

Colecția
Teze de doctorat

Titus Antoniu Chifor



The seeing of Jesus Christ in the Gospel of John
Theological and anthropological perspectives

Presă Universitară Clujeană

Titus Antoniu Chifor

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This work corresponds to the full version of the doctoral thesis in theology devoted to *The Seeing of Jesus Christ in the Gospel of John: Theological and Anthropological Perspectives, (Re)discovery of Theological and Anthropological Seeing*, defended at the Faculty of Greek Catholic Theology of Presov, University of Presov (June 20, 2023), by Titus Antoniu Chifor under the direction of Professor PhDr. Pavol Dancák, PhD.

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Referenți științifici:

Dr.h.c. Prof. PhDr. Pavol Dancák, PhD

Pr. Prof. univ. dr. Alexandru Buzalic

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Universitatea Babeș-Bolyai
Presa Universitară Clujeană
Director: Codruța Săcelean
Str. Hasdeu, nr. 51
400371 Cluj-Napoca, România
Tel./fax: (+40)-264-597.401
E-mail: editura@ubbcluj.ro
<http://www.editura.ubbcluj.ro/>

Thanking

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Abstract

The Gospel of John provides a narrative that renders perceptible the imperceptible for those who have not had the opportunity to encounter Jesus in person. The phenomenon of perceiving the divine has at least two subsidiary approaches. One approach is rooted in the ancient Middle Eastern and Judeo-Hellenistic traditions, which acknowledge the validity of experiencing and contemplating the divine. The second tradition pertains to Christianity, which is characterised by a significant departure from both Judaism and paganism. It postulates that God assumes a form that is comprehensible to humans and manifests Himself through Jesus Christ. The concept of observing Jesus in various forms is prominently evident, though typically regarded as subordinate to the perspective of the auditor. Theophany narratives typically feature a sequential presentation wherein a visible manifestation is succeeded by a divine expression. In several instances where both visual and auditory stimuli are available, the visual mode is often regarded as the more favourable option.

The objective of the study is to map the transformative, conversion passage of seeing God, from invisible to visible, from (not)seeing to “being seen” by God, from extrinsic sight, to inner faith. This journey is proposed from a pluri-disciplinary approach, anthropological, socio-cultural, theological, spiritual view. Furthermore, to facilitate new valences of the phenomenon of seeing and being seen by God, the present study presents multiple contexts and philosophical currents, Greco-Roman world, Jewish world in the Old Testament, the Near East, and the Christian tradition, with Church Fathers’ view on Jesus seeing and a

special emphasis on Gospel of John. To enrich this study we propose an ecumenical analysis of seeing God in Gospel of John.

The episodes on vision presented by John illustrate a correlation between the actions of Jesus, particularly his ability to perceive, and the subsequent reactions that are elicited as a result of his actions, which are observable to us. The significance of perceiving the manifestation of Jesus in the Gospel of John, commencing from the precise lexicology and symbolism of signs, a discernible and imperceptible reflection, culminates in notable theological deductions and evaluation of the function that Jesus fulfils in disclosing the Father (as stated in the Prologue). The encounter has the potential to generate a profound transformation in the met individuals, as the experiences of Nicodemus, the blind man from birth, Mary Magdalene, and others.

The utilisation of semantic analysis enables the differentiation of various connotations of visual verbs and their diverse functions as employed by the author of the fourth Gospel. The inadequate exploration of the concept of “sight” in the book of John highlights the need for a comprehensive exegetical analysis of this theme. The theological elaboration of the topics addressed by John primarily stems from the communicative significance of “vision” as a cohesive principle.

Reading entails an initial act of attentive listening to the text, establishing a unique connection with the author who crafted it, and comprehending the intended message that extends beyond a mere handful of words. The act of observing can have a communicative function through the production of “silence” or “noise,” thereby providing a pragmatic impulse to the observer. By applying this principle to the subject matter, it can be posited that discerning the enigma of Christ in the evangelical episodes of John requires an effort to ascertain the communicative purpose of certain visual expressions.

The evangelist John accentuates the ambivalent nature of the interlocutors' regard towards Jesus, wherein they exhibit a desire to subject themselves to his scrutiny, while simultaneously being exposed to a certain degree of “risk”. The present study aims to examine the various stages involved in the process of visual perception, specifically

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pertaining to the act of “seeing” and “being seen”. Additionally, the study seeks to investigate the potential outcomes and implications that arise from engaging in eye contact. The present study showcases various evangelical episodes that revolve around the theme of vision. Each episode is characterised by its own distinct logic, coherence, and pragmatism, which serve to enrich the human and religious experience in relation to the divine.

Key words: *perception, anthropology, theology, seeing, sight, vision, Jesus, visible, invisible, faith, John Gospel, experience of meeting, blindness, spiritual vision.*

Introduction

We live in a society that emphasizes visibility, a society in which nothing can escape the gaze, a society in which everything is shown, everything is seemed to be said, in which people need to be seen and show themselves to exist in the eyes of others. This situation places the individual in an ambiguous position in relation to the sight, between the desire to be seen at all costs and the desire to escape the gaze of others. The individual oscillates between fear and revolt, between the search for self-discovery and that of absolute individualism. The way man sees the world and connect to the divinity, to God evolves and may involve a transformative journey of connecting to God, shifting from visible to invisible, from extrinsic sight, to inner faith.

The theme of the gaze in the Gospel of John emerges as a fundamental theological principle of the history of salvation and of human existence, which the Church Fathers would call “the sight of God.”

Recent studies have identified two distinct approaches to the phenomenon of God's vision. The first approach is rooted in the ancient oriental and Judeo-Hellenistic heritage, which recognises the legitimacy of God's vision and the contemplation of divinity. The second approach is found in the Christian tradition, which diverges from Judaism and paganism by asserting that God adapts himself to human vision, thereby becoming present and visible in Jesus Christ.¹

¹ Régis BURNET, « *Du miroir au face-à-face : voir comme Dieu voit dans le Nouveau Testament* », *Pallas* [En ligne], 92 | 2013, <http://journals.openedition.org/pallas/266>.

The theme of the gaze is a prominent feature in the Gospel of John and has been the subject of extensive scholarly investigation in contemporary times. It is of paramount significance to our research.

The widespread abandonment of the anthropomorphic representation of God, in favour of a more abstract notion of God as an impersonal force or entity, has implications for the differentiation between religious practices and spiritualities. St. Augustine's classification of vision involves the differentiation of bodily vision, which occurs through the eye, and intellectual vision, which occurs through an intuition, spiritual vision, through the human spirit, of the intellectual soul.²

The Gospel of John provides a nuanced examination of the frequency and intensity of gaze. Firstly, it explores the revelatory experience of encountering Jesus, and secondly, it delves into the faith-based decisions made by those engaging in dialogue.

In her analysis of the five senses in the Gospel of John, Dorothy Lee acknowledges that both the original recipients of the visions and the subsequent storytellers were committed to avoiding ambiguity and providing explicit descriptions:

“The Gospel of John uses a number of images to express its understanding of what it means to believe in Jesus and to belong to the community of faith. These images drawn from the material world, are used as symbols or vehicles of the divine world. Indeed, faith cannot appear and develop without such imagery, so foundational is it to the world of the fourth evangelist”³

The sense of sight is considered to be highly personal as it enables the recognition of facial features and physical forms. The statement posits that communication involves both reciprocity and distancing, as well as concreteness through learning and abstraction. It suggests that any communication is comprised of both content and relationship, and carries

² Œuvres de saint AUGUSTIN, *La Genèse au sens littéral en douze livres* (VIII-XII), intro., trad. et notes par Paul AGAËSSE et Aimé SOLIGNAC, Paris, DDB, 1972 (Bibliothèque augustinienne, t. 49), note 3, pp. 562-563.

³ Dorothy LEE, *The Gospel of John and the Five Senses*, in *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Spring, 2010, vol. 129, p. 115. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27821008>.

significant implications. “Sounds and images make Christianity a “creed”, a symbolic, contingent, imperfect expression of the relationship between man and God, much more complex than we can imagine and that we know.”⁴ The human faculties of perception serve as channels for comprehension and interpersonal exchange, grounded in empirical encounters, and imbued with inherent, metaphysical, and spiritual significance.

“John offers three innovative theological responses to humanity’s problems that push at the normal boundaries of physical bodies in time and space. First, in the incarnation, Jesus, the vehicle for knowledge of God, takes on a human body. Second, John’s “realised eschatology” sees the community as already living in the new, glorious reality, while simultaneously looking towards the future for final redemption. Third, the gospel promises that after Jesus returns to heaven, the Paraclete, or Advocate, will come, remaining with the community as the continuing non-corporeal presence of Jesus. To express his relatively sophisticated theology, the author takes a route through the body and the senses. Despite the gospel’s reputation as “the spiritual gospel” and its undeniable cosmic dualism that denigrates this world, matter, and flesh (1,13), it is sensuous, materialist, and body-oriented. The incarnation, usually expressed along the lines “*the Word (Logos) became flesh and dwelt among us*” (1,14), is more literally translated as “the Logos became flesh and pitched a tent among us”. The word “dwelt” or “tented among us” (*eskēnōsen hēmin*) is an obvious reference to the tent, or tabernacle in the Hebrew Bible, the portable sanctuary that Israel carried through the desert after the Exodus. As it was the physical manifestation of God’s presence with the people in exile, so John implies that Jesus is the physical presence of that same God who lives among his followers.”⁵

Theology in the Johannine tradition offers interpretive methods and principles for this purpose. The concept of the hermeneutic of the gaze pertains to a contemplation of the divine gaze and existence within its purview. The Gospel of John accentuates the duality of the gaze, wherein

⁴ Olivier BAUER, *Du beau, du bon...du Bon Dieu*, in *Lumen Vitae*, Vol LIX/2, 2004, p. 5.

⁵ Cf. Claudia SETZER, “*This Voice Has Come for Your Sake*” *Seeing and Hearing in John’s Gospel*, in *Journal for Religion, Film and Media*, Vol 2, Iss 1, 2016, p. 37.

the individuals involved exhibit a desire to subject themselves to the scrutiny of Jesus, while simultaneously facing the potential peril that such an act entails.

The aim of this study is to examine the various stages involved in the experience of “looking” and “being looked at”, as well as the potential outcomes and implications of such a visual encounter. The objective of this study is to map the transformative, conversion journey of connecting and communicating with God, though a shift from invisible to visible God, from seeing to “being seen”, from extrinsic sight, to inner faith.

This journey entails a transition from the visual perception of the world to a deeper understanding of it through psychological lens. Furthermore, it involves moving beyond the cultural dimension of seeing the world and tapping into the psychological dimension to experience the world on a more profound level. It involves a progression from a world characterised by symbolism and invisibility of God in the Old Testament, in antique, Greco-Roman environment, to the visible, embodied God, the Christ, as is revealed by John Gospel, leading to an inner vision of God, the faith. Our aim is to observe the transformational path which brought us from the imperceptible God prior to embodiment to the perceptible and seen God, transitioning from symbolic representation to introspective vision and faith.

This journey entails an anthropological path, a transition from the visual perception of the world to an understanding intellect and cognitive dimension of seeing, edified on Greek and Roman philosophical ambient, to proceed through psychological lens. Furthermore, it involves moving beyond the socio-cultural- lenses we are used to see the world and the divinity, and tapping into the psychological dimension to experience the world on a more profound level. It involves a progression from a world characterised by symbolism and invisibility of God in the Old Testament, to the rational and cognitive dimension of the antique Greek philosophy of “seeing” the world, if we consider the richness of the Greek language in verbs expressing the seeing, with a varied range of meaning, indicating the importance of regard in Hellenistic world, in harmony with comprehension of the world that Roman world confers to the sight.

The phenomenology explores the correlation between what is presented to consciousness and perceived by the visual senses. The correlation between vision and cognition holds significant relevance in the realm of visual culture philosophy, with particular emphasis on the formal aspects of visual perception. The distinction between two types of knowledge: one based on reasoning and inference, and another based on direct experience or “mystical seeing.” Although phenomenology may help us describe and evaluate how people experience and comprehend their religious beliefs and practises, there may be parts of these experiences that cannot be completely captured or explained by simply logical or empirical methods. This kind of knowledge is often associated with mystical or contemplative experiences in which the individual feels a direct connection to the divine. God transcends human understanding and can reveal himself in ways that are beyond our comprehension. It also suggests that encountering God can be a transformative and life-changing experience.

Marions' examination of the contrast between an idol and an icon and the phenomena of saturation is driven by the dialectic of visibility and invisibility, and highlights the importance of images, icons in the Christian tradition as a means of encountering the divine.

The wholeness of visibility is the embodied God, the Christ, as is revealed by John Gospel. Through Christ embodiment, God can be perceived, and you are seen by God to your depths, inner vision. Our aim is to observe the transformational, conversion path which brought us from the imperceptible God prior to embodiment to the perceptible and seen God, transitioning from symbolic representation, from perception, ration and intellect, “pshyche”, to introspective, inner vision and faith.

The prominence of the sense of sight, particularly in the form of the verb “to see”, is a notable feature of the Johannine imagery, encompassing a range of sensory experiences within the Gospel of John. This observation is not unexpected. Theology is conveyed by the author of the Gospel through a comprehensive exploration of the physical body and sensory experiences within the text.

Starting from this particular notion of the gaze and its contemporary implications, an inquiry arises as to why the gaze delineated in the Gospel of John is entrenched in dichotomous constructs of visual perception and observation, transformation and alteration, and stasis and agency. A segment of this study will explore the correlation between these dichotomies and the predicaments of the symbol as a discernible and imperceptible manifestation. The perception of Jesus by humans encompasses the radiance of divine splendour, which is projected onto the historical figure of Jesus through the lens of faith in His resurrection. This enables individuals to perceive Jesus as a contemporary figure, who was witnessed and heard by those who lived during his time. Setzer and the author both assert that Jesus is situated within a particular historical context, which shapes his relationship to the world and is reflected in the categories used to understand him:

“More than any other gospel author, John engages the problem of being human – subject to physical limitations and a short lifespan and marked by separateness. A sense of human longing haunts John's gospel, longing for loved ones, for community, for knowledge of God.”⁶

If the Gospel of John offers us one of the most fascinating reflections on Jesus' gaze in the New Testament, we must not forget that this Gospel is not a dogmatic treatise on Christology or ecclesiology, but rather a narrative that has its own coherent and pragmatic logic, which develops human, religious experience in relation to the divine. In broad terms, the Johannine theology as a whole creates bridges between narrative and discourse, in other words, the text offers a double perspective on the vision and action of Jesus, on the one hand in the form of a narrative (see the figure of Nicodemus in John 3 or the figure of the blind man from birth in John 9) and, on the other hand, in the form of speeches with a strong reflective character, such as the Prologue of John 1 or the farewell discourse of John 17.

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 35.

Prolegomene

Importance of the theme

The act of surpassing the boundaries of written language should not be ignored, as it pertains to the communicative potential of visual stimuli. The visual system, including the eyes, is widely recognised as a crucial tool for both perceiving and receiving information, and is a powerful non-verbal mode of communication.

Into the passage from the *Phaedrus*, Plato says:

“And when the soul is not directly looking at the truth, but through some kind of imagining, then the beauty it sees is dim and in shadow. But when it looks at the truth head-on, then it is forced to be intelligent and to understand, and it seems to have a blessed vision, and to be nourished and made strong, and to be in that state which is called wisdom. Isn't this the kind of seeing that we were talking about, the vision of the soul, which we said was the most keen of all? [...] Now, of all the things that are, beauty is the most shining and most dazzling to the sight. [...] Beauty alone, it seems, by the divine will and counsel, has been given to the Ideas to be their most manifest and lovable.”⁷

The issue at hand pertains to the narrative structure of the Fourth Gospel, which incorporates symbolic imagery that offers the reader an opportunity to appreciate its aesthetic qualities. The prevalence of the theme of “seeing” throughout the Gospel of John is not unexpected, given its significance to the author. This motif is particularly remarkable as it is linked throughout the text and is most prominently developed through

⁷ Cf. PLATO, *Phaedrus* 250 B 6-7; tr. it. in L.M. Napolitano Valditara, *Platone e le «ragioni» dell'immagine*, Milano 2007.

the description of various individuals who serve as archetypes for different types of people confronted with the enigma of Jesus' glory. This paper aims to make a scholarly contribution by examining the portrayal of Jesus Christ in the Gospel of John.

The primary objective of this work is to provide clarification on the terms *horaô*, *blepô*, *theôreô*, and *theaomai*, which have been utilised in various forms in scholarly and scientific articles of a theological or philosophical nature for several decades. This study focuses on the relationship between these concepts and both theology and anthropology, as well as the associated levels of transformation that occur in God's presence and His gaze. The comprehension of these notions carries significant sociological and political science ramifications. The present dissertation contemplates two distinct approaches towards the phenomenon of perceiving the divine, as reflected upon by the author. The initial approach is rooted in the historical Middle Eastern and Jewish-Hellenistic legacy, which acknowledges the validity of perceiving God and engaging in divine contemplation. The second tradition is the Christian faith, which diverges from both Judaism and paganism. It posits that God adjusts himself to human perception and manifests himself in the form of Jesus Christ, who is visible and present.

The subject matter, which pertains to a fundamental experience of physical perception, is intriguing from an anthropological perspective.

When considering the biblical context, it is given significant attention and re-examined in the context of the history of salvation and divine intervention. This intervention is solemnly manifested and compared to the human response, which demonstrates the capacity to transform it into a genuine and voluntary experience for humanity.

At the textual level, there is a significant inclination towards portraying Jesus as the focal point, particularly in terms of visual perception, while maintaining an enigmatic aura throughout the narrative. This is particularly evident in the significance placed on John the Evangelist. The recurring theme of Jesus being the focal point of the vision is evident throughout the Gospel. The reader perceives and progresses in the logic mentioned above thanks to a series of encounters

with Jesus, which, in the Fourth Gospel, represent true paradigms of the communication that is established between the participants.⁸ The socio-cultural context in which a powerful witness of inevitability was formed and the saving efficacy of perception should not be disregarded in the current investigation.

Status quaestionis

Despite the textual data of the Gospel of John, the number of anthropological studies devoted to the thematic analysis of seeing is limited. The distinct treatment of the "sight" can be observed particularly in biblical dictionaries, such as the work of W. Michaelis on "orao" or J. KREMER's article titled "orao". Numerous academic studies have been conducted on recent events, including but not limited to M. LABAHN's "Blinded by the Light" (453-509) and F. RAMOS PEREZ's "Ver a Jesús y sus signos".

The Gospel of John has been the subject of numerous studies, wherein the concept of "*Heilsgeschichte*" has garnered significant attention. This concept emphasizes the importance of eyewitness testimony, which is predominantly elaborated upon in the Johannine tradition. According to W. MICHAELIS, the experience of "ein Gesehenhaben" inevitably leads to the proclamation of the faithful community.⁹ This is because it encompasses more than just the

⁸ The topic has been extensively discussed by Blaise Arminjon in „*Nous Voudrions voir Jesus. Jean12-21*“ and by Roberto Vignolo in „*Personaggi del Quarto Vangelo*“. They claim the presence of a multifaceted dialogue that takes place between the narrator and individuals from diverse temporal contexts who are called upon to adopt a belief system. This discourse is primarily facilitated by the characters who either accept or reject the revelation of the Logos. The persons are portrayed to the audience as representations of belief or disbelief, prompting them to observe with meticulous scrutiny in order to adopt or distinguish themselves from these figures. The ultimate goal is to accurately ascertain their own personal convictions. The characters in the Johannine literature can be regarded as "signs" or paradigms in their own right, as they are the recipients of the signs enacted by the revealing Christ.

⁹ Cf. W. MICHAELIS „orao“, in G. KITTEL – G. FRIEDRICH, ed., *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, Stuttgart 1933-1978, pp. 315-368.

perception and observation of events; it delves into the profound significance of the facts and acknowledges them as a divine revelation that is accepted through faith. Hence, the credibility of an eyewitness account is contingent upon the prioritization of faith over visual perception during the moment of observation.

The Gospel of John presents a narrative that renders the imperceptible perceivable to the reader who has not had the opportunity to witness Jesus first-hand. The observation of God is a phenomenon that can be approached through at least two subsidiary perspectives. The first perspective is rooted in the ancient Middle Eastern and Judeo-Hellenistic cultural heritage, which acknowledges the validity of experiencing and contemplating divinity. The second tradition is the Christian one, which represents a significant departure from both Judaism and paganism. It posits that God assumes a form that is comprehensible to humans and manifests Himself through Jesus Christ.

The episodes on vision in John's account depict a correlation between the actions of Jesus, particularly his ability to perceive, and the consequent reactions that stimulate these actions, which are observable to us. The significance of perceiving Jesus in the Gospel of John, commencing from the precise lexicology and symbolism of signs, a discernible and imperceptible reflection, culminates in noteworthy theological deductions and evaluation of the function that Jesus fulfils in disclosing the Father (the Prologue).

R. FORNARA's thesis is a solid methodologically piece of work that serves as a valuable guide. The work employs a dialectical approach that effectively juxtaposes the concepts of vision and invisibility. This approach is applied to the vast and rich heritage of the Hebrew Bible, and it provides a clear illumination of the objectives and communicative advantages of the present study.

Anthropologists have been intrigued by the various ways in which individuals perceive and interact with their environment for a considerable amount of time, leading to a large body of scholarly literature on sensory perception and experience, also known as "anthropology of the senses" or "anthropology of perception" (Howes 1991, Ingold 2000, Downey 2007; Howes 1991, Ingold 2000, Downey 2007).

Through an anthropological lens, it can be observed that the Gospel of John suggests that those who have a perception of Jesus are already in the core of a process of following him through faith. Stated differently, the act of solely perceiving Jesus is inadequate; The way people experience and comprehend their religious beliefs and practises, cannot be completely captured or explained only by phenomenology, or empirical methods. This kind of knowledge is often associated with mystical or contemplative experiences in which the individual feels a direct connection to the divine. God transcends human understanding and can reveal himself in ways that are beyond our comprehension. So, how the act of seeing Him and being seen by Him led to the inner transformation, to faith?

The aim of this study is to examine the various stages involved in the experience of “looking” and “being looked at”, as well as the potential outcomes and implications of such a visual encounter. The objective of this study is to map the transformative, conversion passage of connecting and communicating with God, though a shift from invisible to visible God, from seeing to “being seen”, from extrinsic sight, to inner faith.

This research endeavour to analyses the seeing of God from a multi-disciplinary approach, anthropological, socio-cultural, theological, spiritual to identify possible correlations and new connotations on the theme. Furthermore, the present study aims to bring contributions on How is God seen in different cultural and philosophical contexts? from the visual perception of the world to a cognitive comprehension of the environment, edified on Greek and Roman philosophical ambient, Judeo and Middle East worlds, to proceed through psychological lens, moving beyond the socio-cultural lenses.

This study will focus on the viewpoints of Christian authors and the impact of Greco-Roman perspectives on the concept of spiritual discernment, aiming to explore the details of the interaction between the divine and human through sight.

Then, the gaze defined in the Gospel of John is imbedded in dichotomous constructs and we will look for correlation between these dichotomies of visual perception and observation, transformation and alteration, and stasis and action.

What are the perspectives of Christian writers, proposing an ecumenical regard on the issue of spiritual discernment and their endeavours to delve deeper into the dynamics of the interaction between the divine and human realms?

The methodology

Reading a text can be regarded as a mode of communication that entails an entreaty to cooperate and undertake concrete measures towards a common objective. The primary aim of this study is to examine the Christological perspectives within the Gospel of John through the use of exegesis and analysis. However, it will vary from other integrative approaches in certain aspects. The present focus on Christology and the literary aspect is likely to maintain a heightened awareness of the comprehensive structure, stylistic elements, and themes present in the Fourth Gospel.

The research commences considering the anthropological perspective of seeing God, which involves an examination of vision across various levels, from physical, sensorial perception, to the sight as a means of comprehending the world, with the "mind's eyes," and then the cultural dimensions and the limitations that shape our understanding of the world., to go toward the psychological lens of seeing and feeling the world. With the instruments given by anthropological dimension, the study continues by examining the manifestation of divinity across various environments, starting with the Greco-Roman and Middle-Eastern traditions. The Greek tradition is rich in offering numerous verbs of seeing, and in this study we analyse the fine and deep meanings, giving various significations that influence cultures and traditions. It explores the concept of an invisible and inaccessible God within the Judeo tradition, to arrive to the embodied, visible God, the Christs who regard you and overpasses the sensory level to introspection and emotional experiences that transform those who are seen by God, as John's Gospel exemplifies.

This study focuses on the relationship between these concepts and both theology and anthropology, as well as the associated levels of transformation that occur in God's presence and His gaze.

The scholarly works of R. FORNARA and X. DUFOUR have provided guidance by recognizing the importance of diligent *research in biblical lexicology* and the relevance of language used in the Gospel of John.

The present research examines the various applications and connotations of vision-related verbs utilised by the author of the fourth gospel. This study will be conducted in two phases in order to accommodate the particularities of the Johannine scripture, which involves the interplay of multiple levels in the development of the theme of vision.

The initial phase will entail a lexicological study. The analysis of the semantic nuances of vision-related verbs in classical literature can facilitate the identification of their distinct meanings in the language employed by the author of the fourth gospel. A semiotic analysis will be conducted to examine all instances of visual verbs within their respective literary contexts. This phase will facilitate the establishment of semantic connections among verbs, including both synonymic and differential links, culminating in a lexigraphy examination.

The subsequent phase involves a comprehensive examination of the vision-related verbs employed in the principal Johannine episodes, with a focus on their stylistic and literary characteristics. The chapter will commence with a concise literary examination of the initial chapter of the Gospel as per John. It will then proceed to explore the primary evangelical phases where the concept of vision is interwoven into the narrative structure. The study will analyse how the diverse forms of vision depicted in the story are integrated with one another to establish vision as a theologically significant theme.

Then, the analysis of the biblical text's communicative techniques will aid in a comprehensive understanding of what distinguishes the meaning and function of vision. F. Manns have meticulously examined the comparison between the contemporary perspective and the ancient

Jewish conception of the “see” in his work titled “L'Évangile de Jean”. The examination of the evangelist's owing will commence with a semantic analysis of the selected texts, taking into account the biblical and cultural context of specific conceptual elements, terminology, and phrases that are present in his gospel. This is particularly relevant in the biblical context, as the countenance of an individual can reveal much about their character and identity. Hence, it is imperative to meticulously observe the face of individuals we come across, as it can furnish significant understanding of their authentic nature.

In order to comprehend the enigma of Jesus as represented in the gospel episodes, particularly those related to his post-resurrection apparitions, it is imperative to discern the purpose behind certain expressions employed in the communication of the vision. One can argue that the act of telling can be contextualised within the larger scope of communication, acknowledging its distinction from both oral and non-verbal forms of communication.¹⁰ The incorporation of visual components in the analysis of communication is imperative, as their exclusion may lead to a restricted viewpoint that favours nonverbal signals. The statement in question highlights the anthropological dimension of communication, emphasising the need for a holistic comprehension that encompasses both visual language and gaze.

The discourse on *anthropological methodology* prompts us to delve deeper into the communicative implications of the psychological appeal of the Gospel of John. He shows an expertise in conveying the emotional states of his characters and properly dramatizes their circumstances, thereby producing a sense of empathy and engagement from the reader. The emphasis on affective experiences, sentiments, and disturbances extends beyond a mere narrative focal point. The phenomena observed can be attributed to intricate hyper-narrative mechanisms that are deeply rooted in the inner world and shared human experience. These mechanisms are comparable to remarkable physiological phenomena. The Gospel of John presents a valuable opportunity for exploration in this context, as

¹⁰ Cf. André LUCRÈCE. *Éloge du regard*. In: *Littérature*, n°62, 1986. Le réel implicite, pp. 3-13.

it not only conveys the intended message, but also challenges pre-existing beliefs that the reader may hold about the world and themselves.

At an anthropological level, this pertains to the art of perception, whether it be psychic, cultural, intellectual-cognitive, or spiritual. Consequently, this leads us to revisit the initial discourse on the function of the eyes in communication. The logical connection established between visual and narrative communication is deemed justifiable, as it leads to the development of theology and assumes a transformative effect on the reader's mental structure.¹¹

Contribution and limits of the research

The complex and diverse impact of Jewish, Hellenistic, and Christian ideologies on the concept of perceiving and seeing God as portrayed in the Gospel of John is a subject of academic interest. The Gospel incorporates diverse traditions to depict Jesus as the embodiment of the divine in human guise, thereby enabling the prospect of perceiving and encountering God in a novel and unparalleled manner. To complete such a laborious exegetical project, it is necessary above all set the limits. The comprehensive scope of the material, encompassing the individual texts, their theological content, and intertextuality, is necessary by the multifaceted, penetrating, and stimulating nature of the Gospel of John.

The communicative potential of a series is vast and cannot be fully utilised. The series comprises of scenarios that are gradually established to form the basis of thematic development, and are open to the evangelical surroundings. The Gospel of John presents a challenge in terms of interpretation, as it contains complex layers of meaning that are intertwined with other significant themes.

This research adopts a theological viewpoint and endeavours to achieve equilibrium among the diverse phases of formal analysis. The

¹¹ Cf. Mary Charles MURRAY, *The image, the ear and the eye in early Christianity*, in *Études de Lettres : revue de la Faculté des lettres de l'Université de Lausanne*, 1994, <https://www.e-periodica.ch/digbib/view?pid=edl-002:1994:0::557#320>.

practicality and accuracy of comprehending the final text necessitates this action. The research highlights the organisation and fundamental components of written material, while advocating for a comprehensive methodology that entails restoring their wholeness and consistency.

The study attempts to avoid redundancy in theological and anthropological subject matter by prioritising novel interpretations and themes. This passage explores into the Greco-Roman and Ancient Middle-East perspectives on encountering or perceiving divinity, and their subsequent influence on the manifestation of God in Judaism.

This work aims to make a scholarly contribution by examining the portrayal of Jesus Christ in the Gospel of John. The comprehensive examination of a topic of such magnitude holds significant value for its continued advancement across multiple academic disciplines, including theology, philosophy, anthropology, sociology, and biblical studies.

While there are other studies analysing the seeing of God, in John Gospel, these are often dissipated; moreover, the present study proposes a multiple dimension approach, including besides the theological and exegetic observation, the anthropological, philosophical, socio-cultural keys of understanding, offering a comparative and complementary view on God' seeing upon man, in Christian context, according to John Gospel.

This, in turn, had an impact on the visual representation of God in the Gospel according to John. The study endeavours to provide novel perspectives on the theological and anthropological significance of the text by conducting a thorough investigation of these themes and terms, and examining alternative interpretations.

This study concentrates on Christ's gaze upon man and the effect this has on him, allowing him to see God with his physical, mental, and spiritual eyes. This is the reason why, this study consists as well the most influential contexts and philosophical currents regarding the visibility of God, from different times and environments: Greco-Roman world, Jewish world in the Old Testament, the Near East, without entering into details of these contexts.

The review of these different contexts is nevertheless essential to facilitate the progressive understanding, as God revealed himself

progressively in the history of humanity and was perceived and seen differently by people.

However, I noticed a dissipation of studies and ideas regarding the different voices on the visibility of God, in various contexts, without being included in a common corpus. Therefore, putting them together, even without going into a detailed analysis, contributes to a comparative and progressive understanding of them.

The integration of authors from an ecumenical approach is not only novel but essential in the formulation of this theological dissertation, particularly in the examination of the correlation between God's vision and sensory perception. The inclusion of ecumenical perspectives from theologians affiliated with the Catholic, Orthodox, and Reformed traditions has enabled a broader and more diverse understanding of the topic at hand.

This study focuses on the seeing of Jesus in the Gospel of John, rather than the complete evangelical corpus. This, we believe, could have diluted the central theme or made the current study too lengthy. In light of this, we believe that the motif of seeing Jesus in the other Gospels could be analysed in future studies employing the multidisciplinary and ecumenical approach proposed in the present research.

By integrating diverse perspectives in the development of this work, a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the topic of divine vision can be achieved. Furthermore, it fosters a multi-disciplinary and contextual ethos of ecumenical cooperation and facilitates discourse among diverse Christian traditions.

We live in a society that emphasizes visibility, a society in which nothing can escape the gaze, in which people need to be seen and show themselves to exist in the eyes of others, a virtual world. What is the place of seeing God in this virtual world? What would be, if any, the journey from "virtual" perception to spiritual vision, from online visibility to inner faith? Is God visible or invisible in this virtual image-based world? What is the connection to divinity, to God in this "over and virtual visual" from extrinsic sight, to inner faith? These questions can open the door for future studies "looking for visible" ideas.

Chapter 1

The anthropology of gaze

What is the rationale behind developing an anthropology of the gaze? How does the visual aspect of the Gospel of John impact the field of anthropology of senses? Undoubtedly, there exist numerous reasons.

The field of anthropology that focuses on the gaze pertains to the ways in which individuals perceive and comprehend their surroundings, as well as how they are perceived by others. When talking about the “anthropology of the senses” the general agreement of the scholars is that besides making references to cultural values, is as well as a physical act, and psychological process of expressing emotions. So, sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell are also ways for the transmission of cultural values. The academic discipline under consideration investigates the manners in which the process of visual perception influences the dynamics of social interactions and customary behaviours within a given culture.

The Gospel of John's visual component holds great significance for an anthropology of the gaze, as it highlights the potency of visual perception and the act of being observed. The Gospel comprises various occurrences wherein certain characters exhibit the ability to apprehend something that remains imperceptible to others. The aforementioned examples serve to underscore the significance of vision in both spiritual and societal settings.

Moreover, the Gospel underscores the concept of the “divine gaze,” positing that God possesses omniscience and omnipresence. The

aforementioned notion holds significant ramifications for the field of anthropology as it posits that our perceptual faculties are not confined solely to the corporeal domain, but rather encompass the spiritual and metaphysical dimensions as well.

The examination of cultural disparities in visual perception can enhance our comprehension of how distinct societies establish significance and engage with one another.

Thus, if we consider that culture values are transmitted through senses, then the vice-versa is to be considered and the way we perceive the world is influenced and even conditioned by culture, and may vary as the cultural areas diverge. There are even cultures where there two main groups of senses and of seeing the world: through visual and non-visual senses, as Ian Ritchie writes about the African Hausa. This variation, in fact, is true even in regards to the enumeration of the senses and which senses are referred to, how they are prioritized and how are invested with social value.

Marshall McLuhan (1962) and Walter Ong (1967) argued that a society's sensory paradigm is determined by its communication technologies. According to this theory, literate societies, and especially print societies, emphasise sight due to the visual nature of writing, whereas non-literate societies emphasise hearing due to the auditory nature of discourse. For the latter, therefore, the concept of 'world harmony' is more applicable than 'worldview' (Ong, 1969).¹²

Nevertheless, according to McLuhanesque's theory that relates perceptual models to communication media, the sensory combination of culture is far too complex to be defined as auditory or visual based on the dominant mode of communication.¹³

In Christianity mysticism is a multifaceted phenomenon that has developed over centuries. Asceticism is unquestionably an essential

¹² Cf. Walter J. ONG, 1969. 'World as View and World as Event', *American Anthropologist*, 71, pp. 634-47, doi:10.1525/aa.1969.71.4.02a00030.

¹³ Cf. Marshall MCLUHAN, M., 1964. *Understanding Media. The extensions of man*, New York: New American Library, 1964, chromextension://efaidnbmnribpcajpcgclclefindmkaj/https://designopendata.files.wordpress.com/2014/05/understanding-media-mcluhan.pdf.

component of Christian mysticism, but it is not inherently a universal trait.

Accordingly, it is true that Christian mystics have frequently employed sensory symbols and imagery to communicate and experience their encounters with the divine. For instance, they may use images of light, fire, water, and other natural elements to represent God's presence and power. They may also use human relationship metaphors, such as betrothed and groom, to express their sense of closeness and union with God.

In Christian mysticism, the relationship between asceticism and sensuality is complex and dynamic, with different mystics and traditions emphasising various aspects of the spiritual life. The ultimate purpose of Christian mysticism is to strengthen one's relationship with God and to experience the transcendent with ever-increasing depth and richness.¹⁴

Many scholars claim that our perceptions and understandings of the world are complexly linked to the cultural and historical circumstances that surround us. To clarify, the act of seeing is not a neutral or objective process, but rather covers a specific approach to engaging with the surrounding environment.

In different cultures alongside the history, senses have been associated with diverse symbols and meanings. It is true that sensory experiences and symbols can have numerous associations and meanings in various contexts and cultures. In some philosophical and religious traditions, sight has been associated with reason and knowledge, such as the Platonic notion of the "mind's eye" and the Oriental notions of "insight" and "enlightenment." In other contexts, however, sight can be associated with deception or delusion, such as in the concept of the "evil eye" or the use of visual propaganda in political contexts.

In general, the meanings and associations of sensory experiences and symbols are moulded by a complex interplay of cultural, historical, and personal factors, and can vary considerably across contexts and traditions.

¹⁴ Cf. Ian RITCHIE, 1991. *'Fusion of the Faculties: A Study of the Language of the Senses in Hausaland'*. In D. Howes (ed.), *The Varieties of Sensory Experience: A Sourcebook in the Anthropology of the Senses*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

The way a society associate these sense actually influences the way world “make sense” for that group of people, as we experience the world, our bodies through senses.

In discussions regarding the relationship between senses and culture, primary assumptions are typically made. The first assumption posits that the senses serve as “windows on the world,” possessing a transparent nature that is precultural in essence.

Sensory experiences are subject to regulation by societal norms, which dictate the permissible forms and timing of sensory behaviour, as well as the associated meanings. The act of gazing at an individual can be interpreted as impolite, complimentary, or authoritative, contingent upon the context or societal norms. The “sensory rules model” can provide insight into a society's preoccupations, mainstreams, structure, and hierarchies. The senses are responsible for not only physical perception, but also play a significant role in shaping perceptual experience in accordance with social norms, a form of communication and setting social reports and relationships, as well as a way for expressing feelings and mirroring or interiorizing emotions.

To gain a comprehensive understanding of how visual perception is directed towards profound contemplation, a meticulous examination of the gospel is imperative. It reveals that individuals who engage with Jesus in any capacity fail to fully apprehend the enigma of his essence.

The assumption regarding the anthropology of senses assumes that sight has the major importance in terms of cultural significance. Unquestionably Western culture has conventionally prioritised vision and regarded it as the preeminent sense. The presence of this bias is evident in various facets of Western ideology and customs, ranging from the Platonic prioritisation of the “mind's eye” to the scientific examination of optics and visual cognition.

The sense of sight has a strong association with rationality, as per the principles of ancient philosophy. Aristotle, for instance, regarded sight as the most advanced among the senses. Throughout history, the act of acquiring knowledge has been symbolised by the penetrating gaze of scientists (Foucault, 1973; Le Breton, 1990).¹⁵

¹⁵ Cf. Michel FOUCAULT, 1973, *The Birth of the Clinic. An Archeology of Medical perception* (trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith). New York: Random House, 2003, pp. 107-108.

Historically, anthropology has been associated with vision, and vision-related metaphors have influenced the language used to characterise anthropological practises. To completely comprehend the cultures and communities they study, anthropologists must engage all of their senses in observation.

For a considerable period, anthropologists have been intrigued by the diverse approaches through which individuals perceive and encounter their surroundings, as well as the influence that the senses produce in shaping these encounters. The previously mentioned occurrence has resulted in a substantial corpus of scholarly works pertaining to sensory perception and experience, commonly known as the “anthropology of the senses” or the “anthropology of perception.” (Howes 1991, Ingold 2000, Downey 2007)¹⁶. Many scholars claim that our perceptions and understandings of the world are intricately linked to the cultural and historical circumstances that surround us. To clarify, the act of seeing is not a neutral or objective process, but rather covers a specific approach to engaging with the surrounding environment.

During the late 19th and 20th centuries, the significance of vision in Western culture was expanded through the emergence of impactful visual technologies, including photography and cinema (Jay, 1993; Classen, Howes, & Synnott, 1994).¹⁷ Recent studies in cognitive psychology and neuroscience have challenged the notion that vision is the most rational or logical sense. Research has indicated that various factors, including context, expectation, and emotion, can significantly

¹⁶ To see essential studies regarding the anthropology of the senses: HOWES, D. 1991. Introduction: To summon all the senses. In *The varieties of sensory experience: a source book in the anthropology of the senses* (ed.) D.Howes,3-21. Toronto: University Press. INGOLD, T. 2000. Stop, look and listen! Vision, hearing and human movement. In *The perception of the environment: essays on livelihood, dwelling and skill*, 243-88. London: Routledge; DOWNEY,G. 2007. Seeing with a ‘sideways glance’: visuomotor ‘knowing’ and the plasticity of perception. In *Ways of knowing: new approaches in the anthropology of experience and learning* (ed.) M. Harris, 222-41. New York: Berghahn Books.

¹⁷ CLASSEN, C.; HOWES, D.; SYNNOTT, A., 1994. *Aroma: The Cultural History of Smell*, London and New York: Routledge. pp. 88-92.

impact our perceptions and judgements, leading to potential confusion between our actual visual experiences and our interpretations of them.

The classification of the act of looking has held a pivotal position in the discipline of anthropology and in the fundamental characterization of the anthropological methodology. The gaze can provide insight into both the individual's humanity and the extent of divinity, as there exists a duality between the humanization of objects and the deification of humans.

Sensory anthropology diverges from the conventional approach of regarding the senses solely as instruments for acquiring knowledge about the environment. Rather, it examines the various ways in which the senses are employed in the everyday world, including affective experiences, modes of communication, and manifestations of social and cultural connections.

The field of sensory anthropology investigates how individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds perceive and interpret their surroundings through sensory experiences. Sensory anthropology acknowledges the presence of particular anthropological biases in the contemporary Western understanding of the senses. These biases include the separation of mind and body, a focus on vision, and the textual perspective employed to analyse cultural subjects.

Sensory anthropology is concerned with examining the sensory landscape of a particular culture. In the last two decades, the examination of sensory perception has undergone a significant transformation within the field of cultural anthropology. Presently, the study of the senses is approached within a cultural framework, as opposed to being situated within philosophical or biological discourse.¹⁸

A. Buzalic conducted a study on the interconnection between *Homo sapiens* and *Homousus*, drawing upon research from various religious and socio-humanistic fields that pertain to the issue of philosophical anthropology and religion. The impact of religion on human evolution

¹⁸ Cf. P. L. BERGER, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Anchor, 1990), 5-10.

and development, both at the individual and societal levels, has been significant and sustaining.

“The human being is a composite of both material and spiritual components, with the latter manifesting through cultural expression. Of all cultural influences, religion holds the greatest significance as a genetic factor. The epoch of contemporary humanity, in its authentic connotation, essentially commences during the Upper Palaeolithic period (-35,000 to -9000). During this time, the artistic sense and the recognition of the sacred begin to influence art and ethical-religious contemplation, which adopt comparable symbolic modes of representation that persist to the present day. The concept of Homo religiousus can be observed in the behaviour of Homo sapiens sapiens.”¹⁹

From this anthropological perspective, the human sight can be interpreted as a reflection of human nature and the manner in which it can be perceived and regarded by other humans or by forces or entities external to humanity. At same time can symbolise how humans perceive and interact with members of their own species showing empathy, compassion, solidarity, and recognition of the other person's integrity.

It is imperative to comprehend the correlation between the distinct cognitive abilities of Homo religious and our environment amidst all the equipment. One of the methods that can potentially make a difference is acknowledging the fact that each individual is unparalleled and irreplaceable, and exhibits themselves through self-relation and relationships that encompass their entirety, particularly the body, which serves as the most prominent and apparent relational connector.

However, how is it perceived by the individuals in question? An effective practise involves conducting a thorough analysis of the correlation between the said “view” and other related concepts, exploring the linked nature of their definitions, and identifying any observable advancements or developments. Upon examining the development of the concepts within the Gospel of John, it becomes

¹⁹ Cf. Alexandru BUZALIC, *Anthropos-Omul. Paradigmele unui model antropologic integral*, Galaxia Gutenberg, Targu- Lapus, 2022, p. 85.

apparent that the notion of faith, when viewed through a psychological lens, represents a spiritual disposition characterised by a sense of adherence, assent, attachment, and a commitment of consciousness to a particular belief. Frequently, the verbs “to see” and to “believe” are directed towards Jesus as the object, however, the response of Jesus towards this requirement for faith from the interlocutors is not always consistent. “

An anthropological analysis of the Gospel of John reveals that individuals who perceive Jesus are already undergoing a process of faith adherence to him. In other words, merely seeing Jesus is insufficient; one must see him and believe in order to fully embrace his teachings.

The study of sensory perception has been a prominent area of interest in the field of psychology, particularly in neuro-psychology, as well as in the philosophical realm of consciousness, commonly referred to as epistemology. Both disciplines consider the senses as instruments for perceiving the environment. Both theories hold a fundamental premise concerning the ubiquitous utilisation of sensory perception. Researchers in both disciplines endeavour to achieve a more comprehensive depiction of the manner in which individuals acquire knowledge about their surroundings via sensory and other forms of perception. On the contrary, the field of sensory anthropology, which examines cultural perceptions of the senses, adopts a non-universalistic perspective.

The analysis of visual culture has the potential to provide valuable insights into the sensory significances and encounters of a given community. The utilisation of visual representations and symbols is frequently ingrained within cultural norms and values, and can provide significant revelations regarding a society's perspective, social organisation, and power relations.

The analysis of visual culture can provide significant insights into the ways in which power is both declared and challenged within a particular society. Visual representations and symbols are commonly utilized in order to reinforce social hierarchies and power dynamics, while also serving as a means to challenge and undermine dominant norms and values. They function as a form of communication, shaping social

narratives and relationships, and provide a means for expressing emotions and reflecting internal states.

1.1. Sight Versus Gazing

In this study we focus on the vision and it seems important to clarify the meanings and the associate words we use. The act of looking cannot be defined to that of seeing, and the act of gazing cannot be simplified to mere sight. The concept of sight can be characterised as the process of receiving external stimuli that act upon the organs of vision. Conversely, the notion of gaze is distinguished by a more dynamic quality, as it involves an active engagement with the surrounding environment in which the individual is situated.²⁰

The process of vision is initiated by external stimuli acting on the retina, while the act of gazing involves a more complex series of actions, including pro-action, on the part of the observer. This process requires an active desire to focus on a specific object or being, to contemplate it among other stimuli, and to discern the most pertinent information from the available visual data. The act of visual perception involves the internalisation and restoration of images by the eye, while simultaneously allowing for the appropriation of the surrounding world. Nonetheless, it is imperative to acknowledge that our cognitive processes are not solitary, and our visual perception is not independent.

The gaze plays an intermediary function in our relationship with the world and has the potential to disrupt the flow of our activities. It serves as the foundation for all of our relationships.

The concept of relationships includes an individual's interactions with the external environment, including other individuals and the divine entity. The act of observing not only pertains to the recognition of external objects, but also extends to a realm that surpasses this notion. It simultaneously brings to fruition and challenges a particular perspective, or what can be referred to as a "worldview". In other words, it questions

²⁰ Cf. Etienne SOURIAU, Anne SOURIAU, *Vocabulaire d'esthétique*, Paris, PUF, 1990, p. 1210.

the depictions we construct of the world, of others, and even of entities that elude visual perception, such as God.

According to P. Dibia, humans can only perceive and identify natural forms that have been previously constructed by them, and imagination, or internal eyes, is essential to reconstruct the seen images.²¹

The process of looking is one essential way that establishes a connection between individuals and the surrounding environment. This phenomenon is distinguished by its ability to present the external world and individuals to us, while simultaneously not subjecting us to them.

The concept of “the look” is situated at the intersection of our grasp on reality and the aspects that elude our understanding. In other words, it pertains to the visible and invisible, the communicable and intimate, and the shareable and unspeakable facets of our experiences. The mutual dependence of the visible and invisible realities must be acknowledged as well.

C. Saplacan suggests that the interplay between the physical body and its visual representation is complex and characterised by multiple dimensions. There exist both conflicting and cohesive elements, as well as spatial and temporal proximity, between these entities. The demarcation line between the physical form and its representation is not static, but rather exhibits variability between the actual and the imaginary. The correlation between the corporeal form and its visual representation embraces issues of spatial and temporal proximity. The perception of one's body and its representations is contingent upon various factors, including temporal and spatial considerations:

“In the age of speed speech becomes too slow to communicate. The image of the body allows total communication. The body seems to disappear today behind the visibility of its image and with it our humanity. But can we envisage the body without an image? Between the body and its image, the relationships are subtle and multi-faceted: tension and oppositions, but also contiguity and continuity. The border between the body and the image proves to be fluctuating,

²¹ Cf. Pascal DIBIE, *La passion du regard: essai contre les sciences froides*, Paris, Éd. Métailié, 1998, p. 25.

playing between reality and the imaginary, to be the diversion and the revelation, between the production of the image of his body (the visibility of his body) and between perception by the other (the gaze).”²²

The human body is frequently subjected to objectification and visual reduction through the creation of various forms of imagery. From this perspective, the physical form is regarded as a malleable substance that can be shaped and controlled to conform to the preferences of both individuals and communities. The act of reducing the human body to its visual appearance may have noteworthy implications for our perception of the surrounding environment.

The exclusive focus on the physical appearance of the human body may result in the neglect of other significant facets of our sensory encounters, such as tactile sensations, olfactory perceptions, and auditory experiences. It is possible to overlook the intricate interplay between the physical body and the individual's sense of self, which is influenced by various social and cultural elements.

The Western culture has conventionally prioritised vision and regarded it as the preeminent sense, mainly due to the development of writing and reading as main forms of communication, as Marshall McLuhan (1962) and Walter Ong (1967) analysed. The presence of this bias is evident in various facets of Western ideology and customs. When talking about the “anthropology of the senses” the general agreement of the scholars is that besides making references to cultural values, is as well as a physical act. So, sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell are also ways for the transmission of cultural values. In different cultures alongside the history, senses have been associated with diverse symbols and meanings.

There are a multitude of metaphorical uses for taste. It may be used to characterise aesthetic appreciation or discrimination, as in “having an appreciation for art.” It can also be used to describe sexual experiences, such as “having a taste for someone.” In some cultures, particular foods have specific social or religious connotations, such as the kosher dietary

²² Cf. Calin SAPLACAN, *Une éthique du Regard*, Presa Universitatara Clujeana, 2015, p. 5.

laws in Judaism or the ritual use of bread and wine in Christian Communion.

Similarly, odours can convey a variety of connotations and meanings. Certain scents or perfumes may be associated with sanctity or holiness in some religious contexts, such as the use of incense in Catholic or Orthodox Christian liturgy. On the other hand, certain odours may be associated with immorality or impurity, such as sulphur's use as a symbol of hellfire in Christian theology. In political and social contexts, odours can be used to convey power or exclusion, such as the use of perfumes or body odours in certain cultures to indicate social class or caste.

Hence, it is crucial to acknowledge the constraints associated with reducing the human body to its visual aesthetics and to contemplate the body holistically, encompassing its physiological, psychological, and sociological aspects. For consistency reasons, the present study focuses on visual approach to the inner transformation of faith that gives sense to life. A further study, analysing faith from non-visual senses, would enrich and complete this approach.

In general, the meanings and associations of sensory experiences and symbols are moulded by a complex interplay of cultural, historical, and personal factors, and can vary considerably across contexts and traditions. The way a society associate these sense actually influences the way world "make sense" for that group of people, as we experience the world, our bodies through senses.

1.2. The role of sight in social interaction

It is currently acknowledged that visual mechanisms play a role in influencing numerous social interactions. Sensory experiences are subject to regulation by societal norms, which dictate the permissible forms and timing of sensory behaviour, as well as the associated meanings. The visual fixation of an individual can serve as a potent indicator to direct focus towards a specific region of the visual domain. On the other hand, a fixed eye contact could suggest the possibility of a potential danger, or

a favourable chance for an interaction. Nevertheless, the act of gazing at an individual can be interpreted as impolite, complimentary, or authoritative, contingent upon the context or societal norms. Furthermore, the social or affective connotation of a stimulus, along with the affective state of the observer, can exert significant impacts on fundamental and perceptual mechanisms. The objective of this particular part is to clarify the function of visual procedures in social exchanges by establishing a connection between research on the fundamental cognitive mechanisms that facilitate vision and research on the social and emotional context in which the processing occurs.

The topic of the eye and creation is a multifaceted subject that spans across various academic disciplines and inquiries, such as neurobiology, philosophy, psychoanalysis, logic, and iconography. Fundamentally, this theme delves into the intricacies of the interplay between the body, mind, and the external environment, with a particular focus on the phenomenon of autoscopia, which pertains to an individual's self-awareness of their own physical form.

A hermeneutic model comprising of three components, namely "the sight" "the seeing" and "the being seen-by" can be identified through an interdisciplinary analysis of the gaze. Physiology refers to the biological processes that enable vision, or the sense of sight. Psychology pertains to the cognitive process of perception; specifically, the act of visual perception or "seeing" The discipline of philosophy pertains to the approach of self-perception or perception by others, also known as "being-seen-by" The concept of aesthetics pertains to the conclusive aspect of visual perception, encompassing the formation of one's self-representation and the manifestation of artistic creativity.

The neurobiological aspect of gaze pertains to the physiological processes that enable visual perception. This encompasses the operation of the ocular system and the cognitive handling of visual stimuli within the cerebral cortex. The psychological aspect of gaze analysis delves into the mechanisms through which we process and comprehend visual stimuli, encompassing the impact of prior experiences and affective states on our perceptual interpretation.

The philosophical aspect of the gaze pertains to the notion of self-awareness, encompassing the ways in which we perceive ourselves and how others perceive us. This component delves into the examination of the gaze's function in our interpersonal connections, encompassing concerns of authority and subjugation.

The aesthetic aspect of the gaze pertains to the manner in which our observation of the environment can be translated into creative representation. This encompasses the act of producing self-representations via self-portrayal, in addition to utilising the gaze as a means of artistic expression in the realm of visual arts.

According to C.D. Savca, this model of seeing performs three functions: morpho-optical, cognitive and reflexological. There morpho-optical is an optical-physical or morpho-optical-physical function:

“The correlation between the physical sense of sight and the cognitive processes that facilitate the interpretation of visual stimuli closely associates the act of seeing with the function of perception. Visual perception is the process of perceiving objects and their spatial properties through the eyes, which have the capacity to detect and transmit light. The entities that are perceived constitute the objects of perception, while the perceiving individual represents the subject of perception, thereby instigating the process of self-exploration. The cognitive process is characterised by its analytical nature, which entails the utilisation of the brain, rationality, discernment, and outlook. The process also encompasses the utilisation of prisms and other instruments that facilitate the control and review of the objects that we perceive. The analytical eye is a focused and abstract perspective that facilitates the generation and development of novel ideas and concepts, characterised by its unencumbered and unwavering nature. The gaze is frequently linked to the cognitive eye, which has the ability to generate novel insights and viewpoints through meticulous observation and scrutiny.”²³

Recent studies in cognitive psychology and neuroscience have challenged the notion that vision is the most rational or logical sense. Research has indicated that various factors, including context,

²³ Cf. DODU-SAVCA, Carolina. Le Modèle herméneutique valéryen « corps-esprit-monde » dans le circuit visuel « la vue-le voir » et « l'être-vu-par ». In: *La Francopolyphonie*. 2015, nr. 1(10), pp. 125-136. ISSN 1857-1883, p. 128.

expectation, and emotion, can significantly impact our perceptions and judgements, leading to potential confusion between our actual visual experiences and our interpretations of them.²⁴

In general, the meanings and associations of sensory experiences and symbols are moulded by a complex interplay of cultural, historical, and personal factors, and can vary considerably across contexts and traditions. The analysis of visual culture has the potential to provide valuable insights into the sensory significances and encounters of a given community. The utilisation of visual representations and symbols is frequently ingrained within cultural norms and values, and can provide significant revelations regarding a society's perspective, social organisation, and power relations.

1.3. The concept of visual perception as a form of communication and understanding of the world

The fundamental premise of my research is that there exists an organic articulation between the gaze, thought, and language. The production of mental images is facilitated by language, which enables comprehension and acquisition of knowledge about various subjects. It is important to note that this relationship between language and mental imagery is not necessarily reciprocal. The acquisition of knowledge is facilitated through the utilisation of various forms of communication, whereby the spoken word and its capacity to evoke mental imagery serve to enhance one another.

What is the correlation between visual perception and verbal expression? What is the distinction between observation and description? Which visible reflection can be captured and expressed in language? Furthermore, it is imperative to inquire how a discourse facilitates the process of rendering things visible and constructing a spatial framework of visibility that subsequently illuminates objects and organises their perspective. This statement represents a singular idea or concept. In order

²⁴ CLASSEN, C.; HOWES, D.; SYNNOTT, A, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

to elucidate the concepts of sight and gaze, we need to look into the nature of light and establish it as an indispensable requirement for the perceptibility of objects.

Andre Lucrece made an intriguing observation regarding the lexical similarity between the terms “communication” and “communion”²⁵ The co-origination of these two concepts implies the possibility of an underlying correlation between them. The notion that communion entails the exchange of thoughts or emotions is intrinsically linked to the notion of communication. The concept that communion may encompass establishing a connection or relationship with an entity or individual, exemplified by the communion with Christ in the New Testament, especially in the John's Gospel, underscores the significance of connection and relationship in both communication and communion. The notion that the act of looking carries communicative properties is a compelling concept. The statement posits the existence of various modes of communication and interaction with individuals, extending beyond conventional verbal or written forms of expression. The concept that significance arises from the sign, once it becomes interpretable, is a fundamental realisation in semiotics that facilitates comprehension of how communication and connection can occur via diverse signifying systems.

The inclusion of visual elements in communication analysis is crucial as their omission may result in a limited perspective that prioritises nonverbal cues. The statement underscores the anthropological aspect of communication, which necessitates a comprehensive understanding that encompasses visual language and gaze.

Research in ethical science that focuses on nonverbal communication can provide benefits for various social sciences, such as ethnology, sociology, and history. It appears that in some cultures, there may be a greater emphasis placed on completing routine tasks as opposed to utilising visual signals and nonverbal communication, which can lead to a lack of opportunities for introspection and expressive communication through visual channels. There are societies where the act of eye contact

²⁵ Cf. André LUCRÈCE. *Éloge du regard*. In: *Littérature*, n°62, 1986. Le réel implicite. pp. 3-13; doi : <https://doi.org/10.3406/litt.1986.2267> https://www.persee.fr/doc/litt_0047-4800_1986_num_62_2_2267, pp. 3-4.

with an individual can be interpreted as impolite, complimentary, or authoritative, contingent upon the context or societal norms.

In contrast, in certain cultures, the act of gazing may serve as a crucial component of interpersonal interaction and may function as a nuanced mechanism for establishing communal ties. Theoretical analysis may overlook the significance of visual language and gaze in communication, because of the succinct clarity prevalent in contemporary societies. Communication is a comprehensive concept that can only be comprehended in its entirety, encompassing the modes of visual representation that communicate both an aesthetic and an ethical message.²⁶

The gaze has the ability to convey meaning through its distinct code, comprising of elements such as alignment, spacing, and duration, overpassing the verbalisation. Extended duration of gaze can signify a desire to maintain proximity and foster communication between individuals. The present evidence is influenced by a steadfastness akin to the fervent perseverance of verbal exchange. Communication takes place when one participant assigns an emotional significance to the gaze, while the other participant endeavours to enhance its comprehensibility. This phenomenon enables the act of seeing to transcend its passive state and assume an active role in the process of communication.

As A. Berthoz observes, the gaze was influenced by various internal and external factors, such as cultural values, personal beliefs, social norms, and experiences. The concept in question is a dynamic one that has continued to inspire scholarly inquiry and critical reflection.

“Anthropologically speaking, the gaze covers more than just the physical act of directing one's eyes towards a specific point in space to gather visual information about the surrounding world. Rather, it involves the projection of preconceived notions onto the world, and is influenced by the subject's intentions and motivations. The gaze is subject to external capture by the world and others, and involves anticipation and the construction of a world based on the perceiver's past experiences, future aspirations, desires, fears, beliefs, and social norms.”²⁷

²⁶ Cf. Calin SAPLACAN, *op. cit.*, pp. 82-84.

²⁷ Alain BERTHOZ, *L'échange par le regard*, <https://www.cairn.info/revue-enfances-et-psy-2008-4-page-33.htm>.

The act of seeing an individual or an object includes more than perception and acquiring visual data. Frequently, an assessment or appraisal is incorporated, which is influenced by our pre-existing assumptions and prejudices. The manner in which one perceives another through the act of gazing is subject to the impact of cultural and social norms, personal experiences, and individual biases. The assessment of an individual's value or merit is frequently influenced by their physical attributes and is susceptible to a range of biases and preconceived notions. Moreover, the gaze can serve as a mechanism for exercising dominance and authority over the other, given that the act of visual scrutiny can induce a sense of susceptibility and commodification in the other.

The interpersonal encounter between two individuals is a multifaceted social situation that may encompass a variety of factors and exchanges among the involved parties. The nonverbal communication that occurs through exchanged glances in this particular scenario can possess significant connotations, and a thorough examination of such nonverbal signals can facilitate a more comprehensive comprehension of the underlying social dynamics at work. According to V. N. Grappe, the act of making eye contact can convey various nonverbal signs such as trust or mistrust, interest or disinterest in the ongoing conversation, dominance or submission, and emotions of empathy or antipathy towards the interlocutor:

“When I look at the person I'm addressing, I try to “catch” his attention, or at least his gaze, as I want to both strengthen and control the ongoing communication. But ahead of the sociological perspective on communication, the complicated link between speech and gaze has historically been thought of in our culture by the codification of politeness and civilisation. The gaze is “this mirror of the soul” which it is better to hide, by humility sometimes, or, wisely but frankly, to carry in front of yourself in the distance while silent. This tradition of coding visual vectors shows that exchange of views is more than phatic communication. On the other hand, in the exchanged glance, why does it seem to us that the privileged target of a look on one face is the eyes of the other? The diving “in the bottom of the eyes” of the other, even short, is also a beating offer,

since the eyes that penetrate others' eyes offer with the same reversed amplitude the change of mirroring yourself. In the exchange of gaze, taking and giving are precisely linked, for I cannot look into the eyes of others without that in return he may immediately, if he so desires, turn me the visual vector. Visual exchange appears to offer only a simple cross opening with no other content than itself. Yet this exchange can inaugurate a love story or a duel, a secret wound or a buried happiness."²⁸

Furthermore, gazes have the potential to convey affective states or modulate social exchanges. Individuals may utilise their gaze as a means of conveying their receptiveness to the other party, expressing dissent or agreement, prompting the other party to speak, or indicating that they have exceeded their boundaries.

If the act of looking is considered as a method of perceiving others, it should be noted that looking does not solely rely on the sense of sight and cannot be easily comprehended. The act of observing an individual may not solely rely on the acquisition of visual data. The process of perceiving an individual also encompasses appraising them based on their physical attributes, which may be impacted by subjective elements such as individual prejudices and societal conventions. Consequently, the act of gazing possesses an axiological aspect, which implies that it encompasses assessments of value or merit.

The term "look" in common terminology is often associated with a connotation of assessment or review, as opposed to mere visual perception. The usage of phrases such as "looks good" or "looks bad" to describe the appearance of an individual or an object is a notable phenomenon. The evaluative dimension is often prioritised over the perceptual aspect of the gaze, resulting in the latter being disregarded or undervalued.

As Maurice Merleau-Ponty notes:

"We are at the world through our body, and our encounter with others and with things is never disembodied. It is therefore

²⁸ Véronique Nahoum-Grappe, « L'échange des regards », *Terrain* [En ligne], 30 | 1998, mis en ligne le 15 mai 2007, consulté le 19 avril 2023. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/terrain/3375> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/terrain.3375>.

inevitably on a set of perceptions that the contact with them. It is through my body that I perceive others as it is through my body that I perceive things"²⁹

The gaze includes more than just the direction of the eye towards a point in space to gather visual information. It is also a projection of preconceptions, desires, fears, beliefs, and expectations onto the surrounding world. The act of perception is a subjective construction of the world by the perceiving subject, influenced by their past experiences and intentions.

Didier Marcelli's book, „*Les yeux dans les yeux: l'enigme du regard*” investigates the significance and role of the gaze in our societal engagements. This analysis explores the ways in which facial expressions can convey a range of affective states, including but not limited to anger, sadness, happiness, and affection. Additionally, it investigates how these expressions can facilitate emotional bonding and enhance interpersonal relationships. The author delves into the strategic use of gaze as a means of expressing dominance or submission in a given situation. Additionally, the author examines how gaze can be employed to regulate the exchange of information during a conversation and retain authority over the situation. The complexity of looking into our social interactions offers valuable insights into non-verbal communication and human psychology.

“The ability to converge the gaze and sustain extended periods of eye contact seems to be exclusive to the human species.”³⁰

The act of looking is also a means of capturing the world and the others, as it enables the apprehension and interpretation of visual information, while being influenced by the expectations and motivations of each individual. The act of looking can be considered a form of anticipation, as it enables individuals to predict the actions and intentions of others. Additionally, it serves as a means of constructing one's perception of the world, of understanding the world, to “rationalized” the world, as it facilitates the creation of a mental image of the surrounding environment.

²⁹ Cf. MERLEAU-PONTY M, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, Gallimard, 1945, p. 216.

³⁰ Didier MARCELLI, *Les yeux dans les yeux: l'enigme du regard*, Albin Michel, 2012, p. 31.

The visual is responsible not only for physical perception, or as a way of communication, but it plays a significant role in shaping perceptual experience in accordance with social norms, as well as a mean to express and to mirror own emotions and feelings.

1.4. The gaze at the emotion level

The presence of emotions and behaviours, including attachment, love, and empathy, are essential components of community life. These mechanisms are integral to the concept of social cognition. The eyes serve not only as a means of visually exploring scenes, but also as a mode of communication by conveying the object of an individual's attention, their intentions, and their emotions. Thus, the hypothesis is that the initial stages of gaze processing in early development may play a role in the subsequent development of social cognition.

M.G. Calvo & F. Esteves search the utilisation of facial expressions to convey emotions plays a significant role in the communication of people's needs and intentions. The ability to detect and interpret emotional facial expressions is a crucial aspect of human social interaction, requiring both evolutionary and learned preparation. This finding coincides with the observation that kids exhibit early competence in distinguishing various facial expressions of emotion. Additionally, it corresponds with the proof of spontaneous recognition of emotional facial expressions in adults.³¹

In many ways, direct gaze or eye contact appears to represent a singular gaze direction. The functions of gaze contact as a synchronisation signal between individuals have been highlighted by socio-psychological research.

