere to go than to Jesus, in whom they are supposed to put their faith.

The narrator is silent about what the disciples said after Jesus invited them to join him in 9:4. The researcher agrees with Culpepper (1983:117) who argues that the narrator is silent about the disciples throughout Jesus' most intense confrontation with the Jews (cf 3.2.1.2). Although nothing is said about the disciples, it seems that they remained with Jesus. In John 11:7 the narrator quotes Jesus, saying, "Let us go to Judea again." The "again" indicates that they have been travelling with Jesus. This gives the impression that Jesus never separated from them.

In the view of the researcher, Karanga believers will guess that the disciples accepted the call of Jesus in 9:4, and remained with him. As they suffered rejection while associating

⁷⁰ According to Suggit (2003:77), Jesus is the originator, the one sent to do the work of his Father, but it is the disciples who have to do the work with him while it is day.

with Jesus (9:13-34), Karanga believers are challenged to accept confrontation with unbelievers as part of their new reality when they join Jesus as the main character in God's story. The radical implication of the Johannine narrative for the Karanga is that they are challenged to accept their identity as followers of Jesus, and to remain with him.

5.4.1.3 Blind beggar

In Chapter 3 of the thesis an analysis of the narrative in John 9 was made. It has been divided into seven scenes. The blind beggar appears in all the scenes. The first scene looked at who had caused his blindness: "Who sinned (τίς ἥμαρτεν;) – this man, or his parents that he was born blind?" (9:2). After Jesus told his disciples that neither had sinned, He healed the man by putting mud (πηλόν) made of saliva on his eyes, and sent him to go and wash in the pool of Siloam. Suggit (1983:88-89) explains this act of making spittle as an act of creation, modelled on God's act of creation in Genesis 2:7. Suggit continues to say that by this act the man is restored to his true being (cf 3.2.1.4).

In the reading of John 9, Karanga faith communities are challenged to see Jesus smearing clay on the man's eyes, thereby healing his physical and spiritual blindness. This act witnesses about Jesus' practical care and concern for the man's physical suffering, as an embodiment of God's works referred to in 9:4. At the same time the whole incident happens in the context of Jesus as the bringer of spiritual light. Jesus' concrete response to the question of his disciples in 9:2 challenges later audiences/readers of John 9, including Karanga believers, to move away from asking about the causes of suffering, to asking about the purpose of their suffering, and to how God's healing power may be made manifest in their lives – physically, spiritually, emotionally and socially.

Karanga believers, in the process of interacting with the character of the blind beggar in the story, are challenged by Jesus' dignifying response – both to the disciples and to the blind man concerned. On the one hand, Jesus calls the disciples to join him as co-workers (9:4). On the other hand, Jesus miraculously heals the blind man. In this context the healing of a blind person was regarded impossible (9:32). Jesus thus caught them by surprise. Jesus' response presents a special invitation to the Karanga believers – to be open to be surprised by God's healing presence in Jesus Christ and the Spirit. At the same time they are called to follow Jesus in rendering practical service of compassion to people suffering physically, spiritually, emotionally and socially. Through continuing words and deeds of compassion

by Jesus' followers in different contexts, God's presence will be revealed. In this way the ultimate purpose of John's Gospel (20:31) will be fulfilled – people will come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and through believing will have life in his name.

Four scenes dealt with the question of how the blind beggar's eyes had been opened, and who the healer was (cf scenes 2, 3, 4, and 5). The formerly blind man had an entirely different perspective on Jesus compared to the Jews (cf 3.2.5.1). According to the Jews, Jesus was a violator of the Sabbath and a blasphemer (9:16; 5:18). According to the healed man, Jesus was not a violator or a sinner, but his healer, a prophet, and the Son of Man (9:11, 17, 38).

In their dialogue with the blind beggar, the Karanga faith communities can identify with the intensity and prolonged nature of the man's illness – he was blind from birth. Karanga believers may recall the blind beggars they see in their villages, who do not receive healing, and continue to suffer in their blindness. As was the case in the time of Jesus, blind beggars are still marginalised and neglected – pushed out to the streets to beg. However, Jesus saw in this man an opportunity for God's works to be revealed, and called his disciples to follow him in doing that – including Karanga faith communities of the 21st century.

The narrator describes the difficulties the formerly blind beggar went through in all the scenes. Yet, he is described as a helper, a defender, an adjutant of his healer right through. He clearly confesses his healer as a prophet (cf 9:17; 3.2.3.1). He subsequently says to the authorities, "Whether he is a sinner, I do not know; one thing I know, and that though I was blind, now I see" (9:25).⁷¹ The blind beggar boldly resists threats of the Pharisees who told him that his healer was not from God since he violated the Sabbath – a day holy to the Jews (cf 3.2.5.1).

