WHEN ABSENCE MEANS PRESENCE: RE-READING 1 SAMUEL 3 USING TODOROV'S NARRATIVE SECRECY

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Introduction

The word "secrecy" conjures up several and diverse images for a reader. Generally, people associate the term with unknown objects, ideas, circumstances or persons. On the part of the audience, ignorance—to a greater or lesser degree—opens up the reader to suspense, this narrative universal, which pushes the audience to persist in arriving at the narrative resolution. Something or someone is not known; and the unknown needs to be discovered. When the concept of secrecy is applied to Bible reading, it could even be extended, whether justly or not, from the realm of the mysteries to the domain of the surreal.

The use of "secrecy" in this article has more to do with its application as a literary technique than as a term describing enigmatic realities. Secrecy here then is understood—in the words of Jean-Pierre Sonnet—as "another narrative mechanism particularly powerful."[1] In a more detailed manner, secrecy as a narrative technique is put in relief in Tzvetan Todorov's book, "The Poetics of Prose," where the author effectively applies secrecy in the works of Henry James.[2] Guided in great part by Todorov's work, I attempt in this article to make a re-reading of Samuel's call in 1 Samuel 3, regarding it within the framework of narrative secrecy.

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[1] Jean-Piere Sonnet, *L'alleanza della lettura. Questioni di poetica narrativa nella Bibbia ebraica* (Roma-Cinisello Balsamo: Gregorian and Biblical Press, 2011), 146. The English translation above is mine.

[2] See Tzvetan Todorov, *The Poetics of Prose*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980); "French orig." *La Poétique de la prose*, trans., J. Culler, Paris 1971.

Secrecy as a Narrative Technique

Scrutinizing some of H. James' famous novels, whose plots are shrouded often in mystery and reticence, Todorov lays out in the process his insights and elemental principles on narrative secrecy. Todorov makes a general comment that H. James' storytelling always rests "on the quest for an absolute and absent cause."[3] He further explains that a cause triggers the narrative; but this cause is not known, and hence, thought to be absent. Without this absent cause, there will be no telling of the story in the first place. In other words, the absent cause—which could be persons, circumstances, or objects—is the reason for the narrative's existence. The entire narrative, indeed, is a quest for this absent cause. This cause is also described as absolute, since everything in the story subsists on an absent cause. Secrecy is at the heart of the narrative plot; it is the story's lifeline. Thus, when the cause is found out, the story starts to wrap up. Furthermore, Todorov calls the audience's attention to the seeming contradiction in what he calls the two movements of H. James' use of secrecy:

> On one hand he deploys all his forces to attain the hidden essence, to reveal the sacred object; on the other, he constantly postpones, protects the revelation—until the story's end, if not beyond. The absence of the cause or of the truth is present in the text—indeed, it is the text's logical origin and reason for being. The cause is what, by its absence, brings the text into being. The essential is absent, the absence is essential.[4]

To illustrate his point, Todorov comments on James' "Sir Dominick Ferrand" (1892), and brings out posthaste a fundamental point on secrecy: that the story is created around a

[3] Todorov, *Poetics*, 145.

[4] Ibid.

character and a mysterious happening, which will be revealed later in the plot. But he adds that the absence of Sir Dominick Ferrand also prompts some "intermediary mysteries" (what could be inside the desk and letters), further deepening the absence of knowledge and permitting the continuance of the narrative. Another ramification of the absent cause is depicted in the narrative "In the Cage" (1898), where Todorov suggests another facet of ignorance, based largely on the imperfection of the means to attain knowledge, and not simply on the existence of a secret. The main character, a telegraph operator, knows little information about Capt. Everard and Lady Bradeen on account of the nature of her job where information is passed through telegrams.

Todorov recalls, too, the remarks of several scholars about a technical property in Jamesian narrative, namely, an event happening is described and seen by someone else. And so, the truth about Sir Dominick Ferrand is known through Peter Barron's eyes; and the reader receives information on Capt. Everard and Lady Bradeen, not directly, but through the image that the telegraph operator has formed about them. James calls this indirect vision, which he seems fond of using. In a formulaic way, Todorov describes this indirect vision thus: "We do not see the ________ directly; we see the vision X has of the vision of Y who sees the _________."[5] Relatedly, this matter on point of view is linked to the characterization of narrative personages. As Todorov detects it from the narratives of James, he identifies direct characterization in a scene where the character, a priest, reveals his carnal sentiments upon seeing an amorous activity. In contrast, an indirect characterization occurs when the audience comes to know of a character's sentiments through the vision of another.

Another technical factor is discerned where secrecy can occur: the composition of the narrative. Todorov draws from

[5] Paraphrased from Todorov, *Poetics*, 150.

Boccaccio's *Decameron* the narrative's general configuration: a shift from the state of equilibrium or disequilibrium to another state. The transition proceeds from initial equilibrium through second disequilibrium and ends in a new equilibrium. In the *Decameron*, the initial equilibrium constitutes a married couple, disturbed by the infidelity of the wife. Another disequilibrium sets in, followed by the couple's escape from the punishment contrived by the cheated husband. The story ends with a new equilibrium. If my reading on the composition is correct, the disequilibrium emerges from the absent cause, which disturbs what is otherwise an initial tranquil scene. Such being the case, the reader needs to pay close attention to the point in the story where a disturbance commences, and how, if ever, it interacts with an absent cause.

One more matter relevant to the present discussion cannot be glossed over. Todorov mentions another aspect of secrecy and hiddenness, which particularly touches the realm of the supernatural. Noticing the preponderance of this element in James' writings, Todorov describes it thus: "Yet there exists another case in which "absence" cannot be conquered by means accessible to human beings: here the absolute cause is a ghost. Such a hero runs no risk of passing, as it were, unnoticed: the text is naturally organized around the search for him."[6] He further comments that, in fact, the ever-absent ghosts are often referred to in the narrative as "presences." It is beyond the power of the human characters to control the ghostly activities, except perhaps, when the personages exert effort to understand and, if possible, to resolve the mysteries of the supernatural events, so unexpectedly inflicted on them. One helpful example to illustrate this observation is found in James' most famous story, "The Turn of Screw" (1896). Closely related to the notion of ghost as an absent presence is the ultimate and absolute absence—death. Indeed, when does

[6] Todorov, *Poetics*, 154.

a character leave the story? When a character dies, absence is heavily felt. Todorov's words are insightful: "Death makes a character become the absolute and absent cause of life. Further: death is the source of life, love is born from death instead of being interrupted by it."[7] A character dies in the story, and ceases to appear in the text. And unless the memory of the dead is carried through the story, the deceased stays absent.

The narrative technique of secrecy as discussed by Todorov, I reckon, can be regarded side-by-side the plot of revelation (*anagnorisis*), in which the storyline proceeds from ignorance to knowledge, whether complete or partial. Several stories in the Bible are narrated with this motion of reticence and revelation, serving as a framework in several biblical narratives; it is a movement specifically effective in recounting the divine and human interaction. The attempt to employ secrecy as a technique in reading biblical narratives is an interesting endeavor. For this purpose, I would like to do a re-reading of Samuel's call story found in 1 Sam 3 in light of Todorov's suggestions on the absent and absolute cause which, in the first place, sets the life and mission of Samuel going.