Eye contact plays as well a role in the regulation of inter-individual exchanges, particularly during dialogues, where it enables individuals to express expectations and even social control. Moreover, ocular contact

³¹ Cf. Manuel CALVO & Francisco ESTEVES (2005) Detection of emotional faces: low perceptual threshold and wide attentional span, *Visual Cognition*, 12:1, 13-27, DOI: 10.1080/13506280444000094.

can have multiple meanings, ranging from the manifestation of intimacy to that of dominance and hierarchical relationships. This variety of meanings has been acquired through the process of evolution, but it is only in humans where the variety of meaning of direct gaze is highly dependent on the social context and cultural norms that control gaze behaviour that it is manifested in a remarkably diverse manner. Thus, the meaning of direct gaze must be decoded as a function of context, which of course includes facial context. In any instance, however, ocular contact indicates mutual attention: it indicates that the focus of another agent is on oneself rather than on an external object in the environment.³²

As observe I.S. Tellier, the visual attention of individuals holds significant importance in the realm of social cognition and interaction, as well as psychological expression. The ability to perceive the orientation of an individual's visual focus enables us to comprehend their focal point, as well as to construe their motives and affective state. The aforementioned capability is considered to be a crucial component in various domains of social cognition, such as the identification of facial features, interpretation of emotions, and exhibition of altruistic actions:

“The gaze of others is not only very informative: it is also a powerful facilitator of human interactions, especially if it is straightforward. The detection of the direction of gaze of others modulates a large number of processes of social cognition, such as the perception of others, face recognition, perception emotions and prosocial behaviors”³³

Gaze, as a nonverbal signal, is regarded as a highly appealing facial characteristic that is capable of conveying a significant amount of information (Homke, Holler and Levinson 2018)³⁴. The act of perceiving

³² Cf. N. GEORGE, L. CONTY, *Facing the gaze of others*, *Neurophysiologie Clinique/Clinical Neurophysiology*, Volume 38, Issue 3, 2008, Pages 197-207, ISSN 0987-7053, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neucli.2008.03.001>.

³³ Cf. Idriss-Solenne TELLIER, *Le contact visuel : Démonstration de son coût sur le contrôle cognitif*, <https://www.theses.fr/2014AIXM3048.pdf>.

³⁴ Hömke P, Holler J, Levinson SC (2018) Eye blinks are perceived as communicative signals in human face-to-face interaction. *PLOS ONE* 13(12): e0208030. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0208030>.

the eyes of others serves unique social and emotional purposes. The act of gazing typically conveys a sense of interest, as individuals tend to direct their visual attention towards objects or individuals they find appealing, while avoiding those they do not. This behaviour is often associated with approach-avoidance tendencies. Furthermore, it has been observed that gaze can exert a substantial impact on the perception of emotional expression. In certain situations, individuals who are experiencing anger tend to maintain eye contact with the individual they are engaging in a quarrel or altercation with, while individuals who are timid and apprehensive may avert their gaze and avoid eye contact.

The researches of the last decades advanced in demonstrating the neural foundations of emotions and their relationship with cognitive processes. The exchange of gazes is imbued with emotion, and it is imperative to emphasise the significance of emotion in perceiving the gaze of others. Emotions are of the highest significance in the identification and comprehension of social signs within the framework of gaze. The act of exchanging gazes with individuals enables us to discern nuanced emotional expressions in their facial features, including alterations in eye contact, eyebrow placement, and mouth movements. These nonverbal signals can offer valuable insights into the affective condition of the interlocutor, and can facilitate our decision-making process regarding the appropriate mode of interaction.

The brain regions responsible for converting gaze direction and perception of emotions exhibit significant interconnections in activation, as Adams et al. (2003)³⁵ and Spangler and Schwarzer (2010)³⁶ demonstrated in their studies. Consequently, it is reasonable to anticipate that the behavioural reactions vary in the emotion they exhibit. The

³⁵ Adams, Reginald B., and Robert E. Kleck. "Perceived Gaze Direction and the Processing of Facial Displays of Emotion." *Psychological Science*, vol. 14, no. 6, 2003, pp. 644–47. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40063926>. Accessed 21 Apr. 2023.

³⁶ Sibylle M. Spangler, Gudrun Schwarzer, Monika Korell, Johanna Maier-Karius, The relationships between processing facial identity, emotional expression, facial speech, and gaze direction during development, *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, Volume 105, Issues 1–2, 2010, Pages 1–19, ISSN 0022-0965, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jecp.2009.09.003>.

established knowledge within the field recognises the role of the amygdala in emotional processes.

The joint contribution of gaze direction and expressed emotion has been demonstrated to be critical in determining the speed of recognising expressed emotion and the consistency in attributing emotional traits for observed faces, as evidenced by recent studies (Adams & Kleck, 2003, 2005)³⁷.

However, sight can be associated with deception or delusion, such as in the concept of the “evil eye”, or the sin. In different traditions, blindness has been perceived as a consequence of sin, of evil forces. The incapacity of seeing is equivalent to incapacity of understanding the world, cognitive dysfunctionality, emotions less, and consequently of giving a sense to one's life, in antithesis to the vision.

1.5. Blindness – impairment or disability

The etymology of the term for sight problems in Greek can be identified in to the base concept “tyflos,” which denotes a state of blindness. Greek lexicographical sources provide varying interpretations of this notion, suggesting that it can be interpreted both literally and figuratively.

The literature of ancient European culture contains a multitude of depictions of individuals who experienced visual impairment or blindness. These accounts are present in the works of notable writers, including but not limited to Seneca, Euripides, Homer, Thucydides, Ovid, Aristotle, and Herodotus. The aforementioned authors employed a metaphorical and figurative interpretation of visual impairment, utilising it to analyse intangible concepts explored in the fields of ethics and axiology. During this period, the notion of “philosophical blindness”

³⁷ Adams, RB, Jr & Kleck, RE 2005, ‘Effects of Direct and Averted Gaze on the Perception of Facially Communicated Emotion’, *Emotion*, vol. 5, no. 1, pp. 3–11, viewed 21 April 2023, <<https://search-ebscohost-com.proxy.library.lincoln.ac.uk/login.aspx?direct=true&db=pdh&AN=2005-02259-001&site=ehost-live>>.

was acknowledged, as evidenced by Sophocles' King Oedipus. Nevertheless, their knowledge did not encompass the concept of blindness related to matters of the sacred. The period in question also gave rise to the expression "eyes of the spirit," while the term "blind" was employed to denote cognitive functions of the reason in Greek. Democritus postulated that an individual's soul fixated on a singular object may result in a lack of awareness towards other subjects. According to Plato's philosophy, the term "blindness" denotes the incapacity to perceive spiritual truths.³⁸

The theological perspective on disability implies an initial differentiation between the concepts of impairment and disability.³⁹ The term "impairment" refers to a distinctive physical or psychological attribute of an individual that distinguishes them significantly from the typical or average person. On the other hand, "disability" refers to the societal outcomes that arise from having an impairment.

There exist two distinct approaches to comprehending the body that has been affected by impairment. The first perspective pertains to epistemology and explores the influence of body's experiences on an individual's comprehension and perception of the world. The second perspective is phenomenological in nature and investigates the experiences and coping mechanisms of individuals with disabilities, as well as the societal attitudes that affect their self-concept and identity.

Traditionally, blindness has been perceived as the antithesis of vision. Elkins argues that the concept of sight and blindness is often perceived as binary oppositions, similar to the dichotomies of black and white or on and off.⁴⁰ In anthropological discourse, vision has frequently been demarcated from non-visual sensory modalities, such as touch and

³⁸ Cf. RYBICKI, Adam, Andrzej JASTRZĘBSKI, & Monika MCNEILL. "Blindness: physical or spiritual? An attempt at an interdisciplinary analysis." *Verbum et Ecclesia* [Online], 41.1 (2020): 8 pages. Web. 25 Apr. 2023.

³⁹ Cf., John M. HULL, *The Tactile Heart: Blindness and Faith*, Hymns Ancient & Modern, 2014. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.proxy.library.lincoln.ac.uk/lib/ulinc/detail.action?docID=3306191>.

⁴⁰ James ELKINS, *The Object Stares Back: on the Nature of Seeing*, https://archive.org/details/objectstaresback00elki_0/page/n275/mode/2up.

hearing. The author highlights that investigations relating to vision impairment have frequently prioritised non-visual senses. Historically, blindness has been regarded as a state of deficiency or negativity, leading anthropologists to prioritise the study of other senses when examining visual impairment. The observation could indicate a potential inclination towards favouring the sense of sight over other sensory modalities, coupled with a potential deficiency in comprehending the day-to-day realities of individuals with visual impairments.

Theology has long tried to answer the question of why there is suffering and, by extension, disability. Theodicy explains suffering variously as God's will, a punishment, to test someone's faith, an opportunity for character development, a manifestation of the power of God, as redemptive suffering and as a sign of God's mysterious omnipotence.

Christ's regard overpasses the physical, cultural, social, rational and intellectual levels. It triggers emotions and inner reflection of the world, of self. It involves moving beyond the surface dimension of seeing the world and tapping into the profound level. Christ's gaze has a transformational effect, from evidence of being seen and to see, to interior transformation that "gives sense", from physical and spiritual blindness, to clarity and fulfilment of life.

1.6. Seeing through the eyes of faith

The experience of being seen and of seeing trigger inner transformation. Every person, created in the image and likeness of God, possesses an infinite amount of significance: a comprehensive portrayal of our human attributes cannot entirely encapsulate the profundity of our individuality. The human psyche remains enigmatic both to oneself and to others. The enigma of personhood is approached with a profound sense of reverence and amazement. According to 1 John 3:2, we are currently regarded as God's offspring, but our future state remains undisclosed: *"Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed."*

The field of Christian anthropology surpasses a purely pragmatic perspective of the human entity. The inner transformation, the faith is one of the most common way of thinking to go beyond the evidence. The nature of a person's convictions regarding the concept of God is inherently complex and characterised by a multitude of facets. There exists a wide range of theological perspectives regarding the nature, attributes, and interactions of God with humanity. Scholars have conducted investigations on diverse facets of these convictions, from symbolism, to cultural and religious expressions, including the emotional bond, visual perception, ethical standards, and authority of the divine entity.

Sigurdson's attempts to develop a theology of the gaze in his research. He analysis of the power of the gaze emphasizes the inseparable connection between what we see, how we see it, and how we come to see. In other words, the act of looking is never passive but always an active way of establishing relationships in the world.

According to Sigurdson, the power of the gaze resists any transcendental subjectivity that seeks to escape the reality of embodiment or any scope based on a relationship of mastery or control over the world.

“The individual in question cultivates a perspective of faith that serves as a theological framework for comprehending and engaging with the nature of reality.”⁴¹

Sigurdson's theological account of the gaze is organised on the reality of the incarnation, which emphasizes the way God's presence appears in our midst and is correlated with the habits of gazing to the existential concerns of diverse human beings.

In this view, the 'gaze of faith' is an engaged gaze that shapes our perception of the world and makes us accustomed to the appearance of the paradox of transcendence and immanence that the incarnation promises can appear throughout existence. The concept of the 'gaze of

⁴¹ Cf. Ola, SIGURDSON, *Heavenly Bodies. Incarnation, the Gaze and Embodiment in Christian Theology* (Translated by Carl Olsen), Willem B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan 2016, ISBN 978-0-8028-7166-4, p. 22.

faith' involves not only a mode of apprehending the external environment, but also a manner of existing within it.

The formation of theological beliefs is frequently influenced by an individual's cultural heritage, upbringing, personal encounters, and religious customs. Individuals' values, attitudes, and behaviours may also be impacted by external factors. Understanding the complexity of belief systems is crucial in comprehending human psychology and spirituality.

The cultural and religious contexts influence the way people perceive the world, through distinct lenses, according to their respective horizons. The concepts of objectivity and critique, which involve making claims about truth, are only applicable within a specific horizon. The act of seeing is inherently non-innocent and non-passive, as it necessarily involves a specific mode of engaging with the surrounding environment. Christ's gaze has a transformational effect, from an exterior, static, "accepted" truth, toward inner spiritual transformation that "gives sense", clarity and fulfilment of life centric on the belief in God and the truths of the faith, which enable individuals to "see" the world in a new way.

1.7. From visual perception to gaze of phenomenology

The act of perception was subjected to rationalisation, resulting in the positioning of the thinking subject as the dominant entity at the core of the realm of significance.

Ola Sigurdson, a Swedish theologian, provides a concise yet informative historical overview of various modes of perception by utilising the term "scopic regimes".⁴² The statement highlights the prevalent perception and interpretation of vision during a particular era. With the advent of early modernity, the concept of "*Cartesian perspectivism*" acquired authority.

The perception of reality became progressively limited to a specific vantage point. The concept of "seeing" underwent a shift in meaning, as

⁴² Ola, SIGURDSON, *op. cit.*, p.17.

it was no longer perceived as *theoria*, which involved actively engaging with the object being observed. Instead, it became associated with the cognitive process of organising and perceiving a world that was objectified and completely transparent to the inquisitive mind. This new understanding emphasised a disembodied perspective.

The act of perception was subjected to rationalisation, resulting in the positioning of the thinking subject as the dominant entity at the core of the realm of significance. As per Descartes' perspective, the mind is responsible for the act of seeing, rather than the eyes. Furthermore, the physical world, stripped of all obscurity, was simplified into a mathematical construct that could be comprehended through cognitive processes. The global perspective shifted towards a more analytical approach, where the world was perceived as an entity to be scrutinised and analysed, rather than a symbolic representation of divine creation that held inherent significance.⁴³

There exist a multitude of theoretical frameworks in the field of visual culture philosophy, each possessing distinct perspectives and focal points. Several of these methodologies prioritise the identification of fundamental concepts and notions that are essential for comprehending visuality.

Contemporary scientific findings appear to corroborate the traditional philosophical framework, wherein the scientific revolution prioritised vision over the remaining sensory modalities. The reason for this can be attributed in part to the emphasis on observation in scientific progress during the past few centuries, whether it be through the use of telescopes for distant observation or microscopes for close examination.

The prominence of science in Western ideology and perception serves to strengthen a conviction in and a predilection for the faculty of vision from a young age. The presence of this bias is evident in various facets of Western ideology and customs, ranging from the Platonic prioritisation of the "mind's eye" to the scientific examination of optics and visual cognition. The sense of sight has a strong association with

⁴³ Ola, SIGURDSON, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

rationality and cognition. This is due to the fact that Western culture and science development was based on writing, implying sight, and less on oral transmission, which implies hearing sense. In the last centuries, the expand of impactful visual technologies, including photography, cinema and lately digital media impacted even more the “visual model of culture and society”.⁴⁴ Proposed moral justifications are utilised to substantiate the hierarchy of the senses. Certain scholars argue for the supremacy of the figurative, elevated, and celestial senses over the inferior, animalistic, and procedural senses.⁴⁵

The notion of image holds significant importance in numerous visual culture theories, as it pertains to the visual depiction of an object or concept. The concept of meaning holds a central position as it pertains to the interpretation and significance of images, regardless of whether they are intended or perceived. Additional significant notions within the realm of visual culture philosophy encompass the subject and object dichotomy, denoting the observer and the observed correspondingly. The concepts of signified and signifier hold significant importance as they elucidate the correlation between a symbol or sign and its corresponding meaning.

The concepts of the visible and the invisible are frequently examined in relation to the implicit meanings inherent in visual culture, as well as the techniques employed in the construction and framing of images. The viewer and the performance hold significant importance in various theories of visual culture, as they delineate the manners in which viewers engage with and construe visual artefacts.

It is indispensable to acknowledge that these concepts are subject to continuous evolution and lack universal applicability across all cultural and historical contexts. In addition, the utilisation of binary categorizations (e.g. subject and object, masculine and feminine, active and

⁴⁴ CLASSEN, C.; HOWES, D.; SYNNOTT, A., 1993, op. cit., pp 88-92.

⁴⁵ Cf. Yael AVRAHAMI, 2012. *The Senses of Scripture: Sensory Perception in the Hebrew Bible*. The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies. New York: T&T Clark. <https://search-ebscohost-com.proxy.library.lincoln.ac.uk/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e00xww&AN=711593&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

passive) may impose constraints and impede a more profound comprehension of visuality and visual culture.

The concept of “looking” holds significant importance in the philosophical discourse of visual culture and forms fundamental connections with the primary cultural pursuits of mankind. The correlation between vision and cognition entails the stratified arrangement of the observable cosmos, which facilitates our comprehension and traversal of the optical realm. Simultaneously, the correlation between gaze and power places greater emphasis on the discursive level, wherein the visual representation is employed to convey influential concepts and communications to the general public. The interconnection between the act of observing and ownership can be perceived as being directed towards the generative sphere, where visual culture is expressed through tangible items and visual creations. It is crucial to avoid constraining visual culture solely to its outward expressions and instead acknowledge and leverage its multifaceted nature and complexity.

The correlation between vision and cognition holds significant relevance in the realm of visual culture philosophy, with particular emphasis on the formal aspects of visual perception. The focus of our inquiry pertains to the organisation and structure of visual images, their interpretation, and their integration into our overall perceptions of the world. Simultaneously, the correlation between gaze and longing places greater emphasis on the subjective facets of visual perception, pertaining to the manner in which we construct mental images and comprehend the world through potentially biased frameworks. The development of these schemes is indisputably impacted by individual experiences, cultural background, and the societal environment in which one lives.

Radu Toderici proposes in his article “The Cultural History of Visuality in an Analytical Outline” that there is a correlation between visual culture and the phenomenology of gaze. Specifically, Toderici suggests, that visual culture has the potential to shape individuals' perceptions and interpretations of visual information, while the

phenomenology of gaze can serve as a tool for analysing how individuals experience and interpret such information.⁴⁶

The dimension of formalising in visuality pertains to the technical and objective facets of visual culture, encompassing elements such as form, colour, and composition. The subjective dimension pertains to the viewer's personal experience of images, encompassing their emotional responses, attitudes, and convictions.

The interconnection between the two dimensions must be acknowledged, as they are frequently perceived as distinct entities. A comprehensive comprehension of these dimensions cannot be achieved in isolation. The emotional response of a viewer can be influenced by the composition and colour of an image, and the interpretation of the formal elements of an image can be subjectively influenced by the viewer's experience. A comprehensive methodology towards the study of visuality is imperative to gain a complete comprehension of its complexities. This methodology entails the examination of both the objective and subjective aspects of visual perception and their interplay. Through this approach, a more profound comprehension of the manners in which visual culture influences our interpretations and encounters of the world can be attained.

The historical evolution of the hierarchy of senses warrants scholarly observation. When considering the discourse surrounding the historicity of the senses within the Greco-Jewish context, it becomes apparent that there is a recurring pattern of fluctuation in their perceived significance. The most notable evolution of hierarchical disruptions can be discerned from ancient times to the mediaeval period, during which the auditory sense held paramount importance. The auditory sense provided the most heightened perception and richest contact with the world. The theological justification for the dominance of hearing persisted until the 16th century. The Church derived its authoritative power from the concept of faith, which was understood as a form of obedience.

⁴⁶ Cf. Radu TODERICI, *Istoria culturală a vizualității într-o schiță analitică*, <http://caieteelechinox.lett.ubbcluj.ro/?p=2517>.

Conversely, the sense of sight establishes a requirement for the sense of touch, thereby emphasising the association with sensual desire.

The Renaissance marked a significant shift in the hierarchy of the senses, elevating the visual sense to a dominant position that persisted for centuries. This shift was characterised by the emergence of a typology of a personal God, as opposed to an abstract one, who was perceived through interpersonal relationships and better understood through sensory language. This development inaugurated a new paradigm, a “phenomenon” of knowledge that entailed a growing separation between the visual and tactile senses.

The meeting of phenomenology and theology is complex and complicated. Phenomenology, defined by Edmund Husserl (although the terminology originates from Hegel), is a discipline that aims to investigate the nature of phenomena and their underlying essences, also known as “pure ideas.” The study of phenomena involves the exploration of that which is presented to consciousness and perceived by the visual senses. The logic of thought exhibits a correlation with the Ego, specifically a proximate association between the phenomenon and the consciousness that apprehends it (i.e., between the observed and the observer). Phenomenology analyses the appearance of things.

Initially, the prospect of a phenomenology of the imperceptible appears unattainable as phenomenology necessitates a demonstration of the subject matter (Heidegger, *Being and Time*). Martin Heidegger's focus on the “phenomenology of the unapparent” during the Zahringen seminar in 1973 pertains to his examination of the Husserlian notion of intentionality. As per his statement, the inapparent is the fundamental mode of the phenomenon since it enables the appearance of what is apparent through its own state of inappearance (Heidegger, *ibid*). The concept of “inappearing” refers to a deliberate movement that holds intrinsic significance.

Husserl argues that the phenomenological method precludes the possibility of a theological phenomenology since God, who is not a mundane entity capable of appearing to intentional awareness, stays in absolute transcendence after the transcendental-phenomenological reduction.

N. Turcan disputes Husserl's opinion according to which this process of reduction must be followed by further reductions in order to arrive at a truly objective understanding of the world. These further reductions involve abandoning all subjective opinions, including faith, in order to arrive at a pure and unadulterated experience of the world.

“This reduction removes God from its equation and, while the transition from the natural attitude to the phenomenological one has an ascetic dimension, this form of askesis refuses God”.⁴⁷

In general, Husserl's phenomenology expressed in the famous “principle of all principles” emphasizes the importance of approaching experience with an open and impartial perspective, in order to discover the essential structures and features of human consciousness and perception.

“Without an intuition given to the intuition, there is no possibility for a phenomenon to appear, but also in the absence of the intention to receive this intuition there is no phenomenon of the possibility of any occurrence.”⁴⁸

Critics of Husserl's phenomenology argue that this reduction fails to account for the reality of other human beings as distinct and separate subjects with their own consciousness and experiences. As observe Manoussakis,

“God, as the highest religious phenomena, need the human self, which is exactly the place created for him. Hence, every human person is seen to be the holy topos of God's revelation.”⁴⁹

Heidegger, like Husserl, is known for his phenomenological approach to philosophy. However, Heidegger's views on theology differ from Husserl's in several important ways.

Heidegger was critical of theology as an ontic science, which he saw as focusing too much on historical facts and events, rather than on the

⁴⁷ Nicolae TURCAN. 2020. “Religious Call in Eastern Orthodox Spirituality: A Theo-Phenomenological Approach” *Religions* 11, no. 12: 653. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11120653>.

⁴⁸ Edmund HUSSERL, *Idei referitoare la o fenomenologie pur si la o filozofie fenomenologica I*, trad. Christian Ferencz-Flatz, Humanitas, București, 2011, 24, 100.

⁴⁹ John Panteleimon MANOUSSAKIS, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

essential nature of being itself. In his view, the object of theology, Jesus, lacked the ontological dimension of philosophy, which he saw as an ontological discipline par excellence. Instead of focusing on particular historical events or personalities, Heidegger's philosophy was concerned with the underlying character of life itself. He argued that human being, *Dasein* was a component of phenomenological experience and that the focus on experience was equally applicable to religion. In his latter writings, Heidegger explored the links between philosophy and religion, as well as the possibilities of an existential approach to religious experience.

The theological shift in French phenomenology refers to a mid-twentieth-century philosophical movement marked by a revived interest in the connection between philosophy and religion. Thinkers such as Emmanuel Levinas, Jean-Luc Marion, and Jacques Derrida pioneered this approach. One of the most important realisations of this movement was the awareness of phenomena that were neither entirely objective nor purely ontological, but rather tied to difference. Alterity refers to the sensation of experiencing the other, in other words, something or someone drastically unlike to oneself.

Alterity was the basis of ethics for Levinas, and the contact with the other was the source of moral obligation. The conventional philosophical focus on the self and the subject, he maintained, had resulted in a kind of ontological solipsism in which the *Other* was reduced to an object of knowledge or a means to a goal.⁵⁰

The old phenomenology of exteriority, which concentrated on the external world, failed to grasp the essence of human existence, according to the French philosopher Michel Henry. Instead, he offered a phenomenology of life, of pathos, and of interiority, which was capable of more profoundly expressing religious occurrences.

Henry's phenomenology of life was predicated on the notion that human beings are essentially constituted by a life force, a vital energy that

⁵⁰ Emmanuel LEVINAS, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1979, pp. 179-188.

propels all human experience. This vital force is perceived as a kind of pathos or affectivity, which is the source of all human activity and creativity. His phenomenology captured religious experience in a manner that orthodox phenomenology could not. He saw Christ's incarnation as the highest manifestation of this dynamic force, and the invitation to become sons of God as the ultimate manifestation of human potential.

As Turcan observe, Henry's phenomenology was a distinct change from the standard phenomenological method, but it also opened up new avenues for examining the link between philosophy and religion and for comprehending the deeper elements of human experience. In Henry's philosophy, life is an experience of interiority as self-affectation of the *body*.⁵¹

Merleau-Ponty is a prominent figure in the field of visual culture philosophy, with a specific focus on the topics of perception and the body. The author utilised the principles of phenomenology, a philosophical methodology that prioritises the examination of consciousness and experience, to investigate the manners in which our physical bodies influence our interpretations of reality.

Merleau-Ponty's conceptual framework includes a fundamental concept that involves differentiating between the physical body, the subjective experience of the body, and the body as perceived by others. The term "body" pertains to the corporeal entity as a living organism, possessing its own physiological sensations, movements, and functions. The concept of the body in subjective terms pertains to the individual's lived experience and personal perception of their physical self. The concept of the "body for the other" pertains to the notion of the body being perceived and interpreted by external individuals. Merleau-Ponty aimed to demonstrate the manner in which our bodily experiences serve as a mediator for our perception of the world, by examining various aspects of the body. The argument posited is that the human body is not a mere recipient of sensory input from the environment, but rather an active agent that plays a role in shaping and organising our perceptions.

⁵¹ Cf. Turcan, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

Merleau-Ponty's philosophical contributions to visual culture are significant, particularly in the realm of the body and perception. His work highlights the impact of our senses and physicality on our understanding and interpretation of visual materials.

The human body is a physical and biological entity that exists within the constraints of time and space, and is susceptible to various ailments, the ageing process, and ultimately, mortality. In regards to temporality, the physical body is considered the most temporal entity and possesses distinct boundaries. In his publication titled "The Visible and the Invisible", M. Merleau-Ponty states that he consistently perceives his body from a fixed perspective, stating, "I am always on the same side of my body."⁵²

The body is capable of both perception and being perceived. The nature of perception is characterised by both objectivity and subjectivity, or more specifically, from a phenomenological perspective, it is not exclusively objective or subjective. Perception involves a continual oscillation between internal and external states. The human body is capable of perceiving the world, and in turn, the world becomes perceptible to it.

The term "flesh" (chair) is employed by M. Merleau-Ponty to denote the direct correlation between the human body and the entirety of the perceptible universe. According to the Merleau-Ponty, "*meat is a sensitive subject in two ways: how it feels and who experiences those feelings. The concept of embodied subjectivity suggests that the body, as a perceiving subject, perceives other bodies by relating them to itself.*"⁵³ The notion of "flesh" in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy plays a pivotal role in his endeavour to transcend the conventional dichotomy between subject and object, and to underscore the mutual reliance between the subjective corporeal entity and the external environment.

The human body is not merely a physical entity occupying a specific position in space and time. Rather, it is closely connected with the

⁵² Cf. Maurice Merleau-PONTY, *Le visible et l'invisible*, Paris, Gallimard, 1964, p. 194.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, p. 313.

perceptible environment surrounding it. The concept of embeddedness posits that the relationship between the body and the world is interdependent, with each relying on the other. Furthermore, it suggests that our perception of the world is consistently influenced by our physical encounters.

Merleau-Ponty posited that the human body is not merely a discrete physical entity, but rather is intricately linked to the surrounding environment through the mediation of sensory perception, as exemplified by the notion of embodiment.

The author's philosophy regarding visual culture places significant emphasis on the role of embodiment and sensory experience in shaping our perception and interpretation of visual materials. Through acknowledging the interconnectedness of the subjective body and the external environment, a more profound comprehension of how visual culture influences our perceptions and encounters with the world can be attained.

Jean-Luc Marion developed Merleau-Ponty's notion of "flesh" into a theological construct, contending that the concept of "making room" enables the immediate manifestation of divinity in the perceptible realm. The individual held the perspective that the conventional philosophical methodology concerning God, which was referred to as *onto theology*, allocated an excessive amount of significance to human cognition and authority. The author proposed that the above-mentioned approach imposed limitations on the prospects of experiencing divinity, and advocated for a means to expand our receptivity to an ineffable inheritance that transcends our cognitive and regulatory capacities.

According to Marion, the act of making room entails a willingness to encounter the divine in the surrounding environment, as opposed to attempting to comprehend or manipulate the divine through personal cognition and perception. Marion identified a fundamental component of religious encounter to be a form of relinquishment or openness to the divine.

Marion's philosophical perspective of "making room" aimed to present a novel approach towards comprehending the divine and

religious encounters. This approach accentuated the significance of being open and receptive, rather than focusing on knowledge and authority. The aforementioned methodology has exerted a noteworthy influence on present-day theological and philosophical dialogues, particularly with regard to the essence of religious encounters and the interplay between theology and philosophy.

Marion formulated a theological concept known as *theo-phenomenology*, which posits that the manifestation of God in the physical world occurs through events and experiences that enable individuals to encounter Him in a direct and personal manner. The interplay between the notions of corporeality (*chair*) and spatial expansion (*making room*) offers a distinct vantage point for understanding the manifestation of the divine within our perceptible realm.

In opposition to *onto-theology*, which claims to know the presence of God by mere conceptions and without experience, *theo-phenomenology* attempts to define the phenomenality of the visible and the hyper-phenomenality of the Revelation on the basis of personal experience. As a theory, it attempts to be the antithesis of *onto-theology* and to talk of a living God, as opposed to the metaphysical God. As a technique, it explains phenomena by seeing belief/faith as a counter-reduction; thus, it is phenomenology with faith. *Theo-phenomenology* tries, via a phenomenological lens, to comprehend the essence of belief and faith, realising that they are not reducible to simple notions or ideas.

The *theo-phenomenology* can be seen also as a continuation of the mystical tradition, seeking to understand and describe the nature of religious experience through a phenomenological lens that takes into account the unique and personal nature of spiritual vision and perception. In this sense, St. Gregory Palamas highlights the distinction between two types of knowledge: one based on reasoning and inference, and another based on direct experience or “mystical seeing.” According to Palamas, the latter type of knowledge is necessary for truly knowing and experiencing God, and it involves a special kind of vision or perception that is not reducible to ordinary sense perception or rational understanding.

Palamas emphasizes that this kind of spiritual vision is not simply a matter of intellectual or conceptual understanding, but involves a direct apprehension of God's divine nature or glory through a special faculty of the soul:

“In which manner do we receive and see this glory of divine nature? By the knowledge of the reasons for things and inferring thus the knowledge of God's power, wisdom, and providence? There is another eye of the soul seeing those, and it cannot see the divine light [: : :]. This is not the light of consciousness, but another light. Thus, God does not dwell in every person who knows things and sees according to this kind of knowledge. That person only has the knowledge of things and infers God from it by analogy. The person who can mystically see that light does not infer God by analogy but knows and has God in him/her. His/her seeing is a truthful one and beyond all beings.”⁵⁴

This phrase expresses the notion that there are limitations to what can be grasped or comprehended using a purely phenomenological approach, especially concerning the experience of experiencing God or the divine. Although phenomenology may help us describe and evaluate how people experience and comprehend their religious beliefs and practises, there may be parts of these experiences that cannot be completely captured or explained by simply logical or empirical methods. This kind of knowledge is often associated with mystical or contemplative experiences in which the individual feels a direct connection to the divine, without the need for logical or empirical justification.

From a theological perspective, the story of Moses at the burning bush illustrates the idea that God transcends human understanding and can reveal himself in ways that are beyond our comprehension. It also suggests that encountering God can be a transformative and life-changing experience:

⁵⁴ Gregory Palamas, Saint. 1977a. A Word for Those Who Devoutly Practice a Life of Stillness; The Third Among the Last Ones. On Holy Light. In *Philokalia*. Translated by Dumitru Staniloae. Bucharest: Biblical and Mission Institute of Romanian Orthodox Church, vol. 7, pp. 263–72. (In Romanian).

“While he was shepherding in the wilderness the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said, “I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.” When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.” Then he said, “Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground. “He said further, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob.” And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.” (Exodus 3, 2–6)

The dialectic of the visible and the voice in the tale of Moses at the burning bush demonstrates the transforming power of transcendent experiences and their capacity to change our view of ourselves, our existence, and our interaction with the divine.

In the burning bush, the Invisible becomes visible, the Numinous takes on phenomenality. But Moses is able to recognize the presence of the *mysterium tremendum* only when the visible becomes voice, not as sound, to be sure, but as speech act. Perhaps this episode, so understood, can be a hermeneutical key for reading Marion's phenomenology. His examination of the contrast between an idol and an icon⁵⁵ and the

⁵⁵ “Idol” and “icon” are theological terminology, and Marion's analysis mostly appears in *Idol and Distance* and *God Without Being*, two of his theological writings. In theology and phenomenology, the difference between an idol and an icon is essential. An idol is a depiction that is worshipped in and of itself, but an icon is a representation that points beyond itself to something transcendent. The divide has practical and theological ramifications for how we approach and comprehend the divine. Marion claims in his theological works that the idol provides a false feeling of presence, whereby the divine is reduced to a limited, graspable object. On the other side, the symbol expresses a genuine experience of absence, when the holy is acknowledged as transcendent and beyond human reach. This represents the phenomenological understanding that every representation is both a place to rest and a path leading beyond itself. Derrida's concept of signs as traces highlights the same point: every representation is a trace of something outside itself. Levinas, on the other hand, focuses on the face as a relic of an ancient appeal, emphasising the ethical component of the icon: it is not only a portrayal of the divine, but also a summons to ethical duty and connection with others. St. John of the Cross's perspective into icons highlights the need to avoid being preoccupied with the representation itself and to instead

phenomena of saturation is driven by the dialectic of visibility and invisibility. The contrast between idol and icon emphasises the need of understanding the transcendent component of representation and avoiding reducing the divine to a limited, graspable object. It highlights the ethical and practical aspects of representation, as well as the necessity to approach it with a feeling of humility and transcendence.

Faulkner Blake's statement that the usage of idols or icons relies on one's beliefs and traditions, as well as the link between the visible and unseen components of spirituality, is particularly expressive in this regard:

"The icon as general mode of representation, as a qualitative apparatus, affords us a conceptual account of how we "perceive" what is not reducible to visibility...the idol is what we look at while the icon is what we look through. Idols are a certain telos of vision (images, or the visible), while vision never ends with icons but always carries on to transcendence (the invisible)."⁵⁶

God's incomprehensibility is affirmed by the mainstream Christian tradition, which coincides with Marion's theological viewpoint. According to this view, God is beyond human intellect and understanding, and any endeavour to completely comprehend God's nature is ultimately pointless.

Marion believes that God's incomprehensibility is a crucial component in the formal concept of God, because understanding God would put Him on par with finite minds. To sustain the separation between the divine and the human, God's incomprehensibility is important.

concentrate on what is shown. This indicates that the difference between an idol and an icon is not based just on exterior looks, but also on how we interact with the image and what it signifies. The contrast between idol and icon emphasises the need of understanding the transcendent component of representation and avoiding reducing the divine to a limited, graspable object. It highlights the ethical and practical aspects of representation, as well as the necessity to approach it with a feeling of humility and transcendence. Cf. Westphal, M. Vision and Voice: Phenomenology and Theology in the Work of Jean-Luc Marion. *Int J Philos Relig* **60**, 117–137 (2006). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11153-006-0009-2>.

⁵⁶ Blake FAULKNER (2022) *Looking at and Looking Through: Icons as Mythical Sight*, *Western Journal of Communication*, 86:4, 503-520, DOI: 10.1080/10570314.2022.2087891.

“For the one we comprehend would always remain less than and below the one we do not comprehend. Incomprehensibility therefore belongs to the formal definition of God, since comprehending him would put him on the same level as a finite mind ours... As soon as one tries to catch sight of God, the relation must be inverted – knowledge holds only if comprehension ceases.”⁵⁷

Furthermore, Marion argues that the connection between the knower and the known must be reversed the minute one attempts to see God. This implies that God can only be known when understanding ends. This paradoxical remark implies that the human intellect is limited in its ability to grasp God and that knowing of God demands a certain surrender or relinquishment of human endeavours to comprehend the divine. Marion proposes that by acknowledging the potential of meeting the holy in ways that transcend sense and intellect, we might transcend the constraints of our limited human viewpoint and embrace the limitless truth of God.

Marion's philosophical framework places significant emphasis on the concept of *prosopon*, which serves as a crucial element in comprehending the inherent connection between being a person and the act of being perceived by others. *Prosopon* is a term that refers to the face or the countenance of a person. In the context of theology, it is often used to describe the face of God, or the way in which God reveals Himself to humanity. Marion believes that the face serves as a tangible representation of our individuality, enabling us to be identified and validated by our peers as autonomous beings. The human face is not solely a tangible entity, but rather, it acquires connotations and importance through our interpersonal connections. The visage plays a crucial role in establishing interpersonal connections, and consequently, is a fundamental component of our self-concept as individuals.

According to Manousakis, the concept of *prosopon* refers to the individual's being that is revealed through the observation of others, and subsequently shaped by this observation. The individual perceives

⁵⁷ Ibidem, p. 132.

personal qualities as a dynamic and ongoing development that emerges from the constant and reciprocal interaction with others, rather than a fixed and predetermined attribute.

Manousakis highlights the significance of social interaction in the process of personal development. Conversely, it necessitates the presence of a minimum of one additional individual and the interconnection that exists between them. The dynamic and ongoing process of mutual recognition and affirmation characterises the relationship between the self and the other, rather than a static one.

Manousakis emphasises the significance of relationship and community in our comprehension of personhood through the concept of *prosopon*. The concept of self is not considered as a solitary entity, but rather as a construct that is shaped and defined by its interdependence with other individuals. The development of our identities is influenced by our social interactions, and our self-concept undergoes a continuous process of transformation as a result of these interactions. The significance of acknowledging and appreciating the individuality of others, as well as fostering connections that facilitate reciprocal recognition and validation. Through this action, individuals can engage in the continuous process of personal development and make a meaningful contribution towards the establishment of a society that is characterised by fairness and empathy.⁵⁸ In other words, the perception of God depends on being perceived by Him.

For Marion, the relationship between *prosopon* and icon is that the icon can serve as a means of encountering the face of God. In this sense, the icon participates in the saturated phenomenon of the face of God, pointing beyond itself to the divine reality it represents. Marion emphasizes that the icon is not simply a representation of God, but rather a means of encountering God in a direct and immediate way.

Overall, Marion's emphasis on the relationship between *prosopon* and icon highlights the importance of images and objects in the Christian tradition as a means of encountering the divine. Through the use of icons

⁵⁸ Cf. Manousakkis, *op. cit.*, pp. 46-47.

and other sacred images, believers can experience a direct connection with God that goes beyond words and concepts.

There exists a scholarly discourse among theologians regarding the potential correlations between the phenomenological theology espoused by Jean-Luc Marion and the theological principles presented in the Gospel of John.

One factor contributing to this phenomenon is the shared emphasis in Marion and the Gospel of John on the subjective encounter with faith and the direct manifestation of the divine within our perceptible reality. Marion's theory of the saturated phenomenon highlights how our experiences with the world can be imbued with meaning and importance through the existence of the divine.

Likewise, the Gospel according to John places emphasis on the significance of individual interactions with Jesus as a means of comprehending and encountering the divine. The Gospel depicts Jesus as the embodiment of the divine Word, who descends to coexist with humanity and discloses the essence of God through his verbal expressions and deeds.

Both Marion and the Gospel of John underscore the significance of relationship and community in comprehending the divine. Marion's theoretical framework regarding the concept of the face emphasises the manner in which our personal identities are influenced by our interpersonal connections. Likewise, the Gospel of John places significant emphasis on the significance of affectionate connections among the congregation of adherents as a means of encountering and exemplifying the divine.

1.8. The spiritual sight

The visual and the verbal discourses are necessary to understand the notions of image and representation of God in the early Church, follows from this; and it is implied, as we have just seen, in one of the fundamental principles of ancient theology, drawn from the book of Genesis, that it is human beings who are the image and likeness of God, because they are made in his image.

God, being invisible, is known through his word, but he is also incarnate, and therefore visible, in Christ, who is also truly human. In contexts such as these, reflection on the nature of the image will indeed always have a transcendental and metaphysical dimension, but this is not due to a simple preference for Greek views of ocularity. It is an attempt also to appropriate the Hebraic tradition. The two cultures, Hebrew and Greek, reached early Christianity already integrated in the Greek Bible. Thus, theology in the early Church is a network of interlocking concepts based on biblical revelation and expounded in terms of Greek philosophy, in which a certain concept of the image and representation is one of the most central.

The image and the representation of God played a crucial role in a theory of cognition, which was intended to answer the fundamental problem of the ineffability of God, a basic principle in both the Jewish and the Greek philosophical traditions. God is what cannot be communicated or expressed in words, and who is beyond the realm of feelings and concepts.

God is what cannot be communicated or expressed in words, and who is beyond the realm of feelings and concepts. This idea was expounded by John Chrysostom in his sermons of the incomprehensibility of God⁵⁹ and Gregory of Nyssa struggled throughout his works with the difficulty of reconciling the Judaeo-Christian doctrine of God's self-revelation with the philosophical account of the divine transcendence and the incomprehensibility of the divine nature to human beings.

Like M. C. MURRAY observe,

“The Christian tradition, especially in the early Church Fathers, placed great emphasis on the role of the body in the understanding

⁵⁹ According to Chrysostom, God is beyond human comprehension and cannot be fully understood or expressed in language. Instead, he believed that humans can only have a limited and indirect knowledge of God through symbols and images, and that true knowledge of God can only be achieved through a direct experience of the divine. This idea is consistent with the wider tradition of Christian mysticism, which emphasizes the importance of a direct, experiential relationship with God over abstract or intellectual understanding. See Jean CHRYSOSTOME, *Sur l'incomprehensibilite de Dieu 1*, SC 28, Cerf, Paris, 1970, pp. 117-127.

of the image and the representation of God. Unlike Platonism, which saw the body as a hindrance to spiritual progress and held that the soul was separate from the body, Christian theology saw the body as an integral part of the human person and saw human beings as created in the image of God, both body and soul. This emphasis on the body and the senses led to a renewed appreciation for the material world and an interest in the physical structures and functions of the human body, and was one of the ways in which early Christian thought distinguished itself from Platonism. The ears and the eyes were the organs of cognition according to ancient theory, and the connection of both with the Logos was a pre-Christian idea. Both senses had been linked in pre-Socratic thought by Heraclitus. The difference however from the later Christian conception was that it was a scientific matter; it was not viewed as part of the apprehension of a mystical process. Nevertheless the ideas of the early Church are expressed against the background of ancient notions concerning sense perception both auditory and visual.”⁶⁰

The metaphor of “seeing” was widely used in early Christian thought as a way of expressing the idea of understanding or spiritual insight. The expression of “having eyes to see” was used to describe the experience of spiritual enlightenment or the ability to grasp the deeper truths of the faith. In this context, “seeing” refers to a spiritual perception or understanding that transcends the physical senses and enables one to grasp the mysteries of the divine. This idea is closely tied to the concept of faith, which is often described as a “seeing” of things not physically present, and the idea that belief in God and the truths of the faith enable individuals to “see” the world in a new way.

The early Church Fathers often used the term “sight” in two different senses, both to refer to the physical mechanism of vision and to the faculty of perception or understanding. They discussed various theories of vision, including the Stoic theory of emanation and the Platonic theory of light and the eye, and sought to integrate these ideas with Christian theology. They saw the eye and the ability to see as a metaphor for

⁶⁰ Cf. Mary Charles MURRAY, *The image, the ear and the eye in early Christianity*, in *Études de Lettres : revue de la Faculté des lettres de l'Université de Lausanne*, 1994, <https://www.e-periodica.ch/digbib/view?pid=edl-002:1994:0::557#320>.

spiritual perception and understanding, and explored the relationship between physical sight and spiritual insight. By doing so, they aimed to deepen their understanding of the nature of human perception and the ways in which the human mind and soul interact with the physical world.

Murray analysis also the eye-disease, ophthalmic and its interpretation saying that, was a common form of illness in antiquity. Gregory of Nyssa, used the metaphor of ophthalmic to discuss the matter of seeing God and the life of the soul. He compared the problem of ophthalmia to the difficulty of seeing God and the spiritual life, and he used the metaphor of eye disease to illustrate the idea that just as physical sight can be impaired by illness, so too can spiritual perception be clouded by sin and ignorance. Gregory's comparison highlights the importance of spiritual health and the need for individuals to cultivate their spiritual vision in order to see God more clearly. By doing so, he sought to emphasize the importance of a life lived in close relationship with God, and the transformative power of faith in enabling individuals to see the world in a new way.⁶¹

The theology of the defect of human perception is obviously related to the sin that disturbs all human internal and external faculties. According to St Augustine, original sin has caused all human sensual cognition to become decayed and dysfunctional, as a result of which the whole of humanity remains in a state of 'sensual exile'. The dysfunction of the spiritual and all other senses leads to a multifaceted disharmony in the human being, and ultimately to a lack of happiness. The spiritual dysfunction caused by sin also extends to the bodily senses.

The "anthropological journey" entails a transition from the visual perception of the world to a deeper understanding of it through psychological lens. Furthermore, it involves moving beyond the cultural dimension of seeing the world and tapping into the psychological dimension to experience the world on a more profound level. It focuses on the gaze concerns on the ways in which individuals perceive and comprehend their surroundings, as well as how they are perceived by

⁶¹ Ibidem, p. 38.

others. It involves a progression from a world characterised by symbolism and invisibility of God in the Old Testament, in antique, Greco-Roman environment, to the visible, embodied God, the Christ, as is revealed by John Gospel, leading to an inner vision of God, spiritual insight and the faith, as Church Fathers analysed.

Christ's gaze has a transformational effect, from an exterior, static, "accepted" truth, toward inner spiritual transformation that "gives sense", clarity and fulfilment of life centric on the belief in God and the truths of the faith, which enable individuals to "see" the world in a new way.

In the early Christian era, the spiritual perception was shaped by the biblical traditions, Greek and Roman philosophy, and the cultural and historical context of the time. The Church Fathers, used this vocabulary to express their understanding of spiritual realities and to communicate the teachings of the faith to their communities. Through their use of this vocabulary, early Christian writers sought to convey the depth and richness of the spiritual life and to help their readers understand the spiritual realities they encountered in their own lives. They saw the eye and the ability to see as a metaphor for spiritual perception and understanding, and explored the relationship between physical sight and spiritual insight.

Preliminary Conclusions

The correlation between vision and cognition holds significant relevance in the realm of visual culture philosophy, with particular emphasis on the formal aspects of visual perception.

Initially, the prospect of a phenomenology of the imperceptible appears unattainable as phenomenology necessitates a demonstration of the subject matter (Heidegger, *Being and Time*). The study of phenomena involves the exploration of that which is presented to consciousness and perceived by the visual senses. The logic of thought exhibits a correlation with the Ego, specifically a proximate association between the phenomenon and the consciousness that apprehends it (i.e., between the observed and the observer). Phenomenology analyses the appearance of things.

We started from the old phenomenology of exteriority, which concentrated on the external world, failed to grasp the essence of human existence, according to the French philosopher Michel Henry. We continued with Merleau-Ponty is a prominent figure in the field of visual culture philosophy, with a specific focus on the topics of perception and the body. He developed the philosophy regarding visual culture, which places significant emphasis on the role of embodiment and sensory experience in shaping our perception and interpretation of visual materials, of “making room” which enables the immediate manifestation of divinity in the perceptible realm. He formulated a theological concept known as theo-phenomenology, which posits that the manifestation of God in the physical world occurs through events and experiences that enable individuals to encounter Him in a direct and personal manner. This is the phenomenality of the visible and the hyperphenomenality of the Revelation on the basis of personal experience.

This made the way for St. Gregory Palamas' highlights of distinction between two types of knowledge: one based on reasoning and inference, and another based on direct experience or “mystical seeing.” Nevertheless, he emphasizes that this kind of spiritual vision is not simply a matter of intellectual or conceptual understanding, but involves a direct apprehension of God's divine nature or glory through a special faculty of the soul.

Although phenomenology may help us describe and evaluate how people experience and comprehend their religious beliefs and practises, there may be parts of these experiences that cannot be completely captured or explained by simply logical or empirical methods. This kind of knowledge is often associated with mystical or contemplative experiences in which the individual feels a direct connection to the divine. God transcends human understanding and can reveal himself in ways that are beyond our comprehension. It also suggests that encountering God can be a transformative and life-changing experience.

If we are taking Moises experience of connecting to God through the burning bush the Invisible becomes visible. Moses is able to recognize the

presence of the *mysterium tremendum* only when the visible becomes voice, not as sound, to be sure, but as speech act.

Marions' examination of the contrast between an idol and an icon and the phenomena of saturation is driven by the dialectic of visibility and invisibility. The contrast between idol and icon emphasises the need of understanding the transcendent component of representation and avoiding reducing the divine to a limited, graspable object, as God is beyond human intellect and understanding, and any endeavour to completely comprehend God's nature is ultimately pointless.

Prosopon is a term that refers to the face or the countenance of a person. In the context of theology, it is often used to describe the face of God, or the way in which God reveals Himself to humanity. In line with Marions' writings, for Manousakis, the concept of Prosopon refers to the individual's being that is revealed through the observation of others, and subsequently shaped by this observation. The concept of self is not considered as a solitary entity, but rather as a construct that is shaped and defined by its interdependence with other individuals. In other words, the perception of God depends on being perceived by Him.

Further on, for Marion, the relationship between prosopon and icon is that the icon can serve as a means of encountering the face of God. In this sense, the icon participates in the saturated phenomenon of the face of God, pointing beyond itself to the divine reality it represents. Marion emphasizes that the icon is not simply a representation of God, but rather a means of encountering God in a direct and immediate way.

Overall, Marion's emphasis on the relationship between prosopon and icon highlights the importance of images and objects in the Christian tradition as a means of encountering the divine. Through the use of icons and other sacred images, believers can experience a direct connection with God that goes beyond words and concepts.

Chapter 2

The spiritual perception in western christianity

Christian mystics have frequently employed sensory symbols and imagery to communicate and experience their encounters with the divine. The meanings and associations of sensory experiences and symbols are moulded by a complex interplay of cultural, historical, psychological and personal factors, a complex “anthropology of senses” and an anthropology of “spiritual senses” “*sensus spirituales*” related to the inner aspect of a person, rather than just physical sensations. These can vary considerably across contexts and traditions.

The Church' Fathers analyses this anthropology of spiritual senses, in explaining different levers of spirituality aspirations toward God.

Gregory de Nyssa' speaks about the spiritual perception for a fulfilling life and relationship with the divine, or, “ocular perception of the soul” and the “auditory perception of the heart.”. He emphasized that this knowledge goes beyond the intellect and involves the entire person, including the heart and will; Gregory knowledge of God was referring to advanced states of contemplation or *theoria*⁶².

⁶² The Greek noun *theoria* has a primary meaning seeing, beholding and origins in the verb that means to see, to observe *theoreo*. The best works on the problem of *theoria* are e.g. Bradley Nassif, “The 'Spiritual Exegesis' of Scripture: The School of Antioch Revisited”, in: *Anglican Theological Review* 75 (1993/4), pp. 437-470; “Allegoria and The6ria”, in: Frances M.

St Augustin distinguishes corporeal vision “by the eyes”, spiritual vision “by the human spirit”, intellectual vision “by an intuition of the intellectual soul”.

Maximus the Confessor opened a new perspective of connecting to God, through the ability of the human soul to perceive and understand spiritual truths, beyond the literal meaning of scripture and the physical world. Maximus' analysis of God's incomprehensibility reflects a general tendency of Byzantine theology, particularly among the Cappadocian's. Through faith, one can have a perception of God's divine nature and through reason, one can understand the qualities and attributes of God as revealed in scripture.

Gregory the Great sustain the thesis of connecting to God through physical but reason. He sustains the “stability” represents a harmonious relationship between the soul, the body, and God, in which the soul is aligned with God's will and the body acts in accordance with that will. Gregory speaks of the stages of growth in interior life (*vita activa and vita contemplativa*).

Saint Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, held similar views regarding the human body and the importance of the cranium, where primary sensory perceptions such as vision and hearing originate. Thomas d'Aquino consider and interpret this phrase “Come and see” in a mystical sense. In the wake of Origen, in the 4th century Jerome considers that the fleshly senses look at earthly things and do not yet contemplate the heavenly realities.

Evagrius Ponticus believed that sensation is the impression of the sensitive object in the intellect. He advocates for a path of spiritual

Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 161-185; “History, 'Theoria' and Tradition in the Antiochian School”, in: Bertrand de Margerie, S. J., *An Introduction to the History of Exegesis, vol. I*. The term *theoria* was known in both theological schools from this period: in the Alexandrian school they used it as an equivalent to allegorical interpretation, opposite to Antiochene exegesis where it referred to a higher meaning, but still based on the letter and history. There were also other schools in the milieu of the Early Church, such as the Cappadocian and Syriac, which shed different lights on the problem and where the differences between the Alexandrian and Antiochene approach is melted down.

progression that involves moving away from the soul's attachment to sensory experiences and the forms that they leave in the intellect.

The way a society associate these senses actually influences the way world "make sense" for that group of people, the way they experience the world.

The vocabulary of spiritual perception refers to the terms and language used to describe spiritual experiences, beliefs, and practices. It can include words such as mindfulness, meditation, enlightenment, divine, and many others. The vocabulary can vary across different spiritual traditions and belief systems. We will focus our attention here on how Christian authors have viewed the problem of spiritual perception and how they have attempted to probe this conditions of the divine-human encounter further. In the Bible believers are enjoined *to taste and see that the Lord is good* (Ps 34); the beatitude promises that *the pure in hearth will see God* (Mt 5,8); Saint Paul speaks of receiving the vision of God *face to face* (1 Cor 13, 12) and beholding *the glory of the Lord as in a mirror* (2 Cor 2, 18). These biblical passages seem to pint to certain features of human recognition that make perception like contact with God possible. What implications do these statements have for anthropology, on the way we see the world?

As might be expected, the claim to have a special form of perception that makes direct human contact with God possible is problematic both in epistemological and metaphysical terms. While there is general acceptance that humans possess the five physical senses (sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell), there is no such agreement about other modes of perception. Different philosophical, spiritual, and Christians traditions have proposed various additional senses or modes of perception, such as intuition, empathy, and many others. The existence and nature of these non-physical senses are still a matter of debate and investigation. Moreover, the claim that God could be perceived through special senses seems to be in violation of notions of transcendence and divine immanence. Finally, when you try to look at God, you are *looking at what cannot be seen* (2 Cor 4,18). The notion of trying to "look" at God can also be problematic, as it implies a limited, physical perspective.

Many religious and philosophical traditions view God as beyond the physical realm and therefore not susceptible to sensory perception. This is why phrases such as “God cannot be seen” or “God is beyond human understanding” are often used. Ultimately, the nature and existence of God, and whether or not God can be perceived, are questions that have been debated for centuries and continue to inspire discussions and investigations in many fields.

The term “spiritual sense” in Christian terminology denotes an interpretive approach to the Bible or other sacred texts that surpasses the literal meaning of the words. The spiritual sense is commonly acknowledged to provide access to profound verities and discernments concerning the divine, religious conviction, and the essence of the cosmos. The term “spiritual senses” is a rendition of the Latin phrase “*sensus spirituales*,” which was employed to delineate the concepts of Origen of Alexandria in his literary productions. According to P. L. Gavrilyuk and S. Coakley, is a broad term used to describe various interpretations of sensory experiences that are related to the spiritual or inner aspect of a person, rather than just physical sensations:

The *spiritual senses* is an umbrella term covering a variety of overlapping expressions in which *sense* i general or particular sensory modality is typically qualified by reference to spirit (eyes of the spirit), heart (ears of the hearth), soul (eyes of the soul), mind or intellect (mind's eye), inner or faith (eyes of faith).⁶³

The primary focus of spiritual senses may be directed towards the perception of God. As articulated in his *Confessions*, Saint Augustine provided a clear expression of the concept.

“Not with uncertain, but with assured consciousness do I love You, O Lord. You have stricken my heart with Your word, and I loved You. And also the heaven, and earth, and all that is therein, behold, on every side they say that I should love You; nor do they cease to speak unto all, so that they are without excuse. But more profoundly will You have mercy on whom You will have mercy, and

⁶³ Cf. Paul L. GAVRILYUK and Sarah COAKLEY, *The spiritual Senses. Perceiving God in Western Christianity*, Cambridge University Press, United Kingdom, 2012, p. 2.

compassion on whom You will have compassion, otherwise do both heaven and earth tell forth Your praises to deaf ears. But what is it that I love in loving You? Not corporeal beauty, nor the splendour of time, nor the radiance of the light, so pleasant to our eyes, nor the sweet melodies of songs of all kinds, nor the fragrant smell of flowers, and ointments, and spices, not manna and honey, not limbs pleasant to the embracement's of flesh. I love not these things when I love my God; and yet I love a certain kind of light, and sound, and fragrance, and food, and embracement in loving my God, who is the light, sound, fragrance, food, and embracement of my inner man — where that light shines unto my soul which no place can contain, where that sounds which time snatches not away, where there is a fragrance which no breeze disperses, where there is a food which no eating can diminish, and where that clings which no satiety can sunder. This is what I love, when I love my God. (Confessions 10,8)⁶⁴

Ancient authors had significant contributions about spiritual perception, including Platonists, Neoplatonists, Stoics, and Gnostics. Plato, for instance, believed that the physical senses were limited and that the way to gain true knowledge was through the contemplation of eternal Forms or Ideas.⁶⁵

Neoplatonists, such as Plotinus, expanded on Plato's ideas by asserting that the soul can attain union with the divine through purification and meditation. This method was considered indispensable for spiritual perception and union with the divine. In this way, Platonism significantly influenced Plotinus' conceptions of spiritual perception, which combined elements of both philosophy and spirituality. In a famous passage from his *Enneades*, Plotinus draws an analogy between the work of the sculptor and that produced by man, in him, in his body and in his mind to transform himself into a being of beauty.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/110110.htm>.

⁶⁵ "When Plato spoke of the contemplation of the Forms with the eyes of the soul and the sight of the mind he did not mean ordinary acts of imagining or reasoning. Rather Plato intended to describe a direct perception like apprehension of the intelligible, including the god". *Ibidem*, p. 7.

⁶⁶ «Come back to yourself and look: If you do not see yourself beautiful, do as the sculptor of a statue that must become beautiful, he removes, he scratches, he polishes, he cleans, until he makes a beautiful face appear in the statue. You too, take away all that is superfluous,

Stoics, such as Marcus Aurelius, believed that living in accordance with universal reason and virtue led to wisdom and comprehension. Spiritual perception was viewed by Gnostics as a method for acquiring concealed knowledge, or gnosis, which would enable them to escape the material world.

Aristotle attempted to organise the five senses by placing sight first. He believed that sight (the primary sense) was the truest form of perception⁶⁷, since it entails direct perception of objects without physical contact. Because it entails direct physical interaction with an object, he considered contact to be a less pure form of perception. However, Aristotle also believed that both sight and sensation were essential for acquiring knowledge, as they complement one another to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the world. He believed that sight was superior for perceiving form and shape, whereas contact was superior for perceiving texture and rigidity. Despite his emphasis on the superiority of sight, Aristotle believed that both sight and contact were necessary for a comprehensive understanding of the universe.

Despite their differences, these ancient authorities all placed a strong emphasis on the importance of spiritual perception for a fulfilling life and relationship with the divine.

The Christian authors Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine, Maximus the Confessor, or Gregory the Great granted the order of the five senses little importance. As a result, Gregory of Nyssa focused the change of the senses in the spiritual life, perceiving spiritual perception as a process of

straighten out that which is tortuous, clean up that which is dark, make it brilliant, and do not cease to sculpt your own statue, until the divine splendour of virtue shines forth for you, until you see “wisdom standing on its sacred pedestal”. Have you become that? Have you seen this? Do you have a pure relationship yourself, without any obstacle to your unification, without anything else being mixed inwardly with yourself? Have you become whole a true light, not a light of dimension or measurable forms that can diminish or increase in magnitude indefinitely, but a light absolutely without measure, because it is greater than any measure and quantity? If you see yourself becoming this, become yourself a vision, taking confidence in yourself, already going up, while remaining here below, no longer needing a guide, stares intensely at the eyes and looks! In https://www.researchgate.net/publication/344264085_Les_cinq_sens_le_corps_et_l'esprit. pp. 60-61.

⁶⁷ Ibidem, p. 8.

purification and development that leads to a deeper union with God. Augustine underlined the significance of faith in receptivity to God's presence and defined spiritual perception as a voyage towards knowledge and love of God.

Maximus the Confessor emphasised the interconnectedness of body and soul, contending that spiritual perception necessitates the harmonious union of physical and spiritual senses and involves the whole person. Gregory the Great viewed spiritual perception as a gift of divine grace that enables us to perceive and comprehend the concealed realities of God's kingdom.

In the fourth century, Saint Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, held similar views regarding the human body and the importance of the cranium, where primary sensory perceptions such as vision and hearing originate. For them, the eschatological climax of their encounter with God became primarily articulated in terms of the beatific vision. This concept was fundamental to the thinking of numerous Christian philosophers, including Thomas Aquinas.⁶⁸ They believed that the ultimate goal of human existence was to attain the beatific vision and that this would be the crowning achievement of the spiritual journey. They saw the beatific vision as the culmination of the encounter with God, in which the soul would be fully transformed and united with the divine. The beatific vision was seen as an expression of God's love for humanity and the ultimate reward for a life lived in accordance with God's will.

According to P. Gavrilyuk and S. Coakley, the concept of spiritual senses has been a topic of interest for Christian theologians since the early

⁶⁸ St. Thomas Aquinas employs the metaphor of visual perception within a cognitive framework in his theological musings, while refraining from utilising such a metaphorical device in reference to auditory or other sensory experiences. St. Thomas posits that among the external senses, vision is the most superior and unique in that it does not necessitate any inherent or physical alteration in either the organ or the subject. Consequently, it is regarded as an appropriate metaphor, given its non-material essence, which renders it the most proximate of all the senses to non-material intellectual perception. "The highest and perfect felicity of intellectual nature consist in the vision of God", *Summa contra Gentiles*, III. I.60:2: trans. VJ Bourke, *St Thomas Aquinas: On the Truth of the Catholic Faith* (Garden City, NY, Image Books, 1956), p. 199, apud Paul L. GAVRILYUK and Sarah COAKLEY, op. cit., p. 8.

days of the church. In the 2nd century, St. Irenaeus of Lyons wrote about the idea that there were spiritual senses, in addition to the physical senses, that could be used to perceive the spiritual realm. This idea was later developed by other early Christian thinkers, including Origen and Theophilus of Antioch, who saw the spiritual senses as a means of perceiving the spiritual realm and experiencing union with God.

2.1. Gregory of Nyssa

Gregory of Nyssa is a Christian theologian and philosopher who draws his good from various sources. He was influenced by both Posidonius and Plotinus. It is also a theologian that transposes the categories of Greek philosophy into a Christian universe. In this argumentation, I intend to provide a succinct overview of the historical and theological milieu that prompted the eminent French patristic scholar, Jean Daniélou, to accord significant attention to a particular aspect of Gregory's thought in his seminal work, *Platonism and Mystical Theology*. This aspect pertains to the spiritual life and mystical experience, as expounded in Gregory's oeuvre, particularly in *De Vita Moysis*, which delves into the significance of contemplation, the soul's journey, and spiritual inquiries.

Daniélou's reputation for his scholarly proficiency and his fascination with the early Christian Church's assimilation of Greek philosophy is reflected in the book's potential exploration of the impact of Platonism on early Christian mysticism, as well as the influence of Gregory's writings on contemporary theology. Initially, it is imperative to enumerate the Greek terminologies employed by Gregory in his doctrine, namely: the sensibility of the soul, spiritual faculties; the ocular organ of the soul; the visual perception of the soul, and the auditory perception of the heart.⁶⁹

According to Gregory's perspective, the soul possessed spiritual faculties that were separate from the corporeal senses, including the

⁶⁹ Cf. Jean DANIELOU, *Platonisme et théologie mystique*, Paris, Aubier, 1944, p. 240.

“ocular perception of the soul” and the “auditory perception of the heart.” The spiritual faculties enabled the soul to apprehend metaphysical truths that transcended the corporeal senses. In the opinion of Gregory, the concept of the eye of the soul was a figurative representation of one's spiritual perception, while the notion of the sight of the soul denoted the capacity to comprehend spiritual verities. Likewise, the auditory perception of the cardiac organ symbolised the capacity to attain spiritual enlightenment and react to it with belief.

Gregory indicated the significance of cultivating spiritual faculties, commencing with philosophical inquiries concerning ordinary perception and cognition, with the aim of advancing one's relation with the divine. Stated differently, the participation of the soul in the Divine Good demonstrates a perpetual augmentation, with every culmination serving as the inception of a new phase. Thus, it can be assumed that the soul has an inherent inclination towards perpetual growth in its comprehension of the divine.

However, what constitutes this knowledge? Does it represent a certain level of intellectual understanding? Gregory is convinced that due to their restricted abilities, no living being can fully comprehend the divine entity.⁷⁰ Is it recommended to adhere to a rigorous apophatic theology that would preclude humanity from attaining any affirmative knowledge about the imperceptible divine entity? Gregory's perspective differs from the previous statement as he believes that God is comprehensible.

Gregory utilises visual representations related to optics in several of his literary works to depict the outcome of an individual's “epectatic” longing for God, which involves the process of attaining godliness through virtuous conduct and acquiring personal knowledge of God.⁷¹

⁷⁰ On this subject we can consult Raymond WINLING, Introduction, in GRÉGOIRE DE NYSSE, *Contre Eunome I*, « Sources chrétiennes, 521 », Cerf, Paris, 2008, pp. 68-69.

⁷¹ The utilisation of the adjective 'epectatic' derived from the Greek term ἐπέκτασις is employed to encapsulate Gregory's theological anthropology, as it conveys the image of perpetual “stretching” towards God. To further explore the concept of epectasis and its relation to the works of Gregory of Nyssa, one may refer to J. Warren Smith's *Passion and Paradise: Human and Divine Emotion in the Thought of Gregory of Nyssa*, New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2004, p. 105.

The concept of epectasis posits a unique pinnacle between the boundlessness of God and the potential for comprehension by the limited soul. While the soul is capable of apprehending God, it is not through a definitive understanding, but rather through an endless desire.

“The vision of God consists precisely in an infinite desire, as Gregory says several times: In this consists the true vision of God, in the fact that he who looks up to him never ceases to desire him. [...] It is really there to see God that we never find satiety to this desire.”⁷²

He clarifies his thesis through a juxtaposition with the anatomical structure of the ocular organ. According to Gregory's interpretation, an individual's ability to perceive visual stimuli is attributed to the eye's inherent luminosity, which enables it to interact with external light sources:

“For as the eye by the ray of light which is wrapped up in it comes into fellowship with light, [...] so it was necessary that something akin to the Divine should be mingled with human nature, so that by its corresponding state, [human nature] might have a desire for that which is proper to it.”⁷³

According to Danielou, Gregory is introducing a novel approach to negative theology that previously centred primarily on the mystical encounter with God in “darkness”:

“This new way is that the desire itself, which leads [the soul] to seek God, constitutes a grasp of it, the only one which corresponds to both what God is and what the soul is. It is no longer the “seeing is not seeing” of darkness; it is the vision of the infinite God in the infinite desire of the soul.”⁷⁴

⁷² GRÉGOIRE DE NYSSE, *La vie de Moïse 107-109*, « Sources chrétiennes, 1bis », Cerf, Paris, 1987, pp. 169-171.