In the view of the researcher, Karanga Christians have a lot to learn from the formerly blind beggar. Like him, they are supposed to be helpers of Jesus, and witnesses about God's healing power and care. Through the narrator of John they are invited to adopt the positive role of the formerly blind beggar in the story, thereby also becoming supporters of the main character in the story. The narrator showed how Jesus identifies with the blind beggar, and how He saves him from darkness to light. The response of the beggar is remarkable – he bravely defends his healer throughout all the intense scenes. In this way

⁷¹ Suggit (2003:78) argues that the man had been a beggar before, entirely dependent on others, but that he now received his sight, and with it had his own response to make to his new situation.

he is presented by the narrative as an ideal disciple of Jesus. He serves as an invitation to the recipients of the Gospel to do likewise – also to the Karanga faith communities who are still struggling amidst their pain and tension. When Karanga Christians read John 9, they will realise that there is consistency in the man’s defense on behalf of his healer. They are challenged by this character to “see” and learn how faith in Jesus can remove fear and give courage to stand firm against the dangers of evil forces. The formerly blind beggar further challenges them to notice how his life had been recreated and dignified by Jesus. The transforming work of God was indeed made manifest in his life. His experience continues to invite later audiences/readers to put all their faith, trust and loyalty in Jesus, and to receive light and life through him.

5.4.1.4 Neighbours

The narrator does not say anything about the reaction of the disciples after this. What the narrator does report about, is the reaction of the neighbours, and that of the blind beggar. The neighbours’ question in 9:10, “How were your eyes opened” (πῶς [οὖν] ἠνεώχθησαν σου οἱ ὀφθαλμοί;), enquires about the method and material used, and where and when the healing occurred. The question also probed him about the identity of the healer. The narrator does not tell whether the neighbours acknowledged or accepted the healer. The narrator only talks about their interest to know how the formerly blind beggar was healed. This style of enquiring is not foreign to Karanga believers who consult traditional healers. They always want to know about the healer and his/her method of healing.

The formerly blind beggar did not hide the method of healing used by Jesus to the neighbours, and where he was sent to go and wash (cf 3.3.1.2). He openly said to them: “The man called Jesus (ἄνθρωπος ὁ λεγόμενος Ἰησοῦς) made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, ‘Go, to Siloam and wash.’ Then I went and washed and received my sight” (9:11). In the view of the researcher, this healing is analogous to the creation of humankind in Genesis 2:7. According to Suggit (1983:88-89), clay is smeared on the man’s eyes to emphasise that the whole incident occurs in the context of Jesus as the bringer of light.

For Karanga Christian believers to have their eyes opened, they have to “see” Jesus by recognising his presence under their circumstances. In this way they are continuously challenged to be recreated, and to find meaning in life. Jesus proclaimed that “He came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (Jn 10:10). Karanga faith communities, who to a

large extent still function in the Jewish paradigm reflected in John 9:2, are thus challenged to become the audience/readers John 9 had in mind.

Karanga believers, having committed themselves to Jesus as their saviour and healer, have to ask themselves why they still seek the help of other healers while Jesus can do it. He is the revelation of God's healing presence. What seems to be important for Karanga Christians in the healing of the man born blind, is the mud Jesus used, the washing in the pool of Siloam, as well as the reference to him as a prophet. This method of healing would remind them of a traditional way of treating sick persons by means of mud. In some instances mud is used as medicine by Karanga magicians. However, the typical *n'anga* style of application differs from that of Jesus' method in John 9:6-7 (cf 5.2.1.2).

There is another group of so-called *n'angas*, with knowledge of herbs, whose style seems to be similar to that of Jesus. They give their patients medicine, and tell them what to do. However, the researcher would not associate this traditional way of Karanga healing with the creation of humankind in Genesis 2:7. The *n'angas* whom Karanga Christian believers consult, take the process further by consulting the spirits, and by using *hakata* – shaped pieces of wood and bones. This method differs dramatically from what Jesus did when He healed the blind beggar (cf 5.2.1.2). The spirit the *n'angas* use is driven from the ancestors, their dead parents, or the spirits of this world. The Karanga believers are therefore particularly challenged by the manner in which Jesus healed the blind man – not so much by his method of healing, as by his dependence on God's power at work through him (9:4-5). This should give them a radically new perspective on their suffering, and on whom to consult under such circumstances. It should remind them of Jesus as God's ultimate power as creator and light of the world (Jn 1:1-4; 8:12; 9:5). It should remind them that Jesus is indeed mightier than their traditional healers. Karanga Christians who consult the spirits of the dead have to be invited to confirm their identity and unity as followers of Jesus Christ. They need to encourage, guide and console one another as shepherds in the footsteps of the good shepherd – the one sent to reveal God's power in their lives.