Samuel's Call Narrative in 1 Samuel 3

The narrative of Samuel's vocation has been a frequent subject of scholastic investigation and a preferred reading for meditation during spiritual exercises. As a vocation story, 1 Samuel 3 stands side-by-side the call narrative of other biblical characters as Moses or Isaiah. R.F. Youngblood recalls that, as suggested by Gnuse who scrutinizes Near Eastern parallels, 1 Samuel 3 is better re-read as "an auditory message dream theophany."[8] The suggestion of Gnuse is an interesting

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[7] Ibid., 162.

[8] Ronald F. Youngblood, *1,2 Samuel*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, vol.3, gen. ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 590. See also Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel,* Interpretation (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1990), 25.

study. However, in the present investigation, I still retain the common consideration of 1 Samuel 3 as a vocation narrative. H.W. Hertzberg's comments are instructive: "We further learn what sort of a person Samuel was from his boyhood up, namely one who was capable of receiving 'the word.' He has this capability, however, not of himself, but as a man who has received a special qualification. We hear several times in the chapter just what is 'special' about it in comparison with what has gone before."[9] The pericope is delineated with a change of action. In 2:27-38, a man of God communicates to Eli the Lord's foreboding message, with a long discourse on the priest's dreadful sins and consequent punishments. The corruption of his sons, Hophni and Phinehas, as well as Eli's failure to train them to right path have resulted into the rejection of Eli's house and the death of his family.

The next scene begins with the narrator's introduction (3:1): וְהַנַּעַר שְׁמוּאֵל מְשָׁרֵת אֶת־יְהוָה לִפְנֵי עֵלִי (*w^e^hanna'ar š^e^mû'ēl m^e^šārēṯ 'eṯ Adonāy lip^e^nê 'ēlî*). This sentence starting with a *waw* and a noun—"And the lad Samuel was ministering to the LORD in Eli's presence"—indicates the exposition of the story whose main character, Samuel, is first described as הַנַּעַר. This serves, not only as an introduction, but as a piece of information that may mark a new scene or section in the narrative.[10] Moreover, as R.J. Williams suggests, the subject preceding the Hebrew verb, an alteration from the usual Hebrew word order (subject + verb + direct object + prepositional phrases), can mean that the subject in the text has changed.[11] In fact, the subject in the preceding scene (2:27-36) is the man of God. But here in 3:1, the subject is now the boy Samuel. The change of rhythm is

9 Hans Wilhelm Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1982), 41.

10 John H. Dobson, *Learn Biblical Hebrew*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 246.

11 Ronald J. Williams, *Williams' Hebrew Syntax*, 3d ed., rev. and exp. John C. Beckman (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2007), 203.

palpable as the text shifts from the speech in 2:27-38 to the beginning of a narrative. Hence, the reader detects immediately a new story beginning with the boy Samuel in 3:1. In 4:1, the expression וַיְהִי (*way^e^hî*) in וַיְהִי דְבַר־שְׁמוּאֵל (*way^e^hî d^e^ḇar š^e^mû'ēl*) is, as A. Niccacci suggests, "a macro-syntactic sign of narrative."[12] In other words, where one finds *way^e^hî*, a story is in the offing. The presence of *way^e^hî* in 4:1 alerts the reader that a fresh narrative is starting. Furthermore, the change of action (which is a prelude to a new scene) is evident in 4:2 which narrates the Philistine attacks against Israel, often defeated in the battlefields and distressed in their hearts. Thus, the story of Samuel under the present investigation as a self-contained unit can be delineated in 3:1-21, with the discourse of the man of God preceding it (2:27-36) and the battle between Israel and Philistia (4:1-22) following it. From the English translation found in "The David Story," the narrative of God's call to Samuel is as follows:[13]

> [1] And the lad Samuel was ministering to the Lord in Eli's presence, and the word of the Lord was rare in those days, vision was not spread about. [2] And it happened on that day that Eli was lying in his place, his eyes had begun to grow bleary, he could not see. [3] The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying in the temple of the Lord, in which was the Ark of God. [4] And God called to Samuel, and he said, "Here I am!" [5] And he ran to Eli and he said, "Here I am, for you called me," and he said, "I did not call; Go back, lie down." And he went and lay

[12] Alviero Niccacci, *Syntax of the Verb in Classical Hebrew Prose*, Journal for the Study of Old Testament Series 86, trans. W.G.E Watson (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 48. Furthermore, J.H. Dobson explains that it is most common in Hebrew to use *way^e^hî* "to begin a narrative or start a narrative afresh" in Dobson, *Biblical Hebrew*, 231.

[13] See Robert Alter, *The David Story. A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999). When I checked out the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, 5th ed., I noted that R. Alter's translation adheres strictly to the Hebrew text of the *BHS*. Thus, I have decided to use his translation in this article.

down. [6] And the LORD called once again, "Samuel!" And Samuel rose and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." And he said, "I did not call, my son; go back, lie down." [7] And Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. [8] And the LORD called still again to Samuel, a third time, and he rose and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." And Eli understood that the LORD was calling the lad. [9] And Eli said to Samuel, "Go lie down; and should someone call to you, say, 'Speak, LORD, for Your servant is listening.'" And Samuel went and lay down in his place.

[10] And the LORD came and stood poised, and called as on each time before, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for Your servant is listening." [11] And the LORD said to Samuel, "I am about to do such a thing in Israel that whoever hears of it, both his ears will ring. [12] On that day I will fulfill against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. [13] And I have told him that I was passing judgment on his house for all time because of the sin of which he knew, for his sons have been scorning God and he did not restrain them. [14] Therefore I have sworn against the house of Eli that the sin of the house of Eli will not be atoned by sacrifice and offering for all time." [15] And Samuel lay until morning, and he opened the doors of the house of the LORD, and Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli. [16] And Eli called to Samuel and said, "Samuel, my son," and he said, "Here I am." [17] And he said, "What is the thing He spoke to you? Pray, do not conceal it from me. Thus and more may God do to you, if you conceal anything from me anything of all the things He spoke to you." [18] And Samuel told him all the things

> and he did not conceal from him, and he said, "He is the LORD. What is good in His eyes let Him do." [19] And Samuel grew up and the LORD was with him, and He let not fall to the ground any of his words. [20] And all Israel, from Dan to Beer-sheba, knew that Samuel was a stalwart as a prophet to the LORD. [21] And the LORD continued to appear in Shiloh, for the LORD was revealed to Samuel in Shiloh through the word of the LORD.