⁷³ GREGORY OF NYSSA, *Oratio catechetica* 5.4: “καθάπερ γὰρ ὁ ὀφθαλμὸς διὰ τῆς ἐγκειμένης αὐτῷ φυσικῶς αὐγῆς ἐν κοινωνίᾳ τοῦ φωτὸς γίνεται, [...] οὕτως ἀναγκαῖον ἦν ἐγκραθῆναί τι τῇ ἀνθρωπίνῃ φύσει συγγενὲς πρὸς τὸ θεῖον, ὡς ἂν διὰ τοῦ καταλλήλου πρὸς τὸ οἰκεῖον τὴν ἔφεσιν ἔχοι.”

⁷⁴ Cf. Jean DANIELOU, *Contemplation chez les Orientaux chrétiens. Mystique de la ténèbre chez Grégoire de Nysse*, in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, Beauchesne, 1932-1995, vol. 2, p. 1883.

According to Gregory, prophets like Moses are regarded as “eyes” because they possess the ability to gaze unwaveringly towards the Sun of Righteousness, much like the leaders of the Church who remain steadfast in their vision and do not succumb to the works of darkness. Gregory of Nyssa describes a “mysticism of darkness” in his works *In Canticum Canticorum* and *De vita Moysis*, in which Moses' encounter with God in Exodus 24:18 represents humanity's mystical ascent to God. Since Moses is said to have ascended to God “in darkness”, humanity can likewise only ascend to God “in darkness.”⁷⁵ Gregory believed in the idea of an ever-deepening knowledge of God, which is based on the desire for union with God and is constantly seeking to know Him better.

An analysis of the optical imagery in Gregory's *In Canticum Canticorum* reveals that in Gregory's understanding, the vision of God entails likeness to God. The two concepts of vision and likeness are not mutually exclusive. According to Martin Laird's argument, the concept of virtue, which refers to the resemblance to God, and knowledge, which pertains to the perception of God, are interrelated in Gregory of Nyssa's homilies.⁷⁶

The concept of the radical unknowability of God, compounded by his ineffable nature, will emerge as a significant theme and concept in the philosophical discourse of Gregory of Nyssa. The author of the Song of Songs provides a comprehensive analysis that highlights the challenge of comprehending and designating God, which is further complicated by a realisation of its limitations. The nature of God is characterised by the fact that He is inherently unknowable, and this attribute serves as the sole distinguishing feature of His being. The diastema, as defined by Gregory of Nyssa, was a principle that was extensively investigated by Manoussakis in his work entitled “*God after Metaphysics*.”⁷⁷ He emphasized that this knowledge goes beyond the intellect and involves the entire person,

⁷⁵ Cf. Martin LAIRD, *The Luminous Dark Revisited, in Gregory of Nyssa and the Grasp of Faith: Union, Knowledge, and Divine Presence*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, pp. 174-175.

⁷⁶ Cf. LAIRD, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

⁷⁷ See John Panteleimon MANOUSSAKIS, *Dumnezeu după metafizică. O teologie estetica*, Ed. Ratio et Revelatio, Oradea, 2018, pp. 136-146.

including the heart and will. Here Danielou is right to insist that Gregory knowledge of God was referring to advanced states of contemplation or *theoria*⁷⁸, beyond the preparatory stages of ethics and physics. Gregory believed that the journey towards knowing God involves a progression from moral and intellectual preparation to deeper spiritual experiences. It is this very personal and universal experience that Gregory of Nyssa called *epectasis*, transmits to us through the figures of Moses as a model of the seeker of God and his call to the insatiable desire for divine union has had many resonances in the history of the spirituality, as we shall soon see in Augustine, who seems to illustrate the doctrine of *epectasis*:

“Interior intimo meo. – This God who becomes every day less and less foreign and more and more unknown to me”.⁷⁹

According to Zdenko Širka⁸⁰, Gregory In *Vita Moysis* names some criteria for discerning the literal sense from the spiritual in biblical texts. For example, God's face and back are incommensurable with the divine nature; therefore another meaning must be sought.⁸¹ On the positive side,

⁷⁸ The Greek noun *theoria* has a primary meaning seeing, beholding and origins in the verb that means to see, to observe *theoreo*. The best works on the problem of *theoria* are e.g. Bradley Nassif, “The ‘Spiritual Exegesis’ of Scripture: The School of Antioch Revisited”, in: *Anglican Theological Review* 75 (1993/4), pp. 437-470; “Allegoria and Theoria”, in: Frances M. Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 161-185; “History, ‘Theoria’ and Tradition in the Antiochian School”, in: Bertrand de Margerie, S. J., *An Introduction to the History of Exegesis, vol. I*. The term *theoria* was known in both theological schools from this period: in the Alexandrian school they used it as an equivalent to allegorical interpretation, opposite to Antiochene exegesis where it referred to a higher meaning, but still based on the letter and history. There were also other schools in the milieu of the Early Church, such as the Cappadocian and Syriac, which shed different lights on the problem and where the differences between the Alexandrian and Antiochene approach is melted down.

⁷⁹ Cf Isabelle KOCH, *Interior intimo meo. Y a-t-il une intériorité de l'intériorité chez Augustin?*, in in G. Aubry & F. Ildelfonse, *Le moi et l'intériorité. Philosophie, Antiquité, Anthropologie*, Paris, 2088, https://www.academia.edu/42865245/Interior_intimo_meo_Y_a_t_il_une_int%C3%A9riorit%C3%A9_de_lint%C3%A9riorit%C3%A9_chez_Augustin, p. 315.

⁸⁰ Širka, ZDENKO. (2012). The Role of Theoria in Gregory of Nyssa's *Vita Moysis* and in *Canticum Canticorum*. *Communio Viatorum*. 54. 142-163.

⁸¹ De vita Moysis 2,221. In GRÉGOIRE DE NYSSE, *La vie de Moïse*, « Sources chrétiennes, 1Ter», Cerf, Paris, 1968.

Gregory does not reject texts that lead to virtue⁸², what is useful and profitable should be kept⁸³. In these case he accepts the value of the historical sense, but still adds the spiritual sense. For example, the slaying of idolaters is given a practical, moral interpretation and then a spiritual meaning as well; or another example, since spots on garments are no hindrance to ascend to God, the command to wash the clothes before approaching Sinai must mean something else - removing stains from the outward pursuit of life.⁸⁴

The anthropology founds in the dialogue of *De anima Resurrectione* is an emphasis on the spiritual destiny of man.

According S. Coakley, against the idea of an ontological divinity of the soul, Gregory poses in effect that the distance is immense between the essence of God and each being of creation that we can see or conceive. A theme that is much discussed in this dialogue is still that of desire. Gregory defines desire, *epithumia*, as "momentum towards what is missing". Gregory attributes to desire an eminent role, that of "we rise to union with the heavenly goods". Yet this role is only temporary, for all these movements must finally disappear from nature either by the present application or by the purification which will follow to death.⁸⁵

Beyond desire, there is like a spiritual mechanism that God, who is the Beautiful by nature, has the power to draw to himself the soul.

In the wake of Origen, in the 4th century Jerome considers that the fleshly senses look at earthly things and do not yet contemplate the heavenly realities. He believed that the physical senses were limited to perceiving material things and could not fully grasp the spiritual realm or the things of heaven. He admits that a number of Scripture verses relate to these spiritual meanings and describe the object of their perception. I will refer here to those who talk about vision: Ps 122,1: "I have raised my eyes to you who dwell in heaven." Mt 6, 22: "The lamp of your

⁸² De vita Moysis 2, 191.

⁸³ De vita Moysis 2, 301.

⁸⁴ De vita Moysis 2,155.

⁸⁵ Cf. Sarah COAKLEY, *Gregory of Nyssa*, in Paul L. GAVRILYUK and Sarah COAKLEY, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

body is your eye.” Jn 4,35: “Look up and see that the harvests are white to be harvested”.

Another aspect pointed out by Jerome is that the senses, especially that of vision, are marked by fragility: “When Mary Magdalene meets Jesus, she first thinks she sees a gardener (Jn 20,15). The disciples still, seeing the risen Jesus, do not recognize him until John identified him (Jn 21, 4-15). Certainly, the disciples’ inability to recognize the risen Jesus comes from their lack of faith”.⁸⁶

2.2. Augustin of Hippo

As in most areas of theology, the thought of St. Augustine exerted considerable influence on the Christian conception of the five senses involving a thorough reflection on the relationship between body and spirit in Christianity. He is known for his contributions to the understanding of spiritual senses and the inner sense. He also developed the concept of the hierarchy of the five senses and introduced the idea of synesthesia and its modes of operation.

We know that St Augustine classifies the processes of vision according to a ternary hierarchy, in which he distinguishes corporeal vision “by the eyes”, spiritual vision “by the human spirit”, intellectual vision “by an intuition of the intellectual soul”. In this step, the intuitive force of the soul can reason directly on ideas, without going through the images that the mind still borrows from the body in the earlier stage of spiritual vision. It is in this highest degree that Augustine situates the “visio Dei” — where it is less a question of God’s vision, moreover, than of contemplating his light and his truth. The category of vision that we will discuss, in the vocabulary of the African doctor, is the «visio spiritualis» which covers both the dreams that man produces himself and the extraordinary visions produced in him by other minds.

⁸⁶ Cf. Courtray RÉGIS, *Le Débat des cinq sens de l’Antiquité à nos jours Sous la direction de Géraldine Puccini*: https://www.academia.edu/6867111/Le_D%C3%A9bat_des_cinq_sens_de_lAntiquit%C3%A9_%C3%A0_nos_jours_Sous_la_direction_de_G%C3%A9raldine_Puccini, p. 210.

As M. R. Lootens observes,

“Through Augustine's early writings the inner sensory life is dominated by language of vision (oculus/oculi, aspectus and visio are frequently used) and knowing God or anything true in the world is described as a visionary experience of the soul.”⁸⁷

In his understanding of *synesthesia* and the definition of the five senses as they appear in Book of the Confessions, St. Augustine also insists on the hierarchy allowing to classify the five senses in an order favouring sight and hearing. These two meanings play a leading role in the conversion and revelation of God to man in biblical texts.

On the subject of the eye and sight, the first in the hierarchy of the five senses, St Augustine affirms the existence of the eyes of the heart which enable the saints to see God in the afterlife thanks to the Incarnation which has enabled men to see Christ in body:

“Wherefore it may very well be, and it is thoroughly credible, that we shall in the future world see the material forms of the new heavens and the new earth in such a way that we shall most distinctly recognize God everywhere present and governing all things, material as well as spiritual, and shall see Him, not as now we understand the invisible things of God, by the things which are made, and see Him darkly, as in a mirror, and in part, and rather by faith than by bodily vision of material appearances, but by means of the bodies we shall wear and which we shall see wherever we turn our eyes. As we do not believe, but see that the living men around us who are exercising vital functions are alive, though we cannot see their life without their bodies, but see it most distinctly by means of their bodies, so, wherever we shall look with those spiritual eyes of our future bodies, we shall then, too, by means of bodily substances behold God, though a spirit, ruling all things. Either, therefore, the eyes shall possess some quality similar to that of the mind, by which they may be able to discern spiritual things, and among these God, — a supposition for which it is difficult or even impossible to find any support in Scripture, — or, which is more easy to comprehend, God will be so known by us, and shall be so much before us, that we shall see Him by the spirit in ourselves, in one another, in Himself, in the

⁸⁷ Matthew R. LOOTENS, *Augustine*, in Paul L. GAVRILYUK and Sarah COAKLEY, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

new heavens and the new earth, in every created thing which shall then exist; and also by the body we shall see Him in every body which the keen vision of the eye of the spiritual body shall reach. Our thoughts also shall be visible to all, for then shall be fulfilled the words of the apostle, "Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the thoughts of the heart, and then shall every one have praise of God".⁸⁸

This visual language in these texts has generally been interpreted as an early articulation of his illumination theory and intellectual vision, but is also at the same time suggestive of acts of spiritual perception. Augustine held that God is transcendent and beyond the physical realm, and that seeing God requires a spiritual transformation of the soul rather than physical vision. In his writing "City of God," he states that "what eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and what has not entered the human heart, what God has prepared for those who love him" highlighting his belief that God is beyond human comprehension and can only be known through spiritual means.

As he says Lootens:

"Augustine suggest that it is entirely possible and likely that the eyes of the spiritual body will be able to see God. He is clearly speculating on these matters and offers no firm conclusions; he seems willing to hold open this possibility son ling as one does not think that God will be seen as a body."⁸⁹

Moving closer to the face-to-face vision, one in turn draws closer to God and becomes more like God. As 1 John 3,2 suggest the idea that the ability to perceive or envision God is rooted in a similarity to God that exists within the soul and inner self, rather than through physical characteristics, as God is believed to be without a physical form. The journey proposed by St Augustine in man's exploration of his bodily senses and interiority, that is, of the human spirit, where the sense of the heart is found, leads to the perfect correspondence between the external

⁸⁸ Saint AUGUSTINE, *City of God*, Book 22, ch. 29, in <http://www.logoslibrary.org/augustine/city/2229.html>.

⁸⁹ Matthew R. LOOTENS, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

element and the inner mystery. It is indeed the bodily element, the physical sense that serves as a guide for the spirit in access to the divine and for the perception of the Invisible.

A last aspect of Saint Augustine's thought on the five senses deserves to be mentioned. In his use of sensory vocabulary, it is not uncommon to see the Bishop of Hippo use a «sensorial» verb to express a spiritual idea.

Lootens is explaining Augustine's view that individuals possess both bodily and spiritual senses. He notes that, according to Augustine, ultimate joy and satisfaction are achieved when one directs their spiritual senses towards God:

“The human being endowed with both corporeal and spiritual senses, finds true happiness and fulfilment in the use of the spiritual senses completely directed to God.”⁹⁰

2.3. Maximus the Confessor

Maximus the Confessor understands that the spiritual perception of God is possible through *theosis*, which is the process of becoming like God and experiencing union with Him. He believed that the soul could be transformed through asceticism, contemplation, and prayer, leading to a deeper understanding of the divine and the ability to experience God directly. He emphasized that the spiritual perception of God is not just a matter of intellectual understanding, but also a matter of union with the divine, which involves a complete transformation of the person at the deepest level. The terminology of the spiritual senses can be found in the Maximus writings. His teachings on the spiritual senses have had a lasting impact on Christian thought. The concept of the spiritual senses⁹¹ refers to the ability of the human soul to perceive and understand spiritual truths, beyond the literal meaning of scripture and the physical world. Maximus believed that the spiritual senses, along with asceticism,

⁹⁰ Ibidem, p. 70.

⁹¹ Maximus use terms like *divine perception*, *noetic perception*, *noetic eyes*, *the eyes of the mind* or *the eyes of the soul*. See Frederick D. AQUINO, *Maximus the Confessor*, in Paul L. GAVRILYUK and Sarah COAKLEY, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

contemplation, and prayer, are essential tools for attaining union with God and experiencing the divine presence. He correlates sight with the synthetic function of the mind (*nous*), who involves a pure encounter with God; hearing with discursive reason (*logos*), who corresponds to the activity of deducing theological truths from causes; smell with spirit, taste with desire and touch with the vivifying faculty (*aisthesis*), that means the soul gains for itself some impression of the meaning of things.⁹²

Maximus the Confessor in his *Mystagogy* implemented all these aspects of the theology of knowledge, to which we will refer in the following lines. As Marie-Lucie Charpin-Ploix suggests, the mystagogy is an initiation into mysteries, both hidden and revealed, which have as their foundation the Mystery of the Incarnation.⁹³ The *Mystagogia* analyse the study of the mysteries of the faith, holds that the spiritual perception of God enables the deiform person (a person who has been deified, or united with God) to decipher the intelligible realities embedded in the self, nature, the cosmos, and liturgical practices. According to Maximus, the deiform person is able to see the world and all its elements as a manifestation of the divine, and to understand the spiritual truths that lie behind the literal meaning of things. He believed that the spiritual perception of God allows the person to experience a deep unity with the divine and with all of creation, and to understand the deeper spiritual significance of liturgical practices and other religious rites.

In Maximus' mind man is from the beginning a being situated at the intersection between the two worlds, the sensible world and the intelligible world, which are two faces of the same reality while remaining quite distinct from each other. The knowledge of the intelligible realizations that are nevertheless related to it, since it is itself an intelligible soul, is not made directly, but through the intermediate of the perception of the sensitive world in which it is inscribed by its body.

⁹² Ibidem, p. 108.

⁹³ Marie-Lucie Charpin Ploix « Introduction », dans Maxime le Confesseur, *La Mystagogie*, trad. Marie-Lucie Charpin Ploix, coll. « Les Pères dans la Foi » 92, Paris, éd. Migne, 2005, pp. 21-29.

“For the whole spiritual world seems mystically imprinted on the whole sensible world in symbolic forms, for those who are capable of seeing this, and conversely the whole sensible world is spiritually explained in the mind in the principles which it contains...Indeed, the symbolic contemplation of intelligible things means of visible realities is spiritual knowledge and understanding of visible things through the visible. For it is necessary that things which manifest each other bear a mutual reflection in an altogether true and clear manner and keep their relationship intact.”⁹⁴

The ideas in this brief section are organized on the basis of a delineation between what appears (*ta phainomena*) and what does not appear (*ta me phainomena*) which we can summarize by two reports, by the visible the invisible, by the invisible the visible. It is certainly useful to ask what *the phainomena* refer to for Maximus by definition visible. Can we therefore allow ourselves to understand what appears, not as an object of nature, “sensitive” and therefore visible, referring to an invisible form, but as a certain visible structure in the arrangement of a stone building that would express an invisible structure that we could for example consider as the providential design of the Creator bearing on the totality of what is. Thus visible things and invisible things form a unity.

The Confessor presents his thought on the transcendence of God using concepts drawn both from the fact that we know God positively and from what in him escapes us. It is about a God having a simple, unknowable existence, inaccessible to all and totally inexpressible, beyond all affirmation and negation. At this point, what is the purpose of the exposition on the nature of God and the knowledge we have of Him? If the subject of his treat is the Church and the syntaxes, why should he dwell on the question of the knowledge of God? Maxime done the same kind of exposition at the beginning of his first *Centuria Theologica*. His insistence on reflecting on God's incomprehensibility reflects a general tendency of Byzantine theology, particularly among the Cappadocians. And if we pay attention to the words of the Confessor, we understand that the Church, the *synaxes*, the mystic and every other form of life serve one and the same purpose which is that of the encounter with God.

⁹⁴ Cf. Marie-Lucie Charpin Ploix, *op. cit.*, pp. 131-133.

The transcendence of God does not prevent the way to Him since He can still be known through His revelation and the mysteries dispensed by His Son. Thus, the mystagogy of the Church and the synaxis it celebrates constitute the environment and the concrete dynamics that enable us to know God. Together, the mystagogy and synaxis provide an environment for people to deepen their knowledge and understanding of God through worship, teaching, and community.

In the *Questions to Thalassios*, Maxime gives some indications on the fulfilment of human nature through filial union with God, as a place of development of sensations and the framework in which it exercises its mediating role. Maximus's insistence on the importance of sensation in his anthropology reveals an affinity with Evagre and with his doctrine of the contemplation of the Cree, which is a pedagogy that makes the human being accept the knowledge of the wisdom of God as in a mirror. The challenge lies in the overpassing the appearances of the sensitive to accede to the contemplation of beings. However, what is in Evagrius only a stage that is not part of the nature of rational beings a priori and destined to disappear in their fulfilment, takes another dimension in Maximus, as the realization of God's creative project. It belongs to the nature of man as God willed it to progress in the co-existence from the perception of the sensitive, and if this natural condition is destined to be overpassed in the end of human life. It is in a synthesis which assumes its sensitive part by uniting it to the intelligible, and not in the simple abandonment of it in favour of a purer acknowledge.

Evagrius Ponticus believed that sensation is the impression of the sensitive object in the intellect. He advocates for a path of spiritual progression that involves moving away from the soul's attachment to sensory experiences and the forms that they leave in the intellect. He believed that these forms are divisible and not a true reflection of reality. Like Evagrius, Maximus thinks of the passage from the contemplation of the sensitive to the contemplation of the logos, the "purpose" of the sensitive, in which the Logos unveil himself to the intellect of man.

However, the unity between sensitive perception, the representation of the sensitive in the intermediate faculties, the apprehension of the

logos and the acknowledge of the intelligible is posed by Maximus in a clearer and more argumentative way. The human co-existence in nature restores is so one and unifying that its very aim concerns the union of sensation and intellect in a single continuous activity in the bond of logos. The accomplishment of natural contemplation does not pass through a distance from the stage of sensation in order to offer to the intellect only representations that leave no corporeal imprint in him, but by the ability to find through the perception of the sensitive, the sensitive form and the representation that are inscribed in the soul, this way of passage giving access to the logos, and leading the soul to the creator sound.

The representation of the sensory world should no longer be an obstacle to knowing God in our restored nature. Instead, it can be a path towards experiencing the wonder and beauty of the divine plan. He believed that by moving beyond attachment to sensory experiences, one can gain a deeper understanding of the divine. According F.D Aquino, Maximus certainly values perceptual knowledge by associating as something better than conceptual depictions of God.⁹⁵

As there is a reading of Scripture according to the letter and a lecture according to the Spirit, there is a look on the sensitive according to the flesh and a look according to the Spirit, which is the natural contemplation in the Spirit. In other words, the spiritual view, is achieved through natural contemplation in the Spirit, which allows for a deeper understanding and connection to the divine. This statement suggests that the world was created in a close relationship with its creator, allowing individuals to view and understand the world through the gaze of God and with the help of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit unites the intelligence of man and helps individuals to see the presence of the Logos in all beings.

Natural contemplation is therefore a look at creation from above, which takes its starting point in the cause and principle of creation, in union with the creator. This is in conformity with the doctrine of the Logos, of Maximus the Confessor, since in order to subdue the logos in

⁹⁵ Cf. Frederick D. AQUINO, *op.cit.* p. 113.

the sensitive, it is to unite oneself with the Logos through knowledge, and it is to contemplate, through his unbelief intention, the Creator himself.

2.4. Gregory the Great

Gregory the Great saw the knowledge of God as being gained through a combination of faith and reason. He believed that through faith, one can have a perception of God's divine nature and through reason, one can understand the qualities and attributes of God as revealed in scripture. Gregory also believed that contemplation and prayer play an important role in deepening one's knowledge of God. In his writings, he emphasized the importance of humility and the need to seek God with a pure heart, free from the distractions of worldly pursuits. Overall, Gregory the Great saw the knowledge of God as a lifelong pursuit that requires both faith and reason, and must be accompanied by a virtuous life.

According G. Demacopoulos, Gregory the Great believed that the fall of Adam resulted in the corruption of human nature and made it impossible for humans to know God perfectly in this lifetime. However, he also believed that through a correct study of the Sacred Scriptures, combined with a life of ascetic purity, a person could gain a deeper understanding and knowledge of God. Gregory emphasized the importance of humility and the need to seek God with a pure heart, free from the distractions of worldly pursuits. He saw the knowledge of God as a lifelong pursuit that required a combination of faith, reason, and virtuous living, but recognized that the ultimate knowledge of God would only be achieved in the afterlife.⁹⁶

According to a study by A. Menager on the writings of Gregory the Great he notes 302 occurrences of the word *contemplatio* and 106 occurrences of *contemplari*, which denotes the importance Gregory gives to this aspect. Menager points out five different meanings attached to the

⁹⁶ Cf. George DEMACOPOULOS, *Gregory the Great*, in Paul L. GAVRILYUK and Sarah COAKLEY, *op. cit.*, pp. 72-73.

word by Gregory: 1. To gaze upon attentively with the eyes. (21); 2. To ponder attentively in thought. (22) This means to perform occasional acts of pondering; 3. To gaze on God and the things of God. In this usage of *contemplari* the attentive pondering has become habitual, and *contemplatio* is used as a synonym for *vita contemplativa*. (23); 4. To gaze on God and things divine under the supernatural influence, which today is termed “infused contemplation.” (27); 5. To gaze on God in perfect contemplation of the beatific vision. (28).⁹⁷

In one of his later homilies in the commentary on the prophet Ezechiel, Saint Gregory describes a four-stage process by which a Christian can prepare his soul to the full vision of God. These are “cleansing” (*tergere*), “self-gathering” (*se ad se colligere*), “self-seeing” (*videre se*), and “contemplation” of God (*contemplation*).⁹⁸ “Cleansing” refers to the purification of the soul from sin and worldly attachments. “Self-gathering” refers to the process of the soul turning inward and focusing on its relationship with God. “Self-seeing” refers to the soul gaining insight into its own nature and the nature of God. “Contemplation” of God refers to the soul reaching a state of deep, loving contemplation of God, in which it is transformed by His love and experiences a perfect union with Him. These stages are seen as a gradual progression, with the soul moving from faith to a deeper and more complete vision of God. Through the language of sight, Gregory explored various aspects of mental cognition, divine illumination and conversely, spiritual blindness. He believed that everyone has the ability to understand things spiritually, but not everyone uses that ability correctly. He thought that some people choose to ignore their spiritual insight and instead follow worldly desires, that why he encouraged people to cultivate their spiritual perception and use it to understand God's will.

⁹⁷ Mason, Sister Mary Elizabeth, “Active Life and Contemplative Life: A Study of the Concepts from Plato to the Present” (1961). Marquette University Press Publications. 1. <https://epublications.marquette.edu/mupress-book/1>.

⁹⁸ Edward Cuthbert BUTLER, O.S.B., *Benedictine Monachism; Studies in Benedictine Life and Rule* (2d ed.; London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1924), p. 113, https://www.academia.edu/4912329/The_Narrated_Theology_of_Stabilitas_in_Gregory_the_Greats_Life_of_Benedict.

According to Demacopoulos, Gregory used the phrase “eye of the mind” to refer to spiritual perception. He believed that the eye of the mind, or the eye of the heart, is a spiritual faculty that allows individuals to perceive divine truths and understand God's will. Gregory encouraged people to cultivate this faculty and use it to gain spiritual insight, rather than relying solely on physical senses and worldly desires.⁹⁹

In his commentary on the book of Job, he emphasized the importance of spiritual contemplation and the development of a moral and virtuous life as key elements in understanding divine truth. He believed that through prayer and the illumination of the Holy Spirit, the mind could be opened to a deeper understanding of righteousness, leading to wise and virtuous decision-making. One way to this clearer understanding of God, and reception of divine illumination is the path of asceticism, considered by Gregory an external source but the most effective means of entering into communion with God. When Gregory describes the life of this path, he often uses the word “stability”.

A careful examination of J. J. WALES says that according to Gregory “stability” represents a harmonious relationship between the soul, the body, and God, in which the soul is aligned with God's will and the body acts in accordance with that will. This ideal of stability is seen as the key to a virtuous and fulfilling life, both for the individual and for the community as a whole.

“Through prayer, meditation, and a virtuous life, Gregory believed that individuals could achieve this stability and deepen their relationship with God. His interior conformity reflects the soul's participation in God's life.”¹⁰⁰

Gregory envisages the journey towards spiritual perfection is a gradual process that occurs in stages. In the first stage, the Christian must engage in spiritual warfare against their own passions and vices. This requires the relocating of what he referred to as the “capital vices,” or the

⁹⁹ Cf. George DEMACOPOULOS, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

¹⁰⁰ Jordan Joseph WALES, *The Narrated Theology of 'Stabilitas' in Gregory the Great's Life of Benedict*, *Cistercian Studies Quarterly*, 2014, https://www.academia.edu/4912329/The_Narrated_Theology_of_Stabilitas_in_Gregory_the_Greats_Life_of_Benedict.

root causes of sin. In the second stage, the Christian begins to develop virtues, but only gradually and through consistent effort. This gradual acquisition of virtues, combined with the continued effort to root out vices, leads the Christian closer to spiritual perfection and a deeper union with God. Gregory believed that this journey towards spiritual perfection was a lifelong process that required persistence and perseverance.

For him there are two types of lives, the active and the contemplative. The active life is to give bread to the hungry, to teach the ignorant the word of wisdom, to correct the erring, to recall to the path of humility our neighbour when he waxes proud, to tend the sick, to dispense to all what they need, and to provide those entrusted to us with the means of subsistence. The contemplative life involves the prayer, meditation, and other forms of religious devotion. In consequence, a perceptive reader discovers that Gregory speaks of the stages of growth in interior life (*vita activa* and *vita contemplativa*).¹⁰¹ In others words, “to be meritorious, the moral virtues of the active life must be accompanied by the theological virtues. The theological virtues are present with the moral virtues in the active life, but they are stressed more in the contemplative life. The active life is an essential prelude to the contemplative. This latter can be perfected only in heaven”.¹⁰²

After all these interpretations of Christian authors we can conclude that the restoration of the whole person to the resurrection state will encompass the “spiritual body,” in which all human perception will be at the same time fully incarnate and fully spiritual. Thus, a complete description of spiritual perception is inevitably theological and must present the “perception of divine things” in relation to a human endeavour full of grace after full communion with God. This statement means that divine grace and human effort work together in a complementary manner rather than competing with each other. Divine grace is essential for the operation of spiritual perception, but it also requires human cooperation and effort to cultivate and habituate it.

¹⁰¹ *Moralia* XXXI, 5, <http://www.lectionarycentral.com/GregoryMoralia/Book31.html>.

¹⁰² *Moralia*, XXXV, 3, <http://www.lectionarycentral.com/GregoryMoralia/Book35.html>.

Sometimes when John uses verbs of sight, he does not specify the object. For example, when Jesus sees the two disciples following him and invites them to “come and see” (1,38-39, there is no direct object after this phrase. John leaves unspecified what exactly Jesus wants them to “come and see”. This use of sense perception invites us to contemplate a possible symbolic meaning. That why Thomas d'Aquino consider and interpret this phrase “Come and see” in a mystical sense:

“Come, by believing and working; and see, by experiencing and understanding.”¹⁰³

The human gaze is oriented towards objects that are capable of being *represented*, satisfying the intricate requirements of “representability” for humans. This entails a congruence between specific attributes of the object, such as its temporal and spatial relations, and its potential for being envisioned, that is, understood and identified by human rationality. It can be posited that among the various conceivable entities, the countenance of oneself or of another individual in a reflective surface is a favoured object of human cognition. Direct eye contact is a physical stance that implies that two individuals are either engaging with or avoiding the other.

Social sciences such as sociology and history, but also theology, can benefit from the anthropological research of the gaze, which has often been based on non-verbal communication. In this sense, the problems of the social sciences are irreducible to purely behavioural data, without however contradicting them: eye contact is not insignificant in terms of interaction, and its importance is rooted in the possibility of a game of verbal social communication. The meeting of the eyes can accompany an exchange of words; it can mark a conversation by “fixing the eyes” of the interlocutor.

¹⁰³ T. AQUINAS, *Commentary on ST. John: Part I: Chapters 1-7*, (trans. J.A. Weishiepl; Albany, NY: Magi Books, 1993), 1.15.292, apud. Sunny Kuan Hui Wang, *Sense of perception and testimony in the Gospel according to John*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe 435, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, Germany, 2017.

This visual vector coding tradition shows that gaze exchange is more than phatic communication. In the exchange of glances, receiving and giving are intrinsically linked, for you cannot look into the other's eyes without the other being able to immediately return, if he wishes, the visual vector in the depth of his own perceptions. If the exchange is reciprocal, as supply physically merges with demand, what is being exchanged remains opaque when the light-filled eyes are resolutely directed at the other. The visual exchange not only provides a simple *crossover* opening without repercussions, but has much deeper and meaningful implications for the entire relationship.

According to Veronique Nahoum-Grappe,

“The gaze can be characterised as the convergence of four visual vectors that intersect to form two crossed beams of intentional intensity. This point of intersection is situated between the two faces, within the spatial gap that separates them. From an anthropological and phenomenological perspective, this definition captures the essence of the gaze.”¹⁰⁴

The description provided is of a phenomenological nature, aimed at defining our habitual self-evidence. It characterises 'deep-eye-gazing' as a development in space resulting from the intersection of imaginably fused visual trajectories, rather than a mere perceptual addition. The act of interpersonal communication, specifically when two individuals engage in direct eye contact, establishes them as the primary actors within a shared reality. In this context, the passive act of observing or perceiving is supplanted by an active exchange of experiences between the two parties involved. When two individuals exchange kind and compassionate glances, a profound realisation arises – that of acknowledgement and a tacit connection between their inner selves.

The Church' Fathers gave a special attention to the spiritual perception and senses, encouraging the detachment of the physical level of senses, aiming harmony among physic perception, mind, “minds

¹⁰⁴ Véronique Nahoum GRAPPE, « *L'échange des regards* », *Terrain* [En ligne], 30 | 1998, mis en ligne le 15 mai 2007, consulté le 12 janvier 2023. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/terrain/3375> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/terrain.3375>.

eyes”, heart and soul for connecting to God. Starting from Gregory de Nyssa' “ocular perception of the soul” and the “auditory perception of the heart”, to St Augustin distinguishing the corporeal vision “by the eyes”, by the spiritual vision “by the human spirit”, intellectual vision “by an intuition of the intellectual soul”. Maximus the Confessor shows how faith eases the perception of God's divine nature and reason the understanding of qualities and attributes of God as revealed in scripture. Gregory the Great sustains the “stability” represents a harmonious relationship between the soul, the body, and God, in line with Saint Ambrose, Bishop of Milan primatum given to seeing and hearing senses, as the well-known “Come and see” of Thomas d'Aquino, in a mystical sense.

All have in common and advocates for a path of spiritual progression that involves moving away from the soul's attachment to sensory experiences and the forms that they leave in the intellect.

The Western culture is built around the way we see and hear, while the essence of Christianity is that world was created in a close relationship with its creator, from the Logos, hearing, allowing individuals to see and understand the world through the gaze of God and with the help of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit unites the intelligence of man and helps individuals to see the presence of the Logos in all beings.

The way a society associates these senses actually influences the way world “make sense” for that group of people, the way they experience the world, see and understand the reality.

2.5. The icon and the reflection of the invisible

The visage plays a crucial role in establishing interpersonal communication, and consequently, is a fundamental component of our self-concept as individuals and connection to the world. If we have chosen to explore the icon despite its lack of universal significance, it is because it is one of the finest examples of the connection between the visible and the invisible, and not just because of its image title. Obviously, every

image already carries the imprint of the invisible because it represents what is not visible. Anca Vasiliu' statement¹⁰⁵ highlights two distinct approaches to comprehending the function and significance of images in ancient discourse.

The first approach focuses on the definitions assigned to images by authors of that period. This involves analysing what these authors have to say about the meanings and significance of images. This method is more theoretical and relies on the written texts of the period.

In contrast, the second approach is more pragmatic and concentrates on how authors utilised images. This involves analysing how they incorporated images into their works, the context in which they used them, and the visual experience of the images themselves. This approach takes into account the immanent visibility of the extant and how it was represented visually.

The first approach provides a theoretical framework for understanding the meaning and significance of images. For example, an image of something, whether it be a photograph or a painting, represents something that is not visible in the image itself, whereas the second approach provides a more pragmatic understanding of how images were utilised and experienced in the visual culture of the time.

The second approach significant to our work, which centres on the sensory experience of images, sheds light on the emotional and spiritual impact that icons had on believers and thus reveals the role of icons in the Byzantine Christian tradition.¹⁰⁶ Icons are distinguished by their power to signify something that is essentially invisible, namely God. It is precisely this receptivity to the invisible that distinguishes the relationship between believers and icons. At first glance, however, this relationship to the invisible that characterises the icon appears

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Anca VASILIU, *Eikôn. L'image dans le discours des trois Cappadociens*, Paris, 2010, p. 20.

¹⁰⁶ Olivier DELOUIS, *Expérience de l'icône et preuve par l'image chez Théodore Stoudite* In : *Visibilité et présence de l'image dans l'espace ecclésial : Byzance et Moyen Âge occidental* [en ligne]. Paris : Éditions de la Sorbonne, 2019 (généré le 11 avril 2023). Disponible sur Internet : <<http://books.openedition.org/psorbonne/39797>>. ISBN : 9791035105457. DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/books.psorbonne.39797>.

paradoxical, for if God is fundamentally invisible, how can the icon, as a simple image, signify God's presence and bring us into his presence?

Wanting to make visible what will always remain invisible, isn't that illusion? This was the core argument of the iconoclasts, who opposed the use of icons with vehemence and, unfortunately, often with violence. However, thanks to theologians who knew how to defend the legitimacy of icons with theological arguments, they were able to better understand the complex nature of the icon based on its relationship to the invisible. The icon must have a very specific relationship with its model, the divine being.

2.5.1. Similarity, resemblance, imitation or representation?

In order to answer this question, Marie-José Mondzain will make an interlude through the writings of the Church Fathers in order to elucidate the application and meaning of the concept of economy (*oikonomia*). Iconophilia will use this concept to defend iconography, but long before the disputes, it had already presented a number of dogmas, with the Incarnation and Providence being the most central. The concept of "Economy" is used in the context of iconography to describe how the representation of divine figures in icons can serve as a means of accessing the divine. Icons are viewed as a component of God's plan of salvation, serving as a means of communicating his love and compassion to humanity and facilitating interaction between the human and divine spheres. In other words, the concept of economy becomes the articulation of the invisible (the natural and primary image) with the visible (the artificial image).¹⁰⁷

Mondzain argues that the Christian doctrine of incarnation provides God to be visible in the world through Jesus Christ. The natural image of God is invisible and serves as the premise for all other images, but the incarnation of the Son of God reveals God's plan for redemption. Christ

¹⁰⁷ David BOZZINI, 2003. « MONDZAIN Marie-José, 2000, Image, icône, économie. Les sources byzantines de l'imaginaire contemporain ». *ethnographiques.org*, Comptes rendus d'ouvrages [en ligne]. (<https://www.ethnographiques.org/2003/CRBozzini> - consulté le 12.04.2023).

mediates the economy, or the relationship between God and humanity, as its steward. This position of Christ as an intermediary facilitates a more precise comprehension of the administration of change registers in the Christian sense of economy. Mondzain views the incarnation primarily as a means for God to be present and active in the world, and for humanity to comprehend its relationship with God through Christ.¹⁰⁸

In ancient Greek philosophy, “economy” referred to the functional organisation of an order, with or without a view to material profit. It was predominantly a secular concept, with an emphasis on resource management and the efficient distribution of products and services.

However, in the writings of the Church Fathers, the term “economy” takes on a sacrosanct connotation and is used to explain the Trinitarian relationships within God.

For Theodore the Studite and other defenders of the use of icons in devotion, the sensory experience of the image was fundamental to its significance and power. It was believed that the icon's visual and tactile qualities would facilitate a direct encounter with the divine, making the devotional experience immediate and intimate. Believers could interact with the spiritual reality represented by the icon through their senses, and the icon itself was viewed as a conduit between the physical and spiritual realms. By focusing on the sensory experience of the icon, we can obtain a deeper understanding of how images functioned in the Byzantine Christian tradition and how they were used to facilitate the believer's connection with the divine. This method also enables us to recognise the emotional and affective aspects of religious experience, as well as how they were expressed and mediated through the icons.

Theodor the Studite believed that the Gospel of John offers a unique perspective on the nature of Christ as the divine Logos who became human, and that this perspective is essential to comprehending the theological significance of the icon, which depicts the Incarnate Logos. The doctrine of Incarnation is fundamental to the icon's theology, and Theodor the Studite regarded the Gospel of John as the key to comprehending this doctrine and its implications for the Christian faith.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. M.J. MONDZAIN, *op. cit.*, pp. 203-204.

As Christoph Schonborn¹⁰⁹ observe, in the theology of Theodore the Studite's icon, Christ and his icon are interdependent and interconnected. He believed that the icon existed in Christ himself, as the ideal representation of divinity. Consequently, the icon is not simply a work of art created by human hands, but rather a representation of the divine presence manifested in the world through Christ. That is to say whoever perceives Christ also perceives his icon, and vice versa. This implies that the vision of the icon is not distinct from the vision of Christ, but rather a visible manifestation of the divine presence at work. Consequently, for Theodore the Studite, the icon is a physical manifestation of the divine-human relationship, and it has profound spiritual significance for Christians who strive to approach God through the contemplation of sacred images.

“One must, then, venerate the image of Christ but not adore it, but (sc. one must adore) Christ who is venerated in it according to the word of truth, since these are two, the image and the prototype, and the difference is not in the hypostasis but as regards the account of substance.”¹¹⁰

In this statement, Theodore the Studite emphasises the distinction between the veneration of Christ's image and the worship of Christ himself. He observes a duality between the image and the prototype, or original, which is Christ. As a representation of Christ, the image is worthy of veneration, but it is not itself an object of adoration. Only Christ, who is present in the image and deserving of adoration, is worthy of adoration. This comprehension of the relationship between the image and the prototype is fundamental to Theodore's iconology, which emphasises relational veneration. The image is not an end in itself, but rather a means to connect with the divine presence it symbolises. Even

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Christoph SCHONBORN, *L'icône du Christ. Fondements Théologiques*, Les Editions du Cerf, Paris, 2003, pp. 226-227.

¹¹⁰ Theodore of Stoudios, *Letter*, 546 (to John Grammatikos), ed. Fatouros, vol. II, p. 826, ll. 12–18, apud. Dirk Krausmüller, *Christ and His Representation, One or Two? The Image Theologies of Theodore of Stoudios, Leo of Chalcedon and Eustratius of Nicaea in Scrinium 17* (2021), [https://brill.com/view/journals/scri/17/1/article-p356_21 .xml?ebody=pdf-63199](https://brill.com/view/journals/scri/17/1/article-p356_21.xml?ebody=pdf-63199).

further, he affirms that “the invisible becomes visible”¹¹¹ referring to the mystery of the Incarnation.

The teaching of John of Damascus goes so far as to affirm that “every icon reveals something that we cannot see.”¹¹² He argues that the icons reveal something that our physical senses cannot perceive. He believed that icons are not merely representations of physical beings or events, but portals into the spiritual realm. According to John of Damascus, icons enable us to see beyond the material world and into the divine realities, they represent.

“If we made an image of the invisible God, surely this would be contrary to God's nature, for he is uncircumscribable and without form. But when God is seen clothed in flesh, and conversing with men, I make an image of the God whom I see. I do not worship matter, worship the God of matter, who became matter for my sake, and deigned to inhabit matter, who worked out my salvation through matter.”¹¹³

In the context of the Incarnation, it conveys a similar notion regarding the legitimacy of depicting God in art. Since God became visible in the person of Jesus Christ, John of Damascus argues that it is appropriate to represent him in his human form, as this is the form in which he revealed himself to humanity. However, he is cautious to differentiate this from depicting God in his invisible nature, which would be antithetical to God's nature as indefinable and formless. He believes that the Incarnation of God in the person of Jesus Christ solves the problem of representing an invisible God. By assuming human form, God became visible, tangible, and capable of being depicted. Consequently, the image of God in human form is not a representation of the invisible God, but rather a manifestation of God's visible and tangible presence in the world through the Incarnation. The icon serves as a visible mediator between the divine and the human, between the Logos and his flesh, and between God's gaze and human vision.

¹¹¹ Cf. E. SENDLER, *L'icône, image de l'invisible*. Paris : Desclée de Brouwer, 1981, pp. 26.

¹¹² *Ibidem*, p. 32.

¹¹³ DAMASCÈNE, J., *Contre ceux qui rejettent les saintes icônes*. in : *La Foi orthodoxe*. Traduction d'Emmanuel Ponsoye. Paris : Les Editions de l'Ancre, coll. l'Arbre de Jessé, 1966, p. 281.

The icon employs a multitude of techniques to make the unseen visible and to bring attention to it. The icon's genuine uniqueness resides in how it is perceived. Familiar to art theorists, the concept of "reception" is crucial here and acts against another concept, that of inventive creation. The required vision of the viewer is denied to art and the artist. For the icon to have any existence, the painter must disappear or at least act as a passive intermediary as a painter's technician. The icon employs various techniques to convey the trans-visual and trans-sensible, such as the hieratic posture of the characters, their wide-eyed gaze directed towards a higher reality, and the use of a golden background. In line with P. Evdokimov's analysis, the representation of the Absolute through a thoughtfully constructed absence does not appear to be counted among the methodologies employed by Christian art.¹¹⁴

Does Christianity completely omit the concept of representation through absence? The Old and New Testaments comprise significant sections that address the concept of the "erased face." According to Isaiah 53:2, the Messiah is described as missing in physical appearance and notable presence. The act in question eludes definition based on the physical features of the person, instead serving as a symbol of and reference to the broader collective. The death of Christ has the potential to bring about a transformative visual experience. According to A. Scrima's hermeneutic commentary on the contemplative journey, the primary basis for the act of erasing the face can be traced back to the crucifixion of the Logos.¹¹⁵ Scrima's emphasis on the act of wiping the face of Jesus suggests that it embodies a significant moment of human compassion and solidarity with Christ's affliction. In light of Jesus being the embodiment of the divine Word, his crucifixion entails significant physical and emotional distress. The gesture of wiping his face can be interpreted as a manifestation of compassion and affection towards his agony.

¹¹⁴ Cf. Paul EVDOKIMOV, *L'Art de l'Icone. Théologie de la Beauté*, Desclee de Brouwer, Paris, 1972, pp. 11-15.

¹¹⁵ Cf. André SCRIMA, *Réflexions sur les rythmes et les fonctions de la tradition athonite*", dans *Le Millénaire du Mont Athos, 963-1963, Etudes et Mélanges*, 1965, Chevetogne, pp. 301-324.

The author states that the act of wiping one's face may hold significance as a contemplative or spiritually transformative practise, allowing the individual to contribute in the redemptive suffering of Christ. Through the act of meditating on the depiction of Christ's agony on the veil, individuals are able to establish a more profound connection with the divine and undergo a metamorphic encounter with God.

“On the cross, Christ's face was disfigured: it was an “abolished” face. It should be understood not as a rhetoric of suffering, but as a way out of the limitations of the earthly condition. God must hide himself, disappear, so that we may seek him.”¹¹⁶

The concept of the complementarity between “the face that has been disfigured” by death and “the face that has been disfigured” by glory is a frequently occurring theme in both Christian theology and mysticism. The representation of Christ's disfigured face on the cross is symbolic of the the apex of sacrifice and suffering, whereas the image of Christ's transfigured face on Mount Tabor is emblematic of the divine's glory and power.

The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke provide an account of the Transfiguration of Jesus on Mount Tabor as described in the New Testament. In the described event, the countenance of Jesus undergoes a transfiguration or metamorphosis, resulting in a radiant visage akin to the brilliance of the sun, and his garments assume a luminous quality akin to the whiteness of light. This earlier occurrence is widely regarded as a manifestation of the divine essence of Christ and a prefiguration of his subsequent resurrection and ascension.

The notion that the partial expression of Jesus Christ while on the cross and the glorified countenance of Jesus Christ while on Mount Tabor are mutually reinforcing is indicative of the Christian conviction regarding the union of the divine and human aspects within the individual of Jesus Christ. The image of Christ's countenance on the cross, marred by disfigurement, symbolises his human nature and his

¹¹⁶ Citatul din Andre Scrima se aplică unei persoane bine determinate, unui călugăr (și oricărei persoane având această calitate) care se conformează modelului lui Cristos prin „împersonalizare”, urmărind să ștergă, să depășească limitele individuale ale ființei. Ibidem., pp. 41-48.

voluntary endurance of suffering and death for the betterment of humankind. Conversely, the representation of his visage on Mount Tabor, transformed and radiant, signifies his divine essence and his exalted status as the Son of God.

Furthermore, the notion that the transformed expression reveals a momentary insight into the divine obscurity or unoriginated radiance alludes to the enigma of the divine essence and the indescribable quality of divine encounter. Within the context of Christian mysticism, the experience of encountering God is frequently articulated as a mystical union or a surpassing of personal consciousness, wherein the individual self is subsumed by the divine light or darkness.

Nevertheless, with reference to these two particular scenes, the utilisation of Christian iconography does not reject the depiction of the facial characteristics of Christ. The “erased face” deviates from the established canons of this iconography, but is included as one of the noteworthy and preserved features in some of the artist's works. Nonetheless, there exist modern-day artists who exhibit a vested interest in Christian themes and are actively engaged in this tradition. These individuals, through their diligent exploration and experimentation, are able to present to us a certain disposition.

P. Evdokimov's use of Dionysius the Areopagite's work to describe the icon of the Transfiguration as a “hypericon”. According to Evdokimov, the icon serves as more than a mere depiction of a past occurrence; rather, it functions as a portal to a superior spiritual realm. The icon's luminous emanation symbolises the divine energy that pervades everything, and engaging in contemplation surpasses materiality, resulting in a perception that transcends the ordinary. The act of observing the icon facilitates a profound connection with the divine and engenders a metamorphic encounter with the divine radiance.

“Isn't our image a hypericon in the truest sense of the word: an icon that transcends itself? One that amazes, surprises, dazzles the eye, juxtaposing the visible and the invisible? An icon that can trigger the movement of the gaze beyond its own boundaries.”¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷ Cf. Paul EVDOKIMOV, *op. cit.*, p. 197.

The term “hypericon” as utilised by Dionysius the Areopagite refers to a mystical encounter wherein the observer is elevated beyond the realm of sensory perception and gains insight into a divine and transcendent reality. The individual, in this particular state, becomes immersed in a cosmic brightness and achieves immediate and intuitive comprehension of the divine. Contemplation is regarded as a means by which individuals can attain a more profound and genuine comprehension of the divine reality, surpassing the realm of the senses and achieving a distinctive mystical encounter.

Nicolaus Cusanus' work, *De visione Dei*, presents the concept of the ambiguity of seeing God. In this work, Cusanus defines seeing God as both “seeing God” and “being seen by God” highlighting the complexity of this phenomenon:

“What else is your sight, O God, when you look at me with the eyes of mercy, if not your being seen by me? Seeing me, you, who are the hidden God, give yourself to be seen by me. No one can see you unless you allow yourself to be seen. Nor is your being seen except in the fact that you see the one who sees you.”¹¹⁸

Cusa begins his discourse by utilising the icon as a foundational element to convey the concept that the ultimate entity is God, who can solely be perceived through the lens of divine revelation and mercy. As per this notion, it can be inferred that upon God's merciful gaze upon an individual, the individual is able to perceive the manifestation of God through the principle of inverted intentionality. The perception of God is contingent upon being perceived by Him. The perception of God is limited to the realm of faith and spirituality, as God is a transcendental entity that surpasses the physical world. Cusa posits the notion that the divine essence is immanent in all entities, and that a heightened perceptual acuity is requisite for its apprehension. According to Manousakkis, the theological concept of beholding God in Cusanus' philosophy is intrinsically linked to the theological concept of the icon.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Nicholas of Cusa, *Selected Spiritual Writings*, trad. H. Lawrance Bond (New York: Paulist Press, 1997, 241, apud. Manousakkis, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

¹¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 52.

Cusa proposes that the recognition of God can be achieved through the use of icons or sacred symbols that serve to demonstrate and represent divine attributes. Regarding this matter, the symbol serves not only as a representation of visual appeal, but also as a mechanism for comprehending and engaging with the divine. Cusa asserted that the recognition of God is contingent upon a "inner vision," which constitutes an intuitive and unmediated perception that surpasses the realm of sensory experience and is achieved via contemplation. Theology of the icon and theology of seeing God are interrelated in the author's theological framework, as they both facilitate mystical encounters and provide a means for attaining direct comprehension of the divine. Consequently, the aforementioned attributes hold paramount importance in the Christian religion and contribute significantly to comprehending and venerating the divine entity.

In his essay from the *Visible Cross*, the phenomenologist Jean Luc Marion explores the relationship between idols and icons, beginning with the notion of a parallel between icons, paintings, and television. The honour accorded to the icon is conveyed to its prototype:

"The icon receives and expects veneration, which it never appropriates; the glory received immediately turns into the paradox of a glory transmitted and lost."¹²⁰

The icon's complete transparency guarantees communication, the possibility of mediation, and the report's transitivity. In contrast, the idol is an opaque structure that obstructs the view; the dialogue crisis is the measure of the idol, the absence of transparency corrupts the relationship, and the meeting no longer occurs.

Jean Luc Marion considers the concept of interior vision to be fundamental to the mystical tradition, noting that it is frequently associated with the concept of *theoria*, or contemplative vision. Marion argues that interior vision is not solely a form of perception, but rather a form of divine participation. Through interior vision, the contemplative

¹²⁰ Cf. Jean Luc MARION, *Crucea vizibilului*, Deisis, Sibiu, 2000, p. 133.

is able to directly encounter God and experience the divine presence in a manner that transcends language and concepts.

The phenomenologue also cautions against taking inner vision too literally, as if it were a type of visual perception. Rather, he suggests that it is a metaphor for the transcendent encounter with God. He's concept of inner vision is not seeing God as an object, but rather being seen by God and drawn into the divine existence.

Marion's perspective on interior vision is consistent with Cusa's emphasis on direct knowledge of the divine through contemplative practise. Marion and Cusa both acknowledge the limitations of sensory perception and the need for a more fundamental form of spiritual awareness to encounter God.

Marion identifies three remarkable features of the icon that incline towards this theological mediation of the face of others that does not enter into the secularisation of standardisation. He argues that the icon is not merely a representation of a divine figure, but rather a manifestation of the divine presence itself. Therefore, the icon is not a static image that can be comprehended solely through visual perception. Rather, it necessitates a type of vision that transcends the limitations of the physical universe.

Secondly, the icon subverts the conventional method of seeing by employing a different type of gaze. The icon's gaze is not directed at the observer, but rather at the divine. This gaze is manifested in the human visage depicted in the icon, which functions as a portal for the viewer to encounter the divine presence.

Furthermore, the icon does not use perspective alone to organise space or convey meaning. Instead, it generates a prayer and love economy that transcends the objective staging of the visible. The invisible is not merely a backdrop for the visible; rather, the two engage in a dynamic interplay that transcends the limitations of perspective.¹²¹

C. L. Miller observed that, as perceivers, we make at least two types of contributions to what we see when we gaze at something. First, there is the physical perception of at least a portion of what is seen in our range

¹²¹ Cf. Jean Luc MARION, *Crucea vizibilului*, Deisis, Sibiu, 2000, pp. 44-45.

of vision. This interaction of eye and illuminated image is often accompanied by recognition, identification, and even evaluation of the identity and importance of what we see, all of which occur concurrently and without our conscious awareness. This is the typical method in which our brains (including memory, imagination, and cognition) collaborate with our senses in adulthood. Vision in adults involves both visible and unseen components of sense perception and perceptual evaluation. Throughout this thesis, Nicholas of Cusa does not differentiate between these two characteristics of normal vision. Instead, he thinks that the whole complex is included in regular human vision and expands what we consider to be familiar seeing with something astounding for greater 'seeing' and understanding. We must look beyond what we see or believe we observe.¹²²

Thus, we can see that the icon's significance extends far beyond that of a simple image as we typically understand it, therefore, as a non-originating representation, as it invites believers to an original encounter with the invisible, also conceived of as invisible light. This at some point demonstrates that the icon represents one of the most profound connections between the visible and the invisible.

The entire performance of the icon, which ultimately denies itself as a performance, illustrates the dialectic of the face it shows, so that, as M. Quenot states, "the icon reminds us that Christianity is a religion of faces. To be a Christian is to discover, emerging from the depths of the darkest despair, Christ's ever-living and loving face."¹²³ The face contributes to the icon's visibility, as "Christ does not offer the gaze an icon except by manifesting a face." Nevertheless, Marion distinguishes the nature of the painting from that of the icon by employing a distinct play of the invisible within the visible. In the case of painting, the invisible is the condition of the possibility of the visible, of an already existing that he "builds and distributes" to make it visible and visible; it is established along the gaze

¹²² Cf. Miller, C. L. (2013). Seeing and Being Seen in Nicholas of Cusa's *The Vision of God* (1453). *The Downside Review*, 131(464), 147–155. <https://doi-org.proxy.library.lincoln.ac.uk/10.1177/001258061313146404>.

¹²³ Cf. Michel QUENOT, *Icoana, fereastră spre absolut*, Ed. Enciclopedică, București, 1993, p. 9.

whose fatigue creates the perspective as a void placed between the observer and the visible. The icon avoids precisely this pose of the invisible: the invisible that establishes the perspective. But the intangible does not exhaust itself in the painting with this singular pose; it also claims the act of the painting's unveiling.

In the icon, the invisible determines the visible, while the visible reveals the invisible, permitting it to be targeted. As if the gaze exists somewhere, but we cannot locate it until we have a sign pointing towards it. Because of this, it is said that the icon directs our gaze towards God and places us in relationship with Him. In conclusion, "the icon essentially achieves the exchange of two invisible looks, that of the supplicant and that of the benefactor"¹²⁴

Preliminary Conclusion

In this part we have endeavoured to gather diverse answers to the question of how can the icon, as a simple image, signify God's presence and bring us into his presence. Icons are distinguished by their power to signify something that is essentially invisible, namely God. It is precisely this receptivity to the invisible that distinguishes the relationship between believers and icons.

Marie-José Mondzain will make an interlude through the writings of the Church Fathers in order to elucidate this. Icons are viewed as a component of God's plan of salvation, serving as a means of communicating his love and compassion to humanity. The concept of "Economy" is used in the context of iconography to describe how the representation of divine figures in icons can serve as a means of accessing the divine.

For Theodore the Studite and other defenders of the use of icons in devotion, the sensory experience of the image was fundamental to its significance and power. In the Byzantine Christian tradition, icons were used to facilitate the believer's connection with the divine. Theodor the

¹²⁴ Jean Luc Marion, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

Studite believed that the Gospel of John offers a unique perspective on the nature of Christ as the divine Logos who became human, and that this perspective is essential to comprehending the theological significance of the icon, which depicts the Incarnate Logos. For Christoph Schonborn and well as for Theodor the Studite, the icon is not simply a work of art created by human hands, but rather a representation of the divine presence manifested in the world through Christ. John of Damascus believed that icons are not merely representations of physical beings or events, but portals into the spiritual realm. He believes that the Incarnation of God in the person of Jesus Christ solves the problem of representing an invisible God.

Nevertheless, Theodore the Studite emphasises the distinction between the veneration of Christ's image and the worship of Christ himself, the image is worthy of veneration, but it is not itself an object of adoration. Only Christ, who is present in the image and deserving of adoration, is worthy of adoration. He believes that the Incarnation of God in the person of Jesus Christ solves the problem of representing an invisible God.

An important dimension of seeing God is given by Nicolaus Cusanus' work, *De visione Dei*, presents the concept of the ambiguity of seeing God. In this work, Cusanus defines seeing God as both "seeing God" and "being seen by God". Cusa proposes that the recognition of God can be achieved through the use of icons or sacred symbols that serve to demonstrate and represent divine attributes. It serves not only as a representation of visual appeal, but also as a mechanism for comprehending and engaging with the divine. Cusa asserted that the recognition of God is contingent upon a "inner vision," which constitutes an intuitive and unmediated perception that surpasses the realm of sensory experience and is achieved via contemplation.

Nevertheless, the phenomenologist Jean Luc Marion explores the relationship between idols and icons. The icon's complete transparency guarantees communication, the possibility of mediation, and the report's transitivity. In contrast, the idol is an opaque structure that obstructs the view; the dialogue crisis is the measure of the idol, the absence of

transparency corrupts the relationship, and the meeting no longer occurs. The icon's gaze is not directed at the observer, but rather at the divine, and it generates a prayer and love economy that transcends the objective staging of the visible.

What about the visible and invisible God in different cultures? What are the common points and disrupts between the Greco-Roman, iudeo world and Christian?

Chapter 3

The visible of divinity before incarnation

3.1. The experience of seeing God in the Graeco-Roman world

The experience of seeing or experiencing God was interpreted throughout the Greco-Roman era in different ways. The spiritual vision was prominent in Hellenistic literature. The many verbs for seeing and their wide and varied range of meaning, indicate the high regard for seeing among the Greeks. In classical Greek thought, the sense of sight was considered a primary source of knowledge and certainty. This is reflected in the famous saying attributed to Heraclitus, “Eyes are surer witnesses than ears.”¹²⁵ This means that what we see with our own eyes is more reliable than what we hear from others.

3.1.1. The (in) visibility of the gods in Hellenistic literature

Plato considered vision to be the most valuable faculty of humanity and focused the importance of making ethical principles universally accessible to the intellect. He regarded the ability to see as a gift from God and the foundation of philosophy. The philosophers were aware of the

¹²⁵ Heraclit, fragment 101a, în David Michael Levin (ed), «Modernitate și hegemonia vizualului», University of California Press, Berkeley și Los Angeles, 1993, p. 1.

limitations of seeing and hearing; therefore, the verbs of seeing underwent an early transition from sensual to intellectual perception. Plato considered that sensory awareness is limited and incapable of comprehending the actual character of things. He maintained that because the world of the senses is always changing, it is an unreliable source of information. In contrast, he felt that the realm of ideas is the genuine reality since it is everlasting and unchanging.

Plato's philosophy of ideas, also known as the theory of forms, posits the existence of a realm of abstract concepts or ideas that are more real and perfect than the physical world we see with our senses. These concepts are the actual objects of knowledge and can only be seen by the mind, as opposed to the senses. He used the Greek terms ὄραν (to see, perceive) and νοεῖν (to comprehend, understand) to distinguish between sensory perception and intellectual comprehension.¹²⁶ He felt that, while sensory awareness is limited and unreliable, intellectual knowledge is more comprehensive and may lead to a deeper understanding of reality.

Only the, or mind and intellect, according to Plato's philosophy, can grasp the ultimate truth, which he thought to be God. Later philosophers and religious thinkers, such as Plotinus and Saint Augustine, who stressed the significance of intellectual comprehension and contemplation as a way of reaching spiritual illumination, expanded on this notion.

Aristotle regarded vision as the most esteemed among the senses due to its capacity to approach the intellect by means of its knowledge's relative immateriality. For him, to contemplate God is the way in which man should seek, as far as possible, to be like the immortals (*Aristot., Eth. Nic.* 10.7, p. 1177b.33).¹²⁷ The divine mode of being and working consists in pure θεωρία (that which one looks at, sight).

¹²⁶ Plato, 1935, *Republic*, transl. P. Shorey, Heinemann, London, viewed 21 August 2014, from <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0168>.

¹²⁷ Aristotle, 1934, *Ethica Nicomachea*, transl. H. Rackham, Heinemann, London, viewed 22 August 2014, from <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999;01.0054>.

A number of philosophers spreading various historical periods, such as the ancient Greeks, have employed metaphors related to vision to elucidate the concepts of knowledge and truth. The notion of knowledge is equivalent to visual clarity, and that illumination serves as a symbol for truth, has been a widely prevalent motif in philosophical discourse.

The famous theologian, Thomas Aquinas, employed the analogy of vision to elucidate the nature of both perceptual and cognitive understanding. The individual held the belief that the sensory organs serve as a means of acquiring knowledge about the external environment, which is subsequently subjected to intellectual processing to attain a more profound comprehension of the nature of existence.

Aquinas found the metaphor of sight to be a valuable tool in elucidating the mechanism of intellectual comprehension. The individual held the belief that similarly to the utilisation of our eyes to apprehend physical objects, our intellect is also employed to apprehend the intelligible objects of the mind. The author posited that the cognitive process of comprehending abstract concepts is akin to the physiological process of visual perception. Specifically, the intellect is posited as an internalised visual organ that enables individuals to perceive the veracity of phenomena.¹²⁸

H.S. Versnel¹²⁹ writes in his essential essay on epiphany in antiquity that the Greeks in Hellenistic periods, and the Romans following their initial interactions with the Greek world, viewed their gods as creatures unique from mortals in strength, stature, beauty, perpetual health and

¹²⁸ According to Thomas Aquinas, the *Intellectus agens* operates in a manner similar to the visual ray of the classical gaze. The act involves the physical contact of the subject with the object, and through the application of light onto the object, it compels the object to reveal its inherent qualities that are applicable to all instances of its kind. This process can be likened to the *intellectus agens*, which functions as a sun that compels objects to manifest their distinctive features. The process of cognition involves the abstraction of universal characteristics from the object of perception by the “active” intellect. Similar to the way a visual ray is imbued with colour, the intellect is intentionally influenced by these attributes. Upon reflection, the intellect is then reunited with the spirit that initially projected it outward. in <http://idea.ro/revista/ro/article/XIa9bxAAACQAU5QZ/trecutul-scopic-si-etica-privirii.-o-pledoarie-pentru-studiul-istoric-al-perceptiei-oculare>.

¹²⁹ H.S. VERSNEL, *What did Ancient man see when He saw a God? Some Reflections on Greco-Roman Epiphany*. (1987). *Effigies Dei*, 42–55. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004378742_005.

vitality, but not in appearance. The primary focus of Versnel's analysis was on the characteristics of visionary perception and the capacity (and constraints) of language to adequately verbalize this kind of experience.

At the same time, other scholars, like J. Kindt talk about the relationship between epiphany and divinatory experience, as real life experiences of the supernatural:

“The both forms of religious experience describe a contact with the supernatural, they usually differ in the kind of contact between gods and humans entailed. Epiphany involves an immediate encounter with a divinity, while inspired divination relies more often than not on the figure of a human medium who either speaks as a mouthpiece for the god (the Pythia at Delphi, for example) or interprets prophetic dreams in oracles relying on incubation, or the interpretation of dreams... In epiphany, the human/divine encounter is unintentional, accidental, and frequently surprising, and it usually involves physical contact with the supernatural in one of the many guises the gods usually adopt when they physically manifest in the human sphere. The case for epiphany and inspired divination as related phenomena, then, rests on a consideration of the religious issues at stake in both kinds of religious experience. Most importantly, perhaps, in both epiphany and divination, the human/divine encounter is mediated. In epiphany, this mediation occurs through the various disguises (anthropomorphic, zoomorphic, other) the gods and goddesses adopt when visible to humans.”¹³⁰

Greek culture, which is particularly sensitive to light and visibility, never stops debating the ontological and epistemological worth of the physical world. The symbols and figures required for the symbolization of the powers and the weaknesses of both human and non-human inhabitants of the cosmos were built simultaneously by Hellenistic polytheism. This term for the universe means both the pleasure of the eyes and the dissatisfaction of reason; it is the term through which the aesthetic plan of feeling and order comes into contact with the metaphysical and, later, theological plans.

¹³⁰ Julia KINDT, « Revelation, Narrative, and Cognition: Oracle Stories as Epiphanic Tales in Ancient Greece », *Kernos* [En ligne], 31 | 2018, mis en ligne le 01 octobre 2020, consulté le 24 mars 2023. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/kernos/2666> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/kernos.2666>.

The act of seeing and the spectacle of things are together referred to as “opsis” and take up a central position in the world of speculation. The Greek word for vision is sometimes used for dreams as well. The act of vision is frequently regarded as one of the most important senses for human experience because it allows humans to perceive the world around them and adapt to their surroundings. In Greek philosophy, vision is frequently associated with knowledge and truth perception. Platon, for example, frequently employs visual metaphors to explain his philosophical theories, such as the famous “caverne” in *Republica*. Similarly, in his book *De Sensu et Sensibilibus*, Aristotle studied vision and visual perception. The eidetic power of concepts may lead to the termination of the eidos' contract with the visibles, granting legitimacy to any image emanating from thinking hands. Or, the eikon of philosophers is no longer crowned, and the soupçons who cling to it can only be defeated by recourse to science and number, and thus by an invisibility theory. In other words, if we have a clear and precise idea of what an object looks like, we can strengthen our visual perception of it and give legitimacy to any image that arises from it.