Karanga believers interacting with “the neighbours” in the story of the blind beggar, are therefore challenged to “see” the radical change the formerly blind man had undergone. The neighbours act as opponents of Jesus. The way in which they are presented by the narrator functions as a warning to the audience/readers of the Gospel. In this way they serve as an invitation *not* to do likewise, but rather to be open to be surprised by God's love, and

to be transformed into helpers of the protagonist in God's narrative. They seem to miss the opportunity of recognising God's revelation through Jesus. Their role is presented by the narrator in sharp contrast to that of the formerly blind man. The latter becomes a symbol of human beings alienated from God, yet who can be restored to their true being through the action of the incarnate Word of God, who embodies in his own person God's plan for creation (Suggit 1983:87).

5.4.1.5 The Pharisees

The narrator of John subsequently reports that the neighbours brought the blind beggar to the Pharisees (9:13-17). The Pharisees were responsible for ensuring that the Torah was upheld by the Jews – including laws on the Sabbath day (cf 2.3.4). The narrator does not say what the neighbours told the Pharisees about the healed man. The neighbours apparently heard that Jesus had healed the blind beggar on the Sabbath, which was not allowed (cf 3.2.3.1). Fenton (1988:41) remarks that the Pharisees had the power to appeal to the law and condemn Jesus and those with him for disobedience to the will of God. When reading this section of John 9, Karanga believers would be able to identify with the practice of moving a person under trial from one social group to another. It reminds of the Karanga custom of taking a person from the family to the headman to the highest court of the district chief, who has the authority to pass corporal punishment.

The narrator of John describes the reaction of the Pharisees at two levels. According to 9:16, the Pharisees reject both the miraculous healing and the healer: "This man is not from God, because he does not observe the Sabbath." From the Pharisees' ideological point of view, the Sabbath is a day holy to their God (cf 2.4.1.4). The narrator presents them as focusing more on the law of the Sabbath than on who Jesus is. Division (σχίσμα) developed among them because of the healing on the Sabbath – some were on the side of Jesus while others were opposed to his use of the Sabbath (cf 9:16; 3.2.3.1). They generally function as opponents to the protagonist, and therefore as a warning to the audience/readers.

Karanga faith communities would have no problem with healing on the Sabbath. According to their belief, healing could be done on any day, including a Thursday, which is a special day for their ancestors. John 9 challenges Karanga believers to understand the Pharisees' point of view, and to learn from their misunderstanding. In 9:41 Jesus addresses them by saying, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But that you say, 'we see,' your sin

remains.” The narrator’s comments make it clear that the major shift in thinking about suffering, implied by Jesus’ response to the disciples’ question in 9:2, went past the Pharisees. Karanga believers are particularly challenged by this shift in thinking. The words of Jesus directed to the Pharisees in 9:41 challenge Karanga faith communities to think and act in radically new ways about their suffering. Like the Pharisees, many Karanga Christians ironically remain in darkness in spite of God’s revelation being available to them.

In their interaction with John 9, Karanga believers are further challenged to recognise the mistreatment of the formerly blind beggar by the neighbours, who took him to the Pharisees just because he was healed on the Sabbath. They are also challenged to discern the differences and similarities between the Sabbath set aside for God, and the traditional day set aside for the ancestors. According to John 9:16, Jesus violated the Pharisaical interpretation of keeping the Sabbath. However, the division among the Pharisees indicates that some of them might have considered siding with Jesus. Karanga believers would be able to identify with the tension among the Pharisees – schism easily arises among them when there is serious illness. They suspect whose sin may be causing suffering in the family. Meanwhile many of them neglect to acknowledge the revelation of God in their midst, and to emphasise how Jesus can help them. The Karanga believers who accepted Jesus as the Messiah are challenged to be transformed according to their primary identity in Jesus, and radically to reinterpret their ancestral belief.⁷²

Analogous to the role of the Pharisees in John 9, elderly Karanga people guard the ethos of the Karanga today. The metaphorical description of Jesus’ opponents in John 10:1,8 as “thieves and bandits”, probably alludes to them. Their role in the narrative of John’s Gospel is ironically not that of shepherds and leaders, but of thieves and robbers who steal, kill and destroy Jesus’ flock (κλέπτης ἐστὶν καὶ ληστής- cf 2.3.4 and 4.2.1.3). Karanga Christian leaders are supposed to be deeply challenged by these images. In their role to shepherd their co-believers, to be moral leaders, teachers, caregivers, counselors, listening friends, they are especially challenged to lead and guide in ways that will remind of the caring ethos and style of Jesus. The dramatic shift in John 9 – from asking questions about the causes of suffering to asking about the purpose of suffering and the revelation of God amidst suffering – poses unique opportunities to Karanga Christians.

⁷² Suggit (2003:79) remarks that the life which Jesus gives finds its meaning only by the person’s own acceptance of the truth of the gospel.

5.4.1.6 Parents of the blind beggar

According to John 9:19, the parents of the formerly blind beggar were called before the authorities to witness if the healed man was their son: “Is this your son, who you say was born blind?” Both affirmed that he is their son. However, they did not know who had healed him. The parents were afraid (ἐφοβοῦντο) of the Jews who had agreed to excommunicate those who confessed Jesus as the Christ (cf 3.2.4.1).