When the narrative opens, the two main human characters, the old priest Eli and the young boy Samuel, appear in the scene, unknowledgeable of the provenance of the voice, which the boy hears repeatedly inside the temple. The story seems to dovetail with the narrative structure of secrecy which Todorov suggests. The absent and absolute cause, the unfamiliar voice of an unseen character, launches the narration time. The secrecy in this biblical story may not be tightly adhering to a kind of reticence discerned in the Jamesian narratives, where the reader is kept ignorant about the absent cause. Here in the biblical story of the boy Samuel, the reader is immediately forewarned of two significant pieces of information: YHWH's word is rare; and visions are uncommon. From the beginning, the reader knows that the divine voice is about to address the boy Samuel. For, when the voice calls out to Samuel, the narrator gives the reader a privileged position of knowing whose voice it is—it belongs to the Lord. Thus, it looks as though there is nothing more for the reader to do here, since no secrets to crack are present in the first place. Yet the short narrative in 1 Sam 3 is evidently structured within the temporary ignorance of the human characters, mostly kept at bay regarding the unknown and absent personage who owns the voice. In the end, of course, the characters find out the identity of the absent and absolute cause, responsible for the existence of the story. This kind of plot, which moves from ignorance to knowledge is called the plot of *anagnorisis*, in which the protagonists know something

in the end which they did not know in the beginning. It is also called the plot of revelation or, as M.H. Abrams and G.G. Harpham suggest, the plot of discovery.[14] The level of secrecy, which envelops the story of Samuel's call and leads to later recognition of this secret, is so tantalizing simply to disregard. Thus the reason for the present investigation arises.

To find one's bearing in this short study and reflection of 1 Sam 3, it would be profitable to ask the following questions: a) How would the plot of revelation that defines 1 Sam 3 be harmonized and richly explained by the narrative structure of secrecy? b) What possible insights, themes, or ideas may be deduced from 1 Sam 3 with the application of the narrative technique of secrecy? and c) How could secrecy effectively explain this Samuel narrative? With these inquiries in mind, now the analysis of God's call of Samuel begins.

Absent, Absolute Cause and 1 Samuel 3

The narrative begins with Samuel ministering to the Lord under Eli (v.1a). The participle מְשָׁרֵת (*mešarēṯ*: "serving," "ministering") indicates a "repeated, continuous, or characteristic action."[15] One can imagine the boy Samuel going about his daily and ordinary duty in the temple. It is business as usual. The narrator intervenes with a short comment, which will be helpful in understanding the next scenes: "and the word of the Lord was rare in those days, vision was not spread about" (v.1b). The reader, so generously entrusted with this information, turns toward the story with curiosity, which has nothing to do with gossip at all. As one of the narrative universals, curiosity is not about the future, but more about the past. As J.-P. Sonnet describes, curiosity is "retrospective: an element of the past—an event, a decision made, a strategy

[14] M. H. Abrams-Geoffrey G. Harpham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 11d ed. (Boston: Cengage Learning, 2015), 296.

[15] Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*, 88.

taken etc.—that eludes us because the narrator chose to go over it in silence."[16] The reader knows the unfamiliarity of the LORD's word and infrequency of visions. Untold past events must be behind the commentary of the narrator, who opts not to recount the past. Thus, from the beginning, the reader approaches the story with curiosity, wondering how the narrator's opening commentary would influence the narrative.

Eli's eyesight growing dim (v.2) is contrasted with the lamp of God not going out yet (v.3a). With the visions becoming rare on those days, the description in the first verses gravitates heavily to the motif of light and darkness. The day must be over, since both Eli and Samuel are already lying down: Eli in his room (v.2a); Samuel in the temple (v.3). It would have been the same repose of the night and labor of the day just like on the other days and nights. The scene is proceeding, silent and still, in the ordinariness of daily life. It has been business as usual. That night would have passed in the same way as it had done in the past. Or would it?

It happens without any warning: "And God called to Samuel, and he said, "Here I am!" (v.4). The narrator informs the reader that the voice disturbing the silence of the night belongs to God. In the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, the one calling is identified as יְהוָה (*Adonāy*: LORD). In the mind of the narrator and the reader, without doubt the voice of the LORD God is the first word that opens up, not only the story, but also the dialogue between God and man. The boy Samuel answers without delay too, and runs to Eli and says: "Here I am, for you called me" (v.5a). Mistaking Eli's voice for that of the LORD, Samuel shows his cluelessness, which can be explained

[16] Sonnet, *L'alleanza*, 65-66. The English is my translation from the Italian. According to Sonnet, there are three narrative universals: suspense–an imperfect knowledge of the conflict present in the narrative; surprise–an unexpected outcome in the narrative, which leads the audience to see again the story in this new light; and curiosity–a backward-look at a particular event, decision etc. These narrative universals make the stories exciting; without them, narratives are boring.

by his youthfulness and, more significantly, by the rarity of the LORD's word in those days. Moreover, at this point when Samuel displays his ignorance of the matter, the absent and absolute cause sets off the narrative. The character only hears a voice; he sees no one. The cause that begins the story is nowhere visible in the story. And yet it is there. Samuel's running and speaking, the first actions in the narrative, are caused by a bodiless sound of an absent being. It is also the boy's word that is first heard in the text: "Here I am" (v.5a). The reader does not know what the LORD has told Samuel, since the text only says: "And God called to Samuel." Thus, even for a moment, the reader too shares in ignorance, at least here regarding the word uttered by the Lord.

The Lord calls out to Samuel, who goes back to speak to Eli inside his room: "Here I am, for you called me" (v.5a). R. Alter's comment is enlightening: "These words make clear that the previous "Here I am" is not a direct response to God but rather the boy's calling out from the inner chamber of the sanctuary to Eli in the outer room, thinking that it is Eli who called him."[17] With the architectural setting which locates the characters in the story—Eli, in his place; Samuel, in God's temple—R. Alter's suggestion makes sense. Such being the case, the scene paints a picture of dramatic irony: the LORD calls out to Samuel, who is now calling out to Eli.[18] Eli's reply to the boy serves only to deepen the mystery behind the voice: "I did not call. Go

[17] Alter, *David Story*, 17.

[18] In narrative criticism, dramatic irony "involves a situation in a play or a narrative in which the audience or reader shares with the author knowledge of present or future circumstances of which a character is ignorant; in that situation, the literary character acts in a way we recognize to be grossly inappropriate to the actual circumstances, or expects the opposite of what we know that fate holds in store, or says something that anticipates the actual outcome, but not at all in the way that the character intends" in Abrams-Harpham, *Glossary Literary Terms*. In the present text, the reader knows the Lord calling out, but not Samuel or Eli. The ignorance of both characters, which involves "calling out," anticipates the denouement when Israel recognizes Samuel as נָבִיא יְהוָה (*nāḇî' Adonāy*), the one who calls out to the people with the LORD's word.

back, lie down" (v.5a). Both the characters have no idea what is happening: what this voice is about and where this voice is coming from. With this mysterious cause, the story is born. As Todorov says, "The cause is what, by its absence, brings the text into being." If Samuel had known and recognized the LORD's voice from the start, he would have immediately asked the LORD what He wanted. And that would have brought prematurely the narrative to its swift conclusion. But as it is, the narrative is allowed to continue because the absent cause still needs to be discovered. I reckon, when the absent cause is detected, irony could also be set off. Moreover, the equilibrium of the tranquil night is now discombobulated with disequilibrium; the silence of the scene is disturbed. The reason for the disequilibrium is obviously the presence of the absent cause.

The reader would recall that early in the text Samuel is said to be lying in the Temple of the LORD where the Ark of God reposes. So, when the boy goes back and lies down again, he has a sacred place to go back to and lie down. In the second time when the LORD calls out, the reader now learns what He might have said in the first time: "Samuel!" (v.6a). This is the first instance in the narrative that someone addresses the boy with his own name. The voice is starting to get personal. Rising and going back to Eli for the second time, Samuel addresses the priest: "Here I am, for you called me" (v.6a). It is the same words with which the boy addresses the priest. Once again, Samuel's words reveal his ignorance; he is responding to the voice, which he perceives to belong to Eli. From the character's view, the absent cause persists. That is why the boy goes again to resolve the issue. In this way, the absent cause is also the absolute cause; it is the reason why the story continues up to this point. And, together with the absent cause, the disequilibrium persists.