According to Mondzain, neither Plato nor Aristotle, who addressed the issue of mimesis (imitation or representation), the category of relation, and the relationships of the visible with the *veritas*, were led to produce an image-specific thought that is independent of ontological requirements.¹³¹

Nonetheless, it is true that neither Plato nor Aristotle developed a theory of the image specifically as such, which would be independent of the categories of ontology. It is necessary to measure the visible at the equivalent of the unseen, and the copy must be faithful to the original. For these philosophers, the question of the image was closely related to those of mimesis and truth.

¹³¹ MONDZAIN Marie-José, «Chapitre 2. L'helléno-christianisme. Qu'il n'y a pas de judéo-christianisme», dans *Le Commerce des regards*. sous la direction de MONDZAIN Marie-José, Paris, Le Seuil, «L'Ordre philosophique», 2003, pp. 75-140. URL:<https://www.cairn.info/le-commerce-des-regards--9782020541701-page-75.htm>.

Rather than depending on philosophical speculation, some materialist philosophers, like Demokritos¹³², have sought to base the reality of God on human perceptual experience. Others have contended, for instance, that religious experiences, such as awe or transcendence, constitute proof of the presence of a divine entity. Materialist philosophers often struggle to reconcile their naturalistic worldview with the notion of a supernatural god, resulting in interpretations of God's essence that are ambiguous or contradictory. Some may consider God as a manifestation of natural events such as the rules of physics or the complexity of the cosmos, whilst others may view God as a wholly abstract idea. The nature of God in Epicurus's philosophy is much more problematic. According to Hedreen,

“The realism perspective implies that Epicurus believed in the material existence of gods and that our knowledge of them derives from the effluences or particles they release. This view holds that the gods are not supernatural or immaterial, but rather part of the natural universe that can be seen empirically and comprehended. The idealist perspective, on the other hand, contends that Epicurus' understanding of the gods is more intellectual and abstract in character. This theory holds that the gods are not corporeal entities, but rather idealised representations of the ideal existence. In this perspective, the gods symbolise a human-attainable ideal of pleasure, serenity, and calm that is not actually embodied in superhuman or divine entities.”¹³³

One way that the ancient Greeks experienced the presence of the divine was through the concept of theophany, which refers to a visible manifestation of a god. This could take the form of a dream or vision, or it could be a physical manifestation of a god in the natural world. The

¹³² “Concerning Demokritos, the available evidence, skimpy as it is, attributes two different understandings of the nature of the gods to his theology. One idea is that eidōla or ‘images’ of the gods are emitted by materially embodied entities; this is what one would expect, since perceptions, in his system, as we have seen, always correspond to some object in the world.” in R. FERWENDA (1972) ‘Democritus and Plato’, *Mnemosyne* 25, 337–78 apud. Guy HEDREEN, *On The Magnitude Of The Gods In Materialist Theology And Greek Art* <https://www-cambridge-org.proxy.library.lincoln.ac.uk/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/S0075426921000021>.

¹³³ *Idem*, p. 47.

ancient Greeks believed that the gods were present in the world, and that they could be seen and experienced in many different ways.

Another way that the ancient Greeks and Romans experienced the presence of the divine was through the practice of divination. This involved seeking guidance and insight from the gods through various means, such as interpreting the flight patterns of birds, examining the entrails of animals, or consulting oracles.

Additionally, in the Graeco-Roman world, there were also various cults and mystery religions that promised a personal experience of the divine through rituals and initiations. These cults and mystery religions often promised a direct experience of the divine, and promised that their followers would be able to see and communicate with the gods. Some of the mystery religions, such as the Eleusinian Mysteries and the Dionysian Mysteries, promised their initiates a vision of the divine as a reward for their participation in certain rites and rituals. Additionally, some philosophers, such as the Platonists, believed that the soul could achieve a kind of spiritual vision through contemplation and ascetic practices.

The act of being observed or observing others establishes one's presence and initiates a connection. The comprehension of the concept of the gaze encompasses both the Oriental and the Hellenistic traditions. The quest for a perspective that justifies one's actions and enables profound transformation is a common thread in both the Greek philosophical tradition and the biblical narrative, spanning from Genesis to Revelation. Jean Luis Chretien's *Symbolique du corp* highlights the notion that the act of opening one's eyes and gaze enables an individual to alter their direction and orientation.

“It is not enough to have eyes to see, any more than it is enough for the eyes of our body to be blind for our sight to be extinguished. The opening of the eyes, the opening of the gaze refers to religious or philosophical conversion, to this radical transformation of existence... We can be blinded (and blinded so deeply that we do not even know we are blind) by ignorance, by passion, by sin, or by hate, but we can also be dazzled and blinded at first, by the excessive glare of lights or the sun of the first principle.”¹³⁴

¹³⁴ Jean-Louis CHRETIEN, *Symbolique du corps. La tradition chrétienne du Cantique des Cantiques*, Presses Universitaires de France, 2005, pp. 143-164.

The theme of vision has generated a sequence of metaphors and theological reflections that have exerted a significant impact not only on the literature of the late antique period (particularly the Church Fathers), but on the entirety of Western literary output. The notion that underlies the New Testament, particularly the Gospel according to John, has been passed down to us. This concept can be distilled into two key ideas. The first of these is that knowledge is linked to the act of seeing. The attribute of sight is commonly associated with the divine being and is often used interchangeably with the term omniscience. The divine entity perceives and comprehends all that falls within its purview. On the other hand, the act of perceiving God results in acquiring knowledge of His nature. The second concept, which differs from both Judaism and paganism, posits that through Jesus Christ, God adjusts to the human perspective and manifests Himself to His disciples and subsequent adherents. The recognition of humankind's reliance on their Creator is a fundamental tenet of monotheistic faiths. The awareness of this phenomenon prompted individuals, despite the potential hazards they faced, to embrace the concept of altruism. However, it is a persistent human need to behold the gaze of the divine in order to satisfy this intrinsic longing.

According to Florient Urfels, the concept of metamorphosis pertains to the alteration or modification of the outward appearance of an entity, which is symbolised by the term *μορφή* (*morphè*) in Greek. The contemporary usage of this term diverges from its Aristotelian counterpart, which was frequently employed in scholastic theology to denote the inherent rationality that governs the functioning of a living organism. Urfels' emphasis lies on the malleability and representation of the external structure of the entity. The statement suggests that metamorphosis entails a fundamental modification of the physical manifestation of an organism, as opposed to a mere transformation in its internal arrangement or configuration.”.

“The concept of metamorphosis does not inherently suggest a profound ontological shift, but rather denotes a manifestation in an atypical form. Greek mythology is replete with instances of gods undergoing metamorphoses, wherein they assume human, animal,

or even plant-like forms, in order to manipulate human perception and achieve their objectives. The archetype of the literary category is exemplified by the deity of the sea, Proteus, who assumes various forms such as a lion, a serpent, a leopard, a swine, water, and a tree, in order to evade Menelaus and his inquiries, as depicted in the epic poem, the *Odyssey*. In contrast, the mystery cults offered their adherents the prospect of a divine transformation through an initiation process that is tacitly disclosed in Book XI of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*.¹³⁵

The process of asymmetry between the creator and the creature, where the former possesses sight while the latter does not, and the resulting relational connection between them, is commonly referred to as the theology of the gift by theologians. It is possible to assert a priori that the act of looking is a bilateral process, which can be refined as a means of mutual exchange. The deity who manifests in a tangible form, reveals itself to its subjects through various means and stances, remaining detached while anticipating a suitable reaction from its progeny. The concept posits that God possesses a complete understanding of his own being, functioning as a sentient entity that communicates his essence. Consequently, he reveals himself to his creations. Despite the fact that men suppress their understanding of God due to their sinful nature, God has disclosed His identity to His creations through the human being, who is created in His likeness, and through the entirety of the natural world.

In his article titled *"From Mirror to Face to Face Encounter: Seeing as God Sees in the New Testament"*, Regis Burnet provides a concise overview of the historical evolution of the concept of God, tracing its influences from Jewish religious currents, Greek thought, and the early Christian communities.

"The understanding of gods or God, whether in polytheistic or monotheistic contexts, is often not immediate due to the ontological separation between these two universes. The act of contemplating deities or a deity is a mystical encounter that is limited to a select few individuals."¹³⁶

¹³⁵ Florent URFELS, *D'une transfiguration à l'autre*, in Seneve, *Le Visage*, Noël 2013.

¹³⁶ "In Akkadian religion we find many occurrences of this desire to contemplate divinity. The faithful often went to visit the statue in its sanctuary. When the statue was invisible, we

Across the course of human civilization, numerous religions have employed sculptures and other visual artworks as a means of fostering communication with the divine sphere. In many cultures, statues hold a significant symbolic value beyond their representational function as they are believed to encapsulate the essence of the divine and serve as powerful channels of spiritual energy.

Statues often function as central points for prayer and contemplation, offering a concrete representation that devotees can concentrate on during their spiritual practises. Through the act of observing the statue, adherents aspire to establish a link with the divine and attain spiritual illumination or revelations.

The study of visual perception and its relationship to human perception has been a subject of scholarly inquiry throughout history. This area of study was also of interest to the ancient Greek civilization. The Greeks were pioneers in various domains of philosophy, science, and art. Their contributions to the understanding of visual perception have had a persistent influence on Western thought and culture.

The Greek civilization maintained a duality in their tradition that incorporated both legendary and mythical narratives alongside historical accounts. The Greek mythology boasts a diverse array of deities and divinities, each of whom was linked to distinct natural phenomena, including but not limited to the celestial bodies such as the sun, moon, and stars. The deities were often associated with myths and narratives

know from certain cuneiform testimonies that the priests could represent the god himself or allow certain figures to pass through the curtains that barred access to the god's statue. Similarly, in Pharaonic Egypt, "to see the god" is the desire of every believer. It is present and accessible through its statues and its engraved or painted representations. When the priest of Horus, the only one who could see the statue of the god in Denderah, opened the doors of the tabernacle, he said: "*I see God, I see the mighty. Horus rejoices when he sees me. I contemplate the statue of the Flying Divine, the sacred form of the golden falcon.* Seeing and being seen started from the same movement. Those who did not have the privilege of approaching the statue were content to pay their devotion to one of the many representations of the god, often in bas-relief." Régis BURNET, "*Du miroir au face-à-face : voir comme Dieu voit dans le Nouveau Testament*", in *Pallas* [Online], 92 | 2013, Online since 29 November 2013, connection on 12 January 2023. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/pallas/266>; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/pallas.266>.

that integrated aspects of visual perception, including their ability to perceive and comprehend the surrounding environment.

Apart from the renowned narratives, the Greeks also possessed a culture of investigation and scrutiny, wherein numerous Greek philosophers and scientists endeavoured to comprehend the workings of visual perception. Empedocles, the philosopher, held the belief that the eye was comprised of various fluids, each of which served a distinct function in the process of vision. Euclid, the mathematician, composed extensive literature concerning the principles of optics and the propagation of light.

The Homeric epic poems and hymns provide a wealth of knowledge regarding the ancient Greek perspective on the world and their engagements with the divine sphere. The texts describe various instances of divine epiphanies, which were commonly perceived as potent and remarkable occurrences.

In the Iliad, Hera cautions Achilles about the arduousness of perceiving the gods in their entirety, and the potential consequences for mortals who are able to do so, such as being afflicted with blindness or being smitten by their divine potency:

“It is hard to see the gods in full light, states Hera, who will step in to protect Achilles; and when Aphrodite wants to seduce Anchises, she pretends to be a young girl, so that he will not be afraid when he sees her with his own eyes”¹³⁷

In the Odyssey, the sorceress the goddess Circe warns Odysseus to exercise prudence while encountering the gods to avoid being subjected to their formidable might.

The Homeric epic poems and hymns offer valuable insights into the ancient Greek perception of the divine realm and the manners in which humans engaged with the deities.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ *Iliada*, XX, 129-131 “Achilles, says Hera, runs the risk of being frightened “when he finds himself face to face with a god in battle.”

¹³⁸ Françoise DUNAND, *Le désir de connaître Dieu : Une vision de Mandoulis au temple de Kalabscha* In : Voir les Dieux, voir Dieu [en ligne]. Strasbourg : Presses universitaires de Strasbourg, 2002 (généré le 13 janvier 2023). Disponible sur Internet : <<http://books.openedition.org/pus/11676>>. ISBN : 9791034404384. DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/books.pus.11676>.

The recourse to various formulas, or invocations, to effective speech is one of these, but at the same time another sense is spoken of to penetrate the gods, namely sight. Placing the divine out of sight, philosophers speak of an immeasurable distance that separates men from the gods. According to Plutarch in the speech of Pericles "*the gods are not visible, but the honors we offer them and the good they offer us make us judge that they are immortal.*"¹³⁹ Although the Greek philosophers acknowledged certain limitations, Aristotle offers a resolution through the utilisation of *le theoria*, or contemplation. This practise enables religious sentiment and, by extension, grants access to the divine entities. The act of directly contemplating the gods is considered a mystical experience that is limited to a select few individuals. The verb employed by the Evangelist John to denote the act of contemplating God, as will be subsequently demonstrated, bears a distinct connotation from that of visual perception. John lived in the Hellenistic world and culture and wrote in Greek.

The accuracy of Françoise Dunand's observation regarding the manifestation of divine beings during the Hellenistic period is noteworthy. In this era, there was a prevalent utilisation of anthropomorphic depictions of deities in artistic expressions and symbolic representations. It is noteworthy to acknowledge that certain cultures exhibited aniconic interests, in which the divine entities were not depicted in a human-like appearance.

In cultures where anthropomorphic representations were employed, the depictions of deities were regarded as a conduit for devotees to establish a connection with the divine. The aforementioned depictions can be observed on diverse mediums, such as sculptures, low-relief carvings, currency, and celestial bodies. It is imperative to comprehend that the aforementioned depictions were not perceived as the actual divine corporeal form, but rather as pictorial portrayals of the deities.

These visuals work as indicators of holy territory, accentuating the perimeters of the celestial domain and the constraints of human

¹³⁹ PLUTARQUE, *Vies III, Périclès*, trad. par R. Flacelière et É. Chambry, Paris, les Belles Lettres, 1964, p. 23.

cognition. In addition, these objects served as central points for religious veneration and adoration, facilitating the faithful's communion with the divine by means of their visual representation.

During the Hellenistic era, there was a notable increase in the prevalence of accounts detailing divine apparitions. These accounts were not limited to any particular genre of literature, but rather were found in both official and private documents, marking a novel development. The accounts of Apollonius of Rhodes, Diodorus, Pausanias, Plutarch, and Lucian feature numerous narratives of similar nature. Diodorus, in particular, introduces the term *epiphaneia*, which has been in use since the 4th century, with a religious significance denoting the “apparent manifestation of a deity” a definition that would subsequently become its defining characteristic.¹⁴⁰

From the 3rd century BC onwards, there existed a multitude of inscriptions originating from Greece and Asia Minor that documented instances of divine manifestations. Instances of divine interventions were frequently documented during periods of confusion or critical situations, and they functioned to strengthen the conviction in the potency and existence of the divine.

An instance of note is the intervention of Apollo in safeguarding the temple of Delphi from the Galatian invaders. As per the narrative, Apollo manifested in a dream to the protectors of the temple and directed them to position an effigy of the deity beyond the perimeters of the temple. Upon viewing the statue, the Galatians experienced a sense of terror and hastily departed from the vicinity, thereby preventing the temple from being demolished.

An additional instance can be observed in the intervention of Zeus of Panamara, whereby he materialised in the form of a tempest and thunderbolts to salvage his temple located in close proximity to Stratonicea. According to local beliefs, the storm was interpreted as a manifestation of divine wrath, prompting the inhabitants to promptly engage in acts of propitiation and sacrifice in order to placate the deity.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. Francoise Dunand, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

Subsequently, the tempest abated, resulting in the preservation of the temple.

King Attalus II founded the cult of Zeus based on the deity's perceived efficacy in his epiphanies. This pertains to the multiple instances wherein Zeus manifested in diverse forms to offer counsel or aid to the monarch.¹⁴¹

The significance of these divine apparitions lies in their ability to strengthen the conviction of individuals in the potency and existence of deities in their daily existence. The aforementioned phenomena were perceived as indications of the divine's intervention in the world, thereby eliciting a sense of admiration and respect among the devout.

The sanctuaries of the goddess Artemis are frequently linked with divine epiphanies in various sources. The goddess is reported to have manifested herself to her devotees in diverse locations, such as her designated places of worship and holy sites, according to multiple sources.

Furthermore, numerous testimonies confirm the diversity of manners in which the divinities were manifested and depicted within a shared holy location. The relief of Asclepius, which dates back to the 4th century BC and is located in Athens, portrays the deity in diverse manifestations, such as a human form and a serpent. The previously mentioned observance indicates that the representation of the divine was not restricted to a singular manifestation, but rather, could adopt diverse forms reliant upon the circumstances and the convictions of the devotees. Between the roughly six centuries separating the Presocratics from Ptolemy, a fairly wide range of visual theories was preposed and debated.

In ancient times, the gods were perceived through various means, with visual perception being a prominent method, but not the only option.

The analysis conducted by Mark Smith regarding *Ptolemy's Optics*, a highly influential work on ancient theories pertaining to visual perception, classifies stated theories into three primary streams of thought.

¹⁴¹ Pierre ROUSSEL, *Le miracle de Zeus Panamaros*. In: *Bulletin de correspondance hellénique*. Volume 55, 1931. pp. 70-116;doi : <https://doi.org/10.3406/bch.1931.2857>.

The first current of thought was the extramission theory, which posited that the act of emitting rays from the eyes was responsible for visual perception. The aforementioned theory had a broad reach in the ancient civilizations of Greece and Rome, and it exerted a significant impact on the intellectual pursuits of numerous philosophers and scientists, such as Epicurus and Democritus, Euclid and Aristotle.

The intromission theory, which posited that visual perception was a result of rays entering the eyes, was another prominent perspective. The aforementioned theory was not widely prevalent during ancient times, however, it experienced a surge in popularity during the Middle Ages, with Empedocles.

The mixed theory, which amalgamated facets of both extramission and intromission theories, constituted the third current of thought. According to this theory, the phenomenon of visual perception was attributed to the combined effect of emission and reception of rays.

The various theories pertaining to visual perception exerted a notable influence on the ancient populace's perception of the world and their comprehension of the divine. Their impact on the perception and interpretation of visual phenomena, such as divine apparitions and epiphanies, as well as their influence on the representation of deities in art and iconography, was significant:

“a. The advocates of intromission, namely Epicurus and Democritus, assert that physical entities discharge atomic replicas that come into contact with the eye, known as εἶδολα or the simulacra of Lucretius. b. Conversely, the supporters of extraction, such as Empedocles, contend that the eye transmits rays that make contact with the object. The eye can be compared to a lighthouse that emits light onto objects. Some scholars, including Plato in the *Timaeus*, propose intermediate theories that acknowledge the extramissive nature of vision, but also assert that the eye's natural flame requires the assistance of the sun's flame for optimal perception.”¹⁴²

¹⁴² A. Mark SMITH, *Ptolemy and the foundations of ancient mathematical optics: A source bases guide studies*, American Philosophical Society Independence Square, Philadelphia, 1999, pp. 23-25.

Upon analysing the lexicon of perception in Greek texts, it becomes evident that the deities were frequently apprehended through auditory modalities rather than visual ones. There exist several records of oracles and prophecies where the supplicant perceives the voice of a deity. The dependence on auditory perception frequently resulted in a dearth of visual verification, causing considerable dissatisfaction and vexation for individuals in search of such confirmation. The absence of a distinct and conspicuous embodiment of the divine frequently resulted in the devotee being confronted with a surplus of inquiries rather than resolutions, necessitating the utilisation of their cognitive faculties to grasp the essence of the divine. The ancient Greeks held the belief that comprehending the divine was not solely reliant on sensory perception, but rather posed a cognitive challenge. It is possible for an individual to visually perceive a deity, yet lack comprehension of its identity or nature. Consequently, it was imperative to possess a profound comprehension of the myths, narratives, and ceremonies linked to the deities to entirely grasp their essence and importance.

Although visual perception held a prominent position in ancient religious practises, it was not the sole means through which the gods and goddesses were apprehended. The ancient Greeks' religious experiences and beliefs were reliant on crucial components such as auditory perception and cognitive understanding.

Lorenz E. Baumer's article on Greek votive reliefs discusses the significance of visual contact in the depictions of gods on these reliefs. Baumer notes that these representations offer insights into the dynamics of the relationship between gods and mortals, particularly in the absence of direct visual contact between them. The author provides several instances of such votive representations:

Unfortunately, the heads on the Eleusis relief are not entirely extant; nevertheless, it is discernible that Persephone averts her gaze towards Triptolemus, who in turn elevates his head to observe Demeter. Based on extant records, it can be inferred that the goddess was oriented towards her offspring, while the trio of deities maintained visual contact in a self-contained loop. It is observed that

none of the individuals present direct their gaze towards the countenances of the three divine entities. There exists no perceptible communication or interaction between the celestial and earthly realms.

Regarding the Brauron relief, it can be observed that although Artemis is depicted gazing at the entire assembly, no human figure is depicted as making direct eye contact with the goddess. There are additional individuals who orient their facial features towards the observer or downwards, yet their gaze appears to be directed towards no specific point. Despite the presence of the deity before the devotees, it is evident that a significant gap between mortals and immortals persists at the perceptual level.

The Chalcis relief depicts a scenario wherein the gods are situated in their own realm and appear to disregard the woman who is positioned alongside them. However, the woman in question directs her gaze towards Dionysus' countenance. The deity's unforeseen epiphany elicited an emotional response from him, as evidenced by his physical reaction.¹⁴³

In each of the three cases examined, there is an obvious absence of reciprocal gaze between deities and humans, suggesting that the artisans made a concerted effort to avoid explicit eye contact between these two entities. The act of exchanging eye contact was a powerful way of conveying messages and establishing bonds, and the sculptors' decision to omit it in depictions of interactions between deities and humans may have served to underscore the notion that these two domains were inherently disparate and discrete. Baumer¹⁴⁴ cites additional instances of reliefs where deities gaze upon humans, suggesting the potential for visual communication between the two. Despite this possibility, interactions between mortals and gods typically occur without direct eye contact, as each remains within their respective realm. Frequently, a single deity will fix their gaze upon a worshipper, typically the foremost among them. However, the Chalcis relief presents a less common

¹⁴³ Lorenz E. BAUMER, « Entre dieux et mortels – le contact visuel sur les reliefs votifs grecs classiques », *Pallas* [En ligne], 92 | 2013, mis en ligne le 29 novembre 2013, consulté le 16 janvier 2023. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/pallas/95> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/pallas.95>.

¹⁴⁴ Idem.

scenario in which a human being actively engages with a deity, responding physically to the encounter.

The instances presented previously, along with the extensive literature on the subject, suggest that the ancient Greeks perceived gods and humans as existing in separate spheres. The sphere of the gods was believed to encompass that of humans, who were unable to perceive beyond their own sphere. Conversely, it was possible for the deities to intercede on an individual basis within the realm of humanity. Human beings have the ability to perceive the divine through various senses such as sight, hearing, or smell. Additionally, they can establish communication with the divine through the performance of rituals. However, it is important to note that such interactions can only occur at the discretion of the divine entity.

3.1.2. Roman epiphanies

In Rome, the manifestation of gods can be categorised into two distinct types. Firstly, the deity may reveal itself to humans in anthropomorphic form, either during wakefulness or more commonly in dreams. Such appearances are typically brief. Secondly, the gods may be perceived by individuals through figurative representations, such as anthropomorphic statues, situated in sanctuaries or public squares within cities. In contrast to the imagery found in dreams, these representations exist in everyday life and facilitate a sense of familiarity between individuals and the deities they depict, despite not being constantly visible.

Their anthropomorphic character facilitates the recognition and identification of the gods in Greco-Roman mythology. In mythology, deities are often portrayed as anthropomorphic beings, possessing human-like anatomical structures and distinct character traits that are relatable to the experiences of ordinary individuals.¹⁴⁵ This facilitated a closer association between deities and humans, wherein the deities were

¹⁴⁵ See the symbology of the *eye* in J. CHEVALIER, A. GHEERBRANT, *Dicționar de Simboluri*, Polirom, Iași, 2009, pp. 637-640.

not merely remote and detached entities, but could engage with individuals on a more individualised basis.

As Dubordieu¹⁴⁶ observes, in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the gods mingle with men and live with them, in a familiarity, yet superior to the former. In Virgil's *Aeneid*, the physical appearance of the gods is described very succinctly, with the exception of the appearance of Venus to Aeneas. The goddess is depicted as being enveloped in a blinding light, which according to the Romans is the sign of the divine presence. Gods sometimes use different stratagems to appear to people and mingle among them, taking different appearances, but often these representations they have towards people are betrayed by the blinding light that illuminates their bodies. Other appearances of the gods to humans are characterized by their brevity, and the authors who mention them do not indicate that they arouse the horror of those who witness them, this is probably due to the fact that they had the same appearance as humans. This anthropomorphic character that the deities receive, makes them superior to humans and makes their recognition possible.

The significance of divine vision was a crucial aspect of Roman culture. They possessed multiple methods of comprehending their existence. Initially, temples were regarded as the abode of the divine beings, and the Roman populace frequently frequented these sites to pay homage to their pantheon. Religious rituals held significant importance, with deities frequently depicted in parades and communal celebrations.

The belief system held that deities were immanent in the natural world, and adherents frequently sought evidence of their existence through observation of natural occurrences, such as lightning and thunderstorms.¹⁴⁷ The augurs were a class of religious officials in ancient Rome who were responsible for interpreting various signs and omens in order to predict future events and ascertain the favourability of the gods.

Additionally, it was held that deities had the ability to materialise in the form of dreams and apparitions.

¹⁴⁶ A DUBOURDIEU, (2013). Voir les dieux à Rome. *Recherches & Rencontres*, 31, 19-34. Consulté à l'adresse <https://revues.droz.org/index.php/RR/article/view/4027>.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 22.

In summary, in the Graeco-Roman world, people experienced the presence of the divine in a variety of ways, such as through the concept of theophany, divination, and through the participation in cults and mystery religions that promised a personal experience of the divine.

Preliminary Conclusion

The Greek language is abundant in verbs expressing the seeing, with a varied range of meaning, indicating the importance of regard in Hellenistic world.

Plato considered vision to be the most valuable faculty of humanity and focused the importance of making ethical principles universally accessible to the intellect and makes a clear distinction between the “limited” sensorial perception, using the Greek terms *ὄραν* (to see, perceive) and the intellectual comprehension expressed through the *νοεῖν* (to comprehend, understand). Similarly, Aristotle regarded vision as the most esteemed among the senses due to its capacity to approach the intellect by means of its knowledge's relative immateriality.

Greeks have employed metaphors related to vision to elucidate the concepts of knowledge and truth, knowledge being equivalent to visual clarity, while the illumination serves as a symbol for truth, becoming a widely prevalent motif in philosophical discourse, and the Romans following their initial interactions with the Greek world.

Greek culture, which is particularly sensitive to light and visibility, never stops debating the ontological and epistemological worth of the physical world. Platon, for example, frequently employs visual metaphors to explain his philosophical theories, such as the famous “caverne” in *Republica*. Similarly, in his book *De Sensu et Sensibilibus*, Aristotle studied vision and visual perception. The accounts of Apollonius of Rhodes, Diodorus, Pausanias, Plutarch, and Lucian feature numerous narratives of similar nature.

Greeks experienced the presence of the divine through the concept of theophany, which refers to a visible manifestation of gods that were

present in the world, or the promise for a personal experience of the divine through rituals and initiations.

Influenced by antiquity Thomas Aquinas utilised in his theological writings the nature of both perceptual and cognitive understanding. Some materialist philosophers, like Demokritos, have sought to base the reality of God on human perceptual experience. Others have contended, for instance, that religious experiences, such as awe or transcendence, constitute proof of the presence of a divine entity. The Greek civilization maintained a duality in their tradition that incorporated both legendary and mythical narratives, as well as the culture of investigation and scrutiny, wherein numerous Greek philosophers and scientists endeavoured to comprehend the workings of visual perception and link to intellect and connection to the divine. Homer's epic poems and hymns provide a wealth of knowledge regarding the ancient Greek perspective on the world and their engagements with the divine sphere.

Upon analysing the lexicon of perception in Greek texts, it becomes evident that the deities were frequently apprehended through auditory modalities rather than visual ones. Although visual perception held a prominent position in ancient religious practises, it was not the sole means through which the gods and goddesses were apprehended.

The significance of divine vision was a crucial aspect of Roman culture and they possessed multiple methods of comprehending their existence, with a belief system of deities being immanent in the natural world, and adherents frequently sought evidence of their existence through observation of natural occurrences, as Ovidius and Virgilius emphases.

The notion that underlies the New Testament, particularly the Gospel according to John, has been passed down the concept as knowledge is linked to the act of seeing. The attribute of sight is commonly associated with the divine being and is often used interchangeably with the term omniscience. The divine entity perceives and comprehends all that falls within its purview.

Regis Burnet provides a concise overview of the historical evolution of the concept of God, tracing its influences from Jewish religious currents, Greek-Roman thought, and the early Christian communities.

3.2. The representation of God in the Ancient Near East

During ancient times, Egypt was widely regarded as the foremost place for mystical practises. During the pharaonic era, the usage of the phrases “to see the god” or “to see his beauty” includes multifaceted elements. During the Old Kingdom, various texts including liturgical texts and prayers, as well as inscriptions on statues or stars, frequently reference the existence of a deity capable of adopting an anthropomorphic or animal form, such as the sun god. Typically, the inscribed manifestations of the deities were restricted to individuals with entry to the sanctuary, particularly the clergy on ceremonial occasions. The occurrence of a deity's physical manifestation, as a means of demonstrating their existence, appears to be a comparatively rare phenomenon.

The images of the gods were believed to be inhabited by the deity, and the act of seeing or approaching the divine image was seen as a way of communing with God. During the later period, the impact of Greek culture on Egyptian religion resulted in a resurgence of curiosity in mystical encounters, such as the concept of “mystical union” or “communion” with the divine. This achievement was attained through diverse methods, including but not limited to meditation, ceremonial practises, and the utilisation of holy artefacts or compounds.¹⁴⁸

The religious movement centred around the cult of the goddess Isis promoted a meditative form of religious practise aimed at achieving a state of spiritual unity with the divine. With the passage of time, mystics have suggested that the ideal way to attain ecstasy is by engaging in asceticism and solitary meditation as a form of preparation. Individuals who sought to establish a connection with the divine were obligated to

¹⁴⁸ Frankfurter, David. “The Consequences of Hellenism in Late Antique Egypt: Religious Worlds and Actors” *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2000, pp. 162-194. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110234183.162>.

observe specific abstentions and undergo various rituals of purification and ablution. Consequently, they were engaged in a process of spiritual preparation in order to be receptive to the desired favour. The presence of impurity in any form served as a barrier for individuals to attain proximity to the divine. The rituals that individuals underwent in order to establish a connection with the divine induced a heightened state of both mental and physical being. This state was deemed essential in order to attain the long-awaited beatific vision.

The veneration of deities in ancient Egyptian religion was primarily conducted through the use of temples and statues, which held a significant position in the religious practises of the society. The said sanctified areas were accessible to the general public and facilitated personal communion with the divine through the act of presenting gifts, supplicating, and engaging in ceremonial practises.

The priests who served in these temples were responsible for protecting the sanctified images and executing the essential ceremonies to guarantee the divinity's ongoing existence and benevolence. The prevalent belief was that the deity was housed within the sacred image, and as a result, it was accorded great veneration.¹⁴⁹

In Egyptian religious practises, it was customary to observe silent prayer since it was believed that the efficacy of communication with the divine rested solely on the utterances of the priest. The magical papyri, a collection of ancient Egyptian texts that contain spells and incantations, offer a comprehensive account of the rituals and formulas employed in religious practises.

The Egyptologist Françoise Durand provides examples of such visions that come from literary traditions.

The narrative of the Two Brothers is a remarkable illustration, wherein Bata experiences a revelation of the Ennead, a cluster of nine divine entities that hold significant importance in the Egyptian mythos. The previously mentioned vision serves as a catalyst for the individual's

¹⁴⁹ Kitat, Sara. (2017). The Osirian Cult in Temples' Crypts in Egypt during the Greco-Roman Period. *International Academic Journal Faculty of Tourism and Hotel Management*. 3. 82-113. 10.21608/ijaf.2017.95532.

spiritual growth and metamorphosis, ultimately resulting in his emergence as a prominent and esteemed member of his society.

The narrative of Satni and Si-Osiris similarly encompasses interactions with the divine, as they undertake a voyage to the netherworld and engage with diverse deities and ethereal entities. These experiences influence their perception of the world and equip them with the skills to effectively manage the obstacles they encounter throughout their lives.

In official documents, it is common to find accounts of divine visions and encounters, which are frequently ascribed to influential leaders like Thutmose and Queen Ahmose. The aforementioned visions were frequently construed as indications of divine benevolence or endorsement, and they held significant sway in substantiating the ruler's dominion and influence.¹⁵⁰

What emerges from the above examples is that the king or pharaoh was perceived as a divine or semi-divine entity due to his inherent nature and role, resulting in a unique association with the deities. The prevalent notion was that the monarch possessed the capacity to establish a direct connection with the deities via ceremonial acts and supplication, and that it was incumbent upon him to preserve the equilibrium between the mortal and celestial domains. However, experiences of the divine through apparitions and dreams were infrequent and not anticipated. These occurrences were regarded as exceptional and extraordinary, limited to only the most exceptional or selected individuals. The aforementioned apparitions were frequently construed as indications of divine helpfulness or acceptance, and they assumed a significant function in validating the monarch's supremacy and jurisdiction.

During the Ptolemaic and Roman eras, divine manifestations increased in frequency in both Egypt and Asia Minor, with the king no longer being the primary recipient. Instances have been recorded where Sarapis, Isis, and Imhotep have manifested themselves to individuals

¹⁵⁰ Françoise DUNAND, *Le désir de connaître Dieu : Une vision de Mandoulis au temple de Kalabscha* In : *Voir les Dieux, voir Dieu* [en ligne]. Strasbourg : Presses universitaires de Strasbourg, 2002 (généré le 16 janvier 2023). Disponible sur Internet : <<http://books.openedition.org/pus/11676>>. ISBN : 9791034404384. DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/books.pus.11676>.

who are ailing and have sought their intercession for healing, or to women who desire to conceive. Additionally, Thoth has been known to reveal the future of Egypt and his own destiny to one of his priests. Centuries later, in Egypt, Doctor Thessalos visited the Temple of Askleipos or Impteph with the aim of receiving a divine vision that would impart knowledge of extraordinary healing techniques. Following a three-day purification period, the individual was escorted into a chamber containing a vacant throne. Accompanied by a priest, the individual received a divine vision pertaining to a medical consultation, conveyed directly from the deity.¹⁵¹

As evidenced by all of these examples, achieving divinity requires the liberation of oneself from all forms of desire or passion. The Pythagoreans were known to engage in a daily practise of isolation within the temple, whereby they would isolate themselves from the external world in order to focus solely on the pursuit of meditation. Philo of Alexandria posited that the Essenes, who were influenced by the Pythagoreans, established isolated locations within their communities for the purpose of engaging in celebratory activities.¹⁵² This practise subsequently served as a model for Christian anchorites in Egypt.

Preliminary conclusion

The usage of the phrases in ancient Egypt as “to see the god” or “to see his beauty” includes multifaceted elements. The veneration of deities in ancient Egyptian religion was primarily conducted through the use of temples and statues, which held a significant position in the religious practises of the society. These were partly accessible to the general public and facilitated personal communion with the divine through the act of presenting gifts, supplicating, and engaging in ceremonial practises,

¹⁵¹ Franz CUMONT. *Le culte égyptien et le mysticisme de Plotin*. In: *Monuments et mémoires de la Fondation Eugène Piot*, tome 25, fascicule 1-2, 1921. pp. 77-92; doi : <https://doi.org/10.3406/piot.1921.1817>.

¹⁵² Vezi PHILON D'ALEXANDRIE, *De La Vie Contemplative Ou Des Vertus Des Suppliants*, <http://remacle.org/bloodwolf/philosophes/philon/contemplative.htm>

while priests served in these temples were responsible for protecting the sanctified images and executing the essential ceremonies. The king or pharaoh was perceived as a divine or semi-divine entity due to his inherent nature and role, resulting in a unique association with the deities.

During the later period, the impact of Greek culture on Egyptian religion resulted in a resurgence of curiosity in mystical encounters. With the passage of time, mystics have suggested that the ideal way to attain ecstasy is by engaging in asceticism and solitary meditation as a form of preparation.

During the Ptolemaic and Roman eras, divine manifestations increased in frequency in both Egypt and Asia Minor, with the king no longer being the primary recipient. Instances have been recorded where Sarapis, Isis, and Imhotep have manifested themselves to individuals who are ailing and have sought their intercession for healing, liberation of oneself from all forms of desire or passion. Besides healing, the mediation was practiced in temple, subsequently, these practices served as a model for Christian anchorites in Egypt.

3.3. The appearance of God in Judaism – to see or not to see

According to the religious authorities of Israel, the representation of God and the vocalisation of His name were considered unacceptable. The gaze and designation were viewed as two integral components of the divine essence intended to be kept strictly private. As per Jewish authorities, the genesis of all names and the visible world can be traced back to the unspoken name and the invisible image. The only connection between the imperceptible and the perceptible is maintained by the vocalisation. This commitment requires the absence of mutual exchange of gazes. Regarding the voice, it necessitates intermediaries who are selected to listen to and convey it. Despite the absence of a visual intermediary in the Bible, numerous prophets have reported experiencing visions. Frequently, these apparitions manifest as nocturnal visions accompanied by auditory perception. During the state of

wakefulness, the act of seeing can be described as a form of contemplation, while the absence of sight is comparable to a state of blindness. The speaker remains anonymous. The face of the divine is characterised by a stunning and disorienting radiance. The manifestation of divine illumination is expressed through language, facilitating the apprehension of intangible imagery without causing harm. The term serves as a conduit for obtaining insight into the characteristics and attributes of its originator.

The organ of sight is commonly referred to as the eye in various biblical verses within the Hebrew Bible. The co-occurrence of the lexical items “eye” and “to see” is a prevalent phenomenon in biblical texts, underscoring the significance of visual cognition within this context.¹⁵³

In Job 13:1 establishes a direct correlation between the sense of sight and the act of seeing by declaring, “Look, my eye has seen all this, my ear has heard and understood it.” The phrase “your own eyes have seen everything that the Lord your God has done” in Deuteronomy 3:21 underscores the significance of firsthand observation and personal testimony.

The eye is frequently employed in conjunction with the action of “looking down” as exemplified in Isaiah 51:6, wherein the orator directs the audience to “Elevate your gaze towards the celestial realm, and observe the terrestrial plane below” thereby underscoring the visual aspect of the directive.

W. Zimmerli's interpretation of the prohibition of images in the context of ancient Israelite religion is widely accepted by scholars today.¹⁵⁴ This perspective posits that the Israelites' prohibition of depictions of God did not stem from a rejection of materialism or a pursuit of heightened spirituality. Rather, it was a manifestation of their conviction that Yahweh was a deity who could not be confined or portrayed by any corporeal manifestation.

¹⁵³ Cf. Yael AVRAHAMI, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

¹⁵⁴ Walther ZIMMERLI, *Old Testament Theology in Outline*, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2000. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.proxy.library.lincoln.ac.uk/lib/ulinc/detail.action?docID=437046>.

This ideology stood in opposition to the theological convictions of numerous neighbouring societies, which frequently portrayed their deities in the shape of sculptures or figurines. Within these particular cultural contexts, the manifestation and embodiment of the divine entity was closely associated with the tangible depiction of the idol or statue, as previously observed. In contrast, the Israelites held the belief that God was a transcendent entity that could not be confined or restricted by any tangible manifestation. The conviction is demonstrated through the prohibition of creating carved images in the Decalogue, as well as in various other sections dispersed throughout the Hebrew Scriptures.

This does not imply that the concept of God was perceived as being absent or disengaged from the world. Theophanies, which refer to the appearances of God in the world, held significant importance in the Israelite religion and were frequently documented in the Hebrew Bible. The ancient Israelite religion's proscription of images is indicative of a fundamental conviction in the transcendent and unrepresentable essence of Yahweh, rather than a repudiation of materialism or a pursuit of elevated spirituality.

Frequently in religious texts, individuals are urged to pursue the countenance of the divine. The verse from 2 Chronicles 7:14 asserts that if a group of individuals, who identify themselves as belonging to a certain deity, exhibit humility, engage in prayer, seek divine guidance, and renounce their immoral behaviours, then the deity will listen to their supplications, pardon their transgressions, and restore their territory to a state of well-being. In the Old Testament, the term denoting "face" in Hebrew is frequently translated as "presence" in interpretations. The act of seeking the face of God means a pursuit of His divine presence. Throughout history, it can be observed that God has manifested his existence through his creations, with a particular emphasis on establishing a personal connection with individuals. The instruction to pursue the face of God was extended to the faithful as a result of their apostasy and consequent need for reconciliation with Him.

The only instance in the Old Testament where God is described as "*turning his back*" is found in Jeremiah 18:17, "*Like the east wind I will scatter*

them before the enemy, I will show their back, and not my face in the day the disaster." In this passage, God declares that he will scatter his people before their enemies like the east wind, and that he will reveal his back rather than his face on the day of their calamity. As per certain exegetes, the Greek of the Septuagint excluded the usage of the phrase "to turn the back" (literally, "the neck") in this context, as they considered it inappropriate. However, according to other scholars, it is plausible that this phrase was not originally present in the texts, and was instead added erroneously or with ill intent. There is an absence of proof to support the notion that the prophet Jeremiah was more audacious than his contemporaries in depicting God in a human likeness.¹⁵⁵

God has a face! The term signifying the *image of God*¹⁵⁶ is a recurrent occurrence within the biblical text. The term in question is exclusively utilised in its plural form and refers to the countenance of a human being. The plural form in question can be elucidated by the dual nature of the human figure. Firstly, it serves as the subject of visual perception, as the man in question directs his gaze towards an object. Secondly, it functions as the object of visual perception, as we turn our attention to the face of the man in order to observe and comprehend him. Simultaneously, the aforementioned plural form may be explicated by the manifold characteristics of the countenance. The duality of visibility, both in terms of perceiving and being perceived, is a phenomenon that can also be attributed to the divine entity. There exist several biblical passages that assert the physical manifestation of God's face resembling that of a visible entity.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. Frank MICHAELI, *Dieu a l'image de l'homme*, Delachaux & Niestlé, Neuchâtel (Switzerland), 1950, p. 14.

¹⁵⁶ "The Septuagint (LXX) translates this word with "prosôpon" and we meet it more than 1300 times, and 1114 times "prosôpon théou" (the face of God), clearly superior to "prosôpon anthropou" (the face of man). In the Latin Vulgata, it is translated with *facies* and *vultus*. The image of God prevails before the image of man. Why? One answer would be that God is the full and complete Being, the One who gives being to his creatures and gives them life. So if we stick to this idea that the face reflects the person, the Face of God will probably be more important than that of man. Even if this Face remains invisible to us today - being able to see God only in Heaven, as our reward, it remains visible to us today through the eyes of Faith". Cf. Seneve, *Journal de l'aumônerie de l'Ecole Normale Supérieure*, 2013, https://www.elevens.fr/aumonerie/en_ligne/1314/avent13/seneve_avent.pdf.

Thus the expression “*to see God face to face*” (Gn 32,31; Ex 33,11; Dt 34,10) is not a simple grammatical expression, but implies a person whose face we can see. Other texts are even more explicit in this regard. From man's point of view, to appear before God is *to see his face, to look at him, to contemplate him, to seek his face*. “*On your part, my heart says: Seek my face! I seek, O Lord, your face*” (Ps 27,8). However, contrary to this notion, distancing oneself from God or experiencing fear towards Him due to disobedience or unfaithfulness results in a departure from the divine presence or even an attempt at hiding oneself from it. (Gn 4, 14, 16; Jer 7, 15; Ps 68, 2; Job 13, 20).

The phrase “*man caressing the face of God*” is not commonly used in contemporary society, likely due to its specific connotations. In Exodus 32:11, Moses implores the Eternal to temper his wrath towards the disobedient and unfaithful people who have venerated the golden calf. Similarly, in 1 Samuel 13:12, Saul laments the failure for not having *caressed the Lord's face* before the imminent Philistine attack. Paul Dhorme's interpretation of the metaphor “*to caress the face of God*” as a means of mitigating God's wrath is one of several possible interpretations.

The metaphorical use of the expression “*to caress the face of God*” is commonly employed to convey a profound sense of intimacy or proximity with the divine. The statement implies a yearning to attain proximity to the divine, to perceive the benevolence and compassion of the divine being, and to encounter the entirety of the divine's benevolent disposition.

Within the cultural milieu of the ancient Near East, where the concepts of honour and shame held significant sway, it is plausible that the aforementioned expression could convey a yearning to assuage the divine fury or indignation. From this perspective, it can be interpreted as a means of pursuing divine benevolence or absolution, recognising one's own imperfections and limitations, and demonstrating deference to the supremacy and grandeur of the divine.

“The comparison of the biblical episodes in which various characters, especially the prophets “tame the face” of Yahweh, shows that prayer is the means that causes the divine anger to cease, and that makes the Lord’s face take on a gentle and benevolent aspect.”¹⁵⁷

The biblical lexicon presents a significant range of linguistic expressions, of which we shall highlight the most frequently employed in contemporary discourse. Man is believed to receive divine favour when God directs his attention towards him. “*May the Lord raise his face towards you and give you peace!*” In Numbers 6:26, it is stated that in the event of a person’s disapproval and indignation, “*God will turn his gaze from them.*” The biblical passages Leviticus 20:3 and 26:17, as well as Psalm 34:17, convey the notion that individuals who engage in immoral behaviour will face divine retribution.¹⁵⁸ Additionally, the Lord’s ability to hidden his gaze from humanity symbolises a state of abandonment or detachment from human affairs, as evidenced in Deuteronomy 31:18, where the Lord declares his intention to “*hide [his] face*” due to the people’s idolatrous practises. The utilisation of the infrequent formula from Psalms 31:21, “*You hide them in the shelter of your presence from the plots of men*” is employed in a similar manner. This suggests that the face of God serves as a secure haven that safeguards those who revere Him. The Lord reveals His face and demonstrates benevolence towards His people, as evidenced in Numbers 6:25. The book of Psalms is full with sentences that illustrate how the face of God radiates light, such as “*May the light of your face shine upon us, Lord*” (Psalm 4:7).

According to Dhorme,

“The potential requesting of these terms from pagan religious traditions, where solar splendour was revered, may only be construed as a lexical similarity, without of any influence on the notion of divinity.”¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ P. Paul DHORME, *L’emploi Métaphorique des Noms de parties du corps en hébreu et en akkadien*, Librairie Victor Lecoffre J. Gabalda, Éditeur, Paris, 1923, p. 59.

¹⁵⁸ See Leland REYKEN, James C. WILHOIT, Tremper LONGMAN, *Dicționar de imagini și simboluri biblice*, Casa Cărții, Oradea, 2011, pp. 689-691.

¹⁵⁹ Cf. P. Paul Dhorme, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

A person's face reveals much about his or her character and personality. We see the inward emotions of a person expressed outwardly on the face. We recognize a person by looking at his or her face. In a sense, one's face represents the whole person. For the writers of the Bible, the human face could represent the entire person.

The previous example discussions regarding the countenance of the divine entity can be applied to its ocular organs in a comparable manner. There exist a multitude of biblical quotations wherein the aforementioned term is present, in addition to its diverse derivatives. A limited number of examples will be presented in order to comprehend the anthropomorphic nature of the Old Testament.

We will start with the Book of Psalms, where it is stated that God really has eyes and eyelids: *"The Lord has his throne in the heavens. His eyes look, his lids search the sons of men."* (Ps 11,4). Likewise, the Book of Job talks about God's eyes, but it does not question the reality of God's eyes, but their human nature: *"Do you have eyes of flesh to see as man sees?"* (Job 10, 4); *God has his eyes on the land he will take care of* (Dt 11, 12) or *on the people who fear him, believing in him* (Ps 33, 18); *He opens his eyes night and day on the house of Solomon that he built* (1 R 8, 29); *He turns his gaze away from hypocritical gestures* (Is 1, 15); *He will set his eyes for good on the exiles of Judah* (Jeremiah 24,6), *but his eyes will be merciless on the house of Judah when he commits abominable things* (Ez 7,4; 8,18). The judgment passed on the conduct of men is often determined by the following rule: to do what is good and right in His sight, or to do what is evil in His sight. This is how the kings of Israel and Judah were judged by the book of Kings, in a typical formula that was repeated for each of them, at the beginning or at the end of their reign: *"So he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, like David, his father"* (1 Kings 15,11), *"Omri did what was evil before the Lord: he did worse than all those before him."* (1 Kings 16:25); *The greatest hope of the guilty is to find grace in the eyes of God* (Ex 33:13; Num 11:11; Jud 5:17). *He looks at the deeds of men, at their sufferings and their evils.*

In the Old Testament, it is common to find the phrase "to look carefully" or "to contemplate" employed to describe the way of God's interaction with humanity. This statement highlights the notion that God

is not distant or detached, but rather actively involved with his creation and observant of the necessities of his people.

The narrative of Hagar as illustrated in Genesis 16 serves as a compelling illustration of this phenomenon. Hagar, a slave in the household of Abraham, was subjected to mistreatment by her mistress Sarah, which led her to flee into the wilderness. However, despite her seclusion and despair, the divine being noticed her plight and intervened by sending a celestial messenger.

The significance of Hagar's reaction to this encounter lies in her attribution of the name El-Roi to God, which denotes His ability to perceive her existence. The aforementioned appellation not only recognises the divine's capacity for observation and comprehension, but also his disposition to heed the exigencies and tribulations of a singular human being.

The significance of the appellation of the spring where Hagar had an encounter with the angel of God is noteworthy. The term Lahai-Roi signifies that God is a living entity who perceives and interacts with his creation, rather than a remote or theoretical deity.

That sentence suggests that God's omniscience surpasses human perception, as He is able to perceive that which is hidden from human detection. This is exemplified by the rhetorical question posed in the text, *"Can someone hide in a hiding place and I will not see him? - the oracle of the Lord"* which implies that no one can evade God's sight. (Jer. 23, 24). The concept of God's all-knowing nature is exemplified through the panopticon, as evidenced by the scriptural reference in the book of Job: *"For God observes the conduct of all individuals, meticulously scrutinising their every move"* In light of Job 34:21-22, the people who engage in infidelity cannot conceal themselves in darkness or the shadow of death. The concept of God involves the intermingling of sight and knowledge. However, this perspective is not reciprocal. The most important aspect of the biblical theory of vision is its notable absence of reciprocity, wherein the ability to perceive is not mutual; while God is capable of observing humans, humans are incapable of receptive this ability to observe God.

Preliminary conclusions

In Judeo world, the representation of God and the vocalisation of His name were considered unacceptable. The gaze and designation were viewed as two integral components of the divine essence intended to be kept strictly private. As per Jewish authorities, the genesis of all names and the visible world can be traced back to the unspoken name and the invisible image, implying the absence of mutual exchange of gazes, as for voices, there is need for intermediaries who are selected to listen to and convey it, and had the conviction that Yahweh was a deity who could not be confined or portrayed by any corporeal manifestation.

This does not imply that the concept of God was perceived as being absent or disengaged from the world. Theophanies, which refer to the appearances of God in the world, held significant importance in the Israelite religion and were frequently documented in the Hebrew Bible. God has a face! The term signifying the *image of God* is a recurrent occurrence within the biblical text. The term in question is exclusively utilised in its plural form and refers to the countenance of a human being. The plural form in question can be elucidated by the dual nature of the human figure. Thus the expression “to see God face to face” (Gn 32,31; Ex 33,11; Dt 34,10) is not a simple grammatical expression, but implies a person whose face we can see, “On your part, my heart says: Seek my face! I seek, O Lord, your face” (Ps 27,8).

The metaphorical use of the expression “to caress the face of God” is commonly employed to convey a profound sense of intimacy or proximity with the divine, in Moise.

The biblical lexicon presents a significant range of linguistic expressions; of which we have highlighted the most frequently employed in contemporary discourse. Man is believed to receive divine favour when God directs his attention towards him, and we presented here the most significant ones, in relation to God’ face, in genesis, Psalms, Deuteronomy.

In the Old Testament, it is common to find the phrase “to look carefully” or “to contemplate” employed to describe the way of God's

interaction with humanity. This statement highlights the notion that God is not distant or detached, but rather actively involved with his creation and observant of the necessities of his people.

God's omniscience in Old Testament surpasses human perception, as He is able to perceive that which is hidden from human detection. This is exemplified by the rhetorical question posed in the text, "Can someone hide in a hiding place and I will not see him? - the oracle of the Lord" which implies that no one can evade God's sight. (Jer. 23, 24).

3.3.1. The Theophany - The visible manifestation of God to humans

Theologians utilise a specialised term to denote the occurrences in which the divine entity manifests to individuals of the human species. In the Old Testament, a *theophany* refers to a perceptible appearance of God. The term "*theophany*" has its etymological roots in the Greek language, specifically resulting from the combination of two distinct words: "*theos*" which means "God" and "*phainō*" which means "appearing" or "manifesting" with the passive form indicating an act of appearance. A theophany refers to a manifestation or appearance of the divine being. The term "*theophany*" can be applied with varying degrees of specificity. In a wider context, the term would encompass not only overt occurrences depicting a manifestation of the divine, but also more obscure appearances, such as when the deity is perceived within a cloud that obscures visibility. The theme of Theophany holds significant importance in the Old Testament. The symbols present in the text demand appreciation rather than mere neglect. Additionally, the text establishes connections with the overarching theme of God's presence, which is a recurring motif throughout the Old Testament.

The etymology of the term theophany, originating from the Greek language, conveys a clear description of the intended concept, which is the manifestation or appearance of a divine being. The majority of biblical commentators comprehend and employ the term to encompass instances in Holy Scripture that signify the encounter between the divine and the human, as indicated by the Greek term, wherein God manifests Himself.

Theophanies, which refer to the manifestations or appearances of God, are present in the Old Testament and are often depicted with a sense of enigma or careful description.

Theophanies can be categorised into two distinct types: authentic or direct theophanies, wherein God himself is present, and indirect theophanies, which involve the appearance of God through intermediaries like angels or divine attributes like glory (*kavod*).

According to Savran,

Theophany narratives are not exceptional in stressing the visual appearance of Yahve in the Bible. Despite the strong aniconic tendencies in biblical religion and despite the clear preference in the Bible for spoken over visual revelation, there is no shortage of texts describing visual apprehension of the Deity. Although the fear of seeing Yahve is a powerful taboo, a number of these texts describe encountering Yahve face to face (Gn 32, 30; Ex 33, 11; Dt 5,4; Jud 6,22).¹⁶⁰

The term "*kavod*" originally denoted an object or substance that possessed a hard texture, but later evolved to connote a quality that bestows honour or respect.

Reşceanu states that the concept of *kavod* Yahve serves as a means of expressing the manifestation of God's presence in its diverse forms. Israel asserts her conviction that her deity manifests his presence at his discretion among his community, bestowing prosperity and equity. Numerous instances exist wherein the manifestation of "*divine glory*" is presented to the people (Ex. 16,7, 10; 24, 17; Lev. 9, 6, 23); however, as a rule, the chosen individuals are privy to God's revelation of His glory. These three persons, which is Moses, Isaiah, and Ezekiel, were subjects of divine revelation at the onset of their respective missions. This theophanic experience served as a source of motivation for their prophetic endeavours and provided them with fortitude during challenging moments, as exemplified in the case of Elijah. However, it is not at the behest of the individuals themselves, but rather at the prompting of a divine force. Moses is the only exception in this case, as he requests to

¹⁶⁰ George W. SAVRAN, *Encountering the Divine. Theophany in Biblical Narrative*, T&T Clark International A Continuum imprint, London-New York, 2005, p. 49.

witness “*the glory of God*” (Ex. 33, 18), a potentially dangerous act that could have resulted in his death (Ex. 33, 20; cf. Gn. 16, 13; 32, 24 -30; Judg. 6, 22; 13, 22). In this particular instance, Moses is requesting a favour that is not just for his own benefit, but rather for the entirety of people that has passed away to idolatry. This request serves as a symbol of the divine generosity that is demonstrated through the act of forgiving Israel.¹⁶¹

Despite Moses' exceptional connection with God and divine selection as the leader of the Israelites' liberation from Egyptian enslavement, he retained his humanity and acknowledged his limitations. In Exodus 33, the protagonist requested to witness the glory of God. However, the divine entity responded by conveying that the human eye cannot perceive the countenance of God without facing mortal consequences.

The phrase “*face to face*” as used in Exodus 33:11 pertains to the closeness and immediacy of Moses' interaction with God, rather than a physical manifestation of God's countenance. The statement underscores the intimacy of their association and the ability of Moses to communicate with the divine directly, thereby obtaining counsel and directives.

Moses, despite his unique position as a prophet and leader, consistently maintained a humble disposition and a keen awareness of his personal limitations. The individual acknowledged that his capacity to guide the Israelites was contingent upon the potency and direction of a divine force. As such, he consistently pursued the presence and guidance of God in his personal life.

The Jewish tradition interprets the relationship between Moses and God as singular and extraordinary. The passage “*All the prophets looked through an opaque glass, but Moses looked through a clear glass*”, found in Yevamot 49b¹⁶² of the Babylonian Talmud posits that Moses had a superior and unobstructed perception of God's revelations in comparison to other prophets. As he is said to have looked through a clear glass while they looked through an opaque one. The evidence that Moses held not only the role of a prophet, but also that of a legislator and commander of

¹⁶¹ Cf. Ion REȘCEANU, *Receptarea vizuală a prezenței divine după Vechiul Testament*,

https://sbor.ro/receptarea-vizuala-a-prezentei-divine-dupa-vechiul-testament/#_ftnref3.

¹⁶² <https://www.sefaria.org/Yevamot.49b?lang=bi>.

the Israelite people supports interpretation. Moses was the recipient of the Decalogue from the divine and played a pivotal role in the establishment of the covenant between the Almighty and the Israelite community. The individual's proximity to the divine and their distinct comprehension of the divine's intentions facilitated their ability to direct the Israelites out of Egypt and navigate them through the desert.

The exhibition of glory can be interpreted as an illustration of divine charity, given that it signifies an occasion when God offers himself to Moses in a potent and life-changing manner. The phenomenon of theophany can elicit intense emotions and a sense of reverence, while concurrently functioning as a prompt for acknowledging the existence of a divine being and as a wellspring of solace and fortitude for adherents who aspire to comply with the deity's desires.

The prophet Ezekiel 1, 28 presents a unique and exceptional perspective on the divine glory, also known as *kavod* Yahve: "*It was like the appearance of the rainbow that is in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the appearance of its brightness all around; this was the appearance of the likeness of the Lord's glory. When I saw, I fell to the ground and heard a voice speaking.*"

In reference to the passage found in Ezekiel 1:28, E. Wolfson reveals appreciation for the notion that the glory, as presented by Ezekiel, is representative of the human aspect of God's manifestation, rather than a separate hypostasis in relation to God.¹⁶³

Certain texts explicitly state that a theophany is feasible, as God can be perceived and is discernible through human sight. "*Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God*". For instance, Exodus 3:6 recounts that Moses hidden his face out of fear upon beholding God. Upon examination of the pages of the Old Testament, it is evident that while the majority of biblical theophanies occur individually, there are instances of group theophanies present. The Old Testament has a complex integration of the theme of God's presence with other significant themes, including covenant, promise and fulfilment, and kingdom.

¹⁶³ ELLIOT R. WOLFSON, *Through a Speculum That Shines- Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism*, Princeton University Press, 1994.

The theme of promise and fulfilment underscores the unwavering commitment of God to fulfil his promises to his people throughout history, spanning from the era of Abraham to that of Moses and beyond. The fulfilment of God's commitment to accompany his people is manifested through diverse means, including the tabernacle and subsequently, the temple, in addition to the prophetic utterances that anticipate God's forthcoming presence and salvation.

The concept of covenant emphasises the reciprocal bond between the divine and human entities, which is rooted in the benevolent actions of God and his solid commitment to fulfilling his promises. The centrality of the covenant lies in the presence of God, who lives with his people and guides them towards his intended purpose.

The central subject matter of the concept of kingdom pertains to the sovereignty and dominion of God over his subjects, including the current state of issues as well as the anticipated future nation. The theme of God's presence is complexly associated with the concept of the kingdom, as his complying with presence among his people marks the sovereignty of God.

The Jewish faith adheres to a prohibition against producing visual images or representations of God. *"You shall not bow down to them or serve them. For I, Yahweh your God, have a jealous God and I punish a parent's fault in the children, the grandchildren, and the great-grandchildren among those who hate me"* Ex 20,4-5. This practise is grounded in the belief that God transcends human understanding and cannot be adequately conveyed or comprehended through any form of physical or visual representation Deut: 5, 7-9. The focus is directed towards the transcendental and unfathomable nature of the divine entity, as opposed to any specific manifestation or depiction of the same. The utilisation of visual representations such as images or icons in religious practises is frequently linked to the act of idolatry, a transgression of great severity within the Jewish faith. The absence of statues or images of God in Jewish places of worship is a common practise, as the focus is primarily on spiritual connection with God through prayer, study, and other means.

The second commandment explicitly forbids the creation of any visual or physical depictions of objects or beings that are intended for worship, as the Jewish deity is considered to be incomparable and without equal. This prohibition extends to both three-dimensional and two-dimensional representations. The introduction of monotheism is attributed to Abraham, while Moses is credited with the establishment of a political iconoclasm that rigidly prohibits the depiction of God. In order to establish their distinct identity, the Jewish community found it necessary to differentiate their religious beliefs and ritual practises from those of the pagan population. The melding of the light of Israel, the light of the peoples, and the light of the world, along with biblical concepts, come together in the manifestation of a divinity that cannot be seen in visual form, but is clearly bright and omnipresent in human existence. Human beings, despite their limitations in comprehending the essence of God, are capable of recognising Him through the exhibition of His divine magnificence that frequently accompanies His existence and activities in the universe.

The theophanies depicted in the Scriptures provide insight into a deity that possesses both transcendent and personal qualities, and is not confined to abstract notions or constructs. By means of His self-disclosure, God demonstrates that He is a god with being human who wants to establish a connection with people who follow him. The presence of God is apparent in numerous instances throughout the Bible, as demonstrated by the encounters of various individuals such as Moses at the burning bush and Isaiah's vision in the temple. The divine being discloses Himself to humanity through His name, which connotes His essence and attributes, and via His engagements with His followers, showcasing His benevolence, compassion, and equity. By means of His self-revelation "*I am he who is*" (Ex. 3,14), God extends an invitation to us to gain knowledge of Him and to establish a connection with Him, a connection that is based on His benevolence and facilitated by His divine nature.

In light of the theological context, we shall delineate the fundamental components that characterise the Old Testament's perception of the

visual apprehension of the divine presence. Our objective is to apprehend not only the background and the attributes of the forms of visible manifestation of God's presence and activity in the world.

According to R. Fornara, The Old Testament frequently employs the Hebrew expression *ra'ah* (ראַה) to denote the act of visual perception or sight, particularly in relation to experiences involving the divine. The Hebrew word *ra'ah* is used in Exodus 24:10 to denote the visual perception of God by the individuals mentioned in the text, as it states "*and they saw the God of Israel*" The terminology finds its usage in various other occurrences within the Old Testament to depict experiences with the divine, apparitions, and other modes of visual perception.¹⁶⁴

The roots in question can be categorised through an examination based on three criteria: 1) perception in relation to the divine; 2) perception in relation to individuals; and 3) perception in relation to non-living entities. Despite being a plurisemantic term¹⁶⁵, its basic meaning is to see with the eyes, sensory perception preceding all other semantic developments, from experience to cognitive knowledge and from reasoning to memory. However, a distinction must be made in this regard between simply "seeing with the eyes" (Jos. 8, 20; Jud. 13, 20) and "seeing and hearing", in the sense of becoming aware of something (Deut. 4, 28; Ps. 135, 16), as well as to perception through the other, with the meaning of "to hear" (Gn. 2, 19; 42, 1), to perceive", "to feel" (Is. 44, 16).¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ Roberto FORNARA, *La visione contraddetta. La Dialettica fra visibilita e non-visibilita divina nella Bibbia Ebraica*, in *Analecta Biblica*, 155, Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, Roma 2004, p. 27.

¹⁶⁵ According to BROWN-DRIVER-BRIGGS HEBREW AND ENGLISH LEXICON, the meanings are as follows: 1. To see (in an absolute manner); 2. To see, with the meaning of learning to know, to experience; 3. To have the power of sight; 4. To perceive; 5. To look, take a look, observe; 6. Mental observation, to consider, to search, to be attentive, to discern, to distinguish, to reflect; 7. To look with interest, with joy, with anger, with fear; 8. To see with one's own eyes; 9. To be a witness; 10. To observe; 11 to investigate; 12. To discover; 13. To be careful; 14. To accept; 15. To meet; <https://hebrewcollege.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/BDB.pdf>.

¹⁶⁶ E. JENNI, C. WESTERMANN, (1997), *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Vol 3. Hendricksen Publishers, p. 1469; *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*–William L. Holladay- based upon the lexical work of Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, William B. Eedermans Publishing Company, grand Rapids, Michigan, E. J. Brill, Leiden, 1988, p. 328.

When the term refers to God¹⁶⁷, it must be interpreted as an anthropomorphism (Gn. 1, 4; 1, 10; 1, 25, Is. 4, 14), and in the plane of spiritual knowledge it has the meaning of seeing with the eyes of the mind, to show, discover (Gen. 48, 11; Ex. 33, 18; Deut. 5, 24, Ezek. 40, 4; Mic. 7, 5) and see in a dream¹⁶⁸ (Gen. 31, 10; Is. 6, 1; Isaiah 1, 1; Dan. 8, 15; 10, 7).

The classification of the term pertaining to the human individual can be based on two factors: firstly, whether the person engages in the act of seeing, being seen, causing others to see, or being implored to see in an imperative manner; and secondly, whether the person is seen by others or reveals themselves. Conducting a thorough analysis of the particular circumstances in which individuals reportedly perceive the divine entity may be pursued. A minimum of five distinct contexts can be identified: The five distinct themes that have been identified in relation to the experience of God are: 1) the act of contemplation, reflection, and consideration of God; 2) the phenomenon of prophetic visions; 3) the occurrence of cultic visions; 4) the presence of fear and prohibition surrounding the act of seeing God; and 5) the actual experience of seeing God.

There exist several stories of prophets with regard to their divine calling or reception of the divine message. The reports frequently assert

¹⁶⁷ FORNARA makes a clarification of the roots uses with reference to God may be further classified on the basis of whether 1) God is the subject of the verb, e.g. God sees/reveals, sees someone, sees something, is implored to see (imperative), God implores a person to see (imperative), or causes to see (Hiphil); 2) a person or object sees God, or God is seen, appears or reveals himself (Niphai); or 3) something of God, or an activity of God is seen. Cf. Fornara, *op. cit.*, pp. 44-46.