Engaging the parents of the formerly blind beggar in the text will give Karanga faith communities an opportunity to see how fear can bring about misunderstanding. The word ἐφοβοῦντο refers here to fear of the authorities by the blind beggar’s parents – including fear to be excommunicated from the synagogue. They feared to tell how their son was healed, and who his healer was (cf 3.2.4.1). O’Grady (1989:79-82) refers to the parents as belonging to a third group of believers in the post-synagogal period – the so-called “Crypto-Christians.” This group chose to remain in the synagogue while following Jesus privately.

Karanga Christians interacting with the parents of the formerly blind beggar in the narrative of John 9, can identify with their fear to be excommunicated from the synagogue. Karanga people, including Karanga Christian communities, fear the spirits of the dead of both the ancestors and *ngozi* (cf 5.2.2.2; 5.2.2.4). The Karanga ancestors have no mercy for those they left behind until their demands are met. Because of their fear for the ancestors and *ngozi*, many Karanga believers consult the *n’angas* at night – almost like Nicodemus who came to see Jesus at night (Jn 3:2), in fear of being exposed. Many Karanga Christians thus prefer to worship their ancestors privately. As followers of Jesus Christ, they fear “to carry their cross” while being associated with him (cf Mk 8:34). Their fear of the ancestors therefore makes them remain in their sins – like the Pharisees in John 9:41. As reluctant respondents in the drama of John 9, the “character” of the parents (9:18-23) functions as a warning and an invitation to the implied audience/readers of the Gospel. Through them, the narrator invites the audience/readers boldly and unashamedly to identify with the main character, Jesus, until today.

At the same time John 9 presents its audience/readers with a serious reality – those who confessed Jesus as the Messiah were expelled from the synagogue. Karanga faith communities may identify with this action of the Jewish authorities, remembering that

churches in Zimbabwe also discipline their members when discovered guilty of consulting a *n'anga*. A church council of the Reformed Church in Zimbabwe will, for example, give a discipline of not less than one year for such a transgression. Karanga believers are challenged not to fear such actions, but rather to come out boldly for their convictions as Christians. John 9 in general, and the parents of the blind beggar in particular, challenges them openly to identify with Jesus, and to welcome Jesus' perspective on life and on suffering anew.

5.4.1.7 Jewish authorities

The story of John 9 continues in verses 24-34, as the narrator brings the drama around the formerly blind man and the Jewish authorities to a climax. The audience/readers have been confronted with the Jewish authorities for the first time when they interrogated the formerly blind man's parents (cf 9:18-23; 3.2.4.1; 5.4.1.6). Karanga faith communities would be able to identify with the process of investigation and decision-making reflected in the text. As in the case of the Jewish authorities, Karanga church leaders come to a decision on people who are suspected of consulting a *n'anga* after they have been satisfied by their investigations.

John 9 presents Karanga believers with contrasting perspectives on, and responses to Jesus, the main character in the narrative. Through these contrasts, the narrator's implied purpose with the drama is foregrounded. While being confronted with Jesus' opponents (e.g., the Jewish authorities), Karanga audiences/readers are offered different roles to adopt. A prime example is the alternative view of the formerly blind beggar who became a follower and ardent defender of Jesus (cf Brown 1971:377; 3.2.1.4). The text thus leaves Karanga Christian communities with a choice – either to confess Jesus as a sinner and to reject him as the Messiah (9:24), or to accept him as the one sent by God, God's revelation for the healing and shepherding of humankind (9:25,38; 10:1-18). Later audiences/readers of John 9 are continuously called to account for their understanding of, and response to Jesus' radical perspective on life in general, and suffering in particular.

Karanga faith communities will have respect for the Jewish authorities who basically act as the guardians of Jewish doctrine and customs, and who are strict and severe in their application of the law. However, Karanga Christians are also warned by their unbelief: "Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person

born blind” (9:32). The authorities refused to recognise that Jesus opened the eyes of the blind beggar. Ultimately, Jesus accuses them of being blind and of opposing the will of God (9:31, 39-41). The narrator’s warning leaves later recipients of the Gospel, including Karanga faith communities of Zimbabwe, with a radical challenge to revisit their position on suffering – a challenge to move away from asking questions about the causes of their suffering to asking about the purpose of their suffering as an opportunity for God’s healing and caring presence to be revealed in their midst.

Karanga believers, in their interaction with the text, will recognise the way in which the blind beggar is moved from one scene to another as analogous to their moving from one *n’anga* to another in order to ensure that the different *n’angas* agree in their diagnosis and treatment of an illness. Like the Jewish authorities, the Karanga follow a process of investigation into the causes of the suffering before they take final action. Karanga communities also take action in expelling a witch from their village when evidence of the *n’angas* points towards such a person, similar to the expulsion of the formerly blind beggar from the synagogue by the Jewish authorities.