Then, without a warning, the narrator intrudes in the narrative with a comment: "And Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to

him" (v.7). J. Licht notes that this intrusion may be understood as a replacement technique, that is, an element is omitted, often subtly, from the pattern, and is replaced by another to disturb the pattern's monotony.[19] However, P.K. McCarter Jr. suggests that this commentary calls the reader's attention to the fact that "the special relationship with Yahweh that Samuel was to enjoy…was not yet established."[20] In the present parameter of this discussion, I reckon, the verse is an open admission of Samuel's ignorance as well as the identity of the absent cause—the word of the LORD, or simply, the LORD. Thus, I agree with P.K. McCarter Jr. that Samuel's ignorance of an absent cause infers a less than intimate relationship with the LORD.

Would this comment not remove the suspense in the story? For, even if the character is at a loss regarding the mysterious happening, the reader, instead, knows full well now what the absent and absolute cause is. Actually with the disclosure, the suspense still remains. It shifts from discovering the identity of the absent cause to waiting for the resolution of the story. Moreover, the narrator's comment corroborates Todorov's observation that a narrative may not only carry an absent cause, but may also point to imperfect means to uncover the mysterious event. In the present story, Samuel does not have a chance to get to the knowledge of the absent cause, unless it is revealed to him. There are no other ways and means for the characters to know the mysteries, except by the word of the LORD. No oracular devices, no *urim* or *thummim*, no prophetic voice—only the initiative of God. In other words, the absent cause is also the cause of revelation.

The absent cause, still unknown to the characters, permits the continuation of the story, where the voice is heard for the

[19] See Jacob Licht, *Storytelling in the Bible*, 2d ed. (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1986), 54.

[20] P. Kyle McCarter, Jr., *1 Samuel. A New Translation with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary*, Anchor Bible vol.8 (New York: Doubleday, 1980), 98.

third time: "And the LORD called still again to Samuel, a third time" (v.8a). The temporal frequency—third time—now points to a pattern, familiar to reader of the Bible, a structural design that appears repeatedly in biblical narratives. It is what Y. Amit calls the "Three- and-Four Structure," where four events, related to one another by a common element, end up with a determinative change.[21] This structure is employed "to convey confrontation and persuasion and for effecting a change of attitude."[22] Bearing in mind this structure, the reader is now alerted in the Samuel story with "the third time" which may direct the audience to "the fourth time" with its envisioned change of attitude. When Samuel goes to Eli's room for the third time, Eli's hunch and counsel to the boy is setting up the scene for "the fourth time." For, now the narrator reveals to the reader Eli's perspective regarding the mysterious occurrence: "And Eli understood that the LORD was calling the lad" (v.8b). Here, what the reader knows intersects with what Eli realizes. And the priest's suspicion is correct: the voice calling out belongs to the LORD. The absent and absolute cause is about to be revealed to Samuel. It is observed here that the climax of the story aligns with the much-expected disclosure of the absent cause. Thus, it could be said that in the plot of narrative secrecy, the story is reaching its climax, when revelation is in the offing. Eli's straightforward instruction to Samuel is leading to that direction: "Go lie down; and should someone call to you, say, 'Speak, LORD, for Your servant is listening'" (v.9).

The "fourth time" arrives when the Lord again calls out to Samuel with an intensification which is typical of the fourth sequence of actions: "And the LORD came and stood poised, and called as on each time before, "Samuel! Samuel!"" (v.10a). The increment is evident with Samuel's name being called twice as opposed to the LORD's act of calling in v.4, calling out Samuel's

[21] See Yairah Amit, *Reading Biblical Narratives. Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible*, trans. Y. Lotan (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 62-65.

[22] Amit, *Biblical Narratives,* 62.

name once in v.6, and then again a remark on the LORD's call in v.8. But more significantly, it is only in the fourth time that the Lord "stood poised" before Samuel. There are other two instances when the LORD is said to stand before a man. In Gen 28:13, the LORD stands beside Jacob in his dream of the ladder to heaven: "And the Lord was standing beside him and He said, "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God Isaac: the ground on which you are lying I will assign to you and to your offspring." And in Ex 34:5, the LORD comes down and stands with Moses on Mount Sinai: "The LORD came down in a cloud; He stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD." In both instances, the LORD's standing before the human characters ostensibly indicates His presence. So, too, when the LORD stands before Samuel, the LORD is present. In the text, the absent cause is now made known. Samuel recognizes this presence when he answers to the voice: "Speak, for Your servant is listening" (v.10). Samuel omits the name 'LORD' because, as R. Alter agrees with S. Bar Efrat, the boy is sheepish in addressing God.[23]

From v.11 to v.14, God's short discourse to Samuel follows. Here, the absent cause is in full recognition by the character, as God talks to the boy in a quick procession of first person addresses: "I am about to…I will fulfill…I have spoken…I have told…I was passing…I have sworn." The absent cause is God: "And the LORD said to Samuel" (v.11). The voice that calls out to Samuel four times belongs to the LORD. As Todorov suggests, once the veil of the absent cause is lifted up, the narrative ceases. The absent and absolute cause as the rationale of the narrative is already revealed. Not only the identity of the mysterious voice, but also the message, which the LORD wishes to communicate, is disclosed. In vv.11-14, the

[23] Alter, *David Story*, 17, citing Shimon Bar-Efrat, *1 and 2 Samuel: With Introduction and Commentary* (Tel Aviv: Magnes Press, 1996). The note on 1 Sam 3:10 in *The Jewish Study Bible* suggests a similar reason: that Samuel is in awe of God, making him unable to address God with 'LORD.'

Lord announces to Samuel the sins and condemnation of Eli's house. Why would God repeat to Samuel the judgment over Eli's family when in 2:27-36 a man of God had already relayed it in a more detailed manner to Eli himself? The reader has to continue the sequential reading to look for an answer.

With the revelation of the absent cause, which is God, the reader recalls Todorov's observation how inaccessible is the means to unravel the mysteries especially as the matter concerns the presence of ghosts in Jamesian narrative. Certainly, in the narrative of Samuel no ghosts are involved, because as the story shows, it is all purely God's initiative. What human characters cannot control and what human resources cannot access is divine liberty and divine action that proceeds from such freedom.

In Samuel's call story, the occurrences do not revolve around a phantom, but alongside a voice, or more particularly, a disembodied voice. In Hebrew, a phrase describes the phenomenon of heavenly voice—בת קול (*baṯ qol*), literally "daughter of a voice." The Talmud puts in parallel *baṯ qol* and the Holy One, God: "Elijah said to me: What voice did you hear in that ruin? I responded: I heard a *baṯ qol* ("Heavenly voice"), like an echo of that roar of the Holy One, Blessed be He" (*b.Berakhot* 3a). Thus, as the name suggests, the voice is divine. With *baṯ qol*, the speaker is invisible; it is a voice that proclaims God's will, His actions, or intentions. In the biblical story, when *baṯ qol* is heard, divine revelation is expected. It would not be too much stretch of imagination to think that in relation to prophecy, *baṯ qol* could then be identified with the Holy Spirit. Throughout the story, the *baṯ qol* that speaks to Samuel, sets off the narrative by its initial reticence, unknowable and mysterious until its divulgence towards the end of the story. Unlike in the Jamesian story, *baṯ qol*, not ghost, triggers the motion of the narrative plot in Samuel.