¹⁶⁸ Fornara provides a comprehensive examination of the dream vision, asserting that the utilisation of dreams enables the invocation of an individualised connection between the divine and humanity, thereby reducing the gap between the two parties, without relying on anthropomorphic representations. The discourse on visibility lacks explicit affirmation, rather it employs a metaphor of perception that is judiciously utilised to convey the manifestation of the divine and the subjective condition of humanity, encompassing their anxieties and aspirations. In contrast to the dreams found in the Ancient Orient, the biblical dream is distinguished by a particular sense of restraint. The conventional understanding of dreams often involves an element of vagueness and equivocation regarding the awareness of an authentic reality and the uncertainty of its boundaries. When discussing the visual aspect of a dream, one is referring to obscurity and uncertainties, whereas actual experiences provide supplementary assurances. Cf. R. FORNARA, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

with confidence that a divine entity was observed. As an illustration, Amos reported witnessing Yahweh positioned atop the altar and relaying a message. In the book of Amos, chapter 9,1 *"I saw Yahweh standing upon the altar and he said..."*, the prophet Micaiah reports having a vision of Yahweh seated on his throne, with the entire host of heaven standing in his presence. Yahweh then proceeds to speak. According to the biblical passage found in 1 Kings 22:19, *"I saw Yahweh sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing beside him...and Yahweh said..."* and as reported by Ezekiel, he bore witness to "visions of God" and "the likeness of the glory of Yahweh" The individuals do not exhibit any signs of fear subsequent to their encounter with Yahweh.

As he observes Delapp,

There are several psalm and hymn texts which suggest a connection between the visual perception of God, or manifestations of God, and worship in the sanctuary or temple. For example, Ps 63, 3 states, "So I have looked upon thee in the sanctuary, beholding thy strength and glory". There are also references like "seeing the face of God" or God's "form" (Ps 11,7, 17,15; 19; 34,6; 97,6). But "seeing God" or his "face" in the temple do not mean that God was literally seen, but rather that he was worshiped in the temple where his presence was thought to dwell.¹⁶⁹

The references to "seeing God" in the Book of Psalms are rare, with the majority of such occurrences appearing to pertain to "temple worship" The Psalms contain two references to the manifestation of God in relation to "Zion". (Ps 84,8; Ps 63,2-3). The anticipation of Yahweh's appearance or manifestation is closely linked to Zion, which is regarded as the residence of God's presence.

The term "ra ah" conveys the notion of firsthand and individual recognition of God from a point of view of epistemology. This concept is supplementary to other terms such as "galah" (revelation) or "giloui" (unveiling). The term "ra ah" signifies a knowledge of the divine presence and activity in connection with an individual's spiritual encounter. However, this awareness is not invariably and uniformly manifested.

¹⁶⁹ Nevada Levi DeLAPP, *Theophanic "Type-Scenes" in the Pentateuch. Visions of Yahwh*, Bloomsbury T&T Clark, London- New York, 2018, p. 16.

According to C. Prelipceanu, the term *ra ah* indicates this kenosis of God, as God reveals himself in many different ways and through many different experiences to discover his will to humanity. This suggests that God's revelation is not limited to one specific form or mode, but is adaptable to the needs and capacities of human beings. The concept of kenosis in relation to God's revelation underscores the idea that God is not distant or aloof from humanity, but is actively and intimately involved in human affairs, revealing himself in various ways in order to guide and direct humanity towards his will.

“The notion of beholding the face of the God is a precious honour given upon a select few mortals. In the Old Testament, it is suggested that such an act cannot be done without imperilling one's own existence (Gn. 16, 11; 32, 30; Jud. 13, 22; Is. 6:5).”¹⁷⁰

The representation of God and His description with anthropomorphic attributes often creates a natural tension. However, theophanies possess the ability to depict the interaction between the divine and human worlds. The auditory and visual exchange, referred to as “showing”, has the ability to manifest the personal nature of God's presence in the world. In the meantime, biblical theophanies show the capacity to underscore the difference between the two realms that converge, such as the divine and the human. The emphasis is placed on the sanctity and omnipotence of God in relation to the relative and vulnerable nature of humanity and the world.

The notion of the incomprehensibility of God's being is an important theme in the Old Testament; however, this does not imply that God is wholly unapproachable to humanity. As evidenced, there exist diverse modalities through which the manifestation of God's existence is disclosed to individuals, including but not limited to theophanies, dreams, and prophetic visions. The manifestation of God's interaction with the world can be observed through the covenantal bond between God and his selected community, as well as his continuous engagement

¹⁷⁰ Cf. C. PRILIPCEANU, *Teologia numelor divine din Vechiul Testament*, Ed. Doxologia , Iași, 2014, p. 78.

in the course of human events. Nevertheless the various indications of God's existence, the Old Testament underscores the notion that God transcends human comprehension and apprehension.

In the context of a theophany, there exists a clear differentiation between the divine and the human, even when God is represented with anthropomorphic characteristics such as speech, audition, or emotivity. The distinction is supported within the narrative through the accentuation of the paradoxical quality of God's manifestation and discourse. The burning bush episode (Exodus 3:1-15) depicts the manifestation of God in the form of a bush that is ablaze yet remains unconsumed. The paradoxical manifestation of God's appearance serves to underscore His transcendent nature, whereas His communication with Moses accentuates the personal and relational dimension of His engagement with humanity. In Isaiah's account of the divine encounter (Isaiah 6:1-5), the prophet beholds the Lord seated on a throne, while also observing the angels hiding their faces and feet in reverence of His presence, thereby emphasising the holy and profoundly remarkable nature of God.

According to Savran,

“The Bible contains quite a few instances describing God speaking to a human being, where the text does not specifically indicate whether there was an unusual visual display. God is present in his speech, and manifests his character by speaking, as well as in instances with an unusual visual display. In a broad sense, any speech of God to man is theophanic in nature.”¹⁷¹

In Exodus 20:1-21 and Deuteronomy 5:23-27, the people of Israel were spoken to by God in an audible manner, and were provided with the Ten Commandments. Additional instances of theophanies in the Old Testament comprise of divine communications. The impressive visual aesthetics serve to emphasise the credibility and legitimacy of the divine message conveyed by God. The manifestation of the divine at Mount Sinai serves to emphasise the sacredness of the deity and the peril of mortal proximity to

¹⁷¹ Cf. SAVRAN, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

the mountain. Certain passages explicitly reference the wrath of God. Others mention the overthrow of God's enemies. The manifestation of the divine in a sombre cloud may readily connote divine wrath. The immense power of a thunderstorm can evoke a sense of terror, even in its ordinary manifestation. The degree of intensity increases when the phenomena are accompanied by a distinct manifestation of the divine presence.

In the context of Hebrew tradition, which is characterised by an aniconic religious reality, verbal communication is favoured as a method of conveying the appearance of the divine presence. As per the scholarly work of E. Wolfson, the auditory perception of a voice is deemed a permissible mode of anthropomorphic representation. The reason for this is that audition is a perceptual encounter that is not inherently associated with corporeal structure or visual attributes. Perceiving the auditory manifestation of the divine is a means of depicting the spiritual essence without relying on tangible representations. The significance of communication and dialogue in the correlation between God and humans is made clear by the utilisation of language in theophanies.

“In the setting of phenomenological discourse, the vocal expression does not necessarily connote a tangible manifestation that is associated with the spatial domain. The vocal system allows for the expression of non-spatial references related to the external environment, while also requiring an unspecified present moment.”¹⁷²

Preliminary conclusions

In the Old Testament, a theophany refers to a perceptible appearance of God, originating from the Greek language, conveys a clear description of the intended concept, which is the manifestation or appearance of a divine being.

Despite Moses' exceptional connection with God and divine selection as the leader of the Israelites' liberation from Egyptian enslavement, he

¹⁷² Cf. Elliot R. WOLFSON, *Through a Speculum That Shines- Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism*, Princeton University Press, 1994, pp. 14-15.

retained his humanity and acknowledged his limitations. The phrase “face to face” as used in Exodus 33:11 pertains to the closeness and immediacy of Moses' interaction with God, rather than a physical manifestation of God's countenance.

Certain texts explicitly state that a theophany is feasible, as God can be perceived and is discernible through human sight. Nevertheless, the Jewish faith adheres to a prohibition against producing visual images or representations of God. “You shall not bow down to them or serve them” Ex 20,4-5, and the second commandment explicitly forbids the creation of any visual or physical depictions of objects or beings that are intended for worship.

In light of the theological context, we shall delineate the fundamental components that characterise the Old Testament's perception of the visual apprehension of the divine presence. Our objective is to apprehend not only the background and the attributes of the forms of visible manifestation of God's presence and activity in the world. The Old Testament frequently employs the Hebrew expression *ra'ah* (ראַה) to denote the act of visual perception or sight, particularly in relation to experiences involving the divine. The Hebrew word *ra'ah* is used in Exodus 24:10 to denote the visual perception of God by the individuals mentioned in the text, as it states “and they saw the God of Israel”.

Despite being a plurisemantic term, its basic meaning is to see with the eyes, sensory perception preceding all other semantic developments, from experience to cognitive knowledge and from reasoning to memory. However, a distinction must be made in this regard between simply “seeing with the eyes” (Jos. 8, 20; Jud. 13, 20) and “seeing and hearing”, in the sense of becoming aware of something (Deut. 4, 28; Ps. 135, 16), as well as to perception through the other, with the meaning of “to hear” (Gn. 2, 19; 42, 1), to perceive”, “to feel” (Is. 44, 16). Nevertheless, when the term refers to God, it must be interpreted as an anthropomorphism (Gn. 1, 4; 1, 10; 1, 25, Is. 4, 14), and in the plane of spiritual knowledge it has the meaning of seeing with the eyes of the mind, to show, discover.

Whether the person engages in the act of seeing, being seen, causing others to see, or being implored to see in an imperative manner; and secondly, whether the person is seen by others or reveals themselves.

The references to “seeing God” in the Book of Psalms are rare. The notion of the incomprehensibility of God's being is an important theme in the Old Testament; however, this does not imply that God is wholly unapproachable to humanity. Then, in Exodus 20:1-21 and Deuteronomy 5:23-27, the people of Israel were spoken to by God in an audible manner, and were provided with the Ten Commandments. Additional instances of theophanies in the Old Testament comprise of divine communications. The impressive visual aesthetics serve to emphasise the credibility and legitimacy of the divine message conveyed by God.

In the Jewish environment, which is characterised by an aniconic religious reality, verbal communication is favoured as a method of conveying the appearance of the divine presence.

3.3.2. The places of manifestation of the Divine presence

God's its possesses full autonomy in terms of manifesting its presence in various locations, including but not limited to bodies of water, springs, trees, meadows, and unspecified areas, as evidenced by scriptural references such as Genesis 15:1, Judges 13:2-3, Amos 7:4, and Job 38:1. The tabernacle, which contains the ark of the alliance and serves as a portable representation of the divine presence, can dictate the appearance of theophanies in certain circumstances, even when it is relocated from its original position on the mountain. This is evidenced in Exodus 40:34-38 and Numbers 10:35-36. Theophanies exhibit a tendency towards the mountain and temple, frequently linked with Mount Zion.

The mountain is a significant geographical feature that serves as the primary site of God's theophanic manifestations, although it is not an exclusive location. The mountain serves as a site of theophanies for Israel and is perceived as a cosmic centre, representing the convergence of heaven and earth. Within this context, theophanies serve as the paramount instances of divine communication, aid, direction, and sovereignty for the nation of Israel. The mountain provides individuals with the opportunity to ascend towards the enlightenment of divine knowledge, to draw closer to God, and to gain insight into the mysteries of the celestial realm.

The significance of these mountains is not limited to their association with theophanies, but also extends to their symbolic importance. The vertical axis that connects the earth and the heavens is regarded as a conduit for divine communication between humanity and God. It serves as a symbolic meeting place for the two entities. The act of ascending a mountain, frequently portrayed as a challenging and hazardous expedition, serves as a metaphor for the spiritual journey towards the divine. The mountain serves as a site for both revelation and encounter, as well as purification and transformation. The Israelites' comprehension of God and their association with Him is enhanced through their encounters on the holy mountains.

It is helpful for us to see how the theme of God's presence integrates with other themes in the Old Testament. Several themes are important in understanding the Old Testament. Among the prominent ones are the theme of promise and fulfilment, the theme of covenant, the theme of kingdom, and the theme of God's presence. Any one of the themes offers a powerful way of understanding the entire record of God's dealings with his people, in the Old Testament.

First, God makes promises. From very early, he promises to send a redeemer to undo sin and its effects (Gn. 3,15), to save people from their rebellion against God. God's promises include long-range promises about the coming of Christ, as well as short-range promises about acts of redemption within the Old Testament period. The promises include the central promise that God will be God to his people (e.g., Gn. 17,7). He will have a personal, intimate relation with them. Since the promises of God are trustworthy, they imply that God is able and willing to fulfil what he has promised. The promises imply that God rules all of history and will surely accomplish his purposes, including the final purpose of dwelling with humankind in the new heaven and the new earth (Ap. 21:1–3).

The second theme is the theme of covenant. God makes covenants with humankind. A covenant is a solemn agreement that involves personal commitments and a personal relation between the parties to the covenant. In the Old Testament, we find a record of a number of distinct covenants: the covenants with Noah, Abraham, Moses, David and others.

3.3.3. Theophanies in Old Testament

The present chapter examines the utilisation of the motifs of “seeing God” and “the appearance of God” in Old Testament narratives. The semantic field of Old Testament words for “behold” is analysed, with particular emphasis on the context of “beholding in relation to God”. Numerous contexts have been identified wherein the term “God” is frequently associated with the lexicon of “see”. The Old Testament narratives contain motifs of both seeing and appearing, which are present in diverse contexts.

The biblical text of Genesis chapters 12-25 records a multitude of interactions between Abraham and diverse individuals, including the divine entity. In the book of Genesis, chapter 12, 1-3, the first reported encounter between God and Abraham is described. During this encounter, God calls on Abraham to depart from his native land and promises to build up him as a prominent nation, as well as to bless all the family of the earth through him. Subsequent to that juncture, Abraham engages in numerous encounters with the divine, which encompass the reception of the covenant of circumcision (Genesis 17) and the assurance of progeny in the form of a son, Isaac (Genesis 18). Abraham engages in multiple dialogues with the divine concerning the destiny of Sodom and Gomorrah, as documented in Genesis 18-19. The divine encounters experienced by Abraham hold great significance in his life as well as in the formation of the Israelite nation. We will first consider the verse invoked “the country that I will show you,” in order to clarify the meaning of the promise in relation to the Land of Israel.

Abram is first called to embark on his way through the word, with the sight on the earth promised as a goal. Abram's first experience is of the order of listening, the vision being assured to him as a consequence or as a reward for his obedience to the difficult and important act that is required from him. This order is imperative because Abram's experience is the prophetic experience: word and vision are the progressive manifestations of a revelation of the absolute. Abraham is in fact the first biblical character to be called navi, called by God to accomplish a mission.

He will reach a high degree of intimacy with God after a series of successive revelations, identified by a permanent but limited dialogue, which leads to an absolute intuition, a vision, of which it is obviously important to clarify the nature to appreciate its full scope and full meaning. In fact, Abraham's completely spiritual journey seems to be placed under the sign of vision: God appears to him seven times, each presenting itself as an ascending step on the path of his prophetic fulfilment.

The first and the last are introduced in the same way "Go" with the order of a start-up transmitted by speech, without indicating the destination. This is not revealed – it is only seen – when Abraham reaches it. He does not know the land into which he must go until he arrives there, nor does he know the mountain to which he should go with his son until he approaches it. "On the third day, Abraham raised his eyes and saw the place from a distance. Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go over there; and we will worship and return to you." To the question of his son, he replied: "I will see for him the Lamb of the holocaust." And when the son is spared, "he lifts up his eyes and sees a lamb."

Finally, the epilogue gives us the conclusion of this whole prophetic adventure: "And Abraham called the name of this place, saying, 'God sees, that it is said today, "On the mountain of God is seen." God sees man and man sees God. In the intimate of the prophetic encounter. In this context, the act of looking is perceived as a form of compensation for complying with verbal commands.

The book of Genesis relates also that Yahve appeared to Abram to Shechem. "Then the Lord *appeared* to Abram and said: To your offspring I will give this land. So he built there an altar to the Lord, who had *appeared* to him" (Gn 12, 7). The verb is a passive form of the common verb "to see". In this part of the chapter, we have both audio and visual components. According to Hermann Gunkel, there is no record of a vision or sight here, it is simply a command to Abram to leave everything and follow him, but to quote Geerhardus Vos: "Here is something more than a speech".¹⁷³

¹⁷³ Cf. Geerhardus VOS, *Biblical Theology*, 69, apud. Nevada Levi DeLAPP, *Theophanic "Type-Scenes" in the Pentateuch. Visions of Yahwh*, Bloomsbury T&T Clark, London- New York, 2018, p. 17.

This speech has associations with theophanies, which are often the occasion for the most significant speeches of God. This first speech to Abram may or may not have been accompanied by visible phenomena of theophany. After this manifestation, God promises to confer to Abram the possession of Canaan. The two promises, progeny and land, which are usually linked within one theophanic meeting, are here severed as a means of highlighting Abraham's faith. Of course, the story does not relate what Abram actually saw on this occasion, but it is insistent that he saw something. The relationship between appearing and promise is thus introduced, a relationship which remains important throughout not only the patriarchal traditions, but later traditions too, for example Exod 3; and Deut 31,14. The appearance suggests a God who becomes directly involved in the lives of the patriarchal family, who appears and, in the face of threats to fulfilment of the divine promise, reaffirms the promise.

In some cases, these events involve specific visible manifestations of God's presence. The visible manifestations underline the solemnity of the occasion, the reality of God's presence, the character of his faithfulness, and the permanence of his commitment. So the significance of theophany extends beyond the specific occasions and covers the whole life of Abraham after his initial call.

In **Genesis 17 and 18**, two separate occasions for God's appearance concentrate on the promise of the birth of Isaac. The birth of Isaac is a significant stage in the working out of God's promise, so the appearances of God on those occasions underline the importance of his birth.

The first appearance is described in Genesis 17, 1: *"When Abraham was ninety-nine years old the Lord appeared to Abraham and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless."*

The second involves the appearance of three men: *"And the Lord appeared to him by the oaks of Mambre, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day. He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing in front of him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth" (Gn. 18, 1–2).*

The famous Mambre episode centres on the Israelites' perception of the presence of God in their realm.

The doctoral thesis of Esther J. Hamori regarding theophanies in the book of Genesis presents an interesting and legitimate viewpoint on the diverse manners in which God appears as showing Himself to people in the Hebrew Bible. Theophanies are identified by their extraordinary quality and the profound effect they have on those who encounter them, despite the fact that there are numerous examples of God manifesting to humans in various guises and circumstances.

Hamori highlights that a remarkable aspect of the theophany in Genesis 18 is the manifestation of Yahweh in human form, which deviates from the conventional dream or vision, and occurs in broad daylight and during a period of repose. The statement denotes a noteworthy deviation from theophanic occurrences in the Hebrew Bible, wherein the manifestation of God is frequently depicted in more conceptual or figurative guises.

Additionally, the recurring theme of differentiation between divinity and humanity, as emphasised by Hamori, is evident in various instances within the Hebrew Bible. The dynamic between God and humanity is often characterised by discord and strife, as individuals endeavour to comprehend and react to the divine plan. Theophanies are frequently portrayed as instances of profound disclosure and metamorphosis, wherein individuals are faced with the veracity of the presence and potency of the divine.

Hamori's thesis provides a perceptive viewpoint on theophanies within the book of Genesis and their broader implications within the Hebrew Bible. The author's emphasis on the extraordinary quality of these occurrences and the conflict between divinity and mankind constitutes a significant addition to our comprehension of the scriptural resources.¹⁷⁴

The biblical portraits of God, even if anthropomorphic, do not reduce the distance between the two realms; however, two Genesis texts in which God manifests himself to a patriarch speak of the manifestation of

¹⁷⁴ Cf. Esther J. HAMORI, *When Gods Were Men: The Embodied God in Biblical and Near Eastern Literature*, BZAW 384; Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008, p. 5.

a *man* (heb. *îṣ*), with concrete and not metaphorical human characteristics. We are referring to the triad at Mambre's oak (Genesis 18:19), where the plural *îṣ*, *anasim*, and to the enigmatic entity who battled with Jacob (Genesis 32:23–33). According to Hamori,

these are *human theophanies* or *genuine anthropomorphisms*, and in these episodes, God does not manifest in an anthropomorphic vision, but rather in a corporeal human body.¹⁷⁵

As proven by the descriptions of the two episodes, Abraham and Jacob progressively recognise the divine nature of their interlocutors, their initial response being to prostrate or raise an altar in honour of the recognised divinity.

Claudio Monge's explanation of the theophany details in Genesis 18 and 32 is insightful and accurate. The authenticity and sense of direct human relationship between the patriarchs and Yahweh who visits them distinguish these theophanies.

In Genesis 18, the visitors embrace the entire hospitality ritual, including foot-washing, the provision of food and drink, and a place to rest. This attention to detail underscores the significance of hospitality in the ancient Near Eastern culture and Abraham's faith and obedience to God.

In Genesis 32, the confrontation between Jacob and his adversary is not merely figurative; it results in a real wound, suggesting a physical, tangible encounter between Jacob and God. This encounter highlights Jacob's conflict with his own identity and the significance of perseverance in pursuing God's favours for them.¹⁷⁶ Thus, there were no distinguishing physical characteristics between Yahve and an ordinary person, but the mysterious words of the interlocutors brought the two to believe that they were in the presence of a transcendent Being.

As observed in Genesis 18, Abraham is initially the active protagonist, greeting his guests and nourishing them with great care, but he

¹⁷⁵ Ibidem p. 6.

¹⁷⁶ Claudio Monge, *Dieu Hôte. Recherche historique et théologique sur les rituels de l'hospitalité*, Zeta Books, 2008, p. 438.

subsequently demonstrates passivity by not responding to the actual announcement. The only mention of Abraham's perceptions in the text occurs in verse 2, where he raises his eyes and sees them standing in front of him.

Contrary to this view, J.L. Ska observes that from a grammatical perspective, the Hebrew text contains two expressions that are significant: the use of the verb form "wayyiqtol" to describe the appearance of Yahweh and the participle "nissabim" illustrating Abraham seated are interesting. The Hebrew verb form "wayyiqtol" is a narrative tense that illustrates an action that occurs over time. In the Hebrew Bible, this tense is frequently employed to describe the actions of human characters. In contrast, the use of this verb form to characterise Yahweh's apparition in Genesis 18 suggests that God's presence was active and intentional. Also significant is the use of the participle "nissabim" to describe Abraham's seated position. This participle emphasises Abraham's unwavering faith and trust in Yahweh by connoting steadiness and stability. This grammatical construction reinforces the notion that Yahweh is the active participant in the encounter, whereas Abraham is passive but steadfast in his faith. Overall, the linguistic and narrative elements of Genesis 18 indicate that the encounter between Yahweh and Abraham is a deliberate and intentional interaction in which Yahweh actively reveals Himself to Abraham.¹⁷⁷

The use of the verb form "wayyiqtol" reinforces the concept of "going towards"; that is, the concept of a direction to travel, of a transformation, from-towards. In a series of circumstances that intertwine, Abraham sets out to greet his visitors: "He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing in front of him". "he saw them... he ran..., and bowed to the ground" (v. 2).

In this episode, the nature of Yahweh's actions is discernible. He did not see these individuals approaching as he stood at the entrance of his tent. This substantiates the unexpected nature of their presence. Abraham

¹⁷⁷ Jean-Louis SKA, *Abraham et ses hôtes: Le patriarche et les croyants au Dieu unique*, Bruxelles, Lessius, 2001, p. 124.

may not have had the vision required to survey the horizon. The closeness of these individuals to his visual field indicates that he was astonished to see them. It is challenging to determine the route the pilgrims would have taken to reach the oak of Mambre given the lack of information regarding their point of origin in the text. There was no announcement prior to Yahweh's appearance. Aside from these textual elements, the enigmatic visitors do not disclose their identities to Abraham, as was the case in Gn 17:11, where the appearance does not signify any particular expectation because Yahweh's return is not a mystery. The astonishment of the visitors' appearance and the fact that they were standing next to Abraham are the prologue to Yahweh's call. As with any offer, only two options are available: open or close. Abraham chooses the entrance. This decision will be crucial for the continuation of the next spiritual voyage. Therefore, Abraham's "vision" from God is transformative and progressive in essence.

As Monge observe,

"Genesis 18:10 is significant because it demonstrates the omniscience of the enigmatic visitors, who are shown to have knowledge beyond what is immediately apparent. The fact that the visitors were able to hear Sarah chuckling from outside the tent despite having their backs to her suggests a preternatural ability to perceive beyond the physical domain. This moment emphasises the divine nature of the visitors and their omniscience, a central attribute of God in many Judeo-Christian traditions. The concept of a God who sees and knows everything, including the deepest human impulses and desires, is central to the Abrahamic religions. The verse also emphasises faith and trust in the face of the apparently insurmountable. Sarah's amusement at the prospect of giving birth at such an advanced age demonstrates her scepticism and lack of faith in the divine promise. However, the ability of the guests to hear her mirth and call her out on it reinforces the notion that God's promises are reliable and will be fulfilled, even if they appear improbable and impossible."¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁸ Cf. Claudio MONGE, *op. cit*, p. 414.

According to V.S. Poytress, the overall tone is solemn due to the gloomy nature of the prediction of affliction for Abraham's descendants, and the visible representation of God in fire emphasises his divine sanctity and power. In contrast, God's manifestations that predict Isaac's birth are more positive, even including laughter (18:12–15; cf. 21:6). God appears in human guise, emphasising his close relationship with Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac's human progeny. Appropriate to the situation, the manner in which of God's manifestation emphasises God's closeness with his people.¹⁷⁹

In numerous instances in the book of Genesis, theophanies appear to be divine responses to human dread, doubt, and apprehension, according to Delapp. In Genesis 18, for instance, Yahweh appears to Abraham and Sarah in response to their doubt and disbelief that they could have a child despite their advanced age. Similarly, in Genesis 32, Jacob wrestles with God out of dread and anxiety about confronting his estranged brother Esau.¹⁸⁰ Also consistent with other Judeo-Christian traditions is the notion that doubt or terror can serve as a catalyst for theophany. In the New Testament, for instance, Jesus appears to his disciples following his resurrection in response to their fear and disbelief, a topic that will be discussed in the chapter on the resurrected Jesus' appearances. God appears when people begin to doubt the efficacy of his promises.

3.3.4. The Sinai Theophany narratives

The Sinai theophany narratives play an important role in the Pentateuch, particularly in Exodus and Deuteronomy. Mount Sinai plays an essential role in the establishment of the covenant between God and the Israelites in the book of Exodus. Yahweh appears to the Israelites in Exodus 19–24 as a cloud and tempest, accompanied by lightning and fire. The people are unable to approach the mountain, and Yahweh calls Moses to receive his commands and instructions.

¹⁷⁹ Cf. Vern S. POYTHRESS, *Theophany. A biblical theology of God's appearing*, Crossway, Wheaton, Illinois, 2018, p. 308.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. N. L. DELAPP, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

After the incident with the golden calf, the promise is renewed in Exodus 33-34. In this account, Yahweh appears to Moses again in a cloud and reveals his attributes. Moses requests to see the majesty of Yahweh, and Yahweh agrees to pass by him and reveal his back. This passage highlights the visual perception of divinity and the difficulty of directly seeing God.

In both cases, the theophany serves as a demonstration of Yahweh's power and authority and highlights the significance of the covenant between God and his people. The visual elements of the theophanies also serve to emphasise God's majesty, otherness, and the difficulty of directly approaching or understanding him.

Considering Exodus 19-20 and 33-34, which may be referred to as the highest point of the Sinai chapters, as this is where Moses receives the Torah, the heart of which consists of the ten Decalogue commandments inscribed twice by God.

Israel reaches Mount Sinai, the site of God's revelation. They observe cloud, fire, smoke, and lightning as natural phenomena. These are the indications that God has descended from his abode. First of all, Exodus 19:9 contains a remarkable expression: *"I shall come to you in a dense cloud so that the people will hear when I speak to you and believe you ever after."* God appears, but simultaneously conceals himself. The purpose of this incongruous appearance-so-as-to-not-be-seen is then explained. God appears so that Israel can hear him speak without being able to see him. Israel should listen to God's Torah and recognise his majesty in the phenomena of nature, but despite his appearance, God stays hidden by the same phenomena that reveal him.

Second, in verses 16–19, God's appearance is again described as being accompanied by amazing natural events; he is again concealed from view, but speaks "loudly" In verse 21, the peril of "breaking through" to God in order to see is reiterated in a second prohibition. In Exodus 19, 20–23, only Moses ascends the mountain where Yahweh has descended. Again, the restrictions on the people's experience of God's presence are emphasised when Yahweh tells Moses, *"Go down and warn the people not to break through to look at Yahweh, or many of them will perish"* (19, 21). Moses

responds, "The people cannot come up Mount Sinai, since you yourself warned us to mark out the limits of the mountain and declare it sacred" (19, 23). Yahweh responds, "Away with you! Go down! Then come back bringing Aaron with you. But do not allow the priests and people to break through to come up to Yahweh, or he may burst out against them." (19, 24). The repetition of the prohibition clarifies and emphasises the prohibition against breaching the boundary between God and man, and specifically the prohibition against seeing Yahweh.

Cassuto observes that direct knowledge of God's presence is limited, and that the biblical narratives emphasise these limitations. Yahweh informs Moses in Exodus 33:20, "You cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live." This implies that having direct knowledge of God's presence would be too overwhelming for humans to endure.

"The repetition of the prohibition clarifies and reinforces the prohibition against breaching the boundary between God and man, specifically the prohibition against seeing Yahweh."¹⁸¹

Similarly, in Israelite cultic practises, there are strict regulations and preparations that must be observed in order to approach God. To access the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle or Temple, the Levites, for example, must adhere to specific rituals and don specific garments. This emphasises God's sanctity and otherness, as well as the necessity of approaching him with reverence and respect. As a means of illustrating the potential danger of seeing God's presence, biblical narratives also emphasise restrictions against approaching God and handling sacred objects. In 2 Samuel 6, for instance, Uzzah is struck dead for touching the sacred ark of the covenant.

The divine fear that they will break through to see Yahwe proves to be unfounded. The people cannot even stand at the base of the mountain, behold God's majesty, and hear his voice.

In Exodus 20, the Decalogue is framed on one side by the statement that God "spoke all these words and said" and on the other by a repetition of his presence accompanied by terrifying natural events (verse 18). The

¹⁸¹ Umberto CASSUTO, *Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 1967, p. 233.

motif of listening is repeated in verse 19 with the command for Moses to interpret God's words to them so that they can hear, but are not required to listen to God directly during the theophany. This is emphasised in verse 21, which indicates God's invisibility due to "*the thick cloud in which God was.*" The extraordinary formulation in verse 22 emphasises once more the relationship between seeing/not seeing and hearing: "*You have seen for yourselves how I have spoken to you from heaven*".

What concerns us here is God's actual apparition on top of the mountain so that he could be seen by the people (v. 21), but there is no mention of the form under which he appeared, including his body, actions, and gestures. Thus, we can ask ourselves and other exegetes the following question: Did Moses actually see God? Obviously, the answer is no, despite the fact that the text mentions God's presence, which can take many forms. Saint Gregory of Nyssa, in *On the Life of Moses*, appears to best reflect Moses' request and intention:

"For truly to see God is a privilege reserved to those who have reached the height of purification, and who, in consequence of their purity, are capable of seeing things which are withdrawn from men of lesser degree."¹⁸²

In other words, seeing God is a spiritual experience that necessitates a high level of moral and ethical holiness. In the Exodus account, Moses is therefore not described as seeing God, but rather as being in God's presence and receiving his commands.

Exodus 33–34 illustrates the limitations of human perception and God's transcendence. Here, these motifs are again present: the concealing cloud plus God's speaking to Moses (Ex 33,9). As is usual with theophany, the visual phenomena reinforce the significance of God's speech. The tension in God's speaking to Moses "face to face" (hear and see), is heightened by Moses' mediating the word to Israel (Ex 33,11). Moses speaks face to face with God, but then still wishes to see God's beauty (Ex 33,18). The wish is only partially granted, for God sets him in

¹⁸² https://www.academia.edu/44111900/Sf%C3%A2ntul_Grigorie_episcopul_Nyssei_despre_via%C5%A3a_lui_Moise_sau_despre_des%C4%83v%C3%A2r%C5%9Firea_prin_virtute

a crevice and only allows him to see his majestic beauty from behind (v. 19), but denies him seeing God's face because no human can see his face and live (vv. 20–23).

This theophany is not only partial as far as Moses and the Israelites see and do not see, but is also twice accompanied by God's voice as part of his appearance. So what exactly did Moses see? Did he see a man-like appearance? Or is the language about “my back” a metaphor to indicate the less than-full nature of the revelation? In 33, 21-23 God describes how Moses' request will be met. Moses will be prevented by God's hand from seeing God's face as the “glory” passes by. Yet God will remove his hand after he has passed by so that, “you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen” (33,23). By asking to see God's glory, Moses is indeed asking for a theophany. Here, God's glory can also be seen as God's face and goodness. From this passage we can see that, even though Moses does not see God's face, he does have partial vision of God, namely, the back of God. This passage highlights the idea that while God is ultimately unknowable and incomprehensible to human beings, He does reveal Himself in various ways throughout Scripture. God's glory can be seen as His face and goodness, which are both attributes that God reveals to His people. It's also worth noting that Moses' request to see God's glory reflects his deep desire to know and experience God more fully.

After this event, God asks Moses to ascend to Mount Sinai to present himself to him, then God descends in the cloud and stood with Moses there, and gives the law to Moses. After that, Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the covenant: “He did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, behold the skin of his face was shining, and they were afraid to come near him.” (Ex 34, 29-30).

This episode's text is of great interest because it is a remarkable illustration of the diminution of anthropomorphic expressions. J.L. Ska employs a variety of expressions to describe God's apparition, including “the Lord passed before him”, “there was a great and strong wind” “an earthquake” and “a fire”. The language used implies that this was an intense and overpowering experience for Moses, while also emphasising

the mystery and transcendence of God. The text is aware not to attribute human characteristics or form to God, instead presenting him as a manifestation of divine power or a force of nature. The God who appears to Moses is a passing God, a moving God, not a static one¹⁸³, and the sight of him denotes a fascinating experience.

“God uses the verb to pass (I will cause all my splendour to pass before you and I will call the name of the Lord before you - Ex 33,19) to describe the way it will be shown to Moses. God does not say I will stand before you nor does He say I will make all my splendour dwell before you. The dynamic element is central to Moses' view of God. The text excludes any possibility of a purely static vision.”¹⁸⁴

This implies that Moses experiences a privileged level of intimacy with the divine and possesses the ability to communicate with the deity. The intensity of this individual's encounter with God is such that the glory of God persists with them, resulting in a radiant countenance. The experience not only brought about a personal transformation in Moses, but it also generated an influence on the people of Israel.

As Polak observe,

“The reflection of the divine splendour has now become immanent in the human world as a visible indication of the mediator's position between the human and the divine, and as a reminder of the theophany”¹⁸⁵

The divine prohibition of Moses from seeing the face of God is a well-known aspect of the biblical narrative. However, it is remarkable that despite this restriction, God's glory continues to be present with Moses, resulting in the manifestation of divine radiance upon his countenance.

¹⁸³ A reference to Aristotle's theory that God is the fundamental cause of all motion, the first immovable mover. The concept of the Unmoved Mover has been influential in Western philosophy and theology, particularly in the development of the idea of God as the creator and sustainer of the universe. It has also been interpreted in various ways by different philosophers and theologians over time.

¹⁸⁴ Cf. Jean Louis SKA, *Etranges Visage de Dieu*, Bayard Editions, 2016, Paris, p. 110.

¹⁸⁵ Frank POLAK, *Theophany and Mediator: The Unfolding of a Theme in the Book of Exodus* in: M. Vervenne (ed.), *The Book of Exodus*, BETL 126; Leuven: Leuven University Press and Peeters, 1996, p. 147.

Despite the customary belief that the perception of God is impossible to achieve, the words demonstrate that the disclosure of the divine occurs through sensory channels. The narratives of theophanies in Exodus place a significant emphasis on sensory experiences, with the aim of fostering an appreciation for God's laws and the Israelites' submission to Moses as God's mediator. Exodus 33:19 and 34:6-7 contain a divine self-disclosure in which God articulates his name and a concise statement of his attributes, including compassion, loving kindness, and justice. This verbal revelation provides a comprehensive understanding of the identity and character of God.

As much as the knowledge of God can be attained through sense perceptible signs, not all who have perceived these signs can grasp the knowledge of God. Nevertheless, the narrative of the Exodus signs suggests that the knowledge of God can be mediated through sense perception and makes this central to Israel's awareness of their own special relationship with God in whom they trust.

In conclusion, sense perception plays a crucial role in bringing us to knowledge of God in Exodus 33-34. Through what we see and hear, we are able to experience God's presence and power, and this experience is reinforced by the verbal descriptions of His character. Together, these modes of revelation lead us to a deeper understanding and appreciation of God.

3.3.5. Vision reports in Isaiah the prophet:

"I lifted my eyes and saw"

The book of Isaiah is particularly significant for this study because it is considered by most Johannine scholars to be the background of many Johannine themes. One of the most prominent themes in both Isaiah and John is the use of sensory imagery to convey spiritual truths. Both books use metaphors related to light and darkness, sight and blindness, hearing and deafness, and touch to communicate deeper meanings. For example, in Isaiah 6,9-10, the prophet is told that the people of Israel are "blind" and "deaf" to God's message, while in John 9, Jesus heals a man who was born blind and uses the experience to teach about spiritual blindness and

sight. Several expressions, themes and motifs point to the profound influence of Isaiah especially Deutero-Isaiah, on John's narratives and discourses. As C. H. Williams observe

“Many of the Johannine motifs, such as the image of sight, the light, and the glory, can be traced back to Isaianic material. However, it is also true that these motifs bear traces of additional scriptural sources.”¹⁸⁶

An important theme that appears in both Isaiah and John is the theme of the servant (Is 53) and the play on physical and metaphorical senses. Not only that, sense perception and human actions are greatly emphasised.

God expressed his presence in the books of the prophet Isaiah. Seeing or not seeing are often mentioned in the book of Isaiah (1, 5-6; 5,12; 6, 1,7; 11,3; 21,5; 26,11; 28,4; 29,23; 30, 10; 32,3; 33,15; 35,2; 44,16; 49,16; 52,11; 53,1-6; 66, 7-11) so there are in the book data for a serious analysis of the dynamics of communal and personal perception and interaction in the events of everyday communal living.¹⁸⁷

The book of Isaiah also utilizes images and notions of transformations, of the dynamic of transformation and use the sense perception associated with the knowledge of God: “seeing but not knowing” and “hearing but not perceiving”. The knowledge of God is introduced as a problem in Isaiah 1,3: Israel does not know God. The lack of knowledge of God then elicits harsh divine judgement, but also a promise that one

¹⁸⁶ See Catrin H. WILLIAMS, *Isaiah in John's Gospel*, in *The Book of Isaiah-Le Livre d'Isaie. Les oracles et leurs relectures-Unite et complexite de l'ouvrage* par Jacques Vermeylen, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologarum Lovaniensium LXXXI, Leuven University Press, 1989: “The image of sight in John's gospel draws not only from Isaiah, but also from other biblical texts, such as Psalm 119,18, which states, “Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.” This suggests that the author of John's gospel was familiar with a range of biblical texts and drew from them to create a more nuanced understanding of sight. Similarly, the image of the light in John's gospel draws from a variety of scriptural sources, including Genesis 1, where God creates light, and Isaiah 60, where the prophet speaks of a light that will shine on Jerusalem. John's use of this image is unique, however, as he portrays Jesus as the light that shines in the darkness, rather than simply describing a physical light.”

¹⁸⁷ In Is 11,3 we find the use of seeing, hearing and smelling. For the discussion of the verb of smell in Isaiah 11, 3, see I.D. Ritchie, *The Nose Knows: Bodily knowing in Isaiah 11,3*, in *JSOT* 2000 (Journal for the Study of the Old Testament): 59-73.

day the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. Is 11,9. The prophet urges the people to turn away from their wicked ways and return to the Lord, who is depicted as a gracious and merciful God who longs to forgive and restore his people. He encourages the people to seek the knowledge of God and to live according to his ways.

The sense perception plays a significant role in the discussion of the knowledge of God. Throughout Isaiah, in particular in First Isaiah, the verbs "see" and "hear" are frequently used together with "know and understand". For example, in Isaiah 6, 9-10, the prophet hears the voice of the Lord saying, "*Go and tell this people: Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving.*" *Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.*" In other passages, such as Isaiah 42,18-20 and Isaiah 43,8-10, the Lord challenges the people to see and hear his message, to understand his ways, and to recognize his power and authority.

The book of Isaiah presents a complex and nuanced view of the relationship between sense perception and knowledge of God, that highlight the significance of both natural revelation and divine intervention for our comprehension of the divine.

One of them is *the motif of blindness and deafness*, often as a metaphor for spiritual blindness and deafness, who appears in Isaiah 6, 9-10. The prophet is told by God to "*go and tell this people: Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.*" *Make the heart of this people dull and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.*"

This passage suggests that the people of Israel are spiritually blind and deaf, unable to perceive God's message. The sin of Israel is the cause of their blindness and deafness. The prophet sees God sitting on the throne and does not harden his hearth, but recognises that he is a sinner living among the people of unclean lips. After he sees God, he hears the words of God. Again rather than being insensitive, he responds immediately to God's calling.

According to C.A. Evans, "The prophet is an example of one who sees and hears and understands."¹⁸⁸

The statement is referring to the role of the prophet in the Hebrew Bible, who is seen as someone who is able to perceive and understand divine revelation in a way that others cannot.

In the Hebrew Bible, the prophet is viewed as someone who can perceive and comprehend divine revelation in a manner that others cannot. It was believed that prophets had a special relationship with God and could receive messages and visions from God via direct revelation. This frequently involved seeing and hearing things that were inaccessible to others and interpreting these experiences to convey God's message to the people.

Evans's statement underlines that the prophet is not merely a passive recipient of divine revelation, but also an active participant in its comprehension and interpretation. This requires not only an intellectual grasp of the message, but also a spiritual and emotional connection to it, as well as a willingness to share it with others.

There has been a long-standing debate among scholars and theologians about whether the blindness and deafness described in Isaiah is a result of divine hardening or human rebellion. Some interpret the passages as evidence of God's active hardening of hearts and minds, as in the case of Pharaoh in the book of Exodus. They argue that God intentionally blinds and deafens people to his message as a form of judgment for their rebellion and sin, others interpret the passages as evidence of human rebellion and resistance to God's message. However, regardless of the cause, the passages highlight the need for humility and openness to God's message, as well as the consequences of rejecting it.¹⁸⁹

As Evans observe,

"If we compare Isaiah 6,1-6 and Isaiah 6,9-10, we see the emphasis on the verbs of seeing and hearing. In contrast to the Israelites who do not know God and thus are given no theophany, Isaiah is granted

¹⁸⁸ C. A. Evans, *To See and Not Perceive: Isaiah 6.9-10 in Early Jewish and Christian Interpretation*, Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 80.

a vision of God. He sees God sitting on a throne and has a vision of the heavenly court (Is 6, 1-4). His vision of God gives a very powerful sensory insight into the sovereignty of God, the execution of his judgement and the initiation of his deliverance. In the narrative, Isaiah physically sees God and hears God's words. Since Isaiah 6,9-10 follows immediately after Isaiah's vision of God, it is legitimate to see Isaiah as an example of the one who sees, hears and understands. Thus the seeing and hearing in Isaiah 6,9 may be understood as physical seeing and hearing. Yet the seeing and hearing in verse 10 must be metaphorical, for Isaiah cannot physically blind the eyes and dull the ears of the people. We should note that Isaiah never makes it explicit whether he is referring to physical or spiritual blindness and deafness."¹⁹⁰

It is clear that Isaiah 6,10 is paraphrased in John 12,40. The first two lines of the quotation in John 12,40 "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearth" raise questions about the identity of the responsible for the blindness that leads to unbelief. According to the Hebrew text, the prophet Isaiah is the one instructed by God during his vision in the temple to "*make the hearth of this people fat and to shut their eyes.*" God brings about this obduracy through the agency of this prophet. And it is this initiative on God's part that is made explicit in the first two lines of the quotation in John 12,40, pointing to the Hebrew text of Is 6,10 as their source.

In John's commentary on Isaiah's words "Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke about him" (In 12,41), he explains that Isaiah saw the glory of Jesus and spoke of him. This statement is significant because it suggests that John believes that Isaiah's prophecy is ultimately about Jesus, and that Isaiah's vision of the Lord's glory was a foreshadowing of Jesus' own glory. By connecting Isaiah's prophecy to Jesus in this way, John is emphasizing the continuity between the Old and New Testaments and the way in which Jesus is the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy. He is also suggesting that the rejection of Jesus by the Jews is a continuation of their rejection of the Lord in Isaiah's time.

¹⁹⁰ Ibidem, p. 81.

The wording of 12,41, having seen *his glory*, refers to the glory of God, which Isaiah saw in his vision (Isaiah 6,1-3). In John's Gospel, Jesus is portrayed as the embodiment of God's glory, and so when Isaiah saw God's glory, he was seeing a prophetic vision of Jesus. This is why John is able to interpret Isaiah's prophecy with reference to Jesus - because Isaiah was prophesying about Jesus all along.

The conciseness of John's comment (because he saw his glory) has led to much comments among scholars about which aspect of Jesus' glory John believed the prophet to have seen. Some scholars like C.H. Williams have suggested that John may have been referring to the glory of Jesus' resurrection, while others have proposed that he was referring to Jesus' divine nature or the glory he displayed at his transfiguration.¹⁹¹

Another possibility is that John was referring to the glory of Jesus' ministry, which included healings, miracles, and signs that demonstrated his divine power and authority. In John's gospel, Jesus is portrayed as a powerful and authoritative figure who performs miraculous signs and teaches with wisdom and authority. This aspect of Jesus' glory is highlighted throughout the gospel, and it is possible that John saw Isaiah's vision as a prophetic glimpse of this aspect of Jesus' ministry. While Jesus divine glory remained hidden from those who could not see, Isaiah possessed the kind of sight, not only physical but spiritual, that enabled him to recognize Jesus true identity.

As Williams observe, it is possible that John was simply using Isaiah's vision as a way of demonstrating the continuity between the Old and New Testaments and the way that Jesus is the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy

“In Isaiah 52,13-15 the description of the Lord's return as king to a restored Jerusalem is followed by the announcement of the suffering and future exaltation of the Servant and of the reaction of many nations, while John's account of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem leads to a narrative about the approach of certain Greeks and to Jesus' responding discourse (12, 20-36). The distinctive Johannine motif of seeing is given concrete expression in the request of the

¹⁹¹ Cf. Catrin H. WILLIAMS, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

Greeks to Philip "Sir, we wish to see Jesus" (12,21) and prepares for Jesus' statement that all will be drawn to him when he is lifted up from the earth (12,32). This possesses an interesting parallel in Is 52,15 LXX, which, more explicitly than the Hebrew text, links the message about the Servant to the response of many nations: their reaction to him will be one of wonder, because they, who have not been told about the Servant, shall see (opsontai), and they, who have previously not heard, shall understand."¹⁹²

There are other examples of blindness and deafness in Isaiah 29,9-14 and in Isaiah 42,18-25.

In Isaiah 29:9-14, the prophet rebukes the people of Jerusalem for their spiritual blindness, saying, "For the Lord has poured out upon you a spirit of deep sleep, and has closed your eyes (the prophets), and covered your heads (the seers)." The people are described as being like a book that is sealed, unreadable and uncomprehend. This passage suggests that the people have closed themselves off from God's message and are unable to understand it.

In Isaiah 42:18-25, the motif of blindness and deafness is used to describe the spiritual condition of the nations. God says, "Hear, you deaf; and look, you blind, that you may see! Who is blind but my servant, or deaf as my messenger whom I send? Who is blind as my dedicated one, or blind as the servant of the Lord?" This passage suggests that the nations are blind and deaf to God's message, unable to comprehend his plan and respond to his call.

Those passages focus on the fact that the Israelites suffer deafness and blindness and Yahve is the subject who causes this deafness and blindness. Overall, the motif of blindness and deafness in Isaiah serves as a metaphor for spiritual blindness and deafness, suggesting that the people of Israel and the nations are unable to perceive God's message and respond to his call. They have failed to see the deeds and works of God and have failed to hear the law and the commands of God. It underscores the importance of opening our hearts and minds to God's message and being receptive to his call, so that we may be healed and restored. This

¹⁹² Ibidem, p. 114.

sense perceptible deeds and works of God are the basis of the knowledge of God, yet not everyone can grasp that the knowledge because they fail to see the significance of God's mighty works, just as the prophet Isaiah says: "Keep listening but do not comprehend; keep looking, but do not understand".

The motif of light and darkness is a prominent theme in the book of Isaiah, and is often used as a metaphor for spiritual illumination and understanding. This is stated explicitly in Isaiah 9,1-2: The prophet declares, "*The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.*" This passage suggests that God's message brings light and understanding to those who were previously in darkness.

The light and darkness motif is also linked with the motif of blindness to express the hope of Israel's future restoration. This is written in Isaiah 42, 6-16: God says, "*I am the Lord; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.*". This passage emphasizes the transformative power of God's message, which can open the eyes of the blind and bring freedom to those in spiritual darkness.

Isaiah also uses darkness as a metaphor for judgment, saying, "*Behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples*" (Isaiah 60,2). This passage suggests that darkness can represent the consequences of sin and rebellion, as well as the judgment that follows. This motif of darkness as judgment emphasizes the seriousness of sin and the need for repentance.

The motif of Trial and Sense Perception

The prophet Isaiah often employs vivid sensory language to describe the experiences of God's people as they undergo trials and tribulations. One example of this motif can be found in Isaiah 43,1-10, where God speaks to his people, saying: "But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass

through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.”

In this passage, the sensory language of water and fire conveys the intensity of the experience and the danger that the people face.

Another example can be found in Isaiah 6,1-8, where the prophet describes his own encounter with God. Here, the sensory language of sight and sound conveys the overwhelming experience of encountering the divine, with the shaking of the thresholds and the filling of the house with smoke

“In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and said: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.' ... Then I said, 'Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!’”

As we can see from the examples above, Isaiah emphasises the role of sense perception in attaining the knowledge of God, but he is not straightforward on sense perception. According to C.A. Craig

“Sometimes he speaks about the physical disability of senses, but sometimes he refers to the spiritual blindness and deafness of the Israelites. He does not intend to make a distinction between the two for we need the sense organs to receive God's knowledge, but we also need a spiritual understanding.”¹⁹³

Without resuming the full analysis of the so-called “inaugural” vision of the book of Isaiah, it must be focused that despite the prophetic declaration of having seen the Lord, the divine nature is never described: “In the year of the death of King Uzziah, I saw the Lord seated on a raised and lofty throne, and his robe filled the temple” (Isaiah 6,1).

¹⁹³ Ibidem, p. 85.

The prophet Isaiah's experience of seeing God was unparalleled. He lived during a time of severe national crisis, with severe social, political, and religious unrest. His vision transpired in the exact year that the renowned and adored King Uzziah passed away. Moreover, if we read the commencement of the book of Isaiah, we realise that the entire book is a vision.: "*The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth for the Lord has spoken*" (Is. 1,1-2).

As we observed, the characterization of the book of Isaiah as a *vision* that Isaiah *saw* puts the book into relation to themes of theophany. This language is significant, because it places the whole book in the atmosphere of God showing himself and his plans to Isaiah in a visually oriented way. The term *vision* here is to be understood with reference to the whole book, to the writing. Isaiah perhaps sees the book, and give it voice. The invocation of heaven and earth connects us to creation as a manifestation of God's presence. The voice is less easy to locate than the vision; we can hear that which is behind us, but not identify its source.

For F. Landy,

"to hear means the resonance of the person, the event, the community. Through hearing, we listen to those elements of poetry-rhythms, alliteration, sonority- that are not reducible to meaning, but which contribute to its beauty".¹⁹⁴

According to Poytress,

"The desire to seek God implies his special presence in his house. This presence is a grand fulfilment of the lesser presence of God about which Solomon prayed in his prayer of dedication for the temple (1 Kings 8:22-53). As the cloud filled the temple of Solomon (1 Kings 8:10-11), so in the future the glory of God will fill his house. That presence of God results in the going out of "the law" and "the word of the Lord" (Isa. 2:3). The law and the word themselves manifest the presence of God. It is implied that he is especially present in his house."¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴ Cf. Francis LANDY, *Vision and voice in Isaiah*, in *Journal for the Study of the Old Testaments*, 88 (2000), David J.A. Clines and Philip R. Davies Editors, p. 23.

¹⁹⁵ Cf. Vern S. POYTHRESS, *op. cit.*, p. 308.

“The vision of Isaiah son of Amoz, concerning Judah and Jerusalem. It will happen in the final days that the mountain of Yahweh’s house will rise higher than the mountains and tower above the heights. Then all the nations will stream to it, many peoples will come to it and say, ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of Yahweh, to the house of the God of Jacob that he may teach us his ways so that we may walk in his paths.’ For the Law will issue from Zion and the word of Yahweh from Jerusalem.” (Is 2,1-3).

As R.P. Carrol observes,

“The book of Isaiah focuses on the language of body and on the dynamic of human action, perception, attentiveness and perception: seeing, hearing, speaking, observing, exchanging, feeling, reflecting, touching and general somatic experience.”¹⁹⁶

Isaiah's primary, stunning theophany occurs in chapter 6. In a vision, God comes to Isaiah and commissions him. It is a court theophany. It is suitable for underlining the solemnity and weight of the message that Isaiah is to bear and to communicate. Scholars have debated as to whether this episode of commissioning is the original commissioning of Isaiah, or whether it comes later in his life. The vision takes place “in the year that King Uzziah died.” But according to Isaiah 1,1, the span of Isaiah's ministry includes the reign of Uzziah as well as his successors, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. It is possible that Isaiah's commission, described in Isaiah 6:1, took place before the death of Uzziah, but still within the final year of his reign. But, in view of the placing of the vision at a somewhat later point in the literary structure of the book, it seems more natural to see the whole account in 6,1–13 as falling at a point subsequent to the initial ministry of Isaiah.

Isaiah *sees* God on a high and uplifted throne. The verb for seeing here, differs from that in 1,1. Carrol “Blindsight” suggests natural perception, as opposed to prophetic vision:

¹⁹⁶ Robert P. CARROLL, *Blindsight and the vision thing : blindness and insight in the book of Isaiah*, in *Writing and reading the scroll of Isaiah : studies of an interpretive tradition* / edited by Craig C. Broyles and Craig A. Evans. - Leiden ; New York ; Köln : E.J. Brill, 1997, vol.1, p. 80.

“Isaiah seeing and hearing lead on the command to speak to the people about hearing and seeing. But it is hearing without understanding and seeing without perception. The failure of the people to understand, hear or see is caused by the speaker by means of making the people's heart (mind) fat, their ears heavy and besmearing their eyes...”¹⁹⁷

Isaiah sees a glimpse of God's absolute holiness and he finds himself utterly devastated. He is ruined by a glimpse of the only perfect, holy, glorious, eternal God. He cries out, “Woe is me!” which is a funeral dirge over the dead. He recognizes that he is utterly, totally devastated. He makes this plain by crying out “I am ruined!” The Hebrew word Isaiah uses for ruined here is *dâmâh*. It's a verb that could mean “to be silent” or “to be cut off/destroyed.” However he is using the word, it's clear to the reader that Isaiah feels a profound sense of dread in the presence of a holy God. He is utterly ruined because he realizes that God is totally holy, perfect, and pure, and that he is by comparison unclean, impure in both vv.1 and 5. Isaiah describes seeing God, but from different perspectives. In v.1 this seeing is the first part of a vision which uplifts him, but in v.5 it is explained as the cause of the prophet's dread. The focus on Isaiah's eyes and mouth serves as a strategy of intensification rather more than one diffusion.

Isaiah was called upon to a community that habitually violated the covenant with Yahweh, despite warnings from prophets. Consequently, they were banished on account of Yahweh's integrity. Nonetheless, the exiled populace didn't have understanding of their penalty or their national history. The individual's viewpoint was considered incorrect due to the failure to listen to Yahweh's message, as described by Isaiah as a form of auditory impairment. The exile was not perceived by the populace as a justifiable action, but rather as an indication of Yahweh's apathy towards their circumstances. This is why the themes of the “deaf blind” well of light and darkness appears so often in Isaiah.

¹⁹⁷ Ibidem, p. 83.

Preliminary conclusions

The semantic field of Old Testament words for “behold” is analysed, with particular emphasis on the context of “beholding in relation to God”. Numerous contexts have been identified wherein the term “God” is frequently associated with the lexicon of “see”. We analysed Abraham “beholding in relation to God”, emphasizing the “seeing the invisible God”, “he lifts up his eyes and sees a lamb.” The use of the verb form “*wayyiqtol*” to describe the appearance of Yahweh and the participle “*nissabim*” illustrating Abraham seated are interesting. The Hebrew verb form “*wayyiqtol*” is a narrative tense that illustrates an action that occurs over time. Therefore, Abraham's “vision” from God is transformative and progressive in essence.

We analysis as well the theophanies on Mount Sinai, which plays an essential role in the establishment of the covenant between God and the Israelites in the book of Exodus. In other words, seeing God is a spiritual experience that necessitates a high level of moral and ethical holiness. In the Exodus account, Moses is therefore not described as seeing God, but rather as being in God's presence and receiving his commands. The narratives of theophanies in Exodus place a significant emphasis on sensory experiences, with the aim of fostering an appreciation for God's laws and the Israelites' submission to Moses as God's mediator, and sense perception plays a crucial role in bringing us to knowledge of God in Exodus 33-34.

The book of Isaiah is particularly significant for this study because it is considered by most Johannine scholars to be the background of many Johannine themes. One of the most prominent themes in both Isaiah and John is the use of sensory imagery to convey spiritual truths. The book of Isaiah also utilizes images and notions of transformations, of the dynamic of transformation and use the sense perception associated with the knowledge of God: “seeing but not knowing” and “hearing but not perceiving”.

Another them is the motif of blindness and deafness, often as a metaphor for spiritual blindness and deafness, who appears in Isaiah 6, 9-10. This passage suggests that the people of Israel are spiritually blind and deaf, unable to perceive God's message, because of their sins. In Isaiah 42:18-25, the motif of blindness and deafness is used to describe the spiritual condition of the nations, not to mention the long-standing debate among scholars and theologians about whether the blindness and deafness described in Isaiah is a result of divine hardening or human rebellion.

It is clear that Isaiah 6,10 is paraphrased in John 12,40. The first two lines of the quotation in John 11,24-26 "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearth" raise questions about the identity of the responsible for the blindness that leads to unbelief. Having seen his glory, (Isaiah 12,41) refers to the glory of God, which Isaiah saw in his vision (Isaiah 6,1-3) and John Gospel refers to Jesus, the embodiment of God's glory, leading to comments among scholars about which aspect of Jesus' glory John believed the prophet to have seen.

The prophet Isaiah often employs vivid sensory language to describe the experiences of God's people as they undergo trials and tribulations, as is in Isaiah 6,1-8 where the sensory language of sight and sound conveys the overwhelming experience of encountering the divine.

The motif of light and darkness is a prominent theme in the book of Isaiah, and is often used as a metaphor for spiritual illumination and understanding, resumed in the Gospel of John as a light-motive.

As we observed, the characterization of the book of Isaiah as a vision that Isaiah saw puts the book into relation to themes of theophany, God showing himself and his plans to Isaiah in a visually oriented way, Isaiah perhaps sees the book, and give it voice, a grand fulfilment of the lesser presence of God about which Solomon prayed in his prayer of dedication for the temple (1 Kings 8:22-53).

The Theophanies are identified by their extraordinary quality and the profound effect they have on those who encounter them, despite the fact that there are numerous examples of God manifesting to humans in various guises and circumstances. In Genesis 32, Jacob wrestles with God

out of dread and anxiety about confronting his estranged brother Esau. Consistent with other Judeo-Christian traditions is the notion that doubt or terror can serve as a catalyst for theophany. In the New Testament, for instance, Jesus appears to his disciples following his resurrection in response to their fear and disbelief.

Old Testaments themes are actually the basis for the New Testament. For instance, one is a prominent theme in both Isaiah and John the use of sensory imagery to convey spiritual truths, the theme of the servant (Is 53) and the play on physical and metaphorical senses, the theme of blindness and deafness, the theme of light and darkness, or the vivid sensory language. Through Jesus Christ the promise of seeing God is accomplished.

Visibility of God after incarnation in John's gospel

The anthropomorphic manifestations of YHWH described in the texts of the Old Testament culminate in the incarnation of the Logos, Jesus Christ, with the advent of Christ. God, who transcends all physicality, becomes accessible to humanity through the senses' corporeal receptivity. This corporeal experience of God does not exclude the spiritual sphere, but rather presupposes it. It is a complete integration because the experience of faith begins with the physical sensibility that awakens the spirit through Christ's faith: "Have you come to believe because you have seen me?" "Blessed are the unseeing who have believed" (John 20:29).

The Logos through his Incarnation assumes the humanity, manifesting and revealing the mystery of God without the confusing or mixing of his two natures: divine and human. This means that the humanity of Christ is an instrument or channel of communication of the divine mystery, namely, his flesh is not the divinity itself since the human nature is not absorbed by the divine nature. Thus the humanity assumed by the Logos becomes a mean of self-communication of God with the human race through the person of the Son. Jesus makes this statement explicit when he answers to Phillip's question: "Philip said to him, «Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.» Jesus said to him, «Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever

has seen me (*ho heōrakōs emē*) has seen (*heōraken*) the Father (*tón patéra*). How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?" (John 14:8-9).

4.1. The experience of “encounter” as a witness to the presence of Christ

“The inception of any event can be traced back to an initial encounter. A limited number of individuals have encountered Jesus and have chosen to remain in his company. As a result of this particular experience and the significance of Jesus' mortality and immortality, their existence assumed a new connotation.”¹⁹⁸ Those perceive a sense of rebirth and validation, leading to a transformation in their self-perception, interpersonal relationships, and spiritual beliefs, ultimately resulting in a decision to pursue a path of discipleship following Jesus. The paradigm was actualized as a result of the individuals' encounter with the divine being, rather than originating from their own volition. One prevalent methodology employed in various studies involves the examination of evangelical figures as exemplars of diverse faith traditions. According to R. Alan Culpepper, the author of the Gospel employs the characters in order to draw the attention of readers towards positive role models of faith, elicit compassion for insufficient reactions, and distance readers from characters who refuse to accept Jesus.¹⁹⁹

The initial stage of salvation, as depicted in the New Testament, is marked by a profound and unsettling encounter with the divine. The Gospel of John establishes the context for these interactions through a first-hand account of the disciples of John the Baptist receiving news of Jesus' arrival. Upon inquiring about his place of residence, he responds by saying: “‘Come, and you will see’. So they went and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day. It was about four in the afternoon.” (John 1,39)

¹⁹⁸ E. SCHILLEBEECKX, “*Jésus de Nazareth. Le récit d'un vivant*”, *Lumière et Vie* 134 (1997), p. 14.

¹⁹⁹ A. CULPEPPER, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia 1983) 99-148, apud. Craig R. KOESTER, “Hearing, seeing, and believing in the Gospel of John” (1989). *Faculty Publications*.22. http://digitalcommons.luthersem.edu/faculty_articles/22

Although there have been several exegetical works on the “sight” (the gaze) of Jesus in the Gospel of John, this remains an enigmatic theme. Indeed, on the one hand, Jesus states to the crowd: *“Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father”* (John 6,46) and, on the other hand, he tells to his disciples in John 14,9b: *“Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?”*. Is there coherence, continuity or contradiction among these statements? In particular, Jesus announces a reversal made by him between “sight” and “blindness” when he declares: *“I came into this world for judgment, so that those who do not see might see, and those who do see might become blind”* John 9,39. Here, it is not about physical “sight” any longer.

The narrator stresses the importance of the themes of “seeing” and “hearing” from the very beginning of the Gospel. He states in the Prologue: *“And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory”* (John 1,14a). John the Baptist talks about Jesus in John 3,31c – 32a: *“But the one who comes from heaven...He testifies to what he has seen and heard”*. Consequently, it can be inferred that Jesus possesses the dual capacity of being both a visual observer and an auditory observer. The significance of the signs, which were the focus of the “vision” described, is fully realised at the conclusion of the Gospel. (John 20,30-31)

The weakness and failure of the audience's perceptual faculties are evident from the outset of Jesus' mission, as indicated by the narrator in John 2:23-24: *“While he was in Jerusalem for the feast of Passover, many began to believe in his name when they saw the signs he was doing. But Jesus would not trust himself to them because he knew them all”*. In chap. 6, after the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes (Feeding the multitude, n.tr.), Jesus says to the crowd: *“But I told you that although you have seen [me], you do not believe”* John 6,36. At the end of Jesus' mission, it seems that the signs he performs are of little use, as the narrator reports that *“Although he had performed so many signs in their presence they did not believe in him”* John 12,37.

The Gospel narrative presents a striking element of surprise among the characters involved, as they encounter a notable lack of visual and auditory perception. Jesus levels an accusation against the Jews who are

intent on taking his life (cf. Jn 5:18) and also identifies their guilt in Jn 5:37-38: *“Moreover, the Father who sent me has testified on my behalf. But you have never heard his voice nor seen his form, and you do not have his word abiding in you, because you do not believe in the one whom he has sent.”* As for the Pharisees, they are incapable of “seeing” even though they claim to see! Jesus told them in 9:41: *“If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you are saying, ‘We see’, so your sin remains”*.

As demonstrated by the aforementioned examples, there exist multiple connotations associated with the topic of “vision” that we shall endeavour to examine in the subsequent analysis.

The investigation of the visual motif in language necessitates a distinct approach and specialised terminology. The examination of the lexicon will facilitate the interpretation of the semantics of the terms and their correlation with the entirety of the written work.

4.1.1. Definition of terms

It is essential to state at beginning that a search of a word in a specialised dictionary does not sufficient for determining the true meaning of a sentence according to the author's intent in selecting the words to be used in a particular passage. Therefore, the context and circumstances in which the term or expression was used are essential to comprehending its precise meaning. In light of this, the study of the biblical context in which each term appears help the reader in determining the nuances and intended significance of the message. Through this hermeneutic process, the reader discovers the author's intended meaning when he wrote the text for a particular community of faith.

Keeping this in mind, the reader must interpret John's Gospel not as a systematic tractate of the verbs of visual perception where a clear distinction between them is easily understood according to the dictionary, but because of the multifaceted nature of the Gospel, the natural desire to discover stimulates the exegesis that must be done by the reader in order to detect other semantic levels of John's narrative that, most of the time, escape to the superficial reading.

However, *to see* is not the only verb for visual perception in the English language. There is a spectrum of terms used to express various nuances and levels of seeing based on specific circumstances, such as observe, view, gaze at, examine, catch sight of something, set eyes on somebody, etc. The same phenomenon can be compared to the Greek *koiné*, in which a wide range of vocabulary is used to designate various semantic levels of visual perception.²⁰⁰

The Gospel of John employs a semantic field centred around the concept of “sight”, which is conveyed through the use of eight distinct Greek verbs. These verbs include *theaomai* (occurring 6 times), *theôreô* (occurring 24 times), *blepô* (occurring 17 times), as well as two verbs derived from the same root: *emblepô* (occurring 2 times) and *anablepô* (occurring 4 times). Additionally, the semantic field includes the verbs *horaô* (occurring 86 times), *deiknumi* (occurring 7 times), and *fanero* (occurring 9 times). The focus of our research will be on the four non-causative verbs present in the Gospel of John, their contextual usage, and their interrelationships.