In the final analysis, Karanga believers engaging Jesus’ opponents in the drama of John 9 are challenged fundamentally to ask whether their identity and actions reflect or oppose the identity and ethos of Jesus – the one who came to reveal God as the light of the world, and who restored the sight and dignity of the blind beggar.

5.4.1.8 Summary

When reading John 9, the Karanga faith communities may experience different reactions. The narrator presents before Jesus the traditional belief of the disciples about the causes of suffering. Similarly, many Karanga Christians – still bound by their traditional religious beliefs – would present their questions about the causes of their suffering to the *n’angas*. They do not find it easy to overcome their fear of being punished by the ancestors for neglecting them, and would continue to consult the *n’angas* or the said prophets. In the view of the researcher, Karanga believers are therefore radically challenged to be transformed in their thinking about suffering. According to the implied narratological purpose of John 9, they are challenged to make (more) room for the experience of God’s healing presence in Jesus. There is indeed a great need for Karanga faith communities to revisit Jesus’ words in John 9:3, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned (οὔτε οὗτος

ἤμαρτεν οὐτε οἱ γονεῖς αὐτοῦ); he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him" (φανερωθῆ - cf 2.4).

With the authority of an ancient canonised text, the explanation of Jesus goes beyond time and culture. However, for many Karanga Christians, obedience to the demands of their ancestors would take up priority to believing only in Jesus – in order to make them safe from the ancestral attacks. It is rather difficult to tell what the response of Karanga faith communities would be after reading John 9, realising that it is not about who caused the blindness, but about who Jesus is. In the view of the researcher, this shift in thinking certainly challenges Karanga Christians in profound ways. For instance, like the Jews, the Karanga believe that blindness cannot be healed. They may therefore listen to the story of the blind beggar's healing, but it will probably sound incredible to them. Yet, for Karanga believers to grasp and be persuaded that blindness and other illnesses are for God to be revealed through Jesus, may offer even a greater challenge to them – more so than to believe that the man's eyes were opened. The passage therefore challenges them radically to rethink who Jesus is, and who they are as his followers. It also challenges them to think differently about suffering. In short, Karanga Christians are invited to adopt John 9 as a new lens through which their entire lives may be seen.

It has been argued that Karanga people, particularly elderly people, and not only the *n'angas*, traditionally treat sick people with herbs, and sometimes even smear them with medicine (cf 5.2.4). Smearing medicine, similar to Jesus smearing mud in the story of the blind beggar, is commonly used to protect against certain diseases. The spitting and smearing with medicine is meant as treatment for wounds or skin diseases. Karanga faith communities will therefore be able to identify with Jesus' healing of the blind man by means of spittle, mud and water, since it sounds analogous to their traditional way of healing. Jesus' combined technique of touching, spitting, mud application, and the sending of the blind man to the pool of Siloam to wash (cf 3.2.1.1), would certainly remind them of their own techniques of healing. They would probably associate the pool of Siloam with their own dish of water with healing herbs, which patients are supposed to wash from and be healed by it. Some Christian missionaries criticised this method of healing as primitive, and thought that it should be abandoned (cf 5.2.2.2). However, the treatment with herbs has proven to be helpful to many sick people through the ages. The problem lies in consulting the *n'angas* for their advice.

The researcher has indicated possible similarities between the understanding of suffering by Jesus' disciples and the Karanga faith communities of today. They seem to share the fundamental conviction that suffering must be the consequence of sin. In the case of the blind beggar, the disciples suspected either his parents or himself to be guilty. In the case of the Karanga, people are believed to suffer because they neglect their ancestors. In both instances, suffering is regarded as punished for sin committed.

In reading John 9, the Karanga faith communities are challenged to “see” that Jesus healed the blind beggar – not by asking for payment as their ancestors do, but by giving him new life instead, and by restoring his dignity as a member of society. In this way God's power was revealed in the life of the blind man. Karanga people, living in fear of their ancestors' punishment and difficult demands, are offered a liberating and healing alternative through Jesus' perspective on suffering, according to John 9. The implication for Karanga Christian believers is to respond to what Jesus is saying and doing, by allowing God to be revealed in and through their suffering.

5.4.2 Regarding the settings of John 9

5.4.2.1 Temporal settings

(a) Day and night

The narrator of John interprets Jesus as saying that the work of God is to be done as long as it is day, for night was coming when no one could work (9:4). Clues appear later in the Gospel as to when this night might occur. According to 12:35, Jesus prepares his disciples for his return to the Father by saying, “You are going to have the light just a little longer” (ἔτι μικρὸν χρόνον τὸ φῶς ἐν ὑμῖν ἔστιν). The narrator further comments that, when Judas betrayed Jesus, it was “night” (13:30). Through such remarks the narrator pronounces the beginning of Jesus' suffering and passion, when He would be betrayed and alienated even by his own disciples. It is expressed by the narrator that when the main character Jesus, the light of the world, is absent, it is night.