With this revelation, the reader goes back to seemingly plain piece of information given at the start of the narrative. Samuel is "lying in the temple of the LORD, in which was the Ark of God" (v.3). In hindsight, the architectural setting (temple of the LORD) and the props (Ark of God) adumbrate the identity of the absent and absolute cause. Why does the narrator have to mention the temple and the Ark in the early verses? One can dismiss it simply as necessary information, expected to appear in the narrative exposition. Yet, the religious significance of both the architecture and props can hardly be put in the sideline. Israel cherishes the belief of God's presence among them in the temple and the Ark of God. For example, in Israel's early years, the Ark is, first and foremost, considered "the throne of the invisible YHWH…so in various places it represented the presence of God."[24] The same is said of the Temple in Jerusalem with its colorful history and consistent recognition as the center of "faith and piety."[25] R.W. Klein proposes: "The theophany of God was probably related in some way to the ark, at least one of whose functions was to indicate the presence of Yahweh."[26] Relatedly, it is interesting to note that *Targum Jonathan*, an Aramaic translation of the prophets, has an addition to v.4: "And Samuel was sleeping in the court of the Levites. And a voice was heard from the temple of the Lord where the ark of the Lord was."[27] According to the Targum, the voice comes from the temple and, hence, from the LORD. Such being the case, the early mention of these two objects does more than introduce the narrative. They are details strewn for the reader to pick up and consider vis-á-vis the absent and absolute cause.

[24] J. Alberto Soggin, *Israel in the Biblical Period. Institutions, Festivals, Ceremonies, Rituals*, trans. John Bowden (Great Britain: T & T Clark, 2001), 37.

[25] Soggin, *Israel*, 39.

[26] Ralph W. Klein, *1 Samuel*, World Biblical Commentary vol.10 (Waco, TX: Thomas Nelson, 1983, 32.

[27] Daniel J. Harrington-Anthony J. Saldarini, *Targum Jonathan of the Former Prophets. Introduction, Translation and Notes*, The Aramaic Bible vol.10 (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, Inc. 1987), 108.

These objects foreshadow something that will transpire later in the narrative, namely, the revelation of the absent cause and the characters' recognition of the mysterious voice. Thus, the LORD "speaking" is hinted at earlier by two motifs representing divine presence—temple and the Ark.

While Eli could have ascertained correctly the divine voice, he remains ignorant of the LORD's words which God has spoken to Samuel, and which the narrator has generously shared to the reader. In the denouement, the irony of the situation emerges from the request of Eli to Samuel: "What is the thing He spoke to you? Pray, do not conceal it from me. Thus and more may God do to you, if you conceal anything from me anything of all the things He spoke to you" (v.17). Samuel knows about "the thing;" the reader shares with "the thing;" Eli does not know "a thing." It now remains in the story to have the final concealment from the character's eye lifted up. In the beginning of the story, Eli's eyes are failing; at the end of the story, his eyes are still dimmed. To Samuel falls the role to let Eli see "the thing." In the next verse, the reader recognizes what looks like a prophetical function the boy is fulfilling: "And Samuel told him all the things and he did not conceal from him" (v.18). What else would Old Testament prophets do but to speak the LORD's word to the people! The first prophetic words of Samuel are curious. For as R. Alter notes, "God's first message to Samuel is a prophecy of doom."[28] Here lies the answer to an earlier query about why God shares to Samuel what He had already relayed to a man of God. The boy Samuel is getting prepped up to assume the duty of the LORD's prophet. To accomplish this, the LORD will have to speak to Samuel about His will and intentions.

The reader, then, realizes, that the point of the story, built up on an absent and absolute cause, is the call and initiation of Samuel as the LORD's prophet. This is affirmed by the

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[28] Alter, *David Story,* 18.

concluding comment of the narrator: "And Samuel grew up and the LORD was with him, and He let not fall to the ground any of his words. And all Israel, from Dan to Beer-sheba, knew that Samuel was a stalwart as a prophet to the LORD. And the LORD continued to appear in Shiloh, for the LORD was revealed to Samuel in Shiloh through the word of the LORD" (vv.19-21). Rightly does W. Brueggemann write: "The narrative takes great care to show that Samuel's credibility does not rest on any conventional political confirmation. Rather, Samuel is presented as having an authorization rooted in nothing other than the freedom and promise of God."[29] The presence of the absent cause in the call narrative of Samuel makes for a dramatic showing of an important theological point: the divine call happens beyond human knowledge, but not beyond human consent. It is trustful assent to this absent cause that the ministry of prophet Samuel has begun.

Conclusion

In this short article, I have attempted to employ Todorov's observation on Jamesian narrative secrecy and apply it in biblical narratives with an eye to adducing any subsequent conclusions or insights. This endeavor yields the following outcomes and remarks.

When the absent cause, who is God, enters the scene, the human characters get actively engaged in the story. Hearing the yet unfamiliar voice of the LORD, Samuel takes all the pains to rise, walk to Eli's place, and asks question to his master. These activities happen, not once, but thrice. And three times, too, Eli performs similar actions: he wakes from his sleep, listens to the boy, and sends him back to his room. This flurry of human activities is palpable especially when, from the characters' view, the absent and absolute cause remains undisclosed. It gives birth to a hypothesis, both theological and pragmatic,

[29] Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 27.

which makes itself felt in several biblical narratives: when the divine presence is reticent, the human action is evident. This remark also works in reverse: when the divine cause emerges from secrecy, the human initiatives tend to recede in the background. In the fourth time, Samuel finally learns that the mysterious voice belongs to the LORD; it is revealed to the boy. The LORD's discourse, then, begins to dominate the scene, where contrastingly Samuel does nothing but to listen. After speaking to Samuel, the LORD fades in the background, until He speaks again to Samuel some chapters later (1 Sam 8). In the exigencies of human drama, beset with grief and pain, the silence of God does not mean divine desertion and nonchalance. On the contrary, life may need to obscure the presence of God, as human characters will still have to learn by degrees how to perceive the unrecognizable divine voice through trust and confidence.

Knowing the resolution of the story, the reader can comfortably ascribe to Samuel's call story the plot of revelation. But that can only be concluded in hindsight. Reading Samuel's story with Todorov's scheme of narrative secrecy, the reader realizes that *anagnorisis* cannot be simplistically reduced to a shift from ignorance to knowledge, although this substantial change is at the heart of this plot. Rather in the narrative substratum lies hid the paradoxical dynamics of absence and presence, of divine initiative and human response, and of silence and creativity. The plot of revelation described in terms of narrative secrecy brings out the three narrative universals: suspense (non-knowing), curiosity (referral to the past), and surprise (unexpectedness). These elements work effectively in Samuel's vocation narrative: whose voice? (suspense); why no word? (curiosity); and which prophet? (surprise). At the revelation time, the reader recognizes that power behind the story is the LORD's voice, which discloses surprisingly what the boy would become—God's own prophet. It puts forward another idea of theological import: when God speaks, a new

situation is effected. Nothing can stay the same before the word of the LORD. With the presence of the narrative universals, it is small wonder, then, that Samuel's call narrative has gripped the interest and imagination of readers through the centuries.