4.1.2. The verb “*theaomai*”

The lexical item “*theaomai*,” which covers the semantic domains of seeing, looking at, contemplating, and admiring, is attested in six instances throughout the Johannine corpus, specifically in John 1:14, 32, 38; John 4:35; John 6:5; and John 11:45. The verb displays a theological significance in verses 1:14 and 1:32, a symbolic significance in verse 4:35, and a physical significance in verses 1:38 and 6:5. The narrator expounds on the theological significance in the Prologue of the Gospel of 1:14a. “*And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw (ethasametha) -contemplate his glory.*” The Gospel of John, in chapter 1:32, employs a verb to depict the visual experience of John the Baptist. The narrator proceeds to document the testimony of John the Baptist in

²⁰⁰ Cf. DANKER B. F. W., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature* (basé sur W. BAUER, *Griechisch-deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der frühchristlichen Literatur*, Berlin-New York, Walter de Gruyter, 19886), Chicago-Londres, The University of Chicago Press, 2003.

accordance with the vision: "John testified further, saying, 'I saw (*tetheamai*) the Spirit come down like a dove from the sky and abide upon him'." (Jesus uses the verb *theamai* in a symbolic sense when he tells the disciples in 4:35: "Do you not say, 'In four months the harvest will be here'? I tell you, look up and see the fields ripe for the harvest." The focus of this discussion pertains to the Samaritans residing in the urban centre of Sychar who approach Jesus, rather than a literal interpretation of the term "fields". This can be observed by referencing John 4:30. The expression of a symbolic harvest is conveyed through the faith (4:39-42a) and acknowledgement of Jesus as the saviour of the world (4:42b).

In brief, the verb *theamai* has the potential to be interpreted in either a physical or symbolic/theological sense, contingent upon the contextual factors at play. The various subtleties in meaning are utilised to effectively communicate the message of the Gospel.

4.1.3. The verb "*theôreô*"

The verb "*theôreô*" (to see, to contemplate) appears 24 times in the Gospel of John (2:23; 4:19; 6:2,19,40,62; 7:3; 8:51; 9:8; 10:12; 12:19,45a,45b; 14:17,19a,19b; 16:10,16,17,19; 17:24; 20:6,12,14. The meaning of this verb, in its context, can be classified into four categories:

a) The insufficient eyesight: 2:23-24: "While he was in Jerusalem for the Passover feast, many began to believe in his name, seeing (*theôrountes*) the signs that he did. But Jesus did not want to trust them, because he knew them all." This way of seeing (*theôreô*) the signs is imperfect and requires further study;

b) The perception: Jn 12:19: At the end of Jesus' mission, the narrator recounts a word of the Pharisees confirming Jesus' success: 'So the Pharisees said to one another, "You see (*theorete*) that you are gaining nothing. Look, the whole world has gone after him';

c) The physical sight: 6:2; 6:19; 7:3; 9:8; 10:12; 14:19a.19 b; 16,10.16.17.19; 20,6.12. 14; The verb *theôreô* describing physical sight is used either by the narrator when he narrates in 6:2: "A large crowd followed him, because they saw (*etheôroun*) the signs he was performing on the sick", or by Jesus' brothers in 7:3 when they told him: "So his brothers said to him,

'Leave here and go to Judea, so that your disciples also may see (theôrêsousin) the works you are doing''; or by Jesus in his word to the Pharisees in 10:12: "A hired man, who is not a shepherd and whose sheep are not his own, sees (theôrei) a wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away, and the wolf catches and scatters them." The second instance of the verb "theôreô" in 14:19 pertains to both corporeal and theological perception, as the disciples' vision is deeply associated with the existence of the resurrected Jesus. Jesus communicates this message to them: "In a little while the world will no longer see (theôrei) me, but you will see (theôreite) me, because I live and you will live."

d) The theological sight: 4:19; 6:40; 6:62; 8:51; 12:45a,45b; 14:17; 17:24. The term "theôreô" is utilised in the eight references to convey a theological perspective or spiritual perception. According to Dorothy Lee's perspective, the physical manifestation of God's presence with the people in exile is akin to the evangelist John's suggestion that Jesus embodies the physical presence of the same God coexisting with his disciples.

"In fact, to see Jesus in this Gospel is to see God, since sight of the Johannine Father is through, and only through, the palpable presence of the Son (12:45; 14:7-9; 17:24). The invisible God is thus made visible in the Johannine Jesus (1:18; 5:37; 6:46), making possible the visio Dei".²⁰¹

For example, after a brief exchange of words between Jesus and the Samaritan woman on the subject of her husband, she expresses her discovery of Jesus' identity and engages in a theological discussion with him. "Lord, I can see (theôrô) that you are a prophet.... Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain; but you people say that the place to worship is in Jerusalem". The verb *theôreô* has a theological meaning when Jesus reveals to the crowd in 6:40: "For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who sees (ho theôrôn) the Son and believes in him may have eternal life, and I shall raise him up [on] the last day." This view is an authentic and perfect one, which intrinsically involves faith. In 8:51, Jesus reveals to the Jews: "Amen, amen,

²⁰¹ Cf. Lee, *op.cit.*, p. 117.

I say to you (ou mè theôrésèi), whoever keeps my word will never see death”, and in 12:45, “whoever sees (theôron) me sees (theôrei) the one who sent me”. Here, the two occurrences of the verb theôreô take on a profound theological meaning. In 17:24, the verb theôreô has the meaning “to contemplate”. Jesus says to his Father: “Father, they are your gift to me. I want them to be with me where I am, so that they may see (contemplate) (theôrôsin) my glory which you have given me, because you loved me before the foundation of the world.”

Upon analysing all of these instances, it becomes evident that the employment of the verb *theôreô* highlights the multifaceted nature of its meaning within its respective context, and its consequential significance in comprehending and construing the Gospel of John.

4.1.4. The verb “*blepô*”

The Gospel of John features the verb “*blepô*” on 17 occasions, specifically in verses 1:29; 5:19; 9:7, 15, 19, 21, 25, 39a, 39b, 39c, 41; 11:9; 13:22; 20:1, 5; and 21:9, 20. Additionally, the verb “*emblepô*” is present twice in John 1:35-51 (1:36, 42), while the verb “*anablepô*” appears four times in chapter 9 (9:11, 15, 18a, 18b). The verb “*blepô*” is predominantly utilised to depict a visual perception²⁰² in 17 instances. 1:29; 9:7, 15, 19, 21, 25; 13:22; 20:1, 5; 21:9, 20. The theological significance of the four instances of *blepô* towards the conclusion of the account of the miraculous healing of the man born blind can be observed in verses 9:39a, 39b, 39c, and 41. The verb employed in 5:19 denotes a manifestation of divine actuality, whereas in 11:9 it assumes a figurative connotation.

In the following, we will present the use of the verb *blepô* in the Johannine Gospel in three points: *blepô* in chap. 9 in connection with the verb *anablepô*; *blepô* in 5:19 and 11:9; and the verb *emblepô* in 1:36, 42.

This research investigation attempts to examine the usage of the verb “*blepô*” in the Gospel of John, specifically in three instances: the connection between “*blepô*” and “*anablepô*” in chapter 9, the occurrences

²⁰² Cf. CARREZ M., MOREL F., *Dicționar grec-român al Noului Testament*, Societatea Biblică Interconfesională din România, București, 1999, p. 61.

of “blepô” in 5:19 and 11:9, and the usage of the verb “emblepô” in 1:36,42.” *Having said this, he spat on the ground, made a paste with the spittle, put this over the eyes of the blind man, and said to him, ‘Go and wash in the Pool of Siloam’ (the name means ‘one who has been sent’). So he went off and washed and came back able to see (blepon).”* In 9:15b, the narrator relates: *“So when the Pharisees asked him how he had gained his sight (aneblepsen), he said, ‘He put a paste on my eyes, and I washed, and I can see (blepô).”* In this verse, the verb *anablepô* is used in the sense of “physical covering of sight”. The blind man who regained his sight uses the verb *anablepô* to describe his healing in 9:11: *“The man called Jesus made a paste, daubed my eyes with it and said to me, ‘Go off and wash at Siloam’; so I went, and when I washed I gained my sight (aneblepsa)”*. The four occurrences of the verb *anablepô* in 9:11,15,18a,18b have the former blind man as their subject.

Three references to the verb *blepô* in 9:39a,39b,39c have a theological meaning. Jesus declares to the blind man who had just proclaimed his faith in him (cf. 9:38) and to the Pharisees who did not believe in him in 9:39: *“It is for judgment that I have come into this world, so that those without sight (hoi mē blepontes) may see (blepôsin) and those with sight (hoi blepontes) may become blind.”* The verb *blepô* in Jesus’ reply to the Pharisees in 9:41 has a spiritual meaning because sight is linked to sin. Jesus said to them: *“If you were blind, you would not be guilty, but since you say, ‘We can see’, (blepomen)! your guilt remains.” (9:41).*

The verb *blepô* in 5:19 and 11:9 has a theological meaning. Jesus is speaking to the Jews about his authority, works and teaching: *“In all truth I tell you, by himself the Son can do nothing; he can do only what he sees (blepèi) the Father doing; and whatever the Father does the Son does too.”* Therefore, Jesus expresses the divine reality and unity of action between himself and his Father using the verb *blepô*.

The symbolic meaning of *blepô* is found in Jesus’ statement to his disciples in 11:9: *“Are there not twelve hours in the day? No one who walks in the daytime stumbles, having the light of this world to see by (blepei); the verb *blepô* in this sentence has a symbolic and Christological meaning. In the physical sense of the term, the human eye does not see light itself, but only sees objects illuminated by light. However, according to the*

Johannine theology, Jesus is the light of the world (cf. 8:12; 9:5; 12:46), “to see Jesus” therefore means “to see the light”. This way of seeing is inseparable from the recognition that Jesus is the light of the world and the confession of faith in him. In other words, the hearers of Jesus who do not believe in him do not see the light.

The verb *emblepô* appears only twice in 1:36,42. This verb expresses a close look at a subject. In the Gospel of John, this verb describes a theological view. Thus, John the Baptist's careful look at Jesus is followed by a Christological statement. The narrator reports in 1:35-36: “*The next day as John stood there again with two of his disciples, Jesus went past, and John looked (*emblepsas*) towards him and said, 'Look, there is the lamb of God.'*” A little later, in 1:42, Jesus fixes his gaze on Simon and gives him a new name. Indeed, when Andrew brings his brother Simon to Jesus, the latter “*looked (*emblepsas*) at him and said: You are Simon son of John; you are to be called Cephas' - which means Rock*”.

In short, the three verbs *blepô*, *emblepô* and *anablepô* often describe physical sight. In some places, the verb *blepô* expresses spiritual sight (9:41), faithful sight (11:9) or divine reality (5:19).

4.1.5. The verb “*horaô*”

The verb “*horaô*” (to see), found 86 times in the Gospel, is used much more than the other verbs of sight: *theôreô* (x 24 times), *blepô* (x 17 times), *theaomai* (x 6 times), *anablepô* (x 4 times), *emblepô* (x 2 times). The 86 occurrences of the verb *horaô* are distributed as follows:

- Ch. 1-4 (x 23 ori): 1,18.29.33.34.36.39a.39b.46.47a.47b.48.50a.50b.51; 3,3.11.26.32.36; 4,29.35.45.48.
- Ch. 5-8 (x17 times): 5,6.14.37; 6,14.22.24.26.30.36.46a.46b; 7,26.52; 8,38.56a.56b.57.
- Ch. 9-12 (x15 times): 9,1.37; 11,3.31.32.33.34.36.40; 12,9.15.19.21.40.41.
- Ch. 13-17 (x 10 times): 14,7.9a.9b; 15,24; 16,16.17.19.22.29.32.
- Ch. 18-21 (x 21 times): 18,21.26; 19,4.5.6.14.26a.26b.27.33.35.37; 20,8.18.20.25a.25b.27.29a.29b; 21,21.

The verb *horaô* is not used in chapters 2; 10; 13; 17. The same verb appears only once, in chapter 15:21 and twice in chapters: 7:9 and 18. The highest number is found in chapters: 1 (x 14 times); 19 (x 10 times); 6 (x 8 times); 20 (x 8 times). The meaning of the verb can be classified into one of the six categories:

(1) Interjection “*ide*” and “*idou*” (behold, see) 19 times. The verb *horaô* conjugated with the aorist imperative, in the 2nd person singular, active diathesis: “*ide*” or in the middle diathesis “*idou*”, can be used as an interjection.

“The exclamatory “behold” (*ide*, *idou*) is part of the same dynamic in the Fourth Gospel, demonstrating the iconic nature of the Johannine Jesus. Based on what he has seen at the baptism (1:32-34) John the Baptist proclaims, “*ide amnos tou Theou* - behold the Lamb of God (1:29,36). Similarly, the evangelist declares at Jesus entry into Jerusalem, “*idou ho basileus sou erketai*- behold your king comes” (12:15) a kingship that is tauntingly acclaimed by Pilate in the context of the trial: “*idou ho anthropos...ide a basileus humon* - behold the man...behold your king” (19:5,14).²⁰³

The 15 occurrences of “*ide*” are translated according to the context as follows: “behold” (*ide*) 6 times: 1,29,36,47b; 19,14.26b.27; “behold, look” (*ide*), 6 times: 3:26; 5:14; 7:26; 12:19; 16:29; 18:21; “see” (*ide*) x 2 times: 11:36; 19:4. In 11:3, “*ide*” is subtended: “*The sisters sent this message to Jesus, Lord, the man you love (ide hon phileis) is ill*”. The four places of the interjection “*idou*” are found in 4:35 (“well”); 12:15; 16:32; 19:5 (“look”).

(2) Physical sight, x 27 times: 4:48; 5:6; 6:14,22,24,30; 8:57; 9:1; 11:31,32,33,34; 12:9; 15:24; 16:16,17,19,22; 18:26; 19:6.26a,33; 20:25b,27,29a,29b; 21:21.

(3) Theological view, x 22 times: 1:18; 1:33,34; 1:48,50a,50b,51; 3:3,11,32; 5:37; 6:26,46a,46b; 8:38,56a,56b; 12:40,41; 14:7,9a,9b.

(4) Physical sight with reference to spiritual sight, x 14 times: 1:39a,39b,46,47a; 4:29,45; 6:36; 9:37; 12:21; 19:35,37; 20:18,20,25a.

(5) Seeing with faith, x 3 times: 3:36; 11:40; 20:8.

(6) Perceivable, perceptible sight, once: 7:52.

²⁰³ Ibidem, p. 119.

This classification is not all-inclusive since the verb's meaning might sometimes transcend the categories listed. Therefore, it is crucial to keep in mind the following factors: The term “seeing” (*horaô*) is used by Jesus in the theological sense (8:56a,56b), but the Jews understood it to mean physical sight (8:57). The theological sight also implies faithful sight (cf. 6:26); it may have a subcategory of theological conception like “the mysterious vision of Jesus” in 1:48,50a (Jesus saw Nathanael under the fig tree).

Many of the references to the verb “*horaô*” describe a much deeper vision than physical sight. A total of 39 occurrences can be grouped in this sense: “theological sight” (x 22 times); “physical sight refers to spiritual sight” (x 14 times); “sight with faith” (x 3 times). Here are some illustrations of these three categories: First, the importance of the 22 occurrences of the verb *horaô* used to express theological sight represents important revelations. For example, Jesus reveals to the crowd in 6:46: “*Not that anybody has seen (eôraken) the Father, except him who has his being from God: he has seen (eôraken) the Father.*”. Nevertheless, believers can see the Father in Jesus, as he tells his disciples in 14:9b: “*Anyone who has seen (ho heôraken) me has seen (eôraken) the Father*”. The verb “*horaô*” describes the God's world when Jesus says to Nicodemus in 3:31c-32a: “*who is of the earth is earthly himself and speaks in an earthly way. He who comes from heaven bears witness to the things he has seen (ho heôraken) and heard*”. Then the physical sense refers to the spiritual sight in 4:29: “*Come and see (idete) a man who has told me everything I have done; could this be the Christ?*” said the Samaritan woman to the people of the city of Sychar. It is an invitation to come and see Jesus physically and also to discover his divine identity; it is a “seeing” that leads them to “believe in Jesus” (cf. 4:39-42).

Anthony J. Frendo treats the theme of the Samaritan woman's “vision” in the sense of a direct experience gained from her existential encounter with Jesus, which enables her to know the transcendent in depth and to convey the message to others²⁰⁴.

²⁰⁴ “Experience and community have always played a central role in the construction of knowledge. It is upon reflecting on everyday life experiences, and sharing these experiences and reflections with one's community, that knowledge is filtered and

Finally, seeing with faith is found in Jesus' words to Martha in 11:40: "Have I not told you that if you believe you will see (*opsèi*) the glory of God?" Or, again, when the narrator describes the sight and faith of the disciple whom Jesus loved before the empty tomb in 20:8b: "he saw (*eiden*) and he believed".

In a certain context, the verb "*horaô*" denotes an imperfect "sight". For example, the myopic reaction of the crowd in 6:14-15, after seeing the sign of the multiplication of the loaves: "*Seeing (idontes) the sign that he had done, the people said, This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world. Jesus, as he realised they were about to come and take him by force and make him king, fled back to the hills alone*". Later, Jesus revealed his intention to the crowd in 6:26: "*In all truth I tell you, you are looking for me not because you have seen (eidete) the signs but because you had all the bread you wanted to eat*".

In short, like the other sight verbs in the Gospel of John, the context determines the meaning of the verb *horaô*. The richness of meaning and the large number of places in which this verb form of "to see" appears show that *horaô* is one of the key terms of Johannine theology. The Risen One manifests himself to the disciples not only by sight but also by hearing. It is the Word that convinces the doubters. This phenomenon, specific to the New Testament, especially in the Gospel of John, is introduced by a verbal marker, *ôphthê*, constructed from the verb *oraô*, allowing us to designate God as the origin of this phenomenon.

Next, we will address the theme of vision, exemplified in the pericopes of the Gospel of John, exemplifying possible links between them, as well as the language of revelation, starting from the Prologue and ending with the appearances of the Risen One who makes himself seen in all his glory.

transformed into wisdom". Anthony J. FRENDO (2007) "Come and See": an existential approach to received wisdom, *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 12:1, 9-16, DOI: 10.1080/13644360701270848.

4.2. The Prologue of the Gospel of John - Seeing the glory of God

The Fourth Gospel's initial chapter, commonly referred to as the Prologue of John, encapsulates the proclamation that God took on human form, resided among humanity, and manifested himself by revealing his countenance. The initial chapter encompasses several fundamental themes of Johannine theology that serve as the interpretive framework for comprehending the Gospel in its entirety. The multifaceted semantic domain of vision is employed to depict the actions and interpersonal connections of Jesus with the other characters. Within the Gospel of John, there are five distinct verbs utilised to describe vision. In the present chapter, three of these verbs are employed: *orao*, *theoreo*, and *blepo*, in addition to its compound form, *emblepo*. A meticulous examination of the semantic domain reveals the ubiquity of verbs related to vision, except for two significant segments of the prologue: the initial portion of the narrative (verses 1-13) and the section pertaining to John the Baptist (verses 19-28). Leon-Dufour provides an explanation for the author's avoidance of vision verbs in these particular fragments:

“The logos does not require to be seen, and in the dialogue with John the Baptist, Jesus is missing - there is nothing to be seen yet.”²⁰⁵

In addition to the mentioned earlier episodes, the utilisation of vision verbs is frequently observed in close proximity to other sections of the Gospel of John, as will be expounded upon in the subsequent sections of this scholarly article. The Prologue of the Gospel of John (1:14,18) contains a theme pertaining to “vision” that may be expounded upon through a five-point framework in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of its significance: 1. “*And the Word became flesh*” (1:14a); 2. “*we saw (etheasametha) his glory*” (1:14c); 3. “*No one has ever seen God (heôraken)*” (1:18a); 4. “*He has revealed him*” (1:18c); 5. “*I have seen and testified*” (1:34).

²⁰⁵ X. Léon-DUFOUR, *Lecture de l'Évangile selon Jean I*. Parole de Dieu, Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1988, pp. 156-161.

Dufour's analysis of John's prologue emphasises its overarching structure, which is pertinent to our research. This structure guides the semantic framework of the verb "see" and its diverse conjugations, as outlined below. The prologue of the text is bifurcated into two distinct sections, namely 1:1-13 and 1:14-18. Similarly, the testimony of John the Baptist is also segmented into two parts, namely 1:19-28 and 1:29-34. The account of the initial disciples' calling is also divided into two parts, namely 1:35-42 and 1:43-52. Additionally, the episode of the wedding at Cana serves a transitive function.²⁰⁶

4.2.1. "And the Word became flesh" (1:14a)

The speaker asserts that the Logos was present from the commencement (*en arche*) (1:1) and subsequently manifested in human form: "*The Word became (egeneto) flesh (sarx), he dwelt (eskènôsen) among us*". The term "*en arche*" in verse 1 alludes to the account of the Creation, wherein God brought the world into existence, as explicitly referenced in verse 3 through the expression "*panta di aoutou egeneto*". The evangelist employs the term "Logos" and its association with Creation to contextualise the interpretation of the Prologue, thereby encouraging the reader to approach the text through the lens of wisdom literature. The concept of Logos, also known as the Word, represents the perceivable manifestation of the divine entity by human beings. The concept of God is often referred to as "the word." The Prologue places significant emphasis on the concept that the Logos embodies both light and life. The illumination has entered the realm and obscurity has not prevailed within it. The witness of John the Baptist is contextualised by two statements that pertain to the incarnation and the manner in which individuals received the incarnation of the Logos. The ninth through eleventh verses emphasise the response of individuals to the mentioned divine intervention. One perspective suggests that despite the illumination present in the world, it was not acknowledged by society. Conversely, individuals who placed their faith in this light were granted the status of God's offspring. Verse

²⁰⁶ Idem, p. 423.

14 provides an explanation regarding the incarnation of the Logos, wherein it assumed human form. The incarnation of Jesus Christ signifies a transformative and unprecedented shift in the manner in which God establishes connections with humanity.

In 1:14a, the Greek verb “*ginomai*” which means “to become” is utilised in conjunction with the aorist “*egeneto*” to denote a novel form of manifestation of the Logos. This manifestation involves the Logos taking on the form of “*sarx*” or flesh, thereby becoming a human being. The presence of Logos in the world serves to actualize the prophetic declaration of Isaiah 7:14c in the Old Testament, which speaks of the incarnation of God as “Emmanuel” or “God with us.” Simultaneously, the perception of the presence of God in historical events undergoes a significant transformation with the embodiment of the Logos. Henceforth, it can be observed that the Logos, who was incarnated, embodies the essence of divinity, as the Logos was identified as God (1:1c) and established his dwelling (*eskènôsen*) amongst humanity (1:14b). The arrival of the Logos pertains to the “Tent of Meeting” mentioned in Exodus, wherein the divine glory of the Lord was present (Exodus 40:34): “*The cloud then covered the Tent of Meeting (tèn skenèn tou marturiou) and the glory of Yahweh (doxès kuriou) filled the Dwelling.*” There is a double allusion between Jn 1:14 and Ex 40:34: first the verb “*skènôô*” (to dwell) in Jn 1:14b refers to the noun “*skènè*” (tent) which has the same root as in Ex 40:34a, then the glory (*doxa*) of the incarnate Logos refers to the glory of Yahweh in Ex 40:34b, as the narrator declares in Jn 1:14c.14d: “*And we saw his glory (tèn doxan autou), the glory (doxan) that he has from the Father as only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth.*”

The commencement of the second segment of the Prologue is denoted by the recurrence of the term “Logos”, wherein the phrase “*The Word became flesh*” (1,14a) is articulated. The concept of the God of Israel taking on human form is deemed implausible by the Jewish community (refer to 10:33b). The Christian faith's assertion regarding the Logos, who manifested in his vulnerability, embodiment, physical constraints, and interdependence with other beings, encompassed a level of humanity that was beyond the Jews' comprehension. This accounts for the

contentious nature of the Christian-Jewish discourse. The embodiment of the divine Word, also known as the Logos, in the person of Jesus Christ, is a fundamental tenet of the Christian faith.

The statement regarding the incarnation of the Logos in 1:14a holds significant importance in the theological framework presented by the Gospel of John. The opening statement of this verse marks the initiation of a fresh progression in the Prologue's narrative (specifically, the latter portion spanning from 1:14-18) that pertains to the character and purpose of Jesus. The current juncture represents a pivotal moment in the narrative of redemption. The manifestation of this truth is conveyed through the initial verb of perception found in the inaugural chapter of the Gospel. Those individuals who acknowledge (*etheasametha*) the magnificence of the embodied Logos are identified as being "born of God". The Logos that has been personalised assumes the role of the visual object. The contemporaries are able to perceive his existence and comprehend his verbal expressions. Nevertheless, attaining an accurate perception of the embodied Logos has proven to be a challenging task for readers throughout the ages. It is recommended that he places trust in individuals who have directly observed the event in question.

4.2.2. "We saw (*etheasametha*) his glory" (1:14c)

The individual providing the account is among the individuals who directly observed the event. The pronoun "us" appears twice in 1:14b, specifically in the phrase "*He lived (eskènôsen) among us (en hêmin)*" In 1:14c, the phrase "*And we saw (etheasametha) his glory*" establishes a reverential atmosphere regarding the arrival of the Logos-Jesus on Earth, as perceived by the witnesses. The verb "*theaomai*" (to see, to contemplate) conveys the significance of the witness. The verb in question is utilised exclusively six times in the Gospel, with five instances in the aorist and one in the perfect tense. In the context of 1:14c, it pertains solely to an unadulterated contemplation of imperceptible truths, given that the corporeal manifestation of the incarnate Logos was recently alluded to in 1:14b. The utilisation of the term "*theaomai*" in verse 1:14 signifies the significance of the perspective conveyed by

“*theaomai/theoreo*” to the narrator and its potential correlation to the contextual framework of the incarnation. The utilisation of the aorist tense “*etheasametha*” in relation to the verb “*theaomai*” suggests that, at a certain juncture, the Logos took up residence among the human population. These expressions pertain to a visual perception through the physical eyes in the phrase, “*And we saw (etheasametha) his glory*” (1:14c). The manifestation of the divine Word made flesh is evidenced throughout the course of human events. The act of “seeing” referred to in this context is predicated upon the visual perception of the corporeal form of the individual known as Jesus. The concept being conveyed is the association between the act of visual perception (*theaomai*) and the physical body (*sarx*). Zumstein argues that the act of physically seeing in the first person plural enables the collective to become genuine eyewitnesses. This is significant as the faith of readers across generations is founded on the testimony of the initial generation's disciples. The text highlights the significance of the enigma surrounding the embodiment of the Logos by attributing a tangible, corporeal, and factual quality to the verbs of perception used in the narrative. This is why we should not dissociate “spiritual sight” from “physical sight” or favour one over the other.²⁰⁷

Merely possessing visual perception is inadequate to qualify as an eyewitness. The act of “seeing” among the disciples of Jesus is distinct from that of individuals who do not subscribe to the belief in Jesus. The Johannine vision is positioned concomitantly at the sensory experience and spiritual reality levels. The complete and genuine act of perception requires both physical observation and spiritual insight, which can solely be attained through religious belief. The act of visually perceiving Jesus serves as an indication of his divine nature. As the disciples bear witness to Jesus, they come to perceive his magnificence as the sole offspring of the Father, replete with grace and truth (1:14d). As per the research conducted by Brown, Fitzmeyer, and Murphy,

²⁰⁷ Cf. ZUMSTEIN, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

“The Gospel of John portrays the “glory” as the manifestation of God’s glory in Jesus, which is consistent with the pre-existing “glory with the Father” of Jesus. The lexical domain of glory encompasses the manifestation of Jesus Christ through his works and signs, as well as his death and resurrection.”²⁰⁸

In 1:14c of the Gospel of John, the verb “to see” (*theaomai*) is accompanied by the term “glory” (*doxa*), which appears 18 times throughout the text. Notably, six of these occurrences are directly associated with a verb of vision (2:11; 11:40; 12:41; 17:24), while two are linked to the verb “to believe” (11:40; 12:37-43), and two are directly related to the literary context of the prologue (17:5; 5:41). The Septuagint employs the phrase “to see + glory” in reference to the glory of God, as evidenced in Exodus 16:7, Leviticus 9:23, and Numbers 12:8. The term “glory” in the biblical tradition refers to the manifestation of God through a remarkable and salvific theophany. The Gospel account highlights the magnificence of Jesus through the inaugural miracle performed at Cana. The narrator concludes this event in verse 2:11, affirming that this was the foremost of Jesus’ signs, which took place in the region of Galilee. The individual manifested (*ephanerôsen*) their magnificence (*tên doxan autou*), leading to the belief of their adherents. The disciples’ faith in Jesus is prompted by the manifestation of glory. The aforementioned demonstrates his magnificence through the indication of the transformation of water into a superior quality wine (2:1-11). The Cana incident is intricately connected to John 1:50, wherein Jesus declares, “*you will see greater things than this - meizo touton ofthe*”. The aforementioned statement serves as an introduction to the signs that Jesus will execute, as documented in the Book of Signs (Jn 2-12).

These signs commence with the one at Cana, which is the first among those that Jesus proclaims as “*greater things than these you will see*”. Simultaneously, the miracles executed by Jesus serve as a manifestation of the divine splendour. As evidenced in the passage 11:40, the speaker conveys to Martha that belief is a prerequisite for witnessing the glory of

²⁰⁸ R. E. BROWN, J.A. FITZMEYER, R.E. MURPHY, *Introducere și comentariu la Sfânta Scriptură. Vol IX. Literatură Ioaninică*, Galaxia Gutenberg, Târgu Lăpuș, 2007, p. 7.

God prior to summoning Lazarus from the tomb. In light of Martha's incredulity, Jesus poses a rhetorical inquiry in the form of verse 40. The future indicative form of the verb *orao* is utilised in this context to express the actions that will be performed, in conjunction with the combination of "see" and "doxa". The premise of this episode posits that belief is a prerequisite for perceiving a sign rather than a result of perceiving it. Specifically, Martha must possess belief in order to witness the glory of God. The act of "seeing" in this context transcends a mere physical observation of Lazarus' revival, but rather encompasses a comprehensive comprehension of the event. In John 8:54, Jesus addresses the Jews regarding his glory, stating that if he were to pursue his own glory, it would hold no value. Rather, Jesus asserts that his glory is bestowed upon him by the Father. The indivisibility of the glory of Jesus and that of the Father is evident, as the glory of Jesus is contingent upon the glory bestowed upon him by his Father (1:14c,14d).

The Gospel provides a deeper revelation of the manifestation of God's glory. The significance of extraordinary and spectacular components has diminished. The signs in the Johannine tradition, which serve as visible demonstrations of glory, lack any miraculous characteristics. The significance of the signs lies in the ability of the listeners to discern the true nature of Jesus and subsequently place their faith in him. Additionally, the Gospel text expands upon its understanding of glory: The manifestation of Jesus' glory is evidenced through his sacrificial death on the cross. The individual's fervour is represented as a moment of exaltation. The Cross is regarded as a site of the subject's exaltation, as evidenced by the comparison with verses 3:14-15. In the seventeenth chapter of the text, Jesus initiates his fervour by first directing his words to his Father. He implores in verse five, "*Now, Father, glorify me with that glory I had with you before the world ever existed*". The manifestation of Jesus' glory on the cross is evidenced by his selfless act of love, wherein he willingly sacrificed his life for the sake of his companions. In the text, it is stated that at 15:13b "*to lay down his life for his friends*", the individual achieved victory and at 16:33c, it is suggested that this victory was significant in terms of conquering the world. By means of his sacrificial death, Jesus imparts everlasting life to those who have faith in him.

The phrase *“And we saw (etheasametha) his glory”* (1:14c) refers to the testimony of the Johannine community. The pronoun *“we”* designates the beneficiaries of this vision. It means that we have seen the manifestation of the glory of God and of Jesus, God's messenger, through his works and word; that we, the faithful, have contemplated his extreme love through the gift of his life, as he reveals in 10:11: *“I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep.”* Jesus' glory unfolds in his divine identity and power over life and death, as he tells the Jews in 10:18: *“No one takes it from me; I lay it down of my own free will, and as I have power to lay it down, so I have power to take it up again; and this is the command I have received from my Father.”* This way, he can give eternal life to people who truly *“see”* him, as he tells the crowd in 6:40b: *“whoever sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life”*.

The glory of Jesus and the Father is also manifested through the disciples. Jesus communicates his glory to them when he tells his Father in 17:22: *“And I have given them the glory you gave me, so that they may be one, as we are one”*. The disciples therefore receive the glory of Jesus and enter into communion with him and the Father. Thus the disciples glorify Jesus. The latter addresses his Father in 17:10c: *“I have been glorified in them”*. In the farewell discourses (Jn 13-17), Jesus says to the disciples at the end of the parable of the vine-growers (15:1-7) in 15:8: *“By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples”*. Discipleship by keeping his word and bearing fruit is the most beautiful way to glorify the Father and Jesus. It is in this perspective that the narrator declares: *“and we saw his glory”* (1:14c) referring to the testimony of the disciple whom Jesus loved (19,35 and 21,24).

The manifestation of the incarnate Logos presents a challenge in terms of its perceptibility and contemplation. The Gospel narrative will demonstrate that the manifestation of this magnificence has been revealed to humanity, albeit to some extent concealed. The comprehension, disclosure, and dissemination of the exhibition of the magnificence of Jesus and the Father are imperative. The significance of the *“new”* witnesses mentioned in 1:14c is crucial in effectively communicating the gospel message. The individuals in question serve as firsthand observers

to the magnificence of the sole offspring of the divine, who discloses the identity of the Father to humanity, as per the statement “*No one has ever seen (heôraken) God*” (1:18a).

4.2.3 “No one has ever seen (heôraken) God” (1:18a)

The eighteenth verse of the Prologue to John is crucial in comprehending the semantic domain of sight in the Gospel of John. It establishes a correlation between the incapacity to perceive (horaô) God (1:18a) and the act of revealing God the Father (exêgeomai) (1:18c). The perfect tense conjugation of the verb “horaô” is demonstrated through the form “eoraka”. Among the 40 instances of the verb “horaô,” it has been observed that 17 of them are in the perfect tense. This particular tense is frequently used by the evangelists, particularly in reference to the association between the Father and the Son. Verse 18 exhibits a close association with verse 14 through the utilisation of two linguistic elements, namely “monogenous” and “patros,” which serve to demonstrate this filial connection. At 1:18, the speaker asserts that the perception of God (heôraken) has never been achieved by any individual “No one has ever seen (heôraken) God”. Bultmann posits that this notion of impossibility is offset by a dual declaration. The passage 1:18b “The only Son, God, who is at the Father's side, has revealed him” asserts that God's only Son, who is in close proximity to the Father, has made the Father known to humanity. This implies that no one has ever had a direct encounter with God, except through the Son, who has made it possible to comprehend the Father's nature.²⁰⁹

The subsequent statement “*And we saw his glory (kai etheasametha ten doxan aoutou)*” denotes a state of being that occurred after the Easter event. The verse from the Prologue serves as an introduction to significant elements pertaining to the faculties of visual perception and auditory reception. Within the biblical tradition of the Old Testament, there exist two distinct explanations regarding the inherent impossibility

²⁰⁹ R. BULTMANN, *The Gospel of John : a commentary* (trad. par BEASLEY-MURRAY G. R.), Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1971, p. 83.

of perceiving the divine entity known as God. The initial reason is rooted in the theological concept that humanity is inherently sinful, as evidenced by biblical references such as Isaiah 6:5 and Exodus 33:20. The second reason is attributed to the notion of God's complete transcendence, as described in Exodus 33:18-22.

The Bible documents the manifestation of Yahweh to Abraham (Genesis 18) and Moses (Exodus 24). The request made by Moses in this particular episode pertains to his desire to witness the "glory", a concept that aligns with the initial declaration regarding visions in the Gospel of John, wherein it is stated that "*we saw his glory*". The primary objective is not to demonstrate the ability of individuals to perceive God, but rather to underscore the action of God in revealing himself to Abraham and Moses.

The concept presented in 1:18a pertains to the incapability of perceiving God, which is not contingent upon the sinful state of humanity, but rather on the inherent limitations of being a finite entity bound by temporal and spatial constraints. The narrator asserts the complete transcendence of God. The desire to visually perceive God is deemed inappropriate, however, God is not unapproachable. Jesus Christ, referred to as "*The only Son*" (1:18b) and previously mentioned in 1:17, is the means by which we gain knowledge of the Father. According to theological doctrine, the ability to perceive the divine presence of God is exclusive to the Son, due to his distinct identity and unparalleled connection with the Father. Therefore, it is not within the capacity of any human being to assert that they have witnessed God firsthand. He is the sole individual to whom the revelation has been disclosed, thereby rendering him capable of articulating about the divine entity, owing to his firsthand encounter with it and his own divinity.

The correlation between John 1:18 and the *blepo* mentioned in verse 29 is noteworthy. The aforementioned passage serves to introduce the terrestrial actuality of the incarnation, as conveyed by John the Baptist during the initial stages of Jesus' ministry.

4.2.4. "The Son has revealed the Father" (1:18c)

There is a connection between the impossibility of seeing God and making the Father known through the Son in 1:18: "*No one has ever seen God. The only Son, God, who is at the Father's side, has revealed him (exegeōsato)*". As I said, the translation of the aorist "*exegeōmai*" to the middle diathesis "*exègèsato*" (1:18c) varies from case to case. In fact, the two Greek words in 1:18c: "*ekeinos exègèsato*", "*has revealed him [explained]*" can be rendered in several ways. For example, "*made him known*", "*revealed him*", "*explained him*", etc.

The term "*exegeōmai*" denotes the act of providing a detailed explanation or interpretation of a subject matter, often involving a step-by-step approach. It encompasses a range of activities such as expounding, commenting, presenting, and exegeting. The verb "*exegeōmai*" can be differentiated from verbs that pertain to vision, such as "*apokaluptô*" (to reveal) in John 12:38 (cited in Is 53:1), and the verb "*deiknumi*" (to show) in John 2:18, 5:20a, 20b, among others. As per the apocalyptic literary genre, the pair of verbs pertain to the act of visual perception. In the context of 1:18, it can be observed that the verb "*exegeōmai*" pertains to the act of hearing rather than visual perception, as the notion of "*seeing God*" is deemed unattainable (1:18a). The verb "*exègeōmai*" is translated as "*to make known*" with a focus on the conveyance of information through verbal communication and instruction. Jesus portrays himself as an exceptional revealer. The Prologue places emphasis on an additional "sight" that carries both physical and theological connotations, specifically, "*we saw his glory*" 1:14c.

The Gospel of John portrays the act of "*making known (exegeōmai) the Father*" as encompassing both auditory and visual experiences, rather than being limited to solely auditory perception. The author employs various designations to refer to the central character of the narrative, including "*The Word was God*" (1:1c), "*the Word became flesh*" (1:14a), "*only Son (monogenes)*" (1:14d,18b), and "*Jesus Christ (Ièsous Christos)*" (1:17b). All of these designations serve to confirm the divine nature of the only begotten Son (1:18b), who is identified as God (1:1c). The Prologue's

affirmation of Jesus' divine identity is complemented by Jesus' solemn proclamation before the Jews in 8:24, wherein he declares "I AM (*egô eimi*)," and Thomas' confession before the Risen Jesus in 20:28, wherein he acknowledges Jesus as "My Lord (*ho kurios mou*) and my God (*kai ho theos mou*)!"

The affiliation between Logos-Jesus, the Only-Begotten Son, and God, the Father, is conveyed through the utilisation of Greek prepositions (*pros*, *para*, *eis*) and the verb "eimi" (to be). This highlights the interpersonal and filial bond between the two entities. The text employs the phrase "with God (*pros ton theon*)" twice, specifically in 1:1b.2 and in 1:14d. Additionally, in 1:14d, the Son is referred to as "the glory as of the Father's only Son (*para patros*)," while in 1:18b, the Son is identified as "who is at the Father's side (*eis tonne kolpon tou patros*)." The preposition "pros" in Greek, when used with the accusative case, conveys the meanings of proximity, directionality, and association. On the other hand, the preposition "eis" with the accusative case denotes a specific direction of movement or location. The preposition "para" when used with genitive denotes the semantic function of source or origin, indicating concepts such as "subsequent to", "originating from one's domicile", or simply "from".

The three sets of prepositions in question denotes the profound interconnection existing between the divine entities of the Father and the Son. The Prologue employs the use of references to the beginning (1:1), middle (1:14), and end (1:18) to assert that the incarnation of the Logos does not modify the dynamic between the Father and the Son. The verb "eimi" (to be) is utilised thrice in the initial verse of the Prologue (1:1a, 1b, 1c) in the imperfect tense, emphasising the concept of duration. Additionally, in 1:18b, the verb "eimi" is expressed in the present participle form as "ho ôn" (who is), in reference to the "Only Son, who is (*ho ôn*) at the Father's side". The introductory section fails to differentiate between the pre-incarnate and post-incarnate states of the Father-Son relationship. The utilisation of the present participle "ho ôn" (who is) in 1:18b is indicative of a lasting characteristic. Throughout the Gospel, it is evident that the incarnation did not interrupt the relationship and

communion between the Father and the Son. This fact is reiterated in various instances such as 10:30, 11:41-42, 16:32c, 17:22b, among others.

4.2.5. "I have seen and testified" (1:34)

The episode's narrative encompasses John the Baptist, who is subject to questioning by the Jewish authorities regarding Jesus' identity. However, John's testimony commences only in verse 29, wherein he designates Jesus as "the Lamb of God." John the Baptist's position in the Gospel is distinctive and serves to establish his identity in relation to Jesus Christ. The initial claim made by the individual is that they are not the Messiah. This statement serves as a means for the author of the gospel to introduce us to the realm of knowledge related to this topic. The utilisation of the adverb "epaurion" in verse 29 enables the differentiation of the various instances of Jesus' presentation. The aforementioned verse employs a visual verb to introduce the protagonist of the story. The introduction of Jesus characterises him as the individual who "arrives" and the individual who is "observed (blepo)". The reader assumes the role of a firsthand observer of the event due to the inclusion of verse 29. The statement made by John, "*Behold the Lamb of God*", is rooted in a distinct instance of a verb denoting a visual experience that holds significant salvific implications. This verb pertains to the event of the crucifixion. The initial speaking of John the Baptist in verse 15 establishes a connection with the embodied divine word mentioned in verse 14. Additionally, the subsequent statement made during the interrogation of the priests and Levites associates Jesus with the prophesied end times.

Preliminary Conclusion

The analysis of the diverse instances of the semantic domain of the verb "to see" as found in the Prologue of the Gospel of John enables us to underscore the semantic and literary components of vision. This analysis explores the semantic relationships and distinctions among vision-related verbs, as well as their intended contextual meanings as conveyed by the author. Within the realm of literature, the utilisation of a semantic field facilitates comprehension of the theological implications associated

with the concept of vision. The phrases “seeing of signs,” “seeing of the glory,” and “seeing of the Son” are commonly utilised to convey the concept of “believing.” The act of seeing entails a belief system that acknowledges the connection with a divine entity and actively engaging in it. The verb form “eureka” holds significant theological importance as it enables the author to articulate the manner in which the Incarnation and Resurrection facilitate an individual's ability to perceive God in the same way as the Son. The Prologue found in the Fourth Gospel (1:1-18) serves a dual purpose. Firstly, it functions as a declaration of faith by the author and their community regarding the genesis, essence, and purpose of Jesus. Secondly, the Prologue serves as an illuminating guide for comprehending the entirety of the Gospel.

The author of the Gospel intended to convey three main points, as evidenced by the prologue and first conclusion (20:30-31). These points include the revelation of Jesus' identity, the revelation of Jesus' mission, and an invitation extended to the reader to believe in Jesus as a means of obtaining life in his name (cf. 20:31).

4.3. Being born of the Spirit and drawn by the Father to see Jesus: John 3:1-21

The Gospel of John outlines the requirements for individuals to gain a genuine perception of Jesus, comprehend his true nature, and develop faith in him. The author posits that there exist two fundamental prerequisites that originate from a divine source: namely, the experience of rebirth from a spiritual perspective (3:3b) and the act of being irresistibly attracted towards the divine entity known as the Father (6:44b). Human beings are required to both cultivate a receptive disposition towards the divine endowments bestowed upon them by God, and to comply with the directives of the Father (6:45b) while engaging in endeavours that align with the works of God (6:27a).

In this area of inquiry, we shall examine the viewpoint regarding the significance of pattern formation and the ability to perceive the underlying layers of existence within the context of Christian theology.

The Johannine discourse employs a strategy whereby the response serves to elevate the subject matter to a more elevated plane. The inquirer's perspective is grounded in the realm of the perceptible, but must be elevated to the sphere of the spiritual.

The Gospel of John tells the story of Nicodemus, a Pharisee, who goes out at night to speak with Jesus. "*Rabbi,*" he says, "*we know you are a teacher come from God, for no one can work the signs that you work unless God is with him*" (3:2). Jesus' answer seems to come out of nowhere, with no direct relation to Nicodemus's statement: "*Amen, amen I say to you, unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*". Nicodemus acknowledges Jesus as a distinguished instructor, to which Jesus replies with ambiguous allusions to the concepts of sight and rebirth. Within the context of the narrative, a discernible pattern materialises whereby Nicodemus consistently emerges during the nocturnal hours, thereby indicating his presence within a state of obscurity. It is acknowledged that he lacks knowledge regarding the identity of Jesus. While having a teacher who imparts divine knowledge is beneficial, it is important to acknowledge that such a teacher is distinct from the divine entity they represent. The issue at hand for Nicodemus appears to be a lack of perception. The individual holds the belief that they have encountered a highly esteemed instructor, yet they fail to perceive the presence of the Kingdom of God despite being in its midst.

The entrance into the Kingdom of God is contingent upon the disciple's attainment of a genuine birth into the divine life.

The significance of signs in the present discourse warrants recognition. The term "sign" as utilised in the opening of the third chapter delineates Nicodemus' motivation and quest for Jesus. The semantic weight of signs distinguishes them from miracles, which are classified as supernatural events. The significance of a sign is determined by the underlying meaning it represents. In the event that an individual is unable to grasp the intended significance, they will be unable to derive any specific information from the sign. The text describes a transition from the use of symbolic representation to practical implementation.

As per Grob's perspective, an individual must possess faith beforehand to comprehend the significance of a miraculous occurrence and subsequently derive benefits from it. Grob's perspective highlights a closed loop of "faith" - "signs" - "faith" and suggests resolving the issue by acknowledging an initial faith. The understanding of the significance of a sign does not necessarily require an individual to possess faith, but rather a preliminary level of it. Consequently, the sign can be regarded as a subjective construct that is contingent upon an individual's actions, which are informed by their prior knowledge.²¹⁰

There are five details that indicate the connection between 2:23-25 and the episode in 3:1-12: a) the narrator does not pronounce the name "Jesus" (Ièsous): "*He came at night and said to him... "* (*houtos èlthen pros auton nuktos kai eipen autô*). Some biblical editions add the name "Jesus" in 3:2b to facilitate the reading: "*He came to Jesus at night and said to him...*". According to the Greek text, in order to know that Nicodemus comes to Jesus, one has to start reading from 2:24 where Jesus' name appears: "*But Jesus would not trust himself to them because he knew them all*". b) The term "man" (*anthropos*), which appeared twice in 2:25a and 25b, reappears in 3:1a to designate Nicodemus. c) The expression "*the signs (ta sèmeia) he was doing*" in 2:23 is found in Nicodemus' words to Jesus in 3:2b: "*no one can do these signs (ta sèmeia) that you are doing (poieis)*". d) The verb "to know" (*ginôskô*) in 2:25b: "*did not need anyone to testify about human nature. He himself understood (eginôskên) it well*" refers both to Nicodemus' knowledge when he said to Jesus: '*Rabbi, we know (oidamen)...*' (3:2b) and to his ignorance when Jesus says to him in 3:10: "*You are the teacher of Israel and you do not understand this (ginôskeis)?"* e) The coordinating conjunction "of" at the beginning of 3:1 indicates the connection between 2:23-25 and 3:1-2. In short, the unit 2:23-25 prepares for the story of Nicodemus (3:1-2).

The scriptural passage denoted as 3:2b-12 features a dialogue, succeeded by a monologue delivered by Jesus in 3:13-21. This monologue bears resemblance to the monologue of John the Baptist in 3:31-36.

²¹⁰ Cf. F. GROB, *Faire l'oeuvre de Dieu. Christologie et éthique dans l'Évangile de Jean*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris 1986, pp. 19-29.

The narrative in John 3:1-12 is organised into four distinct units, which include an exploration of the identity of Nicodemus and his subsequent intervention. The passage under consideration comprises of several distinct sections, including the initial dialogue in verses 3:1-2a, Nicodemus' two questions and Jesus' answer in verses 3:4-8, and Nicodemus' subsequent question and Jesus' response in verses 3:9-12.

The passage spanning from section 2:23-3:21 presents a series of dichotomies, including but not limited to the dichotomy of "knowing/not knowing" (2:24b; 3:2b,10), the dichotomy between Spirit and body (3:6), the dichotomy between things on earth and things in heaven (3:12), the dichotomy between the descent and ascension of the Son of Man (3:13), and the dichotomy between light and darkness (3:19-21). The Gospel of John is widely recognised for its prominent use of dualistic themes. Regarding this matter, a significant number of characters exhibit a binary perspective; they either embrace the Christian faith or reject it. Nicodemus exhibits a distinctive quality in that there exists an initial uncertainty regarding his reaction to Jesus. He acknowledges the divine origin of Jesus, yet lacks a comprehensive understanding of the process of entering the kingdom. Nicodemus does not exhibit hostility towards the light, rather he struggles to grasp its movement as it transitions from the foreground to the background, alternating between illumination and obscurity.

According to Resseguie,

"Nicodemus leaves his first encounter with Jesus still not comprehending the light. It is not until later in the Gospel that the reader begins to get a sense that he is starting to understand and believe."²¹¹

The statement made by Jesus in 3:21a, "*But whoever lives the truth comes to the light,*" can be interpreted as a resolution to the scenario involving Nicodemus, who sought out Jesus under the cover of darkness

²¹¹ James. L. RESSEGUIE, *The Strange Gospel: Narrative Design and Point of View in John*, Biblical Interpretation Series 56, Brill, 2001, [https://www.academia.edu/60601955/The Strange Gospel Narrative Design and Point of View in John Biblical Interpretation Series 56 Brill 2001](https://www.academia.edu/60601955/The_Strange_Gospel_Narrative_Design_and_Point_of_View_in_John_Biblical_Interpretation_Series_56_Brill_2001).

(3:2a). The text implies that Nicodemus possesses esoteric knowledge. The concept of “coming to the light” in unit 3:18-21 pertains to approaching Jesus himself, as he is identified as the light in reference to passages 1:9 and 8:12a. Hence, Nicodemus' visit to Jesus during the night (3:2a) implies that he was already seeking enlightenment. The text emphasises the phrase “*He came to...*”, indicating that Nicodemus' evening was enlightened by the radiance emanating from Jesus. Section 2:23-3:21 pertains to the “faith” exhibited by the crowd (2:23) and the “*knowing*” demonstrated by Nicodemus (3:2b) upon witnessing the “signs”. The acquisition of faith and knowledge necessitates the addition of a new birth.

The Gospel of John depicts various instances where Jesus interacts with individuals from diverse religious backgrounds and settings, including Nicodemus, a prominent Jewish figure (3:1-12), the Samaritan woman and the inhabitants of Sychar (4:4-42), and Lazarus (11:25). For the characters to perceive and have faith in Jesus, it is necessary for them to broaden their perception, emotional capacity and cognitive abilities to accept the divine offering of God. The individual journeys of each character may vary, however, the objective of their encounters remains consistent: Jesus discloses his identity and purpose to his conversational partners, urging them to have faith in him for the attainment of eternal life.

As Stibbe argues, a central aspect of narrative criticism is character analysis:

“The function of these characters are to draw out various aspects of Jesus's character by supplying personalities and situations with which he can interact, and to illustrate a spectrum of alternative responses to him.” The Samaritan woman at the well is used by the author to show that, through the face of Messiah, ethnic and geographical boundaries are erased and that true worshippers will worship God “in spirit and truth”. The man in chapter 9 was born blind so that “God's works might be revealed in him”. Lazarus is used to show that Jesus has the power to raise the dead and that he is the “resurrection and the life”. In a similar fashion, Nicodemus plays an instrumental role in unveiling a deeper understanding of Jesus.”²¹²

²¹² Mark STIBBE, *John as Storyteller Narrative Criticism and the Fourth Gospel*, Cambridge University, Cambridge, 1994.

The analysis of Nicodemus' character elucidates his role as a “teacher of Israel,” his evolution and progression, and his utilisation by the author to convince the audience to embrace his perspective and religious convictions.

4.3.1. Being born again, being born of the Spirit (3:1-12)

The Gospel of John's third chapter contains a conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus, wherein Jesus discloses the prerequisites for perceiving and accessing the Kingdom of God, which is tantamount to obtaining everlasting life. According to biblical terminology, gaining entry into the kingdom of God entails “seeing” or experiencing it.

According to Blanchard,

“Just catching a glimpse of the signs failed to evoke any genuine sense of admiration within Nicodemus, as such a fleeting experience alone cannot guide him towards the authentic route to belief. Consequently, the individual will be compelled to relinquish their impartial and ambiguous materialistic beliefs (3:4) and attain an authentic spiritual liberation, akin to the flexibility of the wind in adapting to unpredictable events.”²¹³.

Nicodemus serves as an exemplar for the shift from the Old Testament to the New Testament in the Gospel. Furthermore, what holds veracity for him and his kin is applicable to all individuals. It is noteworthy that the character of Nicodemus is featured thrice in the Gospel, in a remarkable manner. On three separate occasions, the individual in question engaged in discourse with Jesus. The initial encounter is documented in 3:1-12, while the second instance involved the individual defending Jesus against his Pharisaic counterparts in 7:48-52. The third and final interaction occurred subsequent to the death of Jesus. Nicodemus demonstrates his loyalty to Jesus through his actions, as opposed to verbal communication. He brings a substantial amount of “a mixture of myrrh and aloes” weighing approximately one hundred

²¹³ Cf. Y.M. BLANCHARD, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

pounds to use in the burial of Jesus (John 19:39b). "The portrayal of Nicodemus serves as a remarkable illustration of a transformative experience, a transition from darkness to light, from ignorance to enlightenment, and from a state of confusion to a genuine conviction."²¹⁴.

In the third chapter, the character makes his initial introduction by visiting Jesus during the night and engaging in a dialogue regarding the kingdom of God and the concept of rebirth. The narrative is situated in Jerusalem amidst the celebration of the Passover festival. A significant number of those who identified as Jewish were convinced of the authenticity of Jesus' teachings due to the miraculous acts that he purportedly carried out. The authenticity of the faith of a significant number of individuals was deemed questionable as it was founded exclusively on the observable miracles and marvels performed by Jesus (2:23-25). Nicodemus is characterised as a member of the Pharisees and a prominent figure among the Jewish community.

In verse 10, Jesus designates him as "Israel's teacher." In this passage, Nicodemus approaches Jesus in a private setting and recognises him as a divine instructor, addressing him as "Rabbi" and affirming that the miraculous deeds he performs are only possible through the intervention of God ("no one can do these things that you do apart from the presence of God" John 3:2). The topic of discourse between Nicodemus and Jesus pertains to the kingdom of God and the means of gaining entry into it.

The following interaction involving Nicodemus takes place in Jerusalem amidst the celebration of the Feast of the Tabernacles, as documented in John 7:50-52. The Pharisaic sect expressed a desire to apprehend Jesus, however, Nicodemus intercedes on his behalf.

The final interaction between Nicodemus and Jesus occurs in the latter part of the Gospel, after to the crucifixion of Jesus (as recorded in John 19:40).

The audience is presented with three distinct representations of Nicodemus. The utilisation of dark imagery in 3:2 exemplifies the

²¹⁴ Joseph Lê Minh THÔNG, "« Aimer Sa Vie » Et « Haïr Sa Vie » (Jn 12,25) dans Le Quatrième Évangile." *Revue Biblique* (1946-) 115, no. 2 (2008): 216-44. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44092145>.

individual's lack of knowledge and inability to perceive the veracity. John emphasises repeatedly that Nicodemus approaches Jesus under the cover of night, potentially giving this detail with symbolic significance, as the broader text juxtaposes themes of illumination and obscurity. Nicodemus approaches Jesus in a state of obscurity, whereas Judas, who betrays Jesus, is expected to come back under the veil of darkness (John 13:30). Nicodemus remains authentic to his identity even in times of obscurity. Upon witnessing the miracles performed by Christ, the individual halts their journey, yet continues to perceive Jesus solely as a divine instructor. The significance of the matter prompted him to inquire about the pedagogical approach employed by the individual in question. However, a shift in the character's portrayal becomes apparent in his subsequent two appearances. Despite his limited appearance in chapters 7 and 9, a distinct persona gradually takes place before the reader, which significantly diverges from the initial portrayal of the character.

The narrator introduces the character Nicodemus in 3:1: *"Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews"*. In the dialogue with Jesus, Nicodemus speaks to him in the plural *"we"*: *"Rabbi, we know..."* (3:2b) and Jesus responds very personally, *"You"* in 3:7b: *"must be born from above"*.

As Jesus tells him, one must be *"born again"* (3:3). Nicodemus takes this to mean a physical rebirth, but Jesus tells him, *"no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of flesh is flesh, and what is born of Spirit is spirit"* (vv.5–6). Nicodemus recognises the miracles Jesus is doing, but cannot tell where they come from. He hears the sound of the wind, but does *"not know where it comes from or where it goes"* (v. 8). In a similar way to how light and dark are separated, Jesus came to separate the world into two groups; those who walk in the light and live in truth, and those who do evil and live in darkness (cf. 1:5). The nighttime setting that Nicodemus visits Jesus in speaks metaphorically about where he stands at that point in time. Nicodemus is blind to the truth and lives in darkness, even though he physically sees Jesus' miracles. Jesus last addresses Nicodemus in verse 11: *"Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen."* He then switches

to the second person plural to address all the Pharisees: "If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things."

Alan Culpepper summarises Jesus's monologue by saying:

"Jesus's declaration is radical: one does not enter the kingdom of God by being born into the people of the covenant or by obedience to the covenant. The entry into the kingdom is individual, not corporate."²¹⁵

Chapter 3 portrays Nicodemus as an inquisitive individual. The individual in question exhibits a degree of curiosity regarding Jesus, yet refrains from making any explicit declaration of religious conviction. The individual in question has witnessed the miraculous occurrences attributed to Jesus, yet lacks comprehension regarding the concept of faith. The impression conveyed to the reader is that Nicodemus is experiencing a state of discomfort.

During Nicodemus' subsequent encounter with Jesus, he expresses empathy towards him, despite being in a precarious situation. John made reference to Nicodemus as being among those who had previously visited Jesus. He doesn't yet profess their faith, however, they currently position themselves in a state of ambivalence between the teachings of Jesus and the established religious authorities.

The ultimate manifestation of bravery is demonstrated by Nicodemus and Joseph when they approach Pilate to request the remains of Jesus for the purpose of funerals.

According to Despotis

"Only an act of grace by the rulers would have granted the men's request to take down the body. Taking such a role in Jesus' burial is a key part in Nicodemus's character development."²¹⁶

²¹⁵ A. CULPEPPER, *The Weave of the Tapestry: Character and Theme in John*, in *Characters and Characterization in the Gospel of John*, ed. Christopher W. Skinner Bloomsbury London, 2013, 24, apud. Christos KARAKOLIS, *The Unfinished Story of Nicodemus. A Reader-Centered Approach*, [https://www.academia.edu/63922229/The Unfinished Story of Nicodemus](https://www.academia.edu/63922229/The_Unfinished_Story_of_Nicodemus).

²¹⁶ Athanasios DESPOTIS, *Drawing and Transcending Boundaries in the Dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus: Fresh Perspectives from John's Hellenistic Background and Chrysostomic Reception*, *Journal of Early Christian History*, 8:1, 68-87, DOI: 10.1080/2222582X.2018.1491320.

4.3.2. Born from above (3:3b,7b)

Chapter three of the text features a recurring theme of birth, as evidenced in the dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus. Jesus responds to Nicodemus' commendable acknowledgement of his divine mission by stating that the ability to perceive the Kingdom of God is contingent upon an individual's rebirth from above, or alternatively, their rebirth. Jesus' statement establishes a seamless connection with 1:12-13 for the intended readership who possess knowledge of the prologue. According to Christian theology, as Jesus is considered to be the divine son of God, individuals who are born of God will also experience a spiritual rebirth from above, which is to say that they will be born through divine agency. The involvement of a divine entity in this particular course of events is once again underscored by the melding of a passive action (*gennethe*) and the declaration made by Jesus that the spirit begets spirit (3:6; 6:63).

According to Deventer and Domeris,

“The Gospel of John contains various memorable metaphors, that give new meanings of interpretation: for example, Nicodemus will not re-enter the womb of his mother, but will, in continuity with the metaphorical language of the prologue, be conceived in the womb “from above” and given new life and lineage as a child of God. As with the prologue, birth language and language of belief bleed into one another (3:12, 15, 16, 18, 36). Additionally, in similar way to the prologue, reproductive undertones can be identified in Jesus' use of language typically used to describe physical birth in ancient medical treatises: *gennethe ex udatos kai pneumatos* (udor is the amniotic fluid in which the child leaves the mother's womb).”²¹⁷

The Greek adverb “another” has three meanings: from above, again, from the beginning (temporal adverb). The phrase “*gennèthè another*” (3:3b) in its context is untranslatable, because the text plays on the double meaning of “another”: “again” and “from above”. Jesus uses the same adverb “another” in 3:3b,7b with its double meaning: “again”/“from above”.

²¹⁷ C. van DEVENTER, & B. DOMERIS, (2021). *Spiritual Birth, Living Water, and New Creation: Mapping Life-Giving Metaphors in the Fourth Gospel*. *Conspectus* (South African Theological Seminary), 32, 144–157. <https://doi-org.proxy.library.lincoln.ac.uk/10.54725/conspectus.2021.2.8>.

Indeed, there are three options for the translation of “another”: In his commentary on the Gospel of John, vol. I, p. 278, X. Léon-Dufour²¹⁸ translated “another” in 3:3b and 3:7b by “from above” - “to be born from above”. Other translators choose to utilise the identical translation, as the Greek term “another” remains consistent. However, this approach renders Nicodemus' objection unintelligible. The concept of being “born from above” raises questions as to why Nicodemus misconstrued the notion as “reentering his mother's womb and being born again” (3:4).

The alternative choice is present in both the Jerusalem Bible and the TOB. The term “another” in 3:3b is rendered as “again”, while in 3:7b it is translated as “from above” in the aforementioned versions. Nicodemus interpreted the phrase “*gennèthè another*” in 3:3b to mean “to be born again” in a literal sense of physical birth, as evidenced by his subsequent statement in 3:4. Nonetheless, this alternative is no longer deemed reliable as it renders the Greek term “another” with two distinct phrases: “again” (3:3b) and “from above” (3:7b). The third alternative renders the term “another” in 3:3b,7b as “again” with the connotation that Nicodemus comprehended, namely, that of being “born again” (3:4). Following the elucidation provided in verses 3:5-6, Jesus reiterates his assertion regarding the necessity of being “born from above” in 3:7b. Nonetheless, this translation fails to convey the connotation of “from above” associated with the adverb “another”. None of the aforementioned alternatives prove to be adequate, as the intricacy of the textual content and the Greek linguistic devices utilised therein are incapable of being accurately provided in translation.

The narrator employs the literary technique of misinterpretation to underscore the correlation between physical childbirth and spiritual rebirth. Nicodemus' inquiries in 3:4 enable readers to establish a correlation between being born from above and being born of one's mother, signifying that physical birth serves as a representation of spiritual birth.

²¹⁸ X Léon-DUFOUR, *Lecture de l'Évangile selon Jean I*. Parole de Dieu, Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1988.

Thong acknowledges that Jesus' reference to "Birth" primarily denotes a passive act rather than an active one, wherein man's adherence, choice, or decision is not the key factor. This is evident in the phrase "be born from above". It is a fact that human beings do not have the ability to determine their own birth. The passivity exhibited by individuals who are born of the flesh is a significant characteristic when compared to those who are born of the Spirit from above. Similar to how a newborn receives its life from its parents, a person who has been born-again receives all that they have from God."²¹⁹ The passive of the verb "gennaô" (to be born, to beget) in 3:3b (gennèthe) and in 3:7b (gennèthènai) shows that the new birth does not come from man. The passive translation of the verb "be born" in 3:3b and 3:7b as "to be born" is closer to the Greek text.

These points aid in comprehending the phrase "to be born- anothen (again/from above)" as it appears in 3:3b and 7b. The misapprehension of Nicodemus provides an opportunity for Jesus to explicate the significance of the concept of rebirth and its purpose. The discourse of Jesus (3:2b-12) and his soliloquy (3:13-21) emphasise the vertical axis, namely the relationship between heaven and earth. In John 3:12, Jesus poses a rhetorical question to Nicodemus, stating that if he were to disclose information pertaining to earthly matters and Nicodemus were to remain incredulous, then how could he expect Nicodemus to have faith in his teachings regarding celestial matters. *"If I tell you about earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you about heavenly things?"* In accordance with the text, Jesus descended from heaven and subsequently ascended back to heaven (as referenced in 3:13).

The term "anothen" is understood to signify "from above". The attainment of a state of being born from above is deemed necessary for the purpose of gaining entry to the revelation of Jesus. The gift is bestowed upon individuals prior to their reception of the testimony of Jesus and the audience of believers (referencing 3:11).

The bestowal of this gift occurs during the Son of Man's ascension, as referenced in 3:14. The verb "dei" (to have) is employed to convey the

²¹⁹ Cf. THONG, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

concept of a new birth, as per Jesus' instruction to Nicodemus in 3:7: "Do not be astonished that I have told you, 'You must (*dei humas*) be born from above'." This requirement pertains to the objective of Jesus as conveyed by the identical verb "dei" (must) in 3:14-15: "And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must (*dei*) the Son of Man be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life". The mentioned verb "dei" denotes a mutual obligation between humanity to be "born from above" and the Son of Man to be "lifted up".

4.3.3. Born of water and Spirit (3:5b), Born of Spirit (3:6b,8b)

To study these two expressions, we first examine the contrast between flesh and Spirit (3:6), earth and heaven (3:12), and then the expression "*being born of water and Spirit.*" (3:5b); and the expression "*born of spirit is spirit.*" (3:6b,8b).