When Karanga believers read about day and night in John 9:4, they will probably associate it with their practical engagement in their fields. It may remind them of their work in the fields, where they spend the whole day attending to their crops, until sunset. Night, to the Karanga, is the time they cannot work in their fields. Those, however, who work “during the

day,” have the promise of harvesting in abundance. This practical experience may help them to understand Jesus’ metaphorical reference to day and night.

The challenge posed by the evangelist to the Karanga followers of Jesus, is to be disciples among themselves while it is day. They are challenged to believe in the light while they have the light, so that they may become children of the light (12:36). The challenge of John 9 to them is therefore to move away from focusing on the causes of their suffering, to focusing on God’s enlightening, caring presence in Jesus. As followers of Jesus, they are called to reflect his light while it is day. As long as they have the opportunity, they are called to be God’s light to one another and to the world. The Karanga believers, like the disciples of the first century, are challenged to join with Jesus and continue with God’s work while it is day.

(b) Sabbath

The Jews did not only strictly keep the Sabbath holy, but also forbade people from doing any work on this day.⁷³ For them, the Sabbath is related to creation. According to Genesis 2:2-3, “God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.”⁷⁴

Karanga people reading of the Pharisees’ reaction to the violation of their Sabbath in John 9:13-16, would probably see it as analogous to their holy day of the week. In respect of their ancestors, the Karanga have rules that stop people from working on a Thursday. They are forbidden to do any work in the fields on a Thursday, even to cut a small bush. People who are found working on this particular day, are heavily fined for that. Sometimes they have to pay two goats (*mbudzi*) – one to be killed and eaten at the tribal court, and the other to be given to the headman. Both the Jewish Sabbath and Karanga “Thursday” require from their adherents that a certain day of the week be set aside as holy, and that certain rules be obeyed to protect it, forbidding people to do certain things on that day.

⁷³ Morris (1986:172) comments that the Jewish teachers made a very thoroughgoing attempt to stop all work on the Sabbath, and that some of their regulations were really extraordinary. The Mishnah tractate *Shabbath* identifies thirty-nine classes of work forbidden on the Sabbath (*Shabbath* 7:2).

⁷⁴ Suggit (2003:78) argues that the restoration of the blind beggar’s sight in John 9 took place on the Sabbath, just as the healing of the cripple in 5:9 was effected on the Sabbath. According to him, Jesus’ work on the Sabbath symbolises the continuation of God’s work which was originally completed on the sixth day of creation.

A main difference between the Jewish Sabbath and the Karanga Thursday, however, is that the Karanga can do other work on Thursdays, like thatching their huts with already prepared material. But they are not allowed to go into the bush to cut a tree, or to yoke their oxen to pull poles or firewood.

A radical challenge posed by the narrator of John is for the followers of Jesus to “see” how He re-interprets the Sabbath. On the occasion of John 9 Jesus uses the Sabbath for revealing the Father by giving new life to the formerly blind beggar. Karanga communities of faith are particularly challenged to understand Jesus’ interpretation of the Sabbath as a life-giving moment, as an opportunity to reveal God’s love and care to the suffering.

5.4.2.2 Social settings

(a) Social groups

The researcher has identified five different social groups in the story of John 9 (cf 3.3.3.1). These groups have different points of view regarding Jesus, the main character – some function as his opponents, others as his helpers. Their roles vary as they grow in their understanding of Jesus in the course of the narrative – either positively or negatively, according to the narrator’s perspective.

Karanga readers of John 9 would also be able to identify with the social groups represented in the story. The Karanga culture, like many cultures in Africa, is based on a deep sense of community. Besides illness, any case involving Karanga family matters, is dealt with in social groups. When there is illness in the family, the wife and husband will typically first sit down and talk (*murume nemukadzi wake*). When the illness continues, the group extends to the parents. If it prolongs and becomes a threat, the in-laws (*vakarabga*) are invited to join, as well as other close relatives in the village (*hama dzapedo*). They do not join for nothing, but are supposed to help to move forward and to find a solution to the problem.

These Karanga social groups consist of Christian-believers and unbelievers. In most cases the unbelievers have a serious influence on the believers. They can influence the believers to consult a *n’anga* or *n’angas*. If the believers follow their advice, they may discover the source of the illness through a *n’anga*, and do what the *n’anga* requires from them to do. If it is found that the illness affecting the village is caused by a witch, the family of the witch

may be driven away from the village. If the demands are that of the *mudzimu* or the *ngozi*, the family may be forced to do as demanded.

The social groups in John 9 are all challenged by Jesus' perspective on suffering. By recognising him as God's revelation to them, they would receive life (20:31). Karanga Christians who still consult the ancestors for help, would be particularly challenged by the example of the blind beggar who boldly defended his healer against the Jewish authorities.