If the word of the LORD is rare in those days, then, how does Eli manage to deduce correctly that the voice calling out to Samuel is the LORD's? The frequency of the voice's occurrence, three times in a row, would have inferred Eli's presumption regarding the divine origin of the voice. From the discussion, one can surmise that the "Three-And-Four Structure" does not only convey a framework to hold the narrative together; it can also point to a pattern of behavior, which exemplifies particular story characters. In the biblical narrative, a voice—summoning and asserting—without a body can only come from God. No phantasm has ever called out to human characters and sent them to proclaim a divine intent, often at a great risk to the persons' reputation and mortal life. While the rabbinic literature has the phrase *baṯ qol* to describe the disembodied voice as divine, the discernible pattern described by reticence, recurrence, and persuasion draws the reader to think of a divine character. In other words, the divine presence, even in its most subtle appearance in the narrative, can be the single force to successfully summon and send someone on a mission. Ghosts cannot call disciples; only the Divine Spirit can.

In matters of spirituality, one can infer from the story of Samuel that the divine voice produces disequilibrium, an unsettling situation, or a creative disturbance to the effect that something new will emerge. The equilibrium of daily life is shaken before any change is possible. Stories of saintly men and women attest to the "busting" effect of God's intervention in establishing a new equilibrium: St. Francis of Assisi, shaken from earthly riches to evangelical poverty; St. Ignatius of Loyola, jolted from love of honor to desire for the greater glory of God; or St. Teresa of Jesus, disquieted from worldly glamor to the simplicity of life. Life's lethargy needs to be

moved and pushed by divine disequilibrium. Israel would never have known one of its great kings, David, had Samuel remained in the tranquility of the temple and refused to listen to that unknown voice which interrupted the silence of the night. With divine disequilibrium, the narrative will turn into a pleasant surprise.

When God summons and makes an appeal, the human response is trust. This is particularly so because the voice calling out seems to originate from an absent cause. Can one still speak of trust when the cause of confidence is fully disclosed and known? An act of faith in the word of the Lord is made, not when the LORD becomes manifest as in a vision, but when the person would have to negotiate one's way in the dark, yet still believing that the voice calls out towards the light. In truth, the voice is the light. It is impossible for Samuel to recognize the LORD's voice, if not by divine revelation. So it is in human experience that a person starts one's spiritual journey by searching for God, only to realize in the end—when one arrives to a partial discovery of God—that it is God all along, who has been searching faithfully and making Himself known to the person.

G.K. CHESTERTON'S THE MAN WHO WAS THURSDAY: THE BOOK OF JOB RETOLD

Fr. Joel N. Camaya, SDB, PhL, SSL, MATh

Introduction

The story of Job always fascinates people, even those who are not into biblical studies. It resonates with many, for it is a tale of someone who suffers and yet remains faithful. One time or another we hear quoted—often with lines from the main character, the one of resignation at the beginning: "Naked I came forth from my mother's womb, and naked shall I go back again. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord!" (Job 2:21)

However, the rest of the book contains a richer part of the human (and divine!) drama. The poetic part that follows are better appreciated when we see it reflecting life. The problem of Job is the problem of the whole human race, of humanity in front of evil and suffering. This is the main problem of theodicy—the stuff of which many priests and church leaders preach. This problem is depicted in so many ways. Historical events, even those involving natural calamities, are often punctuated with a question mark at the end. That is why this problem of evil has become a theme in many discourses, writing, or other forms of expression. The Book of Job is retold over and over again.

Such is the theme of G. K. Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday: A Nightmare*.[1] The novel is a retelling of the Book of Job. This short work intends to examine the novel and then compare it with the biblical work.

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[1] G[ilbert] K[eith] Chesterton, *The Man Who Was Thursday: A Nightmare in The Annotated Thursday*, annot. and ed. Martin Gardner (New York: Georges Borchardt, Inc. 1999).

The Man Who Was Thursday: The Book

The Author: G.K. Chesterton[2]

G[ilbert] K[eith] Chesterton (1874-1936) was a writer, journalist, apologist and illustrator. He was born in London and died in Beaconsfield. His life is divided into four periods: the first one, which was before the turn of the century, was characterized by idealism and romanticism. The second period was the time when he began to be recognized publicly. The way he is often portrayed is derived from this part of his life. The third period was one of crisis. It was the period of Chesterton the apologist and this time of his life was when he was at the threshold of his entry into the Catholic Church. This was when he called himself "an orthodox Christian." The last period began from his entry into the Catholic Church in 1922. His works from this time became more serious and more polemic. He was given the title the Defender of Catholic Faith by Pope Pius XI.

Setting

The setting of the novel is London at the turn-of-the-century (ca. 1900). The story spans several days, and it takes us to as far as Northern France. Some scenes are incongruous to achieve the surreal effect, since this is supposed to be a "nightmare." For this, the time setting is not given so much importance. The mood of the time of the day (e.g., the nighttime travel by ferry at the beginning and the twilight setting of the chase), however, does add much to achieve the surreal effect.

Characters

The following are the major characters of the novel.

Gabriel Syme (Thursday). He is the protagonist of the novel and appears all throughout, beginning as the other poet of Saffron Park. Chesterton called the novel "A Nightmare."

[2] What follows is taken from *A New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1967, s.v. "Chesterton, Gilbert Keith."

This nightmare belongs to Syme. He is described in the first chapter as "a very mild-looking mortal, with a fair, pointed beard and faint, yellow hair." He was said to be "less meek than he looked." He is one who works very hard to fight for his convictions.

Lucian Gregory. He is an anarchist, one of the two poets (the original one) of Saffron Park at the beginning of the novel. Chesterton describes him in the first chapter as "a man worth listening to, even if one only laughed at the end of it." He had an odd appearance: "[h]is dark red hair parted in the middle was literally like a woman's, and curved into the slow curls of a virgin in a pre-Raphaelite picture… He seemed like a walking blasphemy, a blend of the angel and the ape."

Sunday (the President). Through the eyes of Syme, we see that he is "a great mountain of a man…, like a statue carved deliberately as colossal. His head, crowned with white hair, as seen from behind looked bigger than a head ought to be… He was enlarged terribly to scale." In chapter 6, at the dinner, we see that he is one who continually looks at Syme (and perhaps at all the others).

Monday (the Secretary). He is the man with the crooked smile, a sinister looking fellow, a man whose face was emaciated, whose "eyes were alive with intellectual torture." He is perhaps, among characters in the novel, the most conscientious in carrying out his duties, or whatever is expected of him.

Tuesday (Gogol). He is the tousle-headed man who was "obviously mad," as he is described in the book. He has been badly disguised as a hairy Pole and he is the first one whose identity as a police detective is exposed.

Wednesday (Marquis de St. Eustache). He is "the only man at table who wore the fashionable clothes as if they were really his own." Indeed, he is elegant and passionate.