Ford suggests that "the water and the Spirit can, again, be general, but also can refer to the human and divine origin of Jesus, water being connected with natural birth. This is reinforced by the next verse with its mention of flesh and Spirit, as in Prologue of John where these two terms are focused on Jesus: *he is the Word become flesh* -1:14; and John (the Baptist) says: "*I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him*" (1:32)."²²⁰

Jesus said to Nicodemus in 3:6: "*What is born of flesh (*sarkos*) is flesh (*sarx*), and what is born of spirit (*pneumatos*) is spirit (*pneuma*)*", and in 3:12: "*If I tell you about earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you about heavenly things?*". The two phrases "*flesh and Spirit*" (3:6) and "*heaven and earth*" (3:12) may be perceived as a dualistic contrast, potentially leading to misinterpretation. The inquiry pertains to the potential existence of a conflict between the corporeal and spiritual realms, as indicated in 3:6, and the dichotomy between the celestial and terrestrial domains, as referenced in 3:12. With regards to the genesis account in chapter one, it can be posited that the process of new creation

²²⁰ David F.FORD, "Meeting Nicodemus: A Case Study in Daring Theological Interpretation", *Scottish Journal of Theology*, Volume 66, Issue 1, February 2013, p. 10; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0036930612000270>.

through the “new birth” does not entail a mere replication of God's original creative act. The act of Creation, as described in the Book of Genesis, is a prerequisite for the occurrence of the new creation event in the Fourth Gospel. The initial physical birth holds a crucial role in facilitating the subsequent spiritual rebirth. Stated differently, the absence of a divine act of creation at the outset precludes the possibility of subsequent novel creations.

The absence of physical birth precludes the occurrence of spiritual birth. Consequently, there exists no dichotomy between the corporeal and incorporeal or a depreciation of the corporeal, as both are indispensable. However, it is notable that the human body has inherent limitations in its ability to attain celestial realms, as the physical form alone is inadequate for such a purpose. The attainment of eternal life is not contingent upon the physical body, but rather is derived from the spiritual realm and a higher power. The concept of the new birth is not intended to supplant the physical birth, but rather to complete it. The concept of being “born of the Spirit” involves the activation of the Spirit within the body, resulting in the fulfilment of the body's ultimate objective of attaining eternal life.

Jesus explains “gennèthè anothèn (to be born again/ from above)” (3:3b) by “gennèthè ek hudatos kai pneumatos (to be born of water and of the Spirit)” (3:5b). This expression in Greek contains a single preposition “ek” (of) for the two terms “water and spirit” which have no definite article. This phrase alludes to Yahweh's oracle in Ezek 36:25-27: *“I will sprinkle clean water (hudôr katharon) over you to make you clean, I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit (pneuma kainon), I will put within you. I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh, I will put my spirit (to pneuma mou) within you so that you walk in my statutes, observe my ordinances, and keep them”*.

The terms “water and Spirit” in John 3:5b refer also to the beginning of Genesis 1:1-2: *“In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth and the earth was without form or shape, with darkness over the abyss and a mighty wind (pneuma) sweeping over the waters(tou hudatos)”*. Water is used to symbolise the Spirit in certain prophetic texts, such as Isaiah 44:1-4 and Zechariah 12:10. The phrase *“being born of water and Spirit”* (3:5b) holds

significance for Bible readers as it evokes the promise of the restoration of God's people (Ezek 36; Jer 3:1-2) and the act of creation by God in the beginning (Gen 1:2). The act of being born of water and Spirit is considered a divine gift, resulting in a new creation that enables one to enter into the New Covenant established by Jesus and become a part of salvation history.

The Gospel employs the metaphor of water to connote two distinct concepts: the “*living water*” bestowed by Jesus (4:13-14) and the *rivers of living water* that represent the bestowal of the Spirit (7:37-39).

This statement pertains to the function of the Holy Spirit in the Gospel narrative. During the inception of Jesus' ministry, the Spirit descends and endures upon him, as affirmed by John the Baptist in 1:32: “*I saw the Spirit (to pneuma) come down like a dove from the sky and remain upon him*” According to John the Baptist's statement in 1:33d, Jesus is the individual who performs the baptism of the Holy Spirit (*pneumati hagiô*). During his farewell discourse, Jesus discloses to his disciples the function of the “*Paraclete (paracletos)*” (14:16,26; 15:26; 16:7). The aforementioned character is associated with the designations “*Holy Spirit (to pneuma to hagion)*” (14:26) and “*Spirit of truth (to pneuma tes alêtheias)*”. According to the Gospel of John, the Paraclete, also known as the Spirit of truth, bears witness to Jesus (15:26), extols his virtues (16:14a), and serves to convict the world of its wrongdoing (16:8b). Following Jesus' ascension, the Paraclete, also known as the Holy Spirit, assumes a crucial role within the community of disciples, persisting in their presence indefinitely (14:17b) and imparting instruction while recalling the teachings of Jesus (14:26b).

According to Thong, there is a close connection between Jesus and the Holy Spirit on the one hand, and between the Holy Spirit and believers on the other.

“Being 'born of the Spirit' is therefore inseparable from recognising the identity of Jesus. In this perspective, the dialogue with Nicodemus culminates in a monologue (3:13-21) in which the divine identity of Jesus and his mission are revealed. Jesus invites Nicodemus and the reader to receive the gift of the birth of the Spirit, so that they can “see” Jesus and “hear” his word.”²²¹

²²¹ Cf. Thong, *op. cit.*, p. 243.

As per Johannine theology, the phrase *"being born of the Spirit"* denotes *"being born of God"* as stated in the first chapter, verses twelve and thirteen. The discourse found in verses 3:2-8 highlights the correlation between the concept of *"being born again"* and *"being born of water and of the Spirit (3:5b),"* which serves as a fundamental prerequisite for perceiving and accessing the Kingdom of God (3:5c).

The correlation between *"being born again/ from above"* (3:3b) and *"being born of water and the Spirit"* (3:5b) is established in the revelation of Jesus in 3:3 and 3:5. This is further linked to *"seeing (idein) the kingdom of God"* (3:3c) and *"entering (eiselthein) the kingdom of God"* (3:5c). The verb *"idein"* which appears in 3:3c no longer solely denotes visual perception, but rather connotes an act of movement, displacement, and a presumed obligation.

Jesus offers Nicodemus a new birth, now (*hic et nunc*), in this world. Furthermore, Jesus compares the one born of the Spirit (the one who believes) to the wind in 3:8. Thus, *"seeing the Kingdom of God"* (3:3c) and *"entering the Kingdom of God"* (3:5c) is a reality for those who believe in Jesus and already possess it on earth; it is not a reality to be expected, but one that already exists in the life of the believer. *"Seeing"* and *"entering"* the Kingdom of God is equivalent to *"having eternal life, as Jesus also declares to the crowd: "everyone who sees the Son and believes in him may have eternal life" (6:40b).* The dialogue in 3:2b-12 shows that faith in Jesus is a gift from God, a gift of the new birth that is realised in this life. Henceforth, the one who is born of the Spirit already sees the Kingdom of God, has entered and dwells there, knowing that full possession of the realities above (eternal life, seeing and entering the Kingdom of God) will take place permanently after he passes from this world to the Father. The theme of birth in 3:2-12 as well as the theme of the Spirit's gift relates to Jesus' revelation of the Father's drawing in 6:44a: *"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up on the last day."*

The way of obtaining entry into the eternal kingdom of God, which encompasses an existence that is both complete and everlasting, is contingent upon establishing a connection with Jesus, who is identified as the Son of Man and the sole offspring of God. The aforementioned

relationship entails a transformative shift that is facilitated by the efficacious intervention of the divine. In his nocturnal rendezvous with Jesus, Nicodemus is presented with a pivotal moment of choice. Through his inquiries, this emissary of the practical and authoritative Jewish community articulates the reservations and uncertainties of individuals who rely on what can be controlled and assured. Nicodemus exhibits a willingness to adapt, albeit with a preference for minimising risks and unexpected circumstances. Jesus provides a novel point of departure, a transformative commencement akin to that of childbirth, which is not contingent upon the individual or their self.

The process of gaining access to the kingdom of God, akin to the experience of life, is a consequence of a given endowment, namely, the ability to perceive through the lens of God. Upon analysing the various factors that contribute to Nicodemus' perspective on Jesus Christ, it can be inferred that he refrains from adopting polarising stances, be it of a religious or secular nature, and instead prioritises dialogue over conflict. He corresponds to a non-Christian religious belief system and upholds the virtues and principles inherent to their own tradition, striving to act in accordance with ethical standards. He has chosen to experience a dramatic encounter with the visual representation of Jesus.

The dialogue between Nicodemus and Jesus ends with the title he gives Jesus - "Son of Man": *"No one has gone up to heaven except the one who has come down from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up* the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life."* (3:13-15). The importance of the gaze is also found in this comparison with Moses²²². According to the biblical account, Moses elevated the serpent in the wilderness, resulting in the salvation and healing of those who gazed upon it, having previously been bitten by the serpent. Similarly, it was necessary for the Son of Man to be elevated on the cross, and those who placed their faith in him were redeemed. The transition from visual perception of the serpent to belief in the Son of Man is observed.

²²² On the theme of the ascent to Mount Sinai, interpreted in mystical terms as an ascent to heaven, see W. A. Meeks, *The Prophet-King*, pp. 122-124.

The conclusion of the nocturnal discourse between Nicodemus and Jesus in the Gospel of John features an initial manifestation of dualism, wherein Jesus extends an invitation to Nicodemus to embrace the Light. In this instance, the act of arriving at the Light would be tantamount to arriving at Jesus, as Jesus is regarded as the Light of the globe (8:12; 9:5). Nonetheless, the explicit correlation between Jesus and light is not articulated in the narrative presented in 3:9. It is only deducible that the illumination alluded to in this passage pertains to Jesus.

Furthermore, upon examination of the parable presented in John 11:9-10, it can be inferred that Jesus attributes the subsequent words to his own person: *“Are there not twelve hours in a day? If one walks during the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if one walks at night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him”*. Jesus who is the Light of the world can see the light of this world and can in turn be enlightened, because he walks by day and acts while it is day (cf. 9:4). In the same way, Jesus comes to the light so that his deeds may be seen and those who see his manifestation may believe.

As before, the characters in these passages respond quite differently to Jesus. Nicodemus was one of the people who believed in Jesus because of the signs, but when Jesus made unexpected comments about being “born anew”, Nicodemus became completely baffled. Jesus replied, *“If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?”* (3:12).

According to Koester's argument,

“The signs had not prepared Nicodemus to believe Jesus' words. Genuine “seeing” means seeing or entering the kingdom of God (3:3,5) and seeing or having eternal life (3:36). Such vision can only come from a new birth and a faith that receives Jesus' testimony (3:11,33). The statement that Nicodemus did not receive Jesus' testimony, which is related at the end of the chapter, indicates that Nicodemus's positive response to the signs did not lead naturally to genuine faith.”²²³

²²³ Craig R. KOESTER, *op. cit.*, p. 335.

4.4. Blind from birth – The journey of sight and hearing – John 9:1-10:21

The ability to see and believe is crucial for Jesus' listeners: *“everyone who sees (theôrôn) the Son and believes in him may have eternal life”* (6:40b) Why is this once-and-for-all acquired ability a lifelong journey? To answer these questions, we look at section 9:1-41.

A blind man cannot see light, but he can hear. By listening to Jesus' words and doing what he says, the blind man regains his physical sight. For him, listening therefore precedes physical sight. At the same time, the theme of this character's sight runs throughout chapter 9.

Chapter 9 contains a rich semantic field pertaining to vision, as evidenced by the presence of verbs such as “blepô”, “theôreô”, and “horaô” (all meaning “to see”), as well as “anablepô” (meaning “to obstruct vision”) and “anoigô” (meaning “to open”). Chapter 9 features four instances of the term “anablepô,” which refers to obstructing one's vision, one instance of “theôreô,” two instances of “horaô,” which denotes visual perception, and seven instances of “anoigô,” which pertains to the act of opening one's eyes. Additionally, the chapter contains nine occurrences of “blepô,” which refers to the act of seeing. The verb shows both the visual perception of individuals who have been blind since birth and the perception that causes blindness in the Pharisees.

The term “tuphlos” (blind) is mentioned 13 times in John 9, with the initial ten instances denoting individuals who were blind from birth, while the final three instances pertain to the Pharisees' blindness. The text elucidates the circumstances of the individual who was born with blindness and was only able to perceive light after receiving the restorative intervention of Jesus. The condition of congenital blindness cannot be classified as a pathological state, as the aforementioned statement does not allude to any curative measures, but rather pertains to the act of visual perception through the opening of the eyes (anoigô) and the restoration of sight (anablepô).

The process of the visually impaired individual's progression commences with their corporeal vision and culminates with their metaphysical vision as they profess their faith in Jesus by stating, "I do believe, Lord" (9:38a). The individual who was previously visually impaired is among the group of individuals to whom Jesus refers in 9:39b as "those who do not see" subsequent to embracing the faith. The concept of sight has shifted from its physical manifestation to a more faith-based interpretation. The statement made by Jesus in 9:39c, "those who do see might become blind", pertains to the Pharisees who lack faith in him and assert their ability to see by saying, "We see". Consequently, their lack of faith renders them unable to perceive the truth. The verbs "to see" and "to hear" are utilised to depict the protagonist's journey, beginning with the perception of the "light of day" (9:7c) and culminating in the perception of the *light of the world*, which is identified as Jesus (9:5).

4.4.1. The context

The Gospel of John employs an uncommon passage formula to introduce the accounts of the healing of the blind man and the debate with the Pharisees within the epic thread. This departure from the typical style of the Gospel of John is notable, as it bears clear resemblances to the Synoptic style. The narrative depicts John's desire to address the doctrinal and practical challenges that emerged within the church during the latter part of the first century. These challenges were attributed to dualistic heresies that cast doubt on either the humanity or divinity of Jesus. According to Cook's perspective, the Evangelist John refrained from confining himself to any pre-existing framework. The author employs a flexible utilisation of dualistic symbolism in order to convey the dramatic concept of sin, wherein darkness is depicted as having rejected light.

"The Gnosticism, in its various forms, was propounding esoteric theories whose symbols were truth and falsehood, light (illumination, knowledge) and darkness. John confronts these heresies throughout the entire Gospel by giving new and liberating meaning to the symbolic language of the Gnostics".²²⁴

²²⁴ Cf. Gileermo COOK, *Seeing, judging and acting: Evangelism in Jesus' way. A biblical study on chapter 9 of the Gospel of John*, in *International Review of Mission*, 87: 388-396.

The ninth chapter of the Gospel of John portrays a complex event that serves to underscore the dual nature of Jesus as both divine and human. The author presents a series of seven dialogues that are interrelated and depict various reactions to the evangelistic attempts of Jesus. These dialogues can be viewed as confrontations or crises. At the core of every interaction lies a fundamental inquiry: What constitutes veracity and what constitutes falsity? What is the method for accurately distinguishing between the two options? This narrative can be interpreted as a parable that highlights the dichotomy between perceiving reality through illumination versus obscurity.

The Gospel's Prologue presents an opposition that is evident from the outset, as expressed in the following statement: *"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it"* (1:5). The verse asserts the triumph of illumination over obscurity, thereby emphasising the indomitable nature of illumination. Those who oppose the illumination may pave the way for those who embrace it, relying on the divine providence of Christ. When considering the concept of anteriority (before/after), it can be inferred that individuals were in a state of death prior to receiving the life-giving Word. However, the Johannine perspective also suggests that Christ, who is regarded as the Light of the world, presents humanity with the means to emerge from darkness and attain a state of being characterised by illumination and righteousness. This transformation enables one to become a child of the light. *"Whoever walks in the dark does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of the light"* (12:35-36).

In order to make a connection between what precedes and what follows, it should be noted that section 9:1-10:21 narrates Jesus' activity in Jerusalem. Indeed, in 7:10, Jesus goes up to Jerusalem and his activity takes place in the Temple (chs. 7-8), outside the Temple (9:1-10:21), then again in the Temple (10:22-40). Central to this whole context, there is Jesus' statement *"While I am in the world, I am the light of the world"* (9:5).

At the same time, the healing of the man who is blind from birth must also be directly linked to the expression in the previous chapter, *"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."* (8:12), so that the things stated there are to be understood in the context of the event described here, an event that prefigures and demonstrates the care that Jesus, the Light of the world, has for those who see and follow this light.

As for the parallel between 8:12 and 9:5, each statement regarding the identification between Jesus and light has its own particularity. Light - Jesus enables people not to walk in darkness. While in chap. 9, daylight is the time to do the works of God: 9:4-5: *"We have to do the works of the one who sent me while it is day. Night is coming when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world"*.

Part 7:1-10:40 of the text features the Pharisees and the Jews as the principal figures. The discourse pertains to the theological concept of the divine nature of Jesus. The analysis of 9:1-10:21 necessitates consideration of the antagonistic atmosphere in which it is situated, characterised by a desire to terminate Jesus and impede his progress (7:30, 32, 44 and 10:39). The triumph of light over darkness is depicted in the narrative of the man who was born blind (9:1-41), despite facing opposition from the Jewish authorities. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that section 9:1-10:21 commences and concludes with the term *"tuphlos"* (denoting the state of being blind): *"As he passed by he saw a man blind (tuphlon) from birth."* The statement *"a demon cannot open the eyes of the blind (tuphlon), can he?"* was made in a particular context. (10:21b).

4.4.2. The way of the blind from birth (9:1-41)

The structure of chapter 9 of the Gospel of John follows a rigorously composed scheme: seeing, acting, judging. We have a succession of dramatic dialogues organised in chiasmus, and the action of Jesus, as we shall see is not separate from the dialogues, but integral to them.²²⁵ The

²²⁵ For a Christological reading of chapter 9 of the Gospel of John, see C.H. DOOD, *L'interprétation du quatrième évangile*, *Lectio Divina* 82, Edition du Cerf, Paris, 1975, 449-458.

present investigation aims to establish a correlation between the cognitive processes of perception, evaluation, and behaviour, and the kerygmatic facets of contemplation, appraisal, and dedication to a particular course of conduct. The act of perceiving is intricately linked to our understanding of the divine revelation, as it pertains to the manifestation of Jesus and those individuals who are selected to embody him. The term “judging” as used in this passage carries the connotation of “krisis” or “krima,” which are Greek cognates that convey the concepts of sifting and prompting a deep reconsideration of our assumptions and behaviour.

According to Cook, seeing and acting imply some choices²²⁶, as it can be noticed in the first verses of chapter 9.

In order to better understand the message of Jn 9, three key themes can be analysed in the dialogues: a) who is the one who has sinned?, b) discernment (krima) and judgement (krisis); c) knowing and not knowing.

4.4.3. Who is the one who has sinned?

“As he passed by he saw a man blind from birth” (9:1). Jesus saw a man who had been considered socially inferior by the religious authorities of his era. The narrative introduces the subject of sin in conjunction with the motif of blindness through the inquiry posed by the disciples to Jesus. The disciples, in contrast, viewed the individual in question not as a person in need, but rather as an object of curiosity and theological contemplation. The individuals presented a query to Jesus, inquiring, *“Rabbi who sinned (tis hèmarten), this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”* (9:2). The question presented by the person in question effectively circumvents the primary matter at hand. The disciples' inability to perceive their surroundings led to their assessment of the situation, resulting in a missed opportunity for action. Jesus directs the attention of his disciples towards the crux of the matter. The visually impaired individual is positioned in front of them to receive assistance, with the intention of demonstrating God's divine plan through their actions. It is imperative to engage in the work of God during daylight hours, as

²²⁶ Cf. Cook, *op. cit.*, p. 390.

nocturnal hours are unsuitable for such activities. The initial contrast between light and darkness is of great importance in the narrative, as evidenced by the statement “*While I am in the world, I am the light of the world*”. The statement made by Jesus alludes to a connotation distinct from that of perceptual “vision”.

Chapter 9 ends on the same theme when Jesus says to the Pharisees in 9:41: “*If you were blind, you would have no sin (hamartian), but now you are saying, ‘We see,’ so your sin (hè hamartia humôn) remain*”. At the beginning of chap. 9, Jesus does not give the cause of the blind man's blindness: “*Neither he nor his parents sinned; it is so that the works of God might be made visible through him*”, but at the end, Jesus reveals the sinfulness of the Pharisees who say, “*We see*” (9:41b). We have the verb “hamartanô” (to sin) twice in 9:2,3 referring to the sin of the blind man and his parents, four times the noun “hamartôlos” (sinner) in 9:16,24,25,31 designating Jesus; and three times the noun “hamartia” (sin) in 9:34; 9:41a,41b speaking of the sin of the blind man (9:34) and that of the Pharisees (9:41a,41b).²²⁷

As it can be understood, the blind from birth illustrates the condition of the sinful man²²⁸. The blind man's eyes are non-functional in the sense that he does not understand what it means to see spiritually and often confuses spiritual sight with empirical perception of things. It is a

²²⁷ Cf. Joseph Lê Minh THÔNG, *op. cit.*

²²⁸ Concerning the conception of the people of Israel according to which illness is a consequence of sin and a form of divine punishment and the implications that derive from it, see Cristian BĂDILIȚĂ'S commentary on the *Noul Testament – Evanghelia după Ioan. Ediție bilingvă. Introduceri, traducere, comentariu și note patristice de Cristian Bădiliță*, Ed. Curtea Veche, București, 2010, pp. 277-288. Also R. Schnackenburg in *The gospel according to Saint John*, Burnes & Oates, Crossroad/New York, “contends that chapter 9 shows the evangelist's skill in using a loose ‘historical’ framework to deal with his theological themes and simultaneously to conduct a controversy with contemporary Judaism. The transparency with which the narrative reveals the underlying situation of the evangelist and his community is particularly great in John 9. Messiah's question is at the centre of the debate between Judaism and Christianity (v. 2). Official Pharisaic Judaism not only argues vigorously against Jesus' Messiahship and divine origin, but also fights the followers of Jesus Christ with external measures. Defectors are excluded from the Jewish religious community, and so become subject to social sanctions too”.

condition in which we will later see the Pharisees caught. He does not perceive spiritually, but only tacitly, analyses.

Two humorous scenes follow the account of the blind man's healing. The surprised neighbours question each other, and the Pharisees argue among themselves. Some Pharisees think Jesus is a sinner for breaking the Sabbath (9:16a), and others argue in 9:16b: *"How can a sinful man do such signs?"*. The irony found in the Jewish authorities comes from their misjudgement that Jesus is a sinner (9:16a, 24b), that the formerly blind man is a sinner from birth (9:34a), and yet they say *"we see (blepomen)"*, but they don't realise that their sin remains (9:41c). This is the case *"those who do see might become blind"* (9:39c). The sin of the Pharisees is related to their way of seeing, this being a stance against the one who has made signs. In fact, the refusal to believe in Jesus is the sin par excellence, as Jesus told the Jews: *"That is why I told you that you will die in your sins. For if you do not believe that I AM, you will die in your sins"* (8:24). However, the sinful state of the Pharisees in 9:41 is not final. Their sin results from ignorance. They do not know that they are blind. They say to Jesus in 9:40b: *"Surely we are not also blind, are we?"*. Jesus' reply, *"If you were blind, you would have no sin"* (9:41a) reveals their ignorance. Their true sight remains open to them. This openness is expressed in the *"separation"* (schism) between the Pharisees (9:16c) and the Jews (10:19). This separation is significant because, among Jesus' opponents (Jews and Pharisees), there were some who did not share the anti-Jesus attitude. They side with Jesus, saying to the Pharisees in 9:16b: *"How can a sinful man do such signs?"* and to the Jews in 10:21: *"These are not the words of one possessed; surely a demon cannot open the eyes of the blind?"*. The thematic element of division precludes the characterization of the Pharisees and Jews as homogeneous entities in opposition to Jesus. The concept of division demonstrates the potential for alternative perspectives. The possibility of attaining genuine knowledge is perpetually available to the Pharisees as indicated in verses 9:40-41.²²⁹

²²⁹ Cf. Annie JAUBERT, *Approches de l'Évangile de Jean*, Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1976, p. 91.

According to Brodie,

The sin is radically redefined in John. Those who do not believe in Jesus are the ones who have not yet crossed from an existential state of spiritual death to an existential state of spiritual life (cf. 5:24; cf. 8:21: "*I am going away and you will look for me, but you will die in your sin*" *kai en te hamartia humon apothaneisthe*). Thus, the man is not only blind on a biological level, but by implication also blind on a spiritual level, seeing as he knows neither Jesus, nor the Father (8:19: "*You know neither me nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also*", *eme oidate oute tov patera mou ei eme edeite, kai ton patera mou an edeite*) and occupies a sinful existential state, characterised by spiritual death and blindness. According to John, Jesus came precisely for this reason: to heal the spiritually blind (9:41; 12:40-41), who are still ruled by sin (8:21, 24, 34-36) and controlled by the devil (8:44). In the course of the narrative and the forensic court case, it becomes clear that the Jews are labelling Jesus as a sinner (9:24). The Jewish opponents in John betray a lack of insight when they fail to comprehend this life-creating act of Jesus (9:34)²³⁰.

Directing a blind man to wash himself at the Siloam pool can be interpreted as a demonstration of devout compliance with the entire process. Through an act of faith and transformation, a miraculous event took place whereby the man's sight was instantaneously restored or recreated (*elten blepon*). This was achieved through the application of mud to the man's eyes by the individual known as Jesus. "*The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see (anablepsa)*" (9:11). This explanation is replete with verbs and is characterised by vivid and detailed imagery. The said statement reflects the perspective of an individual who lacks familiarity with conjecture and whose existence is evaluated based on their deeds and the resulting outcomes. The significance of faith in the healing narrative is evident, as the man's physical sight of Jesus is not a prerequisite for his healing. However, despite the observable transformation in his behaviour, some of his neighbours

²³⁰ Thomas L. BRODIE. *The Gospel According to John : A Literary and Theological Commentary*. Vol Pbk. rpt. ed., 1997. Oxford University Press; 1997, <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.proxy.library.lincoln.ac.uk/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=23535> site ehost-live.

remained unconvinced, possibly due to their religious biases impeding their ability to perceive the truth. The inclusion of an individual who was previously visually impaired within their community has become a subject of evaluation and urgency.

The healing of the blind man from birth is portrayed as a manifestation of divine intervention, signifying more than just a physical recovery of sight. Rather, it serves as a symbol of profound metamorphosis, spiritual conversion, and rebirth, all of which are central to the purpose of Christ's advent. The visually impaired individual also exhibited trust in the utterances of Jesus - utterances that pledge to bring about regeneration. The utterances of Jesus are instrumental in the creation of life, and his capacity to (re)generate life in a corporeal sense is equally significant. The actions performed by Jesus, such as the act of regaining sight to the blind, hold a symbolic significance. The emphasis lies not solely on the restorative occurrence, but also on the interplay between the visually impaired individual and the other sightless individuals, specifically, on the progression of illuminating those who accept Christ through faith and concurrently the progression of obscuring those who refuse him.

4.4.4. The Discernment (Krima) and Judgment (Krisis)

Jesus speaks of "judgment" (krisis) and "judgement" (krinô) in 3:18-19: *"Whoever believes in him will not be condemned (krinetai), but whoever does not believe has already been condemned (kekritai), because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the verdict (hè krisis), that the light came into the world, but people preferred darkness to light, because their works were evil"*. In 5:24, Jesus tells the Jews: *"Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes in the one who sent me has eternal life and will not come to condemnation (krisin)"*, thus, the believer is not judged (3:18a) and does not come to the judgment (5:24c).

Jesus' mission is stated in the assertion *"For judgement, I have come into the world (9:39)"*. This verse should be read back in the light of 3:19-21 in order to ensure that the judgment has much to do with the light that has come into the world. According to Lincoln,

“the verb *not be exposed* used in v.21 holds juridical connotation 'to convict', so that those who come to the light have their deeds exposed as having been accomplished in God. In that sense, Jesus' mission constitutes the trial exposing whether one's deeds are in conformity to its true judgment, and thus those who practice the truth are revealed to be on God's side rather than on the world's side opposed to the divine verdict. People are divided into two groups: those who do not see (and acknowledge their blindness) and who might be made to see, and those that claim to see (by rejecting Jesus as the plenary and ultimate manifestation of God) and might become blind”.²³¹

The statement made by Jesus in v.39, which includes the epilogue, appears to be in opposition to the previous claim made in 3:17 (as well as 12:47) that God dispatched the Son with the intention of rescuing the world rather than condemning it. The explication provided in verses 3:19 and 9:39 delineates the concept of judgement as pertaining to the manner in which people accepted or refused the illumination that had entered the world. Thus, the verdict at hand entails categorising individuals into two distinct factions: those who subscribe to the notion of illumination and those who reject it.

“The analysis made so far demonstrates that God is at work through Jesus in the healing of the man born blind. The way in which the history ended casts light on why the story, as recounted, is more than simply the story of the man born blind. Rather, it is the story of Jesus, the revealer of God whose status is reversed and transformed into that of the eschatological judge. The special language is so inversed that the judges of everyday life come to be judged by the accused, who becomes the judge. John's understanding of the function of the Son of Man is reformulated in this chapter. According to 5:26-27, the authority to execute judgment has been granted to the Son, but this pronouncement of judgment, a characteristic messianic mission, is executed in chapter 9”²³².

²³¹ Cf. Andrew T. LINCOLN, *Truth on Trial: The Lawsuit Motif in the Fourth Gospel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000) 12-13, apud. Smith, D. Moody. *The Journal of Theological Studies* 58, no. 1 (2007): 221–26. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23970523>.

²³² Cf. “A Comprehensive Reading of John 9: A Socio-Rhetorical Perspective of Discipleship in the Gospel of John.” 2009. <https://search-ebscohost-com.proxy.library.lincoln.ac.uk/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsocai&AN=edsocai.ocn754136937> site eds-live scope site.

“Krima” in 9:39a refers first to the healed blind man: “so that those who do not see might see, and those who do see might become blind” (9:39b) and then to the Pharisees: “and those who do see might become blind” (9:39c). Consequently, it is not feasible to interpret the term “krima” as “judgement” in accordance with the TOB. The contextual coherence of the translation of “krima” as “discernment” by the Jerusalem Bible is noteworthy. The application of 9:39a pertains to individuals who were born blind and the Pharisees. The attainment of sight or blindness is contingent upon one’s decision to take a stance before Jesus, who is referred to as the Light in passages 8:12 and 9:5. The decision to persist in obscurity, that is, to harbour a preference for darkness over light (as referenced in 3:19b) and to reject faith in Jesus, ultimately results in self-imposed condemnation for the individual (as stated in 3:19a). Within the framework of chapter 9, the concept of discernment pertains to the differentiation between possessing knowledge and without knowledge.

Those whose faith is grounded in enlightened vision possess the capacity to comprehend that the arrival of Jesus in the world represents an unparalleled, irreplaceable, and conclusive eschatological occurrence that guides those who perceive or move towards illumination to redemption. On the other hand, those who profess to perceive but lack genuine insight are directed towards condemnation. The phrase “to see” in 9:39 is used figuratively to denote the capacity to comprehend and acknowledge the veracity of the plenary and eschatological revelation of God in the form of Jesus. “The blind man, with an enlightened vision of faith, not only joins the ranks of believers who are called to see, but also shows his ability to know and recognise the eschatological truth, which makes him an example of one who will escape the judgment that will fall upon the unbelieving world”.²³³

²³³ *Idem*, p. 289.

4.4.5. Knowing and not knowing

Chapter 9 is characterised by the prominent theme of knowledge and ignorance. The verb “*oida*” is utilised on 11 occasions, wherein the distribution of knowledge and ignorance among the characters is portrayed in both favourable and unfavourable light. It is noteworthy that the book of John, chapter 9, commences and concludes with the theme of “*lack of knowledge*”. The lexical item “*oida*” (denoting the act of possessing knowledge) foregrounds the thematic dichotomy of cognitive awareness and ignorance.

In contrast to John's consistent and frequent use of two verbs, namely *oida* and *gynosko*, for the act of knowing, the ninth chapter of John stands out for its high density of cognitive verbs. However, it is noteworthy that throughout this chapter, John exclusively employs the verb *oida* (11 times) and never resorts to *gynosko*, despite its apparent synonym with *oida* in other instances. Jeffrey Tripp notes that the interrogation of the man born blind in John 9 is a well-crafted scene that nonetheless presents several difficulties like the declarative use of (*ouk oida*) is a rhetorical trope used either to assert testimony or to avoid it altogether, John 9 can be read as an instruction to assess the potential testimony of the blind man.

“The scene has itself been understood as a “trial” of the formerly blind man, although admittedly a highly irregular one. Instead, since John reflects forensic process and rhetorical tropes, it is possible to view the interrogation as a pretrial hearing assessing whether the man would be a good witness for the prosecution of Jesus. It was during pretrial hearings that the testimony of potential witnesses was vetted, negotiated, and even molded by plaintiffs and defendants. Moreover, witnesses in Greco-Roman courts often couched their testimony—or lack thereof—in terms of what they did or did not know. That is, what a witness was eager to testify to was offered as something he *knew* to be true, while, for a variety of social and legal reasons, a fact to which a witness was not willing to testify was frequently presented as something he *did not know* so simply could not confirm. Such a rhetorical tendency in the context of testimony contributes to the density of cognitive assertions in John 9 and, as we will see, to John's choice of verb.”²³⁴

²³⁴ Cf. Jeffrey M. TRIPP, *Claiming Ignorance and Intimidating Witnesses: Reading John 9 in Greco-Roman Forensic Context*. in *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, vol. 80 no. 3, 2018, pp. 470-490. *Project MUSE*, doi:10.1353/cbq.2018.0093.

The blind man, like other witnesses, underlines what he is willing to testify to with assertions of knowledge and avoids testimony.

The irony of the knowledge and ignorance of the Jewish authorities is found in units 9:24-34 and 9:39-41. They say to the blind man: *"Give God the praise! We know that this man (Jesus) is a sinner"* (9:24b). However, the blind man shows that their knowledge is doubtful because they have no satisfactory explanation of the one who restored his sight (9:25). Moreover, the authorities confess that they do not know the origin of Jesus: *"We know that God spoke to Moses, but we do not know where this one is from"* (9:29). If they do not know where Jesus is from, how can they say that Jesus is a sinner? In other words, they claim to see and know, but in reality they are ignorant and blind, as Jesus told the Pharisees in 9:41b: *"you are saying, 'We see,' so your sin remains"*. The phrase *"we see"* here refers to *"we know"* in 9:24b. The irony is that, for Jewish authorities, Jesus is a sinner (9:24b), but in reality they are the real sinners (9:41b). As for the blind man's parents, for fear of the Jews, they do not give a real answer. The narrator recounts the parents' response to the Jews' question about their son: *"His parents answered and said, 'We know that this is our son and that he was born blind. We do not know how he sees now, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him, he is of age; he can speak for himself.'" (9:20-21).* The narrator also reveals that his parents did not tell all they knew for fear of being expelled from the synagogue. Whatever the nature of the intimidation, it is successful: the parents testify no more. When the man returns, his interrogators demand that he testify under oath (*"Give glory to God!"*) in support of their own position: *"We know [humeis oidamen] that this person is a sinner"* (9:24).

When the debate becomes intense and probes the topic increasingly deeper, the force of an individual utterance seems to become complex. *"Firstly, the blind man continued to build his case against the Jews by appealing to the common religious beliefs shared by Jewish people. It is striking that the man used the verb *oidamen*, 'we know'. He did not say 'I know'. Through an implication, the blind man may mean that his statement was not only his conviction, but also a timeless truth every Jew may share regarding God. The blind man described the beliefs as a norm.*

Secondly, by virtue of another implication, the man's statement is meant as a strong assertion that the Jews should also know this. Hence, the illocution would be assertive. Thirdly, the blind man intended to teach or remind the Jews about the basic principles of God's attributes. Fourthly, his expression was nonetheless made in the speech situation of the intense debate. The force of disputative cannot be ignored."²³⁵

The blind man who was previously visually impaired initially acquired an understanding of Jesus' identity through a state of unawareness. The protagonist's response to his neighbours' inquiry regarding the identity of the man who facilitated his sight restoration is one of ignorance, as he states "*I don't know*" (9:12b) in response to their question (9:12a). At this juncture, the extent of his understanding regarding the individual responsible for his healing is limited to "*the man called Jesus,*" as indicated in verse 9:11a. Following the miraculous event, a debate arises regarding the identity of the man who was previously a beggar. In response, he confidently affirms, "*I am*" (9:8-9). Upon confirming that Jesus had created mud and instructed him to go to the pool of Siloam, the protagonist's acquaintances inquire about the whereabouts of Jesus (John 9:12).

Tripp explain that:

"The man's simple response, *ouk oida* ("I don't know"), helps to establish his honesty. They bring him to the Pharisees (9:13), not the Sanhedrin (11:47), nor even "the chief priests and Pharisees" (cf. 7:45-52; 11:46-53), only the Pharisees who have, at their immediately prior mention, questioned Jesus regarding the validity of his witnesses (8:12-20). None of the questions they ask the blind man are meant to incriminate him. Instead they wish to know how he received his sight (9:14) and what he has to say about Jesus (9:17), a question that can be read only to confirm his testimony that Jesus did in fact open his eyes. The man answers, "He is a prophet" (9:17). They do not press him, as we might expect if he were on trial and the central issue was whether he thought Jesus was the Messiah."²³⁶

²³⁵ *Speech Act Reading of John 9*, in *Acta Theologica*. January 2015:91-448. Accessed on June 9, 2022. <https://search-ebscohost-com.proxy.library.lincoln.ac.uk/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=113492961&site=ehost-live>.

²³⁶ Cf. Jeffrey M. TRIPP, *op. cit.*, p. 491.

Thong observes that the knowledge possessed by the blind man signifies a gradual advancement towards knowledge that is progressively more pertinent.

“Note that the former blind man's knowledge grows during an interrogation by the Jewish authorities. The strength of the account is found in the fact that the insult and threat of the authorities reinforce the conviction of the former blind man. He sees more and more clearly the identity of Jesus. Moreover, the knowledge of the former blind man is the knowledge of all people, including the authorities: *“We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if one is devout and does his will, he listens to him”* (9:31). This knowledge is fundamental in the relationship between God and his people. The insult to the authorities in 9:34a is ironic: *“You were born totally in sin, and are you trying to teach us?”*²³⁷.

The former blind man who was previously visually impaired lacks authority in the face of the authorities, experiences a restoration of their vision, yet encounters social exclusion from the collective community. The works of God, to which Jesus refers in 9:4, are effectively executed in actuality. Jesus encounters the individual who has been cured and poses the question, *“Do you believe in the Son of Man?”* (9:35b). The emphasis on testimonial evidence serves to elucidate the intricate and uniform utilisation of the term “oida” across eleven instances of cognitive awareness within a mere twenty verses. The crucial aspect for John pertains to the blind man's direct testimony in support of Jesus despite facing intimidation. The discourse between the individual and Jesus during their subsequent interaction (9:35-38) is entirely refreshed, as the former now genuinely perceives and places faith in Jesus as the Son of Man.

4.4.6. The sign received by the man born blind

The chapter 9 in its entirety is a “sign” in the Johannine sense of the term. Some Pharisees say of Jesus in 9:16b: *“How can a sinful man do such signs?”*. This sign is the manifestation of God's work in the blind man, and physical sight achieves its purpose when he manages to see the light that is Jesus. In this regard Schnelle observes:

²³⁷ Cf. THÔNG, *op. cit.*

“John describes the possible reactions to Jesus' miracle working: on the one side, the rejection of the divine legitimation of Jesus by means of a remark on his non-observance of the tradition: on the other side, the *semeia* that evoke faith, permitting the witnesses to conclude to the divine origin of the miracle worker (...) the miracle provokes both rejection and trust, so that a disagreement now arises among the Pharisees, just as the neighbours had disagreed among themselves in v.9”.²³⁸

The conclusion of the sign is found in Jesus' words in 9:39b: “*I came into this world for judgment, so that those who do not see might see, and those who do see might become blind*”.

The authenticity of the signs depends on the author's identity. To clarify, the inquiry shifted from the methodology of the recovery process (v.15a) to the identity of the individual responsible for the healing (v.17). Prior to requesting the man who was born blind to recognise his curer, the Pharisees reveal their inconsistent beliefs. The present study sheds light on the pluralistic views within the Pharisaic community with respect to the question of Jesus' divine provenance. Certain individuals maintain that Jesus cannot be of divine origin due to his disregard for the Sabbath (v.16a). Conversely, others challenge this perspective by questioning, “How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?” (v.16b). Hence, it can be argued that the rejection of Jesus as the light of the world is a manifestation of ignorance. The narrative of the blind man's life from birth serves as a paradigm for the journey of all individuals.

The narrative of the visually impaired individual's expedition serves as a paradigm for the audience. As a result of the miraculous healing of the blind man's physical sight, as described in chapter 9, verse 1 of the biblical text, it can be inferred that this was made possible through the intercession of Jesus, and the blind man's compliance with his instructions, as stated in verse 7. After being cured, he serves as a witness in an inquiry conducted by the Jewish authorities regarding the individual who executed the miraculous act. By means of a series of

²³⁸ Cf. U. SCHNELLE, 2015, *Die Semeia [tekens] in die Evangelie volgens Johannes*, In die Skriflig 49(1), Art. #1849, 6 pages. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/ids.v49i1.1849>.

inquiries, the individual who was previously visually impaired gradually ascertains the identity of the person who provided assistance to him. The cured individual's visual and auditory faculties are crucial. The man perceived auditory and visual stimuli of Jesus inquiring, and observed the Son of Man, with the question posed being, "*Do you believe in the Son of Man?*" (9:35b).

The purpose of Jesus' arrival was to reveal the identity of the Father. Hence, within the profound exposition of John's narrative, the central conflict that arises pertains to the dichotomy between the act of believing and not believing. According to Leon Dufour, the narrative of the gospel portrays a conflict between the acceptance and rejection of revelation, specifically the conflict between faith and unfaithfulness as the sole reactions to Jesus. Throughout various sequences, Jesus prompts visually impaired individuals to comprehend the disclosure and their reaction through the lens of faith. Within every scene, the reader is guided to examine diverse reactions towards Jesus and the underlying rationales behind said reactions.

"The episode from chapter 9 recalls the healings of the blind men transmitted by the synoptic tradition, whose function is to show that, with Jesus, the messianic times arrived (...) In John, the symbolism of enlightenment takes all its relief from the fact that it is a birth blind person, a situation without parallel in the synoptic tradition. Rather than an act of power (*dynamis*) announcing the prophetic message, the gift of sight is presented as a "sign" (*semeion*: cf.9:16), even before being accomplished by Jesus. He affirms to the disciples that he is the light of the world (9:5). The symbol of light balanced to the opposite direction: the clairvoyant Pharisees become "blind" by denying the miraculous sign. The Johannine perspective thus embraces the mystery in its totality: coming into the world, the light illuminates or dazzles according to the subjective dispositions of men."²³⁹

This ability leads the healed blind man to the confession of faith expressed in a word and gesture of commitment: "*I do believe, Lord, and he worshipped him*" (9:38).

²³⁹ Cf. X Léon-DUFOUR, *Lecture de l'Évangile selon Jean II (chapitres 5-12)*. Parole de Dieu, Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1990, pp. 198-211.

4.5. To know, to see, to believe: “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” – John 14:9

The unit 14:7-11 is structured around three verbs: “to know” (ginôskô), 4 times in 14:7a,7b,7c,9, “to see” (horaô), 3 times in 14:7,9a,9b and “to believe” (pisteuô), 3 times in 14:10,11a,11b. Note that, instead of asking to “see” (horaô) the Father, Philip uses the verb “deiknumi” (to show) in 14:8: “Master, show us (*deixon hêmin*) the Father, and that will be enough for us” and Jesus takes up Philip's request in his reply in 14:9c: “How can you say, Show us (*deixon hêmin*) the Father?”. Philip's request is met by Jesus with a response that borders on astonishment, that Philip, so long into his relationship with Jesus, could continue to ask for something that has already been amply demonstrated.

These three verbs are about the disciples, and the content of the revelation in 14:7-11 refers to the disciples, Jesus and his Father. Jesus is identified with his Father through “knowledge”: “If you know me, then you will also know my Father” (14:7a) and through the close bond of permanent communion with the Father: “I am the Father and the Father is in me” (14:10a).

The verb “to know” in biblical terminology is a part of the Covenant's lexicon. The term does not solely pertain to cognitive understanding, rather it denotes a lived encounter, a personal connection between two individuals, an affectionate bond between the divine and humanity. The response provided by Jesus in verse 14:7 elucidates the notion that the Father is perceptible solely to those who possess knowledge of Him, and that knowledge of the Father is contingent upon familiarity with Jesus, who serves as the emissary of the Father. The verb “to see” as utilised in verses 14:7, 9a, and 9b is inextricably linked to the accompanying verbs “to know” and “to believe”. The disciples acquire genuine knowledge and a legitimate perception of Jesus and his Father through their faith, as evidenced in 14:10-11. The statement “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (14:9b) must be understood solely within the confines of its immediate context in 14:7-11 and the entirety of the Gospel.

The majority of the narrative actions and discourses attributed to Jesus in the Gospel of John are revelational in nature, serving to invite audiences to provide an appropriate response.

4.5.1. “Seeing Jesus” and “Seeing the Father”

Perceiving the Father's presence is a challenging task as Philip's comprehension of Jesus' statement in 14:7 was limited. The release can be succinctly covered in three key points. The three main themes discussed in John 14:8a are: firstly, the request made by the disciples to see the Father *“show us the Father”*; secondly, the distinction and contrast between Jesus and the Father; and thirdly, the feasibility and infeasibility of perceiving the Father.

4.5.2. “Show us the Father” (14:8a)

The Fourth Gospel's frequent use of the noun “Father” (118 occurrences) implies that the concept of “God as Father” has already been thoroughly established and accepted. As per O'Day's assertion,

“The examination of the “Father” readings has emerged as a central area of investigation within the field of historical Jesus research, feminist inquiry, and the exploration of the connection between John and subsequent Christian doctrine.”²⁴⁰

We find the same expression *“show us the Father”* both in Philip's request (14:8a) and in Jesus' reply (14:9c). Indeed, to Philip's question in 14:8: *“Master, show us the Father”*, Jesus replies in 14:9: *“Have I been with you for so long a time and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, Show us the Father?”*. Thus the revelation in 14:9b: *“Whoever has seen me has seen the Father”* is framed by the two questions to Philip in 14:9a and 14:9c. This structure highlights the unprecedented novelty of Jesus' word in 14:9b, where the disciples “see Jesus”, but do not understand that they see the Father (cf. 14:7c).

²⁴⁰ Cf. Gail R O'DAY, *“‘Show Us The Father, And We Will Be Satisfied’ (John 14:8)”* in *Semeia*, winter 1999, p. 11. *Gale Academic One File*, link.gale.com/apps/doc/A78803157/AONE_ugoglescholar_sid_bookmark-AONE_xid_2c37ebee.

In chapter 14:9a, Jesus initiates a transition by inquiring about Philip's "knowledge", stating, "Have I been with you for a considerable amount of time and yet you have not comprehended me (ouk egnôkas), Philip?" The verb "ginôskô," denoting knowledge, is utilised in the perfect tense as "egnôkas," signifying the enduring and present outcome of an action. Philip's true understanding of Jesus only occurs subsequent to Jesus' communication. In order to gain a genuine understanding and perception of Jesus, it is imperative that we possess faith in the statement, "*believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me*" (cf. 14:10, 11). The transition from the verb "to know" to "to see" in verses 14:7-9 facilitates the unification of these two verbs, as the act of "seeing" presupposes prior knowledge, thereby implying a relationship between the two.

The motif of knowing (*oida*) has been introduced in the dialogue, and it is noteworthy that the epistemological focus is centred on Jesus himself, rather than an abstract location or means of attaining knowledge. The present text illustrates a transition from the term "*oida*" to "*ginosko*" which is plausibly an employment of Johannine synonyms rather than a deliberate alteration in their semantic connotations.

The statement "*If you know me, then you will also know my Father*" in 14:7a presents a parallel argument. The statement "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" in John 14:9b suggests that the outcomes of "knowing" and "seeing" are equivalent. Specifically, the disciples can only attain knowledge and perception of the Father through their knowledge and perception of Jesus, rather than the other way around. The account presented in 14:9b establishes the identification and differentiation between Jesus and his Father.

The utilisation of the phrase "*From now on*" (*kai ap' arti*) in conjunction with the verb "to see" (*horaô*) and the perfect "*eôrakate*" in 14:7b creates a juxtaposition. The phrase "*From now on, you do know him and have seen him*" pertains to the companionship of Jesus with his disciples, as he similarly communicated to Philip in 14:9a: "*Have I been with you for so long a time and you still do not know me Philip?*". Perry contends that the disciples can perceive the "Father" through Jesus, although this may not be immediately apparent to them due to their lack of awareness. The

disciples' comprehension of this verity is flawed, as evidenced by Philip's request for a theophany. However, it is important to note that the eorakate auton does not align with Philip's interpretation. John's account does not feature a conventional theophany, but rather portrays God in human form through Christ the Son. The prologue of the text has made reference to the incomprehensible ontological unity between the Father and the Son. Hence, the logos is deemed monogenous (1:14) and operates in the realm of creation (1:3). Additionally, the logos has been bestowed with the power to adjudicate (5:27) and has been granted all things (3:35, 13:3). However, the logos does not act independently (5:30) but rather solely executes actions that are observed from the Father (5:19).

Upon concluding his initial response to Philip in verse 9, Jesus poses an inquiry to Philip regarding his belief in the mutual indwelling of Jesus and the Father. It is noteworthy that the particle “οὐ” is positioned before the inquiry, indicating an anticipated affirmative response. As such, Jesus, being aware of the innermost thoughts of humanity (2:23-25), comprehends that Philip acknowledges the fundamental oneness of the Father and Son, albeit without complete comprehension.²⁴¹

4.5.3. Identifying and distinguishing between Jesus and the Father

The statement “*Whoever has seen me has seen the Father*” (14:9b) can be comprehended solely by examining the resemblances and disparities between Jesus and his Father. The Gospel underscores the likeness between Jesus' position and the flawless unity he shares with his Father. Assuming the Father's divinity, it follows that the Logos-Jesus also possesses divinity, as stated in 1:1c. In John 10:30, Jesus proclaims to the Jewish people that he and the Father are unified, stating “*The Father and I are one*” Later in John 17:11b, Jesus addresses his Father, referring to him as the Holy Father, and requests that he safeguard his followers in the name that was bestowed upon him, so that they may be unified in the

²⁴¹ Connor PERRY, “Hello Hurricane: An Exegesis on John 14:1-14, https://www.academia.edu/80847012/Hello_Hurricane_An_Exegesis_on_John_14_1_14.”

same manner as he and the Father, *“Holy Father, keep them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one just as we are”*. The act of *“believing in Jesus”* is equivalent to *“believing in the Father,”* as stated by Jesus in verse 12:44: *“Whoever believes in me believes not only in me but also in the one who sent me”* Jesus serves as a genuine embodiment of the Father. The unit 14:7-11 features the presence of Jesus and his Father in all its verses. The Greek preposition *“en (in)”* and verbs such as *“to know”* (14:7), *“to see”* (14:9b), and *“to dwell”* (14:10b) are utilised to express the interpersonal relationship between Jesus and his Father. The depth of intimacy, equality, and unity in the interpersonal relationship between Jesus and his Father is significant.

The similarity and recognition of Jesus and the Father does not result in amalgamation, as the Son and the Father are distinct entities. The phrases *“Seeing Jesus”* and *“seeing the Father”* possess distinct formal meanings. The two phenomena of visual perception are not equivalent. Philip is unable to comprehend the meaning of the revelatory utterance of Jesus as stated in 14:9b. The individual's perception is limited to Jesus and does not encompass a comprehensive understanding of the Father. The statement present in 14:9b emphasises the manner in which one perceives Jesus and the connection he shares with his Father (as seen in 14:10,11), while simultaneously preserving a differentiation between Jesus and the Father. The distinction is articulated through the filial bond (paternal and filial) and the respective roles in the mission (the sender and the sent). The passage in 14:7-11 concerning the connection between Jesus and his Father pertains to the Father-Son dynamic outlined in the Prologue. This includes the Logos (1:1,14a), the Only-Begotten (1:14d,18b), the Son (1:18b), and Jesus Christ (1:17b). Chapter 14 of the text features Jesus' use of the possessive pronoun *“My Father (ho patros mou)”* (14:7a) to refer to the Father. In the farewell discourse, Jesus employs the personal pronoun *“I”* and the possessive *“me”* when addressing the disciples, while utilising the singular *“you”* and plural *“you”* to differentiate the respective roles of Jesus, the Father, and the disciples. The differentiation and delineation of Jesus and the Father serves to demonstrate the coherence of existence, affection, comprehension, and conduct, while also

highlighting the distinctiveness of Jesus' individuality and purpose. The transition from "seeing Jesus" to "seeing the Father" raises a question, as Jesus explicitly states in 6:46a that "no one has seen the Father except the one who is from God, who has seen Him."

4.5.4. The impossibility and possibility of "seeing the Father"

Jesus' statement about the possibility of "seeing the Father" (14:7b,9b) seems incompatible with the narrator's statement in 1:18a: "No one has ever seen God" and Jesus' statement to the Jews in 6:46. "Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father". In fact, the literary unit 14:7-11 manifests the Johannine style. The author's word is set as a riddle for the hearers. In order to understand, they must ask for an explanation that Jesus, and only he, can give them a sense of. Jesus' word in 14:7c: "*have seen him [the Father]*" is elliptical, raising a question. In other words, the statement that the disciples have seen the Father in 14:7b is only understandable with Jesus' clarification in 14:9b: "*Whoever has seen me has seen the Father*". Philip's request to Jesus in 14:8: "*Master, show us the Father*" suggests a deep desire to "see God" throughout history. Using the verb "deiknumi" (to show), Philip expects a visible theophany from God the Father. In any case, Philip does not understand Jesus' words in 14:7c: "*have seen him*".

The expression "*Whoever has seen (ho heôrakôs) me has seen (heôraken) the Father*" in 14:9b must be seen in parallel with Jesus' statement in 12:45: "*whoever sees (ho theôrôn) me sees (theôrei) the one who sent me*". In these two verses, several observations are worth noting:

1. The structure of the two sentences (12:45 and 14:9b) is the same: the first verb is in the participle and the second is in the indicative. The variant concerns the verb used and the aspect of tense. In 12:45, the verb "theôreô" (to see) is conjugated twice in the present tense (present participle: "ho theôrôn" and present indicative: "theôrei"). In 14:9b, the verb "horaô" (to see) is twice in the perfect tense (perfect participle: "ho heôrakôs" and perfect indicative: "heôraken").

2. The parallel 12:45/14:9b shows that the verbs "theôreô" and "horaô" here express both physical and theological sight. "Seeing Jesus"

in a physical way in these two verses implies “knowing” and “believing” him in depth in order to come to “see the Father” who sent Jesus.

3. As for the subject of seeing, it is “and whoever sees me, sees the one who sent me” in 12:45 and “seeing the Father” in 14:9b. These two references attribute a different purpose to God: once being “the one who sent Jesus” emphasises the authority and credibility of Jesus' mission, while the designation “Father” places Jesus in the status of a Son who is in perfect communion with his Father (1:18b): “*the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart*”.

4. Like the construction of 12:45, the first part of the sentence in 14:9b: “*who has seen me (ho heōrakōs eme)*” is the subject of the verb and its complement: “*has seen the Father*” (*heōraken ton patera*). This construction underlines the sequence of the act of seeing: “to see Jesus” means “to see the Father”.

The revelation made by Jesus in 14:9b implies the unfeasibility of perceiving the Father. The statement “*who has seen me has seen the Father*” (14:9b) conveys the notion that it is unfeasible to encounter the Father directly. In actuality, Jesus does not provide a direct manifestation of the Father; rather, he implies that the Father is imperceptible, as he cannot be visually apprehended. Furthermore, it is conclusive that encountering the Father in person is unattainable, as evidenced by the utilisation of the perfect tense of the verb “to see” (*heōrakōs, heōraken*) twice in 14:9b, which denotes a persistent outcome of a prior occurrence.

The disclosure made by Jesus in 14:9b affords the disciples a unique prospect to perceive the Father. This entails apprehending the Father through the act of observing Jesus. Therefore, according to the perspective of believers, the act of “*seeing the Father*” is equivalent to “*seeing Jesus*.”

The challenge for the disciples is that, in seeing Jesus, they see the Father.

In short, Jesus' revelation “*Whoever has seen me has seen the Father*” in 14:9b remains consistent with the narrator's statement in Prologue 1:18a: “*No one has ever seen God*” and Jesus' statement in 6:46a: “*Not that anyone has seen the Father*”. In fact, Jesus' word in 14:9b reinforces God's

invisibility and transcendence in a definitive way. "Seeing God" is now based on "seeing Jesus". It is precisely through faith (cf. 14:10-11) that "seeing the Father" finds its fulfilment in the spiritual sense of the term.

Preliminary Conclusion

The Johannine theology concerning the concept of the "vision of God" is notable for its unique formulation of three distinct assertions.

The human ability to perceive God is limited. However, through the manifestation of the only-begotten Son, the incarnate Logos, namely Jesus Christ, humans can attain a certain level of knowledge of the Father and perceive him in a distinctive manner. Nevertheless, it is important to note that God's transcendence remains absolute.

According to John 6:46, Jesus is the sole individual who is capable of perceiving the Father, as he originates from God. The act of "seeing the Father" by Jesus is an expression of his divine identity and his complete unity with the Father. The sole mediator in the process of "revealing him" and "rendering him perceptible" to the Father is he.

The disciples' ability to perceive the Father is contingent upon their ability to perceive Jesus. The desire to have a direct encounter with God is strictly prohibited. The profound yearning of humanity to behold the divine is fulfilled for those who achieve a genuine perception of Jesus, namely, through their faith in him and his teachings. The act of "seeing" mentioned in the passage is closely associated with faith, as indicated by Jesus' statement to the audience in verse 6:40. Specifically, Jesus asserts that it is the desire of his Father that those who "see" (theôrôn) the Son and have faith in him will attain eternal life, and that he will resurrect them on the final day. The invitation presented in 14:9b of the revelation of Jesus encourages the disciples to enhance their connection and fellowship with both Jesus and the Father. It is my Father's will that whoever sees (theôrôn) the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and that I should raise that person up on the last day".

4.6. Signs - Object of "sight" in the Gospel of John

The Fourth Gospel's thematic exploration of "sight" pertains to the Johannine signs. Jesus conducted miraculous acts as a means of disclosing his persona and purpose, which were perceptible to individuals. Is it possible for faith to be attained through the observation of signs and the reception of verbal communication? The final comment made by the narrator in 12:37 regarding Jesus' mission, which states that despite the numerous signs that were witnessed by the audience, their belief in him was not established, prompts contemplation on this matter. *"Though they had been present when he gave so many signs, they did not believe in him"*.

The perception of Christ's revelation is commonly regarded as a unified process of sensory reception, which includes both visual and auditory modalities, whereby the signs of Jesus are manifested through his deeds and teachings.

Initially, we will recollect certain attributes of the symbol in the Fourth Gospel and examine the correlation between 'signs' and 'works', which are the focal point of observation.

4.6.1. The Johannine signs (sèmeia)

The term "sign" integrates a broad range of meanings in its conventional usage. A sign is an entity that enables us to differentiate and identify various phenomena. The term "sign" can be considered synonymous with other terms such as "index," "manifestation," "mark," "proof," and "symptom." A sign is a basic material object such as a figure, gesture, or colour that is used in place of a complex reality due to natural relation or convention. An example of this is the "sign of the cross," which serves as the emblem of Christians. Typically, the significance of a sign is contingent upon its placement within a given system.

The function of the sign in the Old Testament is to verify the divine commission of a messenger or to corroborate a prophetic utterance.

The Pentateuch features a recurring theme of divine communication to the people through prophets, who were regarded as celestial messengers or

angels dispatched from the heavens. In Exodus 3:10-12, it is recorded that Moses requested and was granted signs as evidence of divine support, which he then used to persuade Pharaoh to release the Israelites. The presence of prophets serves as evidence for the accessibility of communication channels between the celestial and terrestrial realms. According to religious belief, the prophet serves as a conduit for the divine message and communicates it to the people by stating, *"Thus says the Lord"*. The utterances of certain prophets were documented and subsequently incorporated into the written account of God's interactions with his community. Isaiah received a sign from the Lord, as recorded in Isaiah 38:7-8, in order to validate the message he had been given.

The concept that God both performs and clarifies his actions is a fundamental aspect of Judaism and Christianity. This may also be considered an essential characteristic of any religion that perceives God as directly intervening in human history. The extraordinary feats that were accomplished by God in support of his people during the Exodus could have reasonably elicited a fervent and unwavering response from them. However, it is known that they did not. The portrayal of individuals' lack of faith is consistently depicted as an act of disobedience and a deficiency in their ability to listen. The foremost demand that was placed upon them by the divine was to pay heed, as stated in the following passage: *"Hear, O Israel". Yet the very people who are urged to hear are also said to have seen: 'Your eyes have seen'* stated in Deuteronomy 4:3, 9, and 10: *"Your eyes have seen"*.

It is possible, however, to witness such prodigies without really seeing; more important than the eyes of the body are the eyes of the soul: *"You have seen all that the Lord did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, the great trials which your eyes saw, the signs and those great wonders; but to this day the Lord has not given you a mind to understand, or eyes to see, or ears to hear"*.

In the Gospel, the term "sign" is mentioned on 17 occasions. Of these, seven instances pertain to the Jews' use of the term (2:18; 3:2; 6:30; 7:31; 9:16; 10:41; 11:47), six instances refer to signs in a general sense (2:23; 4:48; 6:2,14,26; 12:18), and four instances reflect the evangelist's own teachings (2:11; 4:54; 12:37; 20:30).

The concept of revelation holds significant importance in the book of John. It is through the Word that the Father is revealed, resulting in a diverse range of terminologies associated with revelation such as confession, manifestation, interpretation, teaching, proclamation, announcement, disclosure, and communication. Additionally, the act of seeing is also considered a crucial aspect of revelation. The revelation mentioned by John is consistently associated with Jesus Christ and the gospel proclaimed by the Lord.

Symbolic expression is deemed essential in formulating the mystery of Jesus, his relationship with the Father, and the gift of salvation, as these concepts cannot be fully captured through exhaustive conceptual formulations. Individuals who broaden the concept of sign to encompass the Passion and manifestations of the Resurrected figure are cognizant of the fact that the entirety of the Gospel of John is founded on such a symbolic framework. All features pertaining to the account of Jesus hold a symbolic significance for them. This perspective is founded on the scriptural passage 20:30, which appears to encapsulate the entirety of Jesus' life as a symbol.

The origin of the concept of sign is a topic of inquiry. John does not rely on Hellenistic concepts of signs, such as premonitory facts or dreams, or symbols of a future or higher reality. The phrase "Sign in John" has its origins in the Old Testament and extends beyond that historical text.

Cerfaux asserts that within the Old Testament, the sign serves to validate and establish the credibility of a messenger, bestowing upon them a sense of authority (Ex 4:1,9,30; 7:3,9; 10:1,2; Deut 6:22; 7:19; Wisdom 10:16, among other examples). Jesus frequently requested signs, as the anticipated signs were required to be accompanied by a visible and tumultuous action. Similar to the Old Testament, the Johannine sign primarily constitutes a symbolic gesture, specifically the veiling of the communication in enigma.²⁴²

²⁴² L. CERFAUX, *Les miracles, signes messianiques de Jésus et oeuvres de Dieu, selon l'évangile de S. Jean*, dans *Recueil Cerfaux*, II, Gembloux, 1954, p. 41.

Jesus frequently requested signs, as the anticipated signs were required to be accompanied by a visible and tumultuous action. Similar to the Old Testament, the Johannine sign primarily constitutes a symbolic gesture, specifically the veiling of the communication in enigma.

However, John surpasses the teachings of the Old Testament and significantly alters the concept of a sign. The presence of messianic indications alongside the mystery of the Incarnation is evident in his company, as can be observed in passages such as 7:31 and 20:30-31. The primary purpose of these entities is to manifest the Glory (as stated in verses 2:11 and 11:4) and to render it accessible and relevant in the current context. The statement regarding the symbol made by Fr. Léon-Dufour has been fulfilled in them:

“The symbol is comprised of an intervention that pertains to a specific ontological category. Although the signs may appear to convey a different meaning from a particular perspective, they are interconnected in a manner that, from the believer's standpoint, the semeion is driven by the Glory it conveys. The narrative serves as the primary means of communication.”²⁴³

The line between “signs” and “facts” is not always very clear in John. The term sign is present in chapters 1-12 (and in 20:30), while the term *works* appears especially from chapter 12 onwards. It is also significant that it is essentially Jesus who is talking about these *works*.

The two terms do not overlap, e.g. the Passion, is the act par excellence, without being a miraculous sign in return. Both, however, belong to the revelation and witness of Jesus. As X. Léon-Dufour says,

“the miracle is a work in that it is produced by the Father and the Son while the miracle is a symbol in that it expresses the mysterious reality”²⁴⁴

²⁴³ X. Léon-DUFOUR, *Autour du Semeion johannique*, dans FS Schürmann, Freiburg, 1977, pp. 363-378.

²⁴⁴ X. Léon-DUFOUR, *Les miracles de Jésus selon Saint Jean*, Parole de Dieu, Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1977, p. 280.

Blanchard presents a contrasting viewpoint to Dufour's assertion that the sign functions as a symbol:

“The Fourth Gospel uses the term sign (*semeion*) rather than symbol to designate the works of Jesus that are likely to reveal something of his mystery. The symbol is a concrete relationship, which has an almost natural relationship with an invisible object: just as fire is symbolic of love, or the dove is an expression of peace. In the case of the sign, the relationship is arbitrary; it is a convention to which one must conform: like road signs or, in a broader sense, in any language. Moreover, signs only function within a system, in which each sign is perceptible only by its difference from other signs.”²⁴⁵

The term “sign” (*semeion*) as used in the Gospel of John is a subject of study. In the Gospel, the narrator documents the miraculous occurrences attributed to Jesus, however, the narrator refers to them as “signs” rather than “manifestations of power” as observed in the Synoptic Gospels. The Fourth Gospel features eight distinct signs that can be categorised into three groups. Initially, the text clearly identifies the four narratives as symbols: the transformation of water into wine in Cana (cf. 2:11); the recovery of the son of a nobleman (cf. 4:54); the multiplication of bread and fish (cf. 6:14); and the resurrection of Lazarus (cf. 12:18). Subsequently, two additional texts are classified as signs. The Pharisees assert that the restoration of the blind man's vision constitutes a sign (cf. 9:16b). In addition, within the context of the seventh chapter of the Gospel of John, Jesus' reference to the healing of the paralytic on the Sabbath day in verse 7:23b is followed by the crowd's inquiry in verse 7:31 (“When the Messiah comes, will he perform more signs than this man has done?”) regarding the potential for the Messiah to perform greater signs than those already demonstrated by Jesus. According to these individuals, the restoration of the paralysed man in the passage 5:1-9 is regarded as a solitary indication amidst several others. The shared character between the two episodes in John's Gospel, namely the going out to sea in 6:16-20 and the miraculous catch of fish in 21:1-14, can be

²⁴⁵ Cf. Y.M. BLANCHARD, *Saint Jean*, Les Editions de l'Atelier/Editions Ouvriers, Paris, 2007, p. 40.

regarded as signs of a miraculous intervention. To summarise, the Gospel comprises of a total of eight signs, with seven of them being present in the initial twelve chapters (Jn 1-12) and the remaining one in chapter 21.