5.4.3 Regarding the plot of John 9

The Gospel of John is presented by the narrator as a drama between life and death, light and darkness. Jesus came from God "above" to give life and light to people in darkness, who are from "below." Conflict grows as the giver of life and light is opposed by the religious authorities of his day – the Pharisees. The plot of John's Gospel deepens through the tension caused by Jesus healing a born blind beggar on the Sabbath. Jesus' opponents continue to fight him and his followers, to the point where the healed man is excommunicated from the synagogue. In John 10 Jesus refers to his opponents as "thieves and bandits" who mislead and devastate the flock. He came that they may have life in abundance. The plot development in John offers its audience/readers an opportunity to make a clear choice to be either for or against the protagonist in God's story, until today.

In Chapter 5 of the thesis the researcher describes the major tension of Karanga Christian believers because of their double loyalty to Jesus and the ancestors. The plot development of John's Gospel in general, and John 9 in particular, challenges them to make bold decisions about their identity as followers of Jesus Christ. It will certainly be difficult for those who believe in the ancestors to quickly shift from their belief. Exposed to the point of view of John 9, Karanga communities are, however, challenged to believe that nothing is impossible with God. That Jesus healed a paralysed person, a beggar born blind, and raise Lazarus from the dead (to mention just a few of his miraculous signs according to John's Gospel), should encourage Karanga faith communities that God's works continue through Jesus and the Spirit today – even amidst their conflict and suffering.

5.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The main purpose of this chapter of the thesis was to bring the Karanga faith communities of Zimbabwe into interaction with the implied narratological purpose of John 9. It should

be clear that Karanga Christians are deeply challenged by Jesus' response to his disciples' question in 9:2. The disciples' thinking assumes that every misfortune must be due to a specific sin. This is analogous to the Karanga belief that sickness or death is traceable to the sins of certain individuals. However, the issue at stake in John 9:3-41, is no longer who or what caused the suffering of the blind man, but how Jesus may be understood and received as God's revelation. The focus thus shifts from people's suffering to the presence of God in their lives.

Karanga Christian communities of the twenty-first century face some serious challenges because of the belief of many that suffering is necessarily the consequence of the sins of an individual member of the family or community. Sections 5.1 to 5.3 of the thesis gave some background about the Karanga religion and culture, and how it affects their understanding of prolonged illness. Many Karanga Christians have not abandoned their belief in the causes of suffering and the authority of their ancestors, even though they believe in Christ as their healer and saviour. They are still bound and affected by their traditional religious beliefs and practices. They behave like the "Crypto-Christians" (O'Grady) in John's time, who chose to remain in the synagogue while following Jesus privately. They believe in Jesus and their ancestors at the same time, because of fear for punishment by these spirits. This makes them fail to acknowledge that the Jesus they believe in, is able to liberate them from their suffering. In this way they actually deny Jesus just like one of his first disciples, Simon Peter, did (Jn 18:15-18, 22-27).

Against this background, John 9 invites Karanga believers of today to reconsider who Jesus is for them, and how God's presence may be revealed in their suffering. At the same time, they are challenged to revisit their relationship with the ancestors – loved ones whose memory may be honoured, but who should not be worshipped and consulted as ultimate authority. For Christianity, the prerogative of ultimate loyalty, allegiance, worship, and honour, belongs exclusively to the God of Jesus Christ and the Spirit (cf Deut 6:5; Mt 22:37-40; Lk 10:27). There is no room for compromise. In Johannine language, Jesus is referred to as the Lamb of God – the one who was to be slaughtered at the Passover feast of the Jews, and who was resurrected in glory (Jn 1:29,36; 19:14; 20:1-31; 21:1-25; n. 34). Analogously, Jesus is referred to as the Lamb in the book of Revelation, yet this time as the Lamb on the throne who is worthy of his followers' worship and honour:

Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels surrounding the throne and the living creatures and the elders, singing with full voice, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing!” Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, singing, “To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might forever and ever!” (Rev 5:11-13).

The most radical implication for Karanga faith communities is that they have to realise that their primary identity as followers of Jesus Christ is at stake when they consult their ancestors for advice. In this regard, they are challenged to take special care of Jesus’ response to the question of his disciples in 9:2, τίς ἥμαρτεν; (“who sinned?”). Jesus’ response in John 9:3-5 has two parts (9:3-5). Firstly, Jesus declares that no particular sin had produced the case of blindness. Jesus does not discuss the issue of sin ultimately being the cause of all misfortune because of the fall, nor that some ailments may be traceable to certain sins of an individual or his/her parents. Instead, Jesus secondly emphasises that the purpose of the blindness is for God’s works to be revealed through the healing of the blind man. The second part of Jesus’ response becomes the major issue of John 9. Concretely then, what would its implied effect be in the lives of Karanga Christians today?