Friday (Professor de Worms). He is an old professor (which is actually the disguise), a very ancient one, indeed, who is revered by the others for his age.

Saturday (Dr. Bull). He is "the simplest and most baffling of all." He is a young doctor who carries his fine clothes with confidence and ease. The best feature that distinguishes him from the rest, that has become his reference point throughout the novel are his dark, opaque spectacles that evoked fear in those who looked at them.

Plot: A Synopsis of the Novel

The novel begins at Saffron Park where the poet, Lucian Gregory, is wont to speak before an audience. He is unchallenged until this particular evening, when another poet, Gabriel Syme, comes in and comes into an argument with him regarding the purpose of poetry. This man, Syme, has in fact, been recruited to a secret anti-anarchist force of the police.

The two afterwards spend some time in conversation and Gregory, in order to prove to Syme that he is an anarchist, takes him to a local anarchist meeting. Gregory, who was expecting to be elected to the central council, loses his slot to Syme who is asked to be in the council meeting.

He goes to the meeting place and sees the other members. Together with them, they are seven men with each one using the name of a day of the week as alias. Syme is named Thursday. In the course of the meeting, Sunday, the president, unmasks Tuesday as an undercover of the police. Eventually, in the course of the novel, Syme (as well as the others) discovers that five of the six other members are also undercover detectives.

Having discovered this, they all pursue Sunday whom they realize has put them all into this. In a dream within a dream scene, they all sit at table with the host Sunday. He opens the conversation and all the others say their piece, each of them questioning him. Syme delivers the clincher which can

very well be the climax of the novel: "Have you ever suffered?" Sunday responds, "Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of?" And the dream ends.

The denouement brings Syme back to London at the break of dawn in Saffron Park. This is where the novel ends.

Theme

The novel's constant refrain is anarchy (and in fact, it deals with anarchists) and the opening salvo, the conversation between the two poets at Saffron Park, is a debate about the antitheses, order versus anarchy. This makes us immediately think of what they stand for—many critics putting it as freedom versus determinism.

However, the novel is neither a view into anarchist thought nor a refutation of its principles. It goes deeper than these. It deals with the problem of natural evil. It is an exploration of the possible answer to the question "Why do bad things happen to good people?" Nay more, it does not look at the possible answers for there may be none. Rather, it puts forward the variety of ways that the question is asked and the different dispositions of the people who ask them. Above all, it looks at the relationship between God and the human being in the face of the evil in the world.

Thursday vis-à-vis *The Book of Job*

In the introduction to *The Annotated Thursday*, a recent edition of Chesterton's novel, Martin Gardner says that Chesterton wrote an introduction to the Book of Job. It is a wonder to see that *Thursday* is a modern retelling of The Book of Job. The following pages show the parallels between the novel and the Book of Job.[3]

[3] For ease of reading, in this section, all references to the locations in the book are placed in the main text as opposed to being footnoted.

The introduction to the discourse of Sunday to the six men may be considered parallel to that of God to Job. Aside from the fact that they usher in a discourse, the descriptions may also be rendered similarly: “like some enormous wave” and “storm:”

The Man Who Was Thursday	***The Book of Job***
Chapter 13, p. 224	Job 38:1
“I? What am I?” roared the President, and he rose slowly to an incredible height, like some enormous wave about to arch above them and break.	*Then the Lord addressed Job out of the storm and said: …*

The discourses following these are also parallel. Chesterton has obviously patterned his words from the words of God to Job in the final chapters of the book. The following passages are illustrative of this. Of course, Chesterton has tailored the discourse according to the situation of the novel and so it becomes rather limited, yet the desired effect is achieved:

The Man Who Was Thursday	***The Book of Job***
“You want to know what I am, do you? Bull, you are a man of science. Grub in the roots of those trees and find out the truth about them. Syme, you are a poet. Stare at those morning clouds. But I tell you this, that you will have found out the truth of the last tree and the top-most cloud before the truth about me.You will understand the sea, and I shall be still a riddle; you shall know what the stars are, and not know what I am.	*Gird up your loins now, like a man; I will question you, and you tell me the answers! Where were you when I founded the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its size; do you know? Who stretched out the measuring line for it? Into what were its pedestals sunk, and who laid the cornerstone, while the morning stars sang in chorus and all the sons of God shouted for joy?* (Job 38:3-7)

The Man Who Was Thursday

Since the beginning of the world all men have hunted me like a wolf—kings and sages, and poets and lawgivers, all the churches, and all the philosophies. But I have never been caught yet, and the skies will fall in the time I turn to bay. I have given them a good run for their money, and I will now." (Ch. 13, pp. 224-225)

There is **a plea for a response,** and this is addressed to Sunday (in the novel) and to God (in the Book of Job). It is basically the same, with both passages asking the addressee **whether he knows the situation of the one asking**: "Do you know who and what we are?" (p. 224) and "Does he not see my ways, and number all my steps?" (Job 31:4) Then these are punctuated with a plea for an answer:

The Man Who Was Thursday

"Who are you? What are you? Why did you get us all here? Do you know who and what we are? Are you a half-witted man playing the conspirator, or are you a clever man playing the fool? Answer me, I tell you." (Ch. 13, p. 224)

The Book of Job

But what is man's lot from God above, his inheritance from the Almighty on high? Is it not calamity for the unrighteous, and woe for evildoers? Does he not see my ways, and number all my steps? Let God weigh me in the scales of justice; thus will he know my innocence! … This is my final plea; let the Almighty answer me! (Job 31:2-6; 37)

Chesterton takes note of the mention of animals—lots of them—from the book of Job and from these I make the following observations:

The Man Who Was Thursday	***The Book of Job***
In chapter 13, the pursuit of Sunday brought the six men to the zoo, and they race in the midst of animals – *"a panorama of the strange animals in the cages."* (Ch. 13, p. 232) Animals in their cages remind us of Job 37:8.	Job 38:39-39:30 which is part of God's response, is one replete with descriptions of animals: the lioness, the cock, the ravens, the mountain goats, the wild ass, the wild ox, the ostrich, the horse, the hawk, the eagle. There is even a preview of this from Elihu's lips some verses earlier: *"He shuts up all mankind indoors; the wild beasts take to cover and remain quietly in their dens."* (Job 37:7-8)

Still on animals, two great ones are named in the book of Job. Size does matter! Chesterton compliments the size of Sunday himself, emphasizing this further with the appearance of the elephant:

The Man Who Was Thursday	***The Book of Job***
In the final chase in chapter 13, Sunday rides an elephant, *"a huge grey elephant at an awful stride, with his trunk thrown out as rigid as a ship's bowsprit, the trumpeting like the trumpet of doom."* (Ch. 13, p. 231)	Job is "answered" by Behemoth in 40:15. He is likewise confronted with Leviathan. These two great creatures are great ones which God names to belittle Job (as Syme in the novel is belittled by the President with the elephant).