According to Charlier,

“A practical definition may arise from the classification of *semeion* in association with the most frequently used keywords in the gospel, namely *poieo*, *orao*, and *pisteuo*. The act of *Semeion* is a physical gesture performed by Christ, which upon being observed (*orao*), produces a response of faith (*pisteuo*) in the observer. The description seems to have a lower degree of potential hazard, given that it closely resembles the definition provided by the Evangelist. According to the Gospel of John, Jesus performed numerous other miraculous acts, referred to as “*semeia*.” However, the author specifically recorded these particular events with the intention of inspiring belief, as stated in the passage “*ina pisteuete*” (20:30-31).”²⁴⁶

The complexity surrounding the term “sign” is remarkable. The semantic interpretation of a given term varies depending on the individuals employing it. The author of the text reports that the Sanhedrin was called upon by the chief priests and Pharisees to address the matter of Jesus' miraculous signs, as stated in 11:47: “*So the chief priests and the Pharisees convened the Sanhedrin and said, “What are we going to do? This man is performing many signs”*”. But, for them, what does this term”. The miracles performed by Jesus are referred to as signs by the crowd, as evidenced in 7:31. Nevertheless, it remains to be determined whether the term “sign” as employed by these individuals conveys the identical connotation as that which Jesus intends. Regarding the evangelist, the significance of signs is fully realised in the initial conclusion of the Gospel, as stated in 20:31. “*But these (signs) are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life in his name.*” The evidence serve as a call to authentic belief in Jesus, however, they do not inherently guarantee faith (compare with 12:37). The signs, in reality, serve to intensify the conflict

²⁴⁶ Jean-Pierre CHARLIER, “*La Notion De Signe (Σημειον) Dans Le IV Évangile*” dans *Revue Des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques* 43, no. 3 (1959): 434–48. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44413610>.

between Jesus and his adversaries, culminating in the ultimate sign of the resurrection of Lazarus (11:1-46). Ironically, the actions carried out by Jesus resulted in his final death.

According to Ashton,

“The Fourth Gospel preserves the traditional connection between seeing and hearing so well, in fact, that faith is often described in terms of vision—there is nevertheless a perceptible tension between the two, a tension that comes to full expression in the concluding beatitude. In spite of this, John regards his Gospel as a record of some of the signs that Jesus performed in the sight of his disciples and the purpose of this record was 'that you may believe.’”²⁴⁷

The complex meanings of the term “sign” necessitate a contextual analysis. Within a given narrative, the various meanings of this term are contingent upon the perspectives of the characters. Furthermore, the consecutive signs stated by the narrator contribute to the development of a theology of signs, which serves to inform the reader about the genesis and persona of Jesus. The aforementioned distinctiveness has the potential to attribute a distinctive label to the indications found in the Gospel, specifically referred to as “Johannine signs”. These signs possess unique attributes that distinguish them from the conventional interpretation of the term.

The evangelist attributes a profound significance to the term “semeion”. According to the source, individuals are required to not only rely on signs to substantiate their conviction that Jesus is the Messiah and Son of God, but also to have faith in the life-affirming message of Jesus and to enhance their belief in Jesus as the Son of the Father. The evangelist expounds on this matter in the discourse of great revelation found in 6:25-51b, wherein Jesus is portrayed as the Living Bread (in reference to the significant self-revelation formula *ego eimi*, as seen in John 6:35, 40, 41, 48, and 51). Additionally, the conversation between Jesus and Martha in 11:22-27 further elucidates this concept. Individuals who hold the belief

²⁴⁷ John ASHTON. *Understanding the Fourth Gospel*. Vol. 2nd ed. Oxford: OUP Oxford, 2007. <https://search-ebshost-com.proxy.library.lincoln.ac.uk/login.aspx?direct=true&dbnlebk&AN=208604&site=ehost-live>.

in “eternal life” and triumph over the occurrence of death through Christ have effectively completed the transition from the domain of death to the realm of the living. This denotes that they have successfully crossed over to the imperishable, divinely endowed eternal life.

The presence of a Johannine sign is a necessary requirement that must be consistently observed throughout the entirety of the narrative. Instances such as the exchange between Jesus and his mother during the wedding in Cana (2:1-12) or the extensive speech following the multiplication of the bread (6:22-59) are integral components of the signs. Furthermore, the majority of instances in which the term “sign” is employed are in the plural form. This requires considering all indicators. The extraction of each sign from its context does not facilitate a comprehensive comprehension of Johannine theology, as each sign reveals a distinct aspect of it.

Furthermore, it is imperative to comprehend the signs within the context of the complete Gospel narrative. The Gospel of John comprises two distinct sections, namely the “book of signs” (Jn 1-12) and the “book of Glory” (Jn 13-21). These sections are not to be regarded as separate entities, but rather as interconnected components that establish a cause-and-effect relationship between the miraculous signs performed by Jesus and the subsequent decision to execute him (cf. 11:47-53). Thus, the indications ultimately guide Jesus towards his crucifixion. Hence, the significance of the Johannine signs can be deciphered through the cross. The complete manifestation of Jesus' divine identity and the consequent development of genuine faith in him occur following to his Passion and Resurrection.

4.6.2. “Signs” and “Works”

The Gospel contains a total of 71 instances of the term “deeds/works” (ergon), which has a broad spectrum of semantic meanings. L. Johns and B. Miller have made three observations on this matter:

“The first observation is that the works designated by Jesus himself are clearly his miraculous acts; for example, “The father loves the Son and all that he himself is doing he shows to him, and

greater works than he will show to him, that you may marvel" (5:20; 7:3,21; 9:3; 15:24; 14:12). Second, Jesus introduces his works as important witnesses which give testimony about his identity, as when he says: "*The testimony is greater than that of John. The works that the Father has given complete, the very works that I am doing, testify on my behalf that the Father has sent me*" (5:36; 10:25,37,38). Furthermore, the works are a critical element which condemns those who do not believe in him: "*If I had not done among them the works that no one else has done, they would not have sin*" (15:24; 14:10-11; Exod 34:10; Num 16:23-35)."²⁴⁸

A sign can be considered a miraculous occurrence that holds a unique significance. However, it is noteworthy that within the dialogues and discourses of the Gospel, the term *semeion* is not employed by Jesus in such a manner. The term in question is observed to have a negative connotation in the two occurrences where it is used by the subject at 4:48 and 6:26. The person in question has coined the term "erga" to describe their actions or accomplishments. The inquiry arises as to whether these terms are synonymous. Do they share the same point of reference? Given that they possess distinct meanings, what distinguishes one from the other? A plausible explanation could be that the term "erga" denotes the works that are perceptible only to Jesus, which are essentially the duties assigned to him by the Father to be executed in the presence of humanity. On the other hand, "semeia" refers to the miracles performed by Jesus that are visible to people. These miracles are indicative of Jesus' connection with the Father, as he is the Father's representative and embodies his revelation. Therefore, these miracles are considered as signs of Jesus' magnificence. If we consider that a sign is meant to induce faith, it would be unsuitable for Jesus to regard or articulate his own deeds as signs for himself. In a general sense, the differentiation is accurate.

However, there are several unanswered inquiries, particularly the pivotal matter of the correlation between the statements and actions of Jesus. This matter leads us to revisit the dichotomy between visual perception and auditory reception that we initially discussed.

²⁴⁸ Loren L. JOHNS, and Douglas B. MILLER, *The Signs as Witnesses in the Fourth Gospel: Re-examining the Evidence*, in *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 56, no. 3 (1994): 519-35. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43721715>.

The term “signs” is frequently employed by Jesus in reference to various occurrences (as seen in 5:36, 7:21, 9:3, and 10:25), and it is evident that these signs serve a cohesive function in the Gospel of John. In the seventh chapter of the discourse, Jesus addresses the audience regarding his labour, stating, “I performed one work and all of you are amazed” The subsequent verses contain an allusion by Jesus to the incident of the healing of the paralytic at Bethesda bath, as documented in 5:1-9. The work that Jesus references in 7:21a pertains to the indication of the healing of the paralysed individual in 5:1-9. The manifestation of God's work is evident in the sign of the blind man as described in verses 9:1-7. This is in line with the reference made in verse 9:3b. Additionally, the works performed by Jesus in his Father's name serve as a testimony to his identity, as stated in verse 5:36b. Thus, the works pertain to symbols. Hence, a certain degree of resemblance exists between “signs” and “works”; however, they are not entirely the same.

According to Bultmann,

“the Fourth Evangelist used the signs source, but countered its perspective by insisting that signs were unnecessary for believing - indeed a “signs faith” was not acceptable. “The very fact that many people have been brought to faith by the miracles is an indication that such faith is doubtful.”²⁴⁹

First of all, on the human side, there are good deeds and bad deeds. Jesus reveals in his discourse in 3:20-21: “For everyone who does wicked things (*ta erga autou*), hates the light and does not come toward the light, so that his works (*autou ta erga*) might not be exposed.”

When the crowd asks Jesus in 6:28: “What can we do to accomplish the works of God?” Jesus answers them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in the one he sent.” (6:29). Here “work” is defined by faith in Jesus.

Then, on Jesus's part, they are works-signs, but they are also works-words. When Philip asks Jesus in 14:8: “Master, show us the father, and that will be enough for us.”, Jesus tells him and his disciples in 14:10-11: “Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I

²⁴⁹ Cf. BULTMANN, *op. cit.*, p. 528.

speak to you I do not speak on my own. The Father who dwells in me is doing his works (ta erga autou). Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else, believe because of the works (ta erga auta) themselves."

4.6.3. The ambiguity of the Signs

The multitude had previously witnessed indications of miraculous occurrences such as the amplification of bread and fish. "A substantial assemblage pursued him, as they had observed the prodigious feats he had executed on the infirm..." *"When the people saw the sign he had done, they said, "This is truly the Prophet" (6:2; 6:14a); however, they failed to comprehend the import of said sign (6:26).*

In the sixth chapter of the Gospel of John, it is recounted that a crowd sought out Jesus and subsequently found him in Capernaum. Upon their arrival, Jesus addressed the crowd in verse 6:26, stating *"Amen, amen, I say to you, you are looking for me not because you saw signs but because you eaten the breads and were filled"*. The interpretation of the phrase "saw signs" in this verse presents a challenge. The observation can be made that the crowd's perception of the event was limited to its miraculous nature, rather than recognising it as a designated "sign". Their perception was confined to the immediate visual experience, without acknowledging its deeper symbolic significance. The perception of the signified is halted at the signifier.²⁵⁰

The text seems to exploit the equivocal nature of the expression "to see signs". According to the narrator's account, the crowd perceived signs (6:2b) and observed the sign of multiplication (6:14a). The disparity between the narrator's phrase "saw the sign" in 6:14a and the phrase attributed to Jesus in 6:26a does not denote identical meaning. The sign (6:14) was observed by the multitude and construed as the prophet's anticipation. As per Thong's analysis, the text can be deemed as valid, although it's not come from Jesus.

²⁵⁰ Cf. Y.-M. BLANCHARD, *Des signes pour croire*, Lire la Bible, Editions du Cerf, Paris, 1995, p. 67.

“The reply of Jesus to the assembly that encounters him at Capernaum does not overtly confront the prophetic declaration that arose in light of the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves, nor does it provide any commentary on the endeavour to bestow royal authority. The critique offered by Jesus pertains to the general interpretation of signs. The subjective nature of crowd interpretation disregards the agency of the individual providing the sign. Addressing the audience, the speaker asserts that their pursuit is not motivated by witnessing miraculous occurrences, as stated in 6:26a (“you are looking for me not because you saw signs...”). The sign made by Jesus is given meaning by him, thereby reversing the situation. The populace's comprehension of “perceiving the sign” is earthly in nature, as it deviates from the intended perception of Jesus. The ambiguity of the sign is attributed to the interpreter.”²⁵¹

At 6:27, Jesus extends an invitation to the assembled multitude to shift their focus from the observation of signs to the contemplation of the works of God. The audience requests an additional manifestation despite having recently witnessed one. This ironic observation highlights the challenge faced by individuals in comprehending signs when attempting to be guided by Jesus. The audience requests a demonstration as a means of establishing belief. Currently, there is a lack of comprehension regarding the significance of the multiplication of the loaves. Jesus refrains from providing them with any additional indication.

Jesus garners a following due to the miraculous healings he performs on the infirm, as stated in 6:2. This occurrence is commonly interpreted as a symbol of the validation of the eschatological prophet and a cue for the coronation of Jesus, the Messiah. The audience is admonished by Jesus for failing to recognise the authentic revelatory and messianic implications of his actions, and instead, solely indulging in the material benefits that were bestowed upon them. The preeminent symbol to be observed is, in fact, Jesus himself, as he conveyed to the multitude in 6:36: “*But I told you that although you have seen [me], you do not believe*” The correlation between the sign and the teachings of Jesus is indissoluble.

²⁵¹ Cf. THONG, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

The above analysis shows that the content of the word “sign” is not the same for the narrator (6:2b,14a), for Jesus (6:26b) and for the crowd (6:30a). Nor is the use of the verb “to see” clear: first, “to see” is insufficient in order to believe. Indeed, after the sign of the multiplication of loaves, Jesus said to the crowd in 6:36b: *“you have seen me (heôrakate) you do not believe”*. Then the warning of a belief resulting from “seeing the signs” seems evident in 2:23-24: *“While he was in Jerusalem for the feast of Passover, many began to believe in his name when they saw (theôrountes) the signs he was doing. But Jesus would not trust himself to them because he knew them all”*.

Therefore, the narrator employs the verb “theaômai” (to see) in both 2:23c and 6:40b, despite the existence of multiple tiers of perception. Likewise, it is noteworthy that the text employs the term “sêmeion” (sign) to refer to various levels of signification. The presence of ambiguity appears to be an inescapable aspect of language. Specifically, the phrase “to see signs” is an example of such ambiguity. However, it is noteworthy that Jesus' verbal communication serves to clarify the intended meaning of the sign, rendering it unambiguous. The disciples' crisis of faith, as documented in John 6, is attributed to the utterances of Jesus, specifically in 6:60-66.

Jesus acknowledges the constraints of human reasoning when it comes to interpreting his teachings and the miracles he performed. A considerable number of the disciples exhibit an absence of recognition towards his divine identity, as evidenced by the passages 6:60 and 6:66. Despite this, Jesus consistently exhibits agency in a manner that is authoritative, directing the flow of eye contact and discourse with his audience throughout the entirety of chapter 6. It can be inferred that Jesus possesses foreknowledge regarding the desertion of particular disciples, as indicated in 6:64, thereby rendering him unsurprised by their actions. The manifestation of Jesus' sovereignty is evident in his utilisation of ambiguous language that encourages authentic faith, thereby pushing the boundaries of scandal to their limits.

This reflection shows us that it is not easy to truly understand the signs and words of Jesus. Yet the narrator's observation in 12:37:

“Although he had performed so many signs in their presence they did not believe in him” is not a failure of signs. This observation shows the ambiguous character of the signs that compels us to read on: the Johannine signs point to the cross, to the hour of Jesus' glorification, and reach their climax in the first conclusion of the Gospel in 20:30-31: *“Jesus did many other signs in the presence of [his] disciples that are not written in this book. But these are written that you may [come to] believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life in his name”*.

The recognition of the divine provenance of Jesus and the explication of the interplay between his human and divine nature are contingent solely upon one's faith. The Gospel of John portrays Jesus as surpassing the limits of human incredulity. The concept of ambiguity holds significance in both pedagogical and theological contexts. It serves the purpose of allowing the characters within the narrated episodes, as well as the reader, to uncover the profound meaning of the word of life. Additionally, it facilitates the presentation of Jesus as the ultimate Revelator. The presence of ambiguity highlights the limitations of language when confronted with the act of revealing something. Acknowledging the potential for linguistic ambiguity in articulations of religious belief serves to uphold a proper correlation between matters of faith and rationality.

The coexistence of conflicting attitudes towards visual and auditory perception allows for individual agency. The act of having faith entails making a conscious choice, demonstrating a steadfast dedication, and embarking upon a continuous expedition, rather than reaching a final destination. The theology of the Johannine perspective does not hold a negative view towards the faculty of human reasoning. In fact, the significance of this cognitive ability is highlighted through the presentation of Nicodemus' argument and the narrative of the man who was born blind.

Nonetheless, the concept of faith necessitates taking a leap into the unknown depths of enigma. The presence of ambiguity in both sign and word within the context of encountering Jesus serves as an invitation for the reader to engage in a more profound exploration of said experience.

4.7. The experience of “meeting” the risen Jesus – The invisibility and visibility of God

“No one has ever seen God” Jn 1:18... “Have you come to believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed” 20:29.

The closeness between the Johannine Prologue and the account of the resurrected Jesus in chap. 20 of the Gospel of John is obvious and has been widely debated in the theological world. Among these theologians, the idea has developed that the author of the Prologue already had in mind the scene of Jesus' resurrection and his appearances when he composed it, closing a circle that was absolutely necessary²⁵².

The twentieth chapter of the Gospel of John is widely regarded as a crucial testimony to the Resurrection of Christ. The use of the term “vision” in its different Greek verb forms plays a significant role in comprehending this pivotal occurrence, which serves as the foundation of Christian belief. The Gospel of John emphasises two distinct modes of perceiving Jesus: one that is sensory in nature, accessible to all who have encountered him in their earthly existence, and another that is rooted in faith, pertaining to those who have possessed or currently possess a belief in the glorified Christ. The corporeal manifestation of the resurrected Christ is perceptible through both empirical observation and spiritual discernment.²⁵³ As per the theologians L. Dupont, C. Lash, and G. Levesque,

“Combining the four terms: Sensory Christ/ glorified Christ/ sensory vision/ vision of faith can explain to some extent the perfectly coherent structure of chapter 20 of the Gospel of John.”²⁵⁴

²⁵² T. DEREK, *Completing the circle. The resurrection according to John*, in *Evangelical review of theology (ERT)*, vol. 30, 2006, Issue 2, p. 169.

²⁵³ See *VOCABULAIRE DE THEOLOGIE BIBLIQUE*, sous la direction de Xavier LEON DUFOUR, Editions du Cerf, Paris, 1971, pp. 1378-1379.

²⁵⁴ DUPONT, L., LASH, C., & LEVESQUE, G. (1973). *Recherche sur la structure de Jean 20. Biblica*, 54(4), 482–498. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42609836>.

The account of Jesus' resurrection experience as presented by John can be analysed into two primary segments. The initial unit encompasses the perspective of the vacant tomb and the encounter between the Risen Lord and Mary Magdalene. The subsequent section takes place in the presence of the assembled disciples and involves Jesus' revelatory encounter with the sceptical Thomas.

The after death narrative sequence of Jesus presents two distinct patterns of visual perception predicated on discipleship: (a) those whose faith is contingent upon witnessing the resurrected Jesus, and (b) those who choose to follow him despite lacking visual confirmation of his resurrected form. The Johannine text has been subjected to a thorough analysis, wherein the responses of various individuals such as Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus, Peter, the beloved disciple, Mary Magdalene, and Thomas to the death of Jesus have been closely examined. The findings of this analysis reveal that the passage in question has a chiasmic structure. The scriptural passage found in John 19:38-42 is interconnected with John 20 and serves to provide a counterbalance to the content presented in 20:30-31. The purpose of this chiasmus is to underscore the notion that Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus are exemplary disciples.

According to Ken Chan's (2013) observation, the disciples' inclination to adhere to Jesus even in the absence of witnessing his resurrection is precisely the type of faith that John advocates for in his Gospel:

“The exhortation in 20:30–31, that 'these things have been written so that the readers “should believe” (pisteusete), or “may continue to believe” (pisteuete)', shows that John is primarily interested in helping the readers to receive spiritual life (or to remain in it) as they get to see the life of Jesus, and what that reveals about his heavenly status. This observation, that John wants to point people to Jesus, leads to the corollary question of what effect the life, death, and the resurrection of Jesus actually had on the biblical characters that experienced this sequence of events”.²⁵⁵

²⁵⁵ Ken CHAN, *John 19:38-20:31: Discipleship after the Death of Jesus*, *Conspectus* (South African Theological Seminary), 15, 2013 pp. 57–83. Available at: <https://search-ebsohost.com.proxy.library.lincoln.ac.uk/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=90599106&site=ehost-live>.

The understanding of Jesus' life within the context of salvation history is imperative. The hermeneutics of the Fourth Gospel pertaining to the Resurrection event is characterised by its particular emphasis on the multifaceted interpretations of the verb "to see." John interprets the apparitions as significant indications that are intended to manifest the identity of the Son of God and guide his followers towards belief.

Manns' analysis of John chapter 20 reveals that the chapter is constructed around parallels that emphasise four distinct modes of perceiving Christ. These modes include an initial sensory vision that lacks a corresponding vision of faith, followed by a vision of faith that is devoid of visual perception, a vision of faith that is accompanied by sensory perception, and finally a sensory vision of the glorified Christ that is not accompanied by a vision of faith.²⁵⁶

Most authors divide the scene into four concentrically arranged parts and construct it based on different combinations of the four terms. To exemplify this, we use the model proposed by D. Mollat:

1. The two disciples at the tomb (20:1-10- v.8 *eiden kai episteusen*);
2. The appearance of Jesus to Mary Magdalene (20:11-18-v.18 *eoreka ton kurion*);
3. The appearance of Jesus before the disciples (20:19-23-v.25 *eorakamen ton kurion... ou me pisteuso*);
4. Appearance in the presence of Thomas (20:24-29-v.29 *oti eorakas me...oi me idontes pepisteukas kai pisteusantes*);²⁵⁷

The analysis of each of these types of vision will demonstrate that the passage under consideration can be explicated as manifesting two forms of discipleship in reaction to the resurrection of Christ. This study explores two distinct models of discipleship: one that is rooted in a sensory perception of the glorified Christ, specifically through the experience of seeing the resurrected Jesus, as exemplified by Mary

²⁵⁶ Frédéric MANNNS, *L'évangile de Jean a la lumiere du Judaisme*, Studium Biblicum Franciscanum Analecta n.33, Franciscan Printing Press, Jerusalem, 1991, p. 433 tome 57, fascicule 1, 1983. pp. 10-28.

²⁵⁷ Daniel MOLLAT, *La foi pascale selon le chapitre 20 de l'évangile de saint Jean (Essai de thologie johannique)*, dans: E. Dhanis (ed.), *Reswexit*. Actes du symposium international sur la Resurrection de Jesus (Rome, 1970) (Libreria Vaticana, 1974), pp. 316-339.

Magdalene; and another that is not dependent on such sensory perception, but rather on a vision of faith, as demonstrated by Thomas. The twentieth chapter of the Gospel of John serves as a rhetorical device aimed at motivating readers to pursue a path of devotion to Jesus, despite his lack of physical presence. Chapter 20 of the text centres on the quest for Jesus, as indicated in verse 2, “*we do not know where they have laid him,*” and in verse 13, “*and I do not know where they have laid him.*”

The subsequent section, which serves as the fundamental motif, emphasises the manifestation of the Resurrected Christ. Let us examine these components sequentially.

4.7.1. The two Disciples at the tomb (20:1-10)

As per Bădiliță's analysis, the account of the empty tomb in the Gospel presents a narrative of a prolonged race between two disciples, namely Peter and the “beloved disciple”. The identity of the latter remains enigmatic, however, a meticulous examination of the entire episode indicates that the intention was not to undermine Peter's authority but to supplement it. A relationship of complementarity is established between Peter and the beloved disciple, rather than one of ambitious competition.²⁵⁸

However, the notion of a question of priority between the Johannine and Petrine communities, which could be the foundation of the Gospel, cannot be dismissed as implausible. The comparison of the two disciples in motion highlights the precedence of the unnamed disciple, who is distinguished by his unique association with Jesus. The function of the two disciples in this instance is to corroborate the account of Jesus' embalment, consistent with both biblical and Jewish custom, which mandates the presence of two concurring witnesses (Deut 17:6; 19:15). The expeditious flight of the cherished disciple serves to prime the reader for the pivotal juncture of the empty tomb episode, wherein he “saw and believed”.

The remarkable utilisation of the verb *erchomai* and its derivatives in the initial lines of the text to depict the motion towards the “empty tomb,”

²⁵⁸ Cristian BĂDILIȚĂ, *Noul Testament - Evanghelia după Ioan. Ediție Bilingvă. Introduceri, traducere, comentariu și note parastice de Cristian Bădiliță*, Ed. Curtea Veche, București, 2010, p. 412.

which, through its existence, commands the entire setting, is noteworthy. The Greek terminologies 'mnemeion' and 'othonia' have been mentioned seven and three times respectively. Apart from the lexicon associated with motion and spatiality, the lexicon pertaining to the visual semantic domain is noteworthy, encompassing terms such as 'to look' (*blepein*) in John 20:1,5, 'to observe' (*theorein*) in John 20:6, and 'to see' (*horan*) in John 20:8. The author employs a rich visual vocabulary pertaining to the appearances of the resurrected Jesus, enabling a connection between the resurrection account and the epilogue that serves as the culmination of the Gospel and delineates the ultimate objective of the faith journey. The verb "*blepei*" conveys the concept of visual perception, whereas "*theorei*" elicits contemplation. According to R. Brown's statement::

“While in 20,5 John uses *blepein* to describe the Beloved Disciple's seeing the wrappings, he uses *theorein* here for Peter's sight. No progression of meaning is verifiable, as if Peter's look was more leisurely or penetrating”.²⁵⁹

The discourse proceeds with an empirical observation. Both disciples have observed that the sepulchre is devoid of the body or rather that the body is absent from the sepulchre. The emphasis on the shroud and its configuration is not fortuitous, as it holds evidentiary significance. The meticulous arrangement of events, devoid of any sense of urgency, is likely the catalyst for the belief expressed in the statement "*he saw and believed*" (20:8). The observation made by the disciple refers to the absence of physical presence and chaos, leading to the development of faith. Our perception is limited to the objects of our attention. As stated by Merleau Ponty, the act of perceiving through a lens of faith may result in an individual solely recognising the absence of certain elements.²⁶⁰ Only here does the illumination rendered by the two verbs take place: "*saw and believed*". What did he "*see*"? What is the relationship between this seeing and believing?

²⁵⁹ Raymond E. BROWN, *The Gospel according to John (XIII-XXI)*, The Anchor Bible, New York, 1970, p. 986.

²⁶⁰ Maria VILLELA-PETIT, « « Qui voit ? », du privilège de la peinture chez M. Merleau-Ponty », *Les Études philosophiques*, 2001/2 (n° 57), pp. 261-278. DOI : 10.3917/leph.012.0261. URL : <https://www.cairn.info/revue-les-etudes-philosophiques-2001-2-page-261.htm>.

The verb “*blepei*” is observed just in the initial segment of the episode (20:1,5), succeeded by “*teorei*” (20:6) in the present tense, and culminating with “*eiden*” (20:8) in the aorist tense, which is associated with the verb “*Episteusen*” denoting “*he saw and believed*”. The observed phenomenon is that there exists semantic overlap among the words, yet they are associated with varying degrees of conviction. The phenomenon of visual perception is denoted by the term “*blepei*” in the context of Mary’s observation of the stone’s removal from the tomb (20:1) and the beloved disciple’s observation of the burial cloths (20:5). However, in reference to Peter’s observation of the same burial cloths, a distinct verb, “*teorei*,” is employed in 20:6. The observation made by the disciple regarding the contents of the vacant sepulchre is congruent with the visual encounter experienced by Peter, who initially refrained from confirming the veracity of the scene from an external vantage point. The observer has also perceived the intricate folds of the shroud that has been set aside. From the perspective of the disciple, the occurrences hold significant symbolic value, thereby rendering the act of observation as an act of faith.

Using the chiasmic structure of the episode in the Gospel of John 20:1-10 presented by Manns²⁶¹, we can see the way in which John builds the text in a concentric and progressive way emphasising the ignorance and misunderstanding of the disciples:

- v.1: *de*. Mary of Magdala came and saw (*blepei*).
- v.2: *oun*. She ran. We don’t know. (*oidamen*)
- v.3: *oun*. Peter went out. Came to the tomb.
- v.4: *de*. They both ran. The other disciple arrived.
- v.5: He saw (*blepei*), did not go in.
- v.6: *oun*. Peter arrived, he went into, saw (*theôrei*).
- v.7: The cloth rolled up in a separate place.
- v.8: *oun*. The other disciple also went in. He saw (*eiden*) and believed.
- v.9: *gar*. They not yet understand (*edeisan*).
- v.10: *oun*. Returned home.”

²⁶¹ F. Manns, *op. cit.*, p. 434.

As can be seen above, there is an osmosis between the verb “to see” in its various semantic interpretations and the verb “to know” (*oida*).

The author, John, utilises the two primary verbs that denote knowledge, namely *ginôskein* and *oida*, in a manner consistent with their classical meaning. Specifically, the former verb, which is employed in the passage under consideration, connotes the attainment of knowledge at the conclusion of an inquiry, as well as the recognition and comprehension of a subject matter. The latter verb, on the other hand, is frequently reserved for Jesus and signifies an intuitive, contemplative, and inherently flawless knowledge. It is noteworthy that the root of the verb *oida* is derived from a term that denotes visual perception. The differentiation between these two verbs is not consistently apparent in John's written works; however, in this instance, the subtlety is duly acknowledged.

The initial sequence of the narrative pertaining to the resurrection event, which takes place in close proximity to the tomb, serves as a quintessential model of the entire progression that transpires from the act of “seeing” to “believing”. As delineated in Manns' framework, there exists a gradual advancement in the stages of this journey undertaken by the various characters, commencing from the mere act of “gazing” and “noticing”, culminating in the act of “perceiving” that is illuminated by faith. The aforementioned belief, which originates from the encounter with the vacant sepulchre, serves as a crucial factor in comprehending the Christocentric and prophetic trajectory of the complete canon of sacred texts. The significance of the verse in John 20:9, wherein it is stated that the disciples did not comprehend the scripture (“*they did not yet understand the scripture that he had to rise from the dead*”) that necessitated Christ's resurrection from the dead, is reinforced by its placement between the account of the two disciples' investigation of the tomb and their subsequent departure to their abode in verse 10.

4.7.2. Mary Magdalene – From the glorified Christ's “sensory vision” to the “vision of faith”

This conclusion of the episode with the two disciples stands in contrast to the beginning of the next scene: as the disciples return home, Mary remains by the tomb outside to weep (v.20:11a).

According to Chan's view, Mary Magdalene's journey is one of a spiritual nature:

“The narrative about Mary Magdalene in 20:1–18 is divided into four parts: (a) Mary Magdalene tells the disciples about the empty tomb in 20:1–2 and this is contrasted by (b) her announcement of the resurrected Jesus to the disciples in 20:17–18. Placed in between there are: (c) the reaction of Peter and the beloved disciple to the empty tomb in 20:3–10, which is paralleled by (d) Mary Magdalene's reaction to the empty tomb in 20:11–16”.²⁶²

The sense of sight and hearing act jointly in the crucial scene in which Mary Magdalene meets Jesus after the resurrection (20:11-18). Although Peter and the beloved disciple saw the empty tomb and the discarded burial cloths, the first to truly encounter the risen Jesus is Mary Magdalene. After the departure of the two, she remains and uses her multiple senses, “sees”, “hears” and, extrapolating verse 20:17, seems to touch the risen Jesus. She stayed, weeping in the garden and telling the angels at the tomb: “*They have taken my Lord, and I don't know where they laid him*” v.13. She turns around and, seeing Jesus, does not recognise him, literally, “*she turned around and saw (theōrei) Jesus there, but did not (ēdei, from the verb eidō, “to see”) know it was Jesus*” 20:14. She saw, but in fact she did not see. He speaks, saying: “*Woman, why are you weeping?*”. But she still does not recognise him, thinks he is the gardener and asks him if he knows where Jesus' body is. Only when he says her name, “*Mary*”, does she recognise him. It is as if, by speaking her name, he opens her eyes, as he opened the eyes of the blind man to see. She calls him “*My rabbi*” and must have embraced him, because he says, “*Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father.*” Many have tried to explain this odd

²⁶² Cf. Chan, *ibidem*, p. 65.

statement, but Raymond Brown is right, I think, in saying that the point is that the relationship to the earthly, bodily Jesus is over.

As in the previous episode, Manns proposes the same chiasmic and concentric structure for this narrative:

“v. 11: Marie weeping.

v.12: saw (*theôrei*) two angels.

vv.13-14: why are you weeping? I don't (*oida*) know where they laid him.

She saw (*theôrei*) Jesus there, but did not know (*êdei*) it was Jesus.

vv.15-16: Why are you weeping? Tell me where you laid him. She recognises him.

v.17: Stop holding on to me.

v. 18: Mary of Magdala announced to the disciples: “I have seen (*heôraka*), the Lord”.²⁶³

The visual lexicon above, unlike that relating to movement, is extended in successive sections: *theorein* (20:12,14); *horan*, six other times mostly in the Greek perfect form. The expression attributed to Mary Magdalene and the disciples is built on this temporal form: “I have seen (*heôrakal heôrakamen ton Kyrion*) the Lord” (20:18,25). In four cases, the verb “to see” is associated with *pisteuein*, “to believe” (20:8,25,29a,29b).

“She had seen the empty tomb (*blepei*). She sees (*theôrei*) now the Christ risen without recognising him; When she recognises him, she wants to hold him back, but the Lord sends him to his brothers. She tells them that she has seen (*heoraka*) the Lord. Of sensory vision, it arrives at faith through the “relational” vision”.²⁶⁴

The obscurity of the moment when Mary Magdalene approached the tomb (referred to as “*skotias eti ouses*”) does not indicate her state of despair. Instead, the timing of her visit to the tomb is indicative of the impending emergence of both corporeal and metaphysical illumination. Nevertheless, the visual observation of the vacated sepulchre caused her to experience emotional disturbance. The subject's attention was directed

²⁶³ F. Manns, *op. cit.*, p. 435.

²⁶⁴ Idem, p. 435.

towards the individuals responsible for taking possession of Jesus' body, as indicated by the use of third person plural verbs "*eran*" and "*ethekan*", and the location where it was subsequently deposited. In the 20th chapter and second verse, the woman proceeded towards Peter and the disciple whom Jesus loved while harbouring doubts regarding the whereabouts of Jesus' remains (*ouk oidamen*).

Upon her return to the scene in 20:11, Mary Magdalene was observed to be in a state of emotional distress, characterised by tearful expression and a sense of helplessness in addressing her predicament. At this juncture, it was observed that a pair of angels manifested themselves to her, as stated in the text "*kai teorei duo aggelous*" (20:12). The alteration of the inflection of the Greek verb *οἶδα* from the plural form in verse 20:2 to the singular form in verse 20:13 could potentially serve as a literary device employed by the author John to emphasise the protagonist's state of doubt and unease. Thus far, her level of faith appears to be suboptimal. The prominence of her incapacity to visually perceive Jesus is evident in verse 20:14, wherein she gazes upon him, yet remains oblivious to his identity.

Mary's verbal expressions, coupled with her agitated response, initially conveyed to the disciples during the flight and subsequently manifested through her lamentation at the tomb, epitomise the prevailing motif of the episode, which is the conspicuous absence of Jesus. However, the aforementioned unforeseen realisation, alteration, or rather inversion of circumstances, solely arises due to the proactive approach of Jesus in appearing before Mary. However, Mary exhibits an inability to identify him. The individual is akin to the disciples who witnessed the crucifixion of Jesus, as they were not yet cognizant of the prophetic significance of the Scriptures pertaining to the resurrection. Jesus' proactive approach signifies the fresh direction to which he summons Mary, as he inquires, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for? The invocation of Mary's name elicits a response of "turning" (*strephesthai*) and recognition of the speaker, as indicated in 20:16a. Mary's attitude undergoes a transformation that results in an internal and spiritual shift, characterised by a deep-seated conversion, as opposed to a mere external

and spatial alteration. The appellation “Rabbouni” succinctly encapsulates Mary’s newfound relationship with the resurrected Jesus, who addresses her by name.

“Mary’s story confirms that seeing alone does not guarantee faith. She saw the open tomb (20:1), the two angels (20:12), and even the risen Jesus himself (20:14), yet persisted in thinking that the body had been stolen (20:2,13,15). Only when she heard Jesus speak her name did she recognise him. What she heard enabled her to make sense of what she saw, although the command to stop touching Jesus (20:17) indicates that she did not fully comprehend the significance of the resurrection. Mary did respond to Jesus’ command, however, by telling the disciples what she saw and heard (20:18). The evangelist does not say how the disciples reacted to what she said, but her words set the stage for the scenes that follow”.²⁶⁵

Mary’s recognition of Jesus occurs only after he addresses her by name. Mary was addressed by Jesus with the words, ‘Mary’. “Jesus said to her, ‘Mary’. She turned and said to him in Hebrew, ‘Rabboni’ (which means teacher)” (20:16). The author has explicitly stated that Mary’s recognition was not prompted by the visual or auditory perception of Jesus. Upon witnessing Jesus addressing Mary by her name, readers of John’s gospel may be reminded of the author’s previous statements regarding Jesus’ identity as the virtuous shepherd who calls his own sheep by name (10:3), as well as Jesus’ own declaration that he is familiar with his own followers and they are familiar with him (“I know mine and mine know me” 10:14). According to certain interpreters, such as Leon-Dufour, Mary’s reaction can be perceived as lacking in faith. This interpretation draws a comparison with the response of the apostle Thomas upon encountering the resurrected Lord.

“It is not enough to admire the promptness of the answer, one must above all be astonished that, however admirable it may be, it does not go beyond what the disciples answered at the dawn of public life: « Rabbi, that is to say Master-, where do you live? » (1:38). Mary does not accede to the faith of Thomas who exclaims: « My

²⁶⁵ Craig R. KOESTER, “Hearing, seeing, and believing in the Gospel of John” (1989). Faculty Publications. 22. http://digitalcommons.luthersem.edu/faculty_articles/22.

Lord and my God » (20:28). Mary remains in the Jesus she knew on earth, she did not come to faith in the Lord. By everything she says, we see that she remained in the figure of the past and did not fully recognised Jesus. For the moment, she has found alive the Jesus of yesteryear, the one who had said: « you are sad, but I see you again and your heart will rejoice» (16:22)”.²⁶⁶

Dufour's interpretation suggests that the witnesses encounter challenges in identifying the Risen One, which may be subject to dual interpretation. Specifically, it appears as though Jesus' likeness to himself is momentarily suspended, thereby contributing to the witnesses' difficulty in recognition. The individual in question exhibits a state of being that is characterised by a lack of change in essence, yet a notable alteration in internal composition. Furthermore, their outward manifestation is disassociated from their perceived external form. Conversely, the challenging, ambiguous, and questionable recognition raises the issue of belief. The crux of the matter lies not in acknowledging the familiar, but in placing faith in the unfamiliar. Mary's faith is rooted in a trust that may be perceived as “blind,” wherein she believes that the entity calling her is exclusively addressing her. The fidelity of Mary's call is comparable to that of Abraham, Moses, or Samuel, who received a call that demanded an immediate response. The association between Mary Magdalene's “seeing” and the Word is apparent; her testimony pertains not to her visual perception, but rather to her auditory experience.

The conclusive events of Mary's Easter encounter contribute to the attainment of her idealised portrayal. In the episode concerning the recognition of the Risen One, Mary is assigned the responsibility of informing the disciples, and she accomplishes this task by declaring, “*I have seen the Lord*” (John 20:18a). The formula, which describes the Paschal encounter and serves as the foundation for the testimony replete with apostolic credibility, represents the ultimate destination of Mary's journey of belief.

²⁶⁶ Xavier Léon-DUFOUR, *Résurrection de Jésus et message pascal*, Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1971, pp. 230-231.

In summary, it can be asserted that the prevailing theme of this episode pertains to the evolution of Mary's perspective, which enables her gradual recognition of Jesus as the Lord. The gradual acknowledgment can be delineated into four distinct phases:

Mary's initial encounter with the tomb can be characterised as a basic act of observation, specifically in regards to the displacement of the stone. As she approached the tomb, the observer noticed the presence of two angels adorned in white garments, as described in John 20:12. The lack of the corporeal form that she seeks and the existence of celestial beings ought to have prompted her to consider the concept of the Resurrection. However, these two indications are insufficient.

Subsequently, the woman scrutinises Jesus with great attention, yet fails to identify him and mistakes him for the gardener. Mary's visual perception is yet to identify the Lord, indicating a deficiency in her faith's visual aspect.

In the third stage, Jesus specifically addresses Mary by her given name. Upon observing the scene, it can be inferred that the individual in question perceives the figure before them to be Jesus. This marks the initial instance of acknowledgement, albeit one that is solely grounded in human perception. At present, she is still connected to her past and holds a strong association with an individual whom she regards as "*the Teacher*". This rationale elucidates her inclination to reach out and make physical contact with him. Upon discovering him, she becomes unwilling to release him.

Thus, there exists a crucial ultimate barrier to overcome, which holds the utmost significance, enabling Mary to transcend her fixation on the perceptual realm and ascend to the realm of belief, directing her focus towards the future instead of the past. However, the attainment of a significant transformation in both her physical appearance and research cannot solely be accomplished through a direct disclosure of Jesus. Rather, it is imperative that Jesus himself conveys to her the message of Easter, as he states, "*I have not yet ascended (anabebeka) to the Father. But go to my brothers and tell them, 'I am going (anabaino) to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God'*". Upon this occasion, Mary Magdalene

comprehended the veracity of Jesus' resurrection and declared, "I have seen (*eoraka*) the Lord" (Jn 20:18).²⁶⁷

4.7.3. The double appearance of Jesus – to the Disciples and to Thomas: John 20:19-29

The account of the experience with the group of disciples begins with a temporal specification: 'On the evening of that first day of the week', and the homogeneity between space and time, which also creates literary unity, is largely given by the presence of the verb to 'see' and 'believe'.

Unlike Matthew and Mark, in John, Jesus shows himself to the disciples immediately (on the very evening of the Resurrection) in Jerusalem, where they were living behind closed doors for fear of the Jews. The appearance of the Risen Jesus to the assembled disciples occupies a fundamental role in the existence of the ecclesial community.

The previous episode primarily focuses on the concept of recognition. The theme of the mission is presented in a condensed manner, potentially leading to its oversight. The focus of this narrative has been inverted. The correlation between the crucified individual and the resurrected Lord is established by Jesus himself through the display of his hands and side to his disciples. The act of seeing and perceiving something is implied, yet not explicitly expressed. The crux of the matter lies beyond the surface level, pertaining to the attainment of commitments and ultimate objectives. This narrative contains various elements that bear similarities to other instances, such as the physical manifestation and greeting of Jesus (verse 19), his self-revelation (verse 20), his purpose (verse 21), the impartation of the Holy Spirit (verse 22), and the granting of forgiveness of sins (verse 23). The significant allusions in this context pertain to the promises made in the Farewell Discourse (Jn 14-16) where Jesus proclaimed his arrival among the disciples as a realisation of the prophecy, "I will come to you".

²⁶⁷ Cf. De La POTTERIE, I. (1984). Genèse de la Foi Pascale d'après Jn. 20. *New Testament Studies*, 30 (1), 26-49. doi: 10.1017/S0028688500006986.

For this part as well we will follow the pertinent proposal of Manns, whose proposal of a chiasmic structure highlights the progressive movement between “seeing” and “believing” by concentrically situating the faith experience of the disciples gathered together. The decisive moment in the itinerary of Thomas' paschal faith is not the actual fact of “seeing” – checking, but Jesus' final invitation “do not be unbelieving, but believe” (20:27).

“v. 19: *oun*. Jesus came. Peace.

v. 20: he showed them his hands and his side.

oun. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord (*idontes*).

v. 21: *oun*. Peace – Sent.

vv. 22-23: Receive the holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained

v. 24: *de*. Thomas was not with them when Jesus came.

v. 25: *oun*. We have seen (*heorakamen*) the Lord

de. Unless I see (*idô*), the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the nailmarks and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.

v. 26: Jesus came. Peace.

v. 27: See (*ide*), do not be unbelieving.

v. 28 : My Lord and my God!

v. 29: Blessed are those who have not seen (*idontes*) and have believed.”²⁶⁸

The composition of John's written work pertaining to the manifestation of Jesus in front of his disciples is a product of the amalgamation of sequences in a diptych that can be deconstructed into two distinct depictions. The recurrence of the expression “seeing the Lord” in verses 20 and 25 indicates a noteworthy escalation, which is not adequately accommodated by the composition of the text.

The paragraph elucidates the concept of progressive revelation as described by John. It emphasises that this revelation should not be construed as a comprehensive and chronological narrative of the paschal mystery's historical and transcendent unfolding. Instead, it should be

²⁶⁸ F. MANNNS, *op. cit.*, p. 437.

viewed as a catechetical and theological exposition that gradually reveals the various facets of the mystery.

An important aspect worth mentioning is that the “sight” (*idontes* 20:20) of Jesus is accompanied by *joy*²⁶⁹, which is in contrast to the *fear* of the disciples locked in the house. It is precisely for this reason that the interpreters Dupont, L., Lash, C., & Levesque, state that:

“The fear of those who killed Jesus disappears in the face of the sensory appearance of Christ, who conquered death, because His appearance is also glorious. The sight in question here is both sensible sight and faith sight, without, however, being able to distinguish one from the other.”²⁷⁰

The disciples, including Mary Magdalene, underwent a profound transformation subsequent to the manifestation of Jesus to them. In the year 19, the disciples exhibited fear towards the Jewish community. The depiction of the closed doors behind which the disciples were gathered constitutes a vivid representation of their state of apprehension. Upon the arrival of Jesus in their midst, he declared peace to the disciples and displayed the wounds on his hands and side. As a result, the disciples' initial fear transformed into joy, as they came to the realisation that this was indeed the resurrected Jesus.

In the final scene, the verb “to see” is consistently paired with the verb “to believe,” with the exception of the kerygmatic formula found in verse 25a. This is all the more remarkable because in the first scene, *theôrei* was accompanied by the theme of ignorance represented by the verb *ouk oida*, which gives meaning to the Resurrection. We are dealing with a sensory and glorified Christ who is “seen” in both sensory and with the

²⁶⁹ See Gert J.C. JORDAAN, *The joy of seeing Christ: A thematic study of joy in the Gospel of John*, *In die Skriflig* 49(2), Art. #1968, 9 pages. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/ids.v49i2.1968>. “The final reference to joy in John brings the theme to its climax. The disciples finally saw the risen Lord standing before them in person. He had endured the cross, as proved by the marks in his hands and the wound in his side. And he had conquered death by rising in his body from the tomb, for he was present not only in spirit, but also in body. Yet Jesus did not return merely to his earthly existence. He was standing before them in glory, ready to return to the Father. That is how the disciples saw him.”

²⁷⁰ Dupont, L., Lash, C., & Levesque, G., *op. cit.*, p. 490.

eyes of faith. It seems that the two aspects of the Risen One are presented successively. This duality is marked by the expression "*Peace be with you*" (20:19-21).

The physical manifestation of Christ can be observed among the disciples as he stands in their midst, displaying his hands and side. Subsequently, a manifestation of Jesus in glory is witnessed, as he returns to the Father and sends the Holy Spirit. (20:21-23). Simultaneously, this sequence undergoes correction through multiple alterations that take place between the sensory and glorified facets. From one perspective, the sensory manifestation is exceptional in nature: Jesus transcends the physical barrier of locked gates and presents his wounds that resulted in his demise. Conversely, the exhibition of his magnificence is concomitant with corporeal actions: he exhales upon his adherents, confers upon them authority over their transgressions, either to absolve or retain them. This recognition is without any reservation, it goes beyond any sensory observation, it is the sight of the Lord with the eyes of faith. This "seeing" fulfils Jesus' promise: "*the world will no longer see me, but you will see me, because I live and you will live*" (Jn 14:19). The recognition of the Lord implies that the relationship is definitive. The narrator's use so far of the title "Lord" (*Kyrios*) is rare (Jn 4:1; Jn 6:23; Jn 11:2,21).

The expression "to see the Lord" here is equivalent to the expression "the Lord reveals Himself", for the disciples, recognising the Lord, anticipate the vision they will have of the glorified One in heaven²⁷¹. Thomas, one of the Twelve Apostles, is a member of two distinct groups. Firstly, he is part of the group of the Twelve, having been granted the same divine privilege as his peers to witness the Lord. Secondly, due to his absence during Jesus' initial appearance to the disciples, Thomas is the foremost among those who must believe in the absence of physical evidence. By considering this dual perspective, it is possible to explicate the theological import of Christ's manifestation to Thomas, thereby facilitating comprehension of the significance of "*faith without sight*" (20:29). The account commences with the encounter of Thomas, and the

²⁷¹ Cf. X.L. DUFOUR, *op. cit.*, pp. 75-78.

initial observers who were privileged to partake in the revelation of the exalted Christ will be required to have faith in the absence of visual confirmation.

To further clarify this point, de la Potterie says that observing the parallelism between Christ's appearance to Thomas and the appearance to the disciples helps us to better understand the meaning of Jesus' "vision".

"The disciples said to Thomas, 'We have seen the Lord' (20:25). It was a *vision of faith*, fruit of the gift of the Holy Spirit, yet Thomas' refusal is categorical. He wants to verify for himself, to experience, to see, to touch Jesus in his physical reality. In other words, he sets and defines the conditions of faith. The resurrection of Christ was not so popular to any of the witnesses of the Gospel, but nevertheless, Jesus appears again, this time in the presence of Thomas, accedes to his desire and allows himself to be touched. The Lord invites him to go beyond the ambiguous and dangerous stage in which he had been: "*do not be unbelieving, but believe*" (20:27b). No other text in this chapter expresses so clearly the fundamental requirement for growth in faith. The theme will be addressed in the overall conclusion of the Gospel (20:31). For Thomas, this word is an invitation to radical change: the shift from the sensory "vision" of Jesus and the wounds of the Passion (*ean me idw*) to the vision of faith of the glorified Lord (*eorakas*); this is also the one that will be his confession of faith: "*My Lord and my God!*" (20:28)"²⁷².

According to Fabris, the encounter with the Risen One does not end with the recognition of the One who has gone through the ordeal of death on the cross:

"In the Easter encounter with the disciples, Jesus presents himself as Lord and gives them the role of extending his mission with the powers and gifts that derive from them. In this scene, too, Jesus' initiative predominates. The disciples react positively: they rejoice at the sight of the Lord. This optimistic picture is integrated into a second one, in which the resistance and doubts in the face of the resurrection event are concentrated in the figure of Thomas, one of the Twelve."²⁷³

²⁷² Cf. De La POTTERIE, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

²⁷³ Rinaldo FABRIS, *Evangelhia după Sfântul Ioan, traducere și comentariu*, Editura Sapienția, Iași, 2016, p. 824.

The disciple Thomas holds a distinctive significance in the account of John, and his vulnerable position as an apostle of the Lord grants him typological worth.

The initial act of John 20 is primarily dominated by Mary, whereas the subsequent act centres around Thomas as the key figure. The two protagonists, Mary and Thomas, exhibit a remarkable symmetry: the female figure who held a special place in Jesus' heart is counterbalanced by the disciple who held a deep attachment to him; the manifestation of sorrow (the affective aspect of Mary's erroneous conviction that Jesus has passed away), which subsequently transforms into elation, is mirrored by the archetype of scepticism (the cognitive aspect of Thomas's erroneous conviction that Jesus has perished), which subsequently evolves into conviction; both characters evince an intense preoccupation with the corporeal form of Jesus and appear to possess limited comprehension of, or interest in, his spiritual significance. The Evangelist John proposes two symmetrical movements in the account of the appearance of the Risen One to Mary Magdalene and Thomas: on the one hand with Mary we have an upward movement from the sensory to the glorious, and with Thomas a downward movement from the glorious to the sensory. Thus, Mary obtains a sensory view of a glorified Christ thanks to a sensory Christ who is self-effacing, while Thomas obtains a faith view of a sensory Christ thanks to a glorified Christ who offers himself: "*Put your finger here and see (ide) my hands, and bring your hand and put it into my side.*" (Jn 20:27) What a difference from 20:17: "*Stop holding on to me!*"

This is also Most's intention when he states,

"Within the immediate dramatic situation of John's story, Jesus' words "*Do not touch me*" are spoken only to Mary Magdalene; but, in fact, we can only understand them fully if we take them as an anticipation of a later stage of the narrative and interpret them as looking forward to the only other person in this whole chapter with whom Jesus has an individual exchange, Thomas. That is, Jesus' prohibition against Mary's touching him (20:17) and his invitation that Thomas touch him (20:27) must be understood together: these two utterances are the points at which the two halves of the *symbolon* of this chapter fit most precisely together."²⁷⁴

²⁷⁴ Glenn W. MOST. *Doubting Thomas*. Harvard University Press; 2007. <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.proxy.library.lincoln.ac.uk/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=282380&site=ehost-live>.

The events in the two halves of the chapter are designed to correspond with one another through the events they depict. Specifically, Jesus' disappearance from the sealed sepulchre in the first half is mirrored by his two appearances within the locked room where the disciples are gathered in the second half. Additionally, all of these events occur on the first day of the week.

The concise narration of Thomas' scepticism upon encountering the resurrected Christ who had been crucified (as recounted in John 20:24-29) serves as a heraldic emblem that encapsulates the salient themes of the Gospel of John in its entirety. The formal structure of the text involves a repetition of the previous narrative of the apparition, as seen in Jn 20:19-20. This repetition sheds light on the relationship between vision and faith, and highlights the underlying structure of intelligibility that permeates the entire gospel. The individual known as Thomas, who was not present during the Resurrection event, is precluded from being subjected to empirical scrutiny or being regarded as a reliable source regarding the veracity of said event, as supported by the text.

Regarding conceiving Thomas as the figure of the absent one, Faessler observes that

*"Seeing is always an event. It opens onto what is given according to the perceptual field inaugurated by its purpose and where the 'presence' of something gradually takes shape. But the visible is only given in horizons. The feature that completely escapes Thomas, which also explains his protest, is that he sees only what is given 'in the flesh', a presence identifiable only by evidence, similar to the 'hand-holding' of the present where the hand must be able to verify what the spirit sees. For Thomas, who speaks only in the first person - "I" - the seeing is the attachment to a temporality in which everything is recovered. A trace is never anything other than a locatable mark of the past, a sign that memory can attribute to recollection."*²⁷⁵

²⁷⁵ Cf. Marc FAESSLER, *Autrement voir. Thomas l'absent, figure du lecteur en Jean 20, 24-29* In: *La littérature : Réserve de sens, ouverture de possibles* [online]. Bruxelles: Presses de l'Université Saint-Louis, 1999 (creato il 05 juin 2022). Disponible su Internet: <<http://books.openedition.org/pusl/19741>>. ISBN: 9782802803393. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/books.pusl.19741>.

The observation of an absence (*out of sight*) is the first stage of belief, but this must be followed by a second stage, that of belief (*in absence*). The episode of Jesus' appearance to Thomas is based on the question of "sight". "We have seen the Lord", say the disciples, while Thomas asks for proof: "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the nailmarks and put my hand into his side, I will not believe"; this proof does not come freely, but in the form of a lesson: "Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed". Thomas professed his belief after witnessing the resurrected figure of the crucified individual before him. The presence of a deceased individual among a gathering of individuals was commonly interpreted as a miraculous occurrence or a significant indication. Thomas' sceptical response to his fellow disciples' assertion in 20:25 that they had witnessed something is indicative of his thought process. Upon analysing 20:25, it is evident that Thomas firmly believes in the veracity of his fellow disciples' sighting. The individual appears to harbour scepticism regarding the corporeal existence of an individual and thus declines to accept the purported sighting of the physical manifestation of Jesus absent empirical evidence. As a means of substantiation, he expressed a desire to have a personal encounter with Jesus.

Bonney's observation suggests that Thomas' scepticism is not limited to the message itself, which asserts the resurrection of Jesus, but also extends to the credibility of the messengers who conveyed it to him, namely his fellow disciples. Thomas appears to be unwilling to accept both the content of the message and the reliability of those who delivered it.

"Thomas' words in 20:25 are more likely a sarcastic expression of unbelief than a request for proof. He rejects the possibility of Jesus' resurrection. He does not demand to see it. Furthermore, one would be misunderstanding John's presentation of Jesus throughout the gospel if he or she would suppose that Jesus condescends to fulfil Thomas' desires. Rather, through the sign he becomes through his resurrection, he transcends and changes Thomas' limited mode of perception".²⁷⁶

²⁷⁶ Cf. William BONNEY, *Caused to Believe : The Doubting Thomas Story at the Climax of John's Christological Narrative*. Brill; 2002, <https://search-ebscohost-com.proxy.library.lincoln.ac.uk/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=105547> site ehost-live.

The discourse of Jesus to Thomas, “*you come to believe because you have seen me*”, discredits and challenges not the act of seeing per se, but rather the disassociation between “seeing” and “believing”. This suggests that the criterion or foundation of believing is not solely based on visual perception. One aspect of the Johannine narrative pertains to the significance of the phrase “*believing without seeing*” (refer to John 20:24-25). A parallel can also be observed between the aforementioned passage and John 20:1-2. Upon receiving the news from Mary Magdalene regarding the removal of the stone from the tomb, the two disciples proceeded with haste to witness the miraculous occurrence. Despite not having yet laid eyes upon Jesus, the beloved disciple began to exhibit signs of belief (20:8). Thomas is informed by the disciples that they have visually perceived the Lord. Despite not having personally witnessed Jesus, Thomas was expected to have faith in the reported sighting. The text emphasises the significance of effectively communicating the message, specifically the kerygma, in both instances. The felicitous line at the conclusion of chapter 20:29 should be interpreted within this particular context: “*Blessed are those who have not seen (me idontes) and have believed*”.

The association between “seeing” and “believing” seems to be broken here. “In his reaction to the confession of Thomas, Jesus addresses this newly found faith of Thomas, but immediately shifts the emphasis (20:29). His reply to Thomas is in the form of a rethorical question: “*Have you come to believe because you have seen me? (oti eorakas me pepisteukas)*”, which leads to a statement “*Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed (makarioi oi me idontes kai pisteusantes)*”. These two phrases follow an antithetical parallel pattern. Contrast on the level of *seeing* is emphasised, but similarly on the level of *faith*”.²⁷⁷ This need to believe without seeing does not mean that the Easter apparitions and the vision of faith of the first witnesses no longer have any weight for later believers, but are of decisive importance for the disciples, who will henceforth manifest their faith in the Lord by testifying to what others have seen.

²⁷⁷ Jan van der WATT, (2002). *The presence of Jesus through the Gospel of John*, Neotestamentica, 36(1/2), 89–95. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43049112>.

The conclusion of the Easter experiences of the first disciples and the original version of the Gospel are marked by Jesus' encounter with Thomas, as evidenced by the subsequent epilogue (20:30-31). Within this particular context, the ultimate discourse of Jesus establishes a connection between the spiritual state of the disciples and that of the Gospel's recipients, the believers.

Final conclusions

The theme of the gaze in the Gospel of John emerges as a fundamental theological principle of the history of salvation and of human existence, which the Church Fathers would call “the sight of God”. The endeavour of this paper has been to make a scholarly contribution by examining the portrayal of Jesus Christ in the Gospel of John.

The comprehensive examination of a topic of such magnitude holds significant value for its continued advancement across multiple academic disciplines, including theology, philosophy, anthropology, sociology, and biblical studies, avoiding redundancy in theological and anthropological subject matter by prioritising novel interpretations and significance of the themes, and conducting a thorough investigation of these terms, and examining alternative interpretations. By proposing this multi-disciplinary approach, anthropological, socio-cultural, theological, spiritual we have identified correlations and new connotations on the theme. The “file rouge” of the thesis is the transformative, conversion passage of seeing God, from invisible to visible, from (not)seeing to “being seen” by God, from extrinsic sight, to inner faith.

The Multiple contexts and philosophical currents approaches to the phenomenon of God's vision have been highlighted in this research, rooted in the ancient oriental and Judeo-Hellenistic and Roman heritage, and the Near East which recognises the legitimacy of God's vision and the contemplation of divinity; and the Christian tradition, with Church Fathers' view on Jesus seeing and a special emphasis on Gospel of John.

The study has analysed the way God is seen in different cultural and philosophical contexts, from the visual perception of the world to a

cognitive comprehension of the environment, edified on Greek and Roman philosophical ambient, Judeo and Middle East worlds, to proceed through psychological lens, moving beyond the socio-cultural lenses, and the impact of Greco-Roman perspectives on the concept of spiritual discernment, offering insights on the interaction between the divine and human through sight. The Greek tradition is rich in offering numerous verbs of seeing, and in this study we have analysed the fine and deep meanings, giving various significations that influence cultures and traditions. We have explored the concept of an invisible and inaccessible God within the Judeo tradition, to arrive to the embodied, visible God, the Christs who regard you and overpasses the sensory level to introspection and emotional experiences that transform those who are seen by God, as John's Gospel exemplifies.

This study focuses on the relationship between these concepts and both theology and anthropology, as well as the associated levels of transformation that occur in God's presence and His gaze.

The review of these different contexts proved to be nevertheless essential to facilitate the progressive understanding, as God revealed himself progressively in the history of humanity and was perceived and seen differently by people. Furthermore, in this research we managed to mirror and put together different voices on the visibility of God, in various contexts, which has contributed to a comparative and progressive understanding of God' seeing.

The ecumenical analysis of seeing God in Gospel of John, by referring to most preeminent Catholique, Orthodox and Protestant authors, have enrich the study and gave new valences, helping the reader "to see and comprehend" new perspectives in relations to the theme. Each perspective offers a distinct comprehension of the subject matter concerning the concept of God's vision. Catholic theology places emphasis on the sacramental character of the universe and the potential for perceiving the divine in the mundane, whereas Orthodox theology centres on the notion of theories or divinization, the veneration of icons which underscores the prospect of human beings partaking in the divine essence and attaining godliness. In contrast, Reformed theology places significant emphasis on

the supremacy of God and the significance of divine revelation as communicated through Scripture.

Studying the semantic field of vision shows us how the author of the Gospel of John used the theme of vision in its various and multiple meanings. The frequent use of sight verbs, as well as the varied meanings they reveal, allows the reader to see that sight is found in both narrative accounts and dialogues. This studied theme can involve understanding a seen person or object, but it can also elicit faith through appropriate testimony. The four verbs used for “to see”, *oraō*, *blepo*, *theoreō* and *theaomai* sometimes have specific uses that allow the author of the fourth Gospel to give a particular meaning to the episodes in which these verbs are used.

Investigating the narrative implications of the “seeing of Jesus” in the Fourth Gospel also revealed John's theological and communicative techniques. Examining them according to the interpretative key of the vision also identified the main pragmatic juncture that was at the centre of the interlocutors' gaze. The essence lies in the fact that “seeing Jesus” is nothing more than a preparatory, preliminary stage for acquiring intelligence, conversion and finally faith, which takes place once the theological and anthropological journey has been completed. However, it is and remains, as such, a fixed point at which the reader's personal conviction can mature, having acquired and experienced the strategies of communicating vision and understanding. At the same time, the study was intended to be an exploration of the vital questions of faith and hope underlying the eager desire to see. We understand therefore how important the Johannine theological theme of sight is, weaving together different perspectives of recognition and communion with Jesus. The unity and subsistence of the theological discourse of Jesus in the polyvalence of his appearances is precisely due to the discourse on sight.

The semantic field exemplified in this study offers enormous space for reflection on the *seeing* of Christ that is itself transformative and moves the viewer towards a new humanity. The Johannine theology of sight certainly finds an important place here, as it directs commitment and responsibility to the human person to be in continual visual contact with Jesus.

The prologue of John's Gospel that illuminates the whole journey of Jesus' vision through his incarnation highlights the ultimate meaning of the theological narrative of history. The Gospel calls for "seeing" the invisible, behind appearances, and testifying to the work of the Risen One who is ever present and discernible in history. The theme of "seeing" is used by the evangelist to express his theological understanding of the Christ-event, the one who enabled all to see God and be seen by Him, to know Him and to be known by Him. The Fourth Gospel provides the reader with a powerful toolbox in this regard through its pericopes on sight and faith. Recognising that you have seen God is not a purely empirical observation, but a confession of faith.

The dynamic expressed by the act of seeing can be thought of as a dialogue in which the one who sees first, having the initiative, elicits a response from the one who is seen. Due to the presence of Jesus, who functions as a source of power and virtue, this interaction becomes dynamic, generating effective results with a positive outcome. In instances in which Jesus takes the initiative, the reader recognises that his seeing entails a personal connection with his interlocutors that elicits distinct forms of responses (positive and negative) in response to the invitation to encounter Christ.

The pedagogical aspect of Jesus' view is manifested explicitly in the Gospel of John. To educate the disciples to "see" as God "sees," that is, to develop the capacity to perceive reality with spiritual senses, is the objective of the didactic communication described in a direct style of speech and a sincere dialogue between the interlocutors. Jesus, who is the evident evidence of God's sight, perceives the soul and heart. This is because man looks at the external aspect of every situation, whereas Jesus, who is the evident proof of God's sight, perceives the soul and heart. This is reminiscent of Yahweh's instruction to Samuel at the time of David's selection, when the Lord said, "Do not look at his appearance or height of stature, for I have rejected him; for God does not see as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Sam 16:7).

Genuine faith, according to the Fourth Gospel, is engendered through seeing. Sometimes, seeing leads to faith without any attendant miracle, as it did among the Samaritans. In the case of John the Baptist, the disciples, the blind man, Philip, and Mary Magdalene, seeing evoked an initial response of faith or obedience which was confirmed and deepened by a sign. Moreover, their faith enabled them rightly to perceive the sign and receive it as testimony to Jesus' claims. Not everyone who heard came to faith, and the reasons for their unbelief lie beyond the bounds of this study. Nevertheless, those who did manifest a genuine faith, did so after an initial experience of seeing.

Those whose initial perception of Jesus was based on seeing regularly failed to come to true faith. Jesus' seeing is intuitive and personal. He sees the totality of a person scrutinizing every aspect of the spiritual essence. The direct objects of Jesus' seeing are: the divine reality, the faith, the interior of a person and his/her spiritual state. His sight captures everything that would be hidden to a simple human eye. His seeing goes beyond the physical limitations, penetrating the earthly masks, seeing the spiritual or supernatural dimension. This also highlights that His seeing is not casual.

It has authority and purpose in the dynamic behaviour of Jesus: it becomes the preamble that initiates a calling, act of mercy, teaching, healing or conversion: The paralytic at Bethesda, the blind man at birth, some of the Jewish leaders who reacted to the signs with hostility and Thomas when Jesus appeared to him after the Resurrection was sceptical and they showed a blunt inability to believe. Other people responded to the signs with an unreliable faith, which Jesus mistrusted (2:23-25). People like Nicodemus, and the crowds in Galilee and Jerusalem interpreted Jesus in light of their own expectations and finally balked at his words. Our study does not suggest that the evangelist disparaged seeing signs, resurrection appearances, or the healing of the blind man.

At the same time, "signs faith" cannot be understood as a first step toward genuine faith, since the characters who manifest faith in signs consistently fail to move beyond it. The evangelist makes clear that Jesus' actions were rightly perceived only by those who already responded with

faith or trusting obedience to what they had heard from or about Jesus. The evangelist would say that "*in the beginning was the Word*", which evoked responses to Jesus that were confirmed by signs, led to proper perception of signs, and could grow into genuine faith even without signs.

We considered this study has achieved a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the topic of divine vision, by integrating diverse perspectives in the development of this thesis. Furthermore, it has highlight a multi-disciplinary and contextual ethos of ecumenical cooperation and facilitates discourse among diverse Christian traditions, with a special focus on John Gospel, as emerged as a fundamental theological principle of the history of salvation and of human existence, which the Church Fathers would call "the sight of God".

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