Before Jesus restored the blind beggar’s sight, He called his disciples to join him in doing the work God had sent him to do. Jesus invited them as follows, thereby giving them a new identity and a new task: “We must work the works of him who sent me (9:4).” Jesus’ invitation would apply to all his followers through the centuries. Karanga believers are challenged whole-heartedly to acknowledge and believe this. They are primarily called to join Jesus in doing God’s work. They are challenged to confirm their identity by doing the work with him. For the Karanga to follow Jesus today may be interpreted to mean that they psychologically have to move from darkness to light in Jesus, like the blind beggar in John 9 (cf 2.4.1). Since the Karanga accepted Jesus as their saviour, they are also challenged to accept his call to represent his light in the world. In the view of the researcher, Jesus’ call to the Karanga believers today implies a willingness on their side dramatically to move away from asking about the causes of their suffering to working with Jesus in bringing hope and light to people amidst their suffering. In this way they are called to identify with Jesus as the light of the world (Jn 8:12; 9:5), and to represent him among people suffering from illnesses believed to be caused by ancestors, avenging spirits, and HIV and Aids.

The healing of the blind beggar witnesses about Jesus as the light of the world. It forced the different social groups in the drama to make a decision about his identity. The evidence of Jesus' miracles left no one to be neutral about who He is. The neighbours wanted to know how the eyes of the man born blind were opened. Out of curiosity, the Pharisees asked the same question, but with a different intent – they wanted to determine whether any Sabbath laws had been broken. The challenge to Karanga believers is to identify with the formerly blind beggar in his bold response (9:15). Perhaps he sensed the Pharisees' displeasure and stuck to the bare facts. But here the light is shining through the formerly blind beggar's testimony, providing an example for future disciples of Jesus.

The Pharisees did not acknowledge his healing. They rejected the evidence because it did not conform to their preconceived ideas. Jesus was in their midst, but they did not recognise him – they remained in their sins and darkness (9:41). Their example serves as a warning to later receivers of the Gospel of John, including the Karanga faith communities. Karanga Christians are therefore called to acknowledge and witness about the authenticity of God's continuing presence in their midst through Jesus the Messiah, their saviour and healer.

Some Karanga believers attempt to be neutral on the issue of Jesus, like the parents of the blind beggar. They do not move away from asking about the causes of their suffering because of ideological and moral problems. This has been explained *inter alia* to be due to fear of being punished by the ancestors. Neutrality about Jesus is a failure to pronounce him as the Messiah, and means that He is denied and rejected again.

Jesus' response to the blind beggar created an opportunity for the work He was sent to do, to be demonstrated. According to John 10, Jesus cared for the excommunicated as “the door for the sheep,” “the good shepherd” and “the light of the world.” John 9-12 poses a major challenge to Karanga believers today, namely to understand and believe that the emphasis of Jesus' response is not an explanation of the causes of suffering or the origin of evil, but his ability to deal with suffering as the good shepherd and the light of the world. By granting sight to the blind beggar, Jesus became the light of the world to him. Karanga believers are challenged to recognise Jesus as the one sent by God, and to witness about his

healing power as the true light that overpowers their darkness, also the darkness of their suffering.⁷⁵

The way in which Jesus healed the blind beggar, as his response to the disciples' question in 9:2, opens up a new understanding of who Jesus is. The disciples must have been surprised by Jesus' response. They never seem to ask him about the cause of the man's blindness again. The focus of the narrative rather shifts to Jesus' invitation to them to do God's work with him. The disciples were called to continue with God's work, even when they were confronted with conflict and expulsion from the synagogue. If they were rejected and suffered because they identified with him, they were to follow in his footsteps by being shepherds and light to one another – physically, emotionally, spiritually, and socially. Karanga Christians are, likewise, called to be shepherds and light to one another under circumstances of alienation and suffering associated with followers of Jesus. John 9 invites them boldly (prophetically), yet with compassion (priestly), to acknowledge and affirm Jesus' healing presence in their midst, and to join hands in working with him.

The story of Jesus healing a blind beggar in John 9 thus provides Karanga faith communities with a new perspective on their suffering, and with new opportunities to deal with illness and death in their families. By moving away from asking questions about the causes of their suffering to experiencing God's presence amidst their suffering, Karanga believers may become the audience/readers the narrator of John 9 would have intended them to be. Through witnessing about God's healing and hopeful signs among them, they will indeed continue to embody the purpose of John's Gospel: "But these (miraculous signs) are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name" (Jn 20:31).

⁷⁵Daneel (1974:197) reports that when Kraposi's brother became ill, the DRC leaders did not come to visit and pray for him. His younger brother Kraposi, who was then already a member of the Topia Church, called the Topia members to come and pray for his brother. *When they came, they took care of him, and God heard their prayers, so that he was healed.* It was then that he decided also to become a *muTopia* (italics mine).

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