Incongruous—this is an adjective that can describe this "nightmare" by Chesterton. It is the same comment we can say about the life of the human being on earth. God's answers sometimes add to the enigma. Gardner, the one who did the annotation on Chesterton's novel, writes that Nature (or God) "is forever confronting scientists with the phenomena they cannot fathom… No one can discover the ultimate reasons for why the universe exists or why it is structured the way it is." (Introduction, p. 15) Here is a comparison:

The Man Who Was Thursday	***The Book of Job***
Throughout the chase, Sunday kept on throwing small pieces of paper to the pursuers. These contain short messages of varying length. The messages are incoherent, not to mention, puzzling (with Gardner describing them even as "nonsense," see Introduction, p. 15). (Ch. 13, pp. 226-237)	The book of Job all throughout is a puzzle, a question on the suffering of the just. It is, if one notices carefully, a string of questions—and interestingly, questions on the part of Job and on the part of God. Gardner mentions that the messages in the novel are parodies of God's "evasive, relevant replies to Job." (see Job 38-39)

The banquet, feast or dinner setting is an obvious parallel in both the novel of Chesterton and the book of Job. It seems that Chesterton took this element from Job and emphasized it in his novel.

The Man Who Was Thursday	***The Book of Job***
The first time the characters (Sunday to Saturday) are seen together, in their inaugural council meeting, they were at table and Chesterton even entitles the chapter "The Feast of Fear." (Chapter 5)	The book of Job underscores the importance of eating and drinking—right from the first chapter and following:

The Man Who Was Thursday	***The Book of Job***
There is the final scene in the novel where everyone is seated at table to dine. (Chapter 15)	*"His sons used to take turns giving feasts, sending invitations to their three sisters to eat and drink with them."* (Job 1:4) *"And so one day, while his sons and his daughters were eating and drinking wine in the house of their eldest brother…"* (Job 2:13) The first trial mentions eating and drinking more than once: *"Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in the house of their eldest brother…."* (Job 2:18) The final scene is a banquet scene: *"Then all his brethren and his sisters came to him, and all is former acquaintances, and they dined with him in his house."* (Job 42:11)

In the final chapter, in the banquet scene, Chesterton, through the lips of Dr. Bull, quotes the Book of Job directly. This was at the arrival of the poet Gregory, who said that he was the real anarchist.

The Man Who Was Thursday	***The Book of Job***
"And there came a day," murmured Bull, who seemed to have fallen asleep, "when the sons of God came before the Lord, and Satan also came with them." (p. 261)	*"One day, when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, Satan also came among them."* (Job 1:6)

As a final take, it is quite interesting to note the words of the poet Lucian Gregory at the last chapter, "The Accuser."

The Man Who Was Thursday	***The Book of Job***
"You never hated because you never lived. I know what you are all of you, from first to last – you are the people in power! You are the police – the great fat, smiling men in blue and buttons!	Gregory is accusing the detectives that they have never suffered. This is one mood that we see in the Book of Job: accusations.
But is there a free soul alive that does not long to break you, only because you have never been broken? We in revolt talk all kind of nonsense doubtless about this crime or that crime of the Government. It is all folly! The only crime of the Government is that it governs. The unpardonable sin of the supreme power is that it is supreme. I do not curse you for being cruel. I do not curse you (though I might) for being kind. I curse you for being safe! You sit in your chairs of stone, and have never come down from them. You are the seven angels of heaven, and you have had no troubles. Oh, I could forgive you everything, you that rule all mankind, if I could feel for once that you had suffered for one hour a real agony such as I…." (p. 262)	The friends of Job come to castigate him—that he is suffering because he has sinned. Add to this, on the other hand, the rantings of Job.

Conclusion

"Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of?"[4] This passage pulls the rug from beneath our feet. We will find this unexpected if we are reading the novel for the first time. All the time it was the book of Job that was at the back of our minds and then come these lines from the New Testament. The book of Job did not have any resolution like this. It exposes to us the thesis that even the just do suffer, but it is not resolved except for the fact that God is so great that we cannot put into question all that happens in our lives. And the novel provides an answer, albeit in a "*Deus ex machina*:" that God also suffers.

Chesterton proposes this conclusion. The sufferings of humanity are complemented by the suffering that God also endures. It is of this cup that we drink.

The subtitle of Chesterton's work likewise proposes another aspect of the conclusion. The novel is subtitled "A Nightmare." It is of our opinion that this title is appropriate—that the happenings in the novel are described as a nightmare because they would end in an awakening: that they would come to an end. Yes, sufferings will not endure; they will not be permanent.

The problem of evil in the world, the suffering of human beings, even if they are just, is a great theme because it is a theme that is real. The Book of Job and this book of Chesterton share this fact. The book of Job will always be retold because this is an imperfect world, a world that has no right to question God's creation, but nevertheless, a world with which God would also stoop to suffer.

4 Chesterton, *Thursday*, 263.

THE WORD OF GOD THROUGH SYMBOLS

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It may not be original to start with reference to the opening of the Letter to the Hebrews, but I believe it captures one of the firmest of Israel's convictions. "At various times in the past and in various different ways, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets" (Heb 1:1).[1] There was in Israel for centuries such a powerful prophetic tradition. And we are blessed to be heirs of that tradition. But such was Yahweh God's love and desire to share the mystery of himself, to communicate his life to us, that a gesture was needed. This supreme gesture theologians call the Incarnation - the enfleshment of the Word. "In our own time, the last days, God has spoken to us through his Son" (Heb 1:2).

John's gospel introduces this theme in that poetic piece known as the Prologue, which the late Raymond Brown calls "the pearl within the Gospel."[2] The Prologue is possibly an adaptation of an early Christian hymn based on reflection about Wisdom in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament presentation of Wisdom, there are parallels for almost every detail of the Prologue's description of the Word.[3] The Prologue furnishes us with a key with which to unlock the deepest meaning of the narrative which follows. It begins, echoing Genesis, with the familiar words: "In the beginning… was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (Jn 1:1). So, beyond our space and time categories the Word,

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[1] All Scriptural text is taken from the New Standard Revised Edition found in the *Oremus* Bible Browser, unless otherwise specified.

[2] Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 18.

[3] See Brown, *John,* 521-523; C.H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 274-277; Dorothy Lee, *Flesh and Glory: Symbolism, Gender and Theology in the Gospel of John* (New York: Crossroad, 2002), 32.

the *Logos* ("word") existed in dynamic love and was divine. Later in the Prologue we find that amazing statement, the twinning of incompatibles: "and the Word became flesh, and pitched tent amongst us" (Jn 1:14). The divine Word becomes a human being at a particular moment in history, in a particular place in our world, and has a human name, Jesus. And now it is through the words, actions, life and death of Jesus that our God addresses us.

This term "the Word," *Logos* in Greek, already had a long history in Greek thought, as far back as Heraclitus in the sixth century BC. Later the Stoic philosophers considered the Logos to be the power which shaped and guided the world. It was, however, the Jewish background, I believe, which seems to have had the determining influence on the evangelist.

The biblical concept of the "word of God" (*dabar* in Hebrew) is extremely rich. This term *dabar* is used in two ways. Firstly, it has to do with understanding, enlightenment and revelation. In this sense God manifested his will for the people in the conduct of their lives, the ten "words," the Law. Through the prophets God enlightened Israel about the events of its history. God's word was also a word of promise and of judgement. A word inevitably entails communication, and so something of God's mystery and identity came to be understood by the people of Israel. Secondly, the word of God is dynamic and creative; "let there be light" (Gen 1:3), and light there was; it directs the course of history; it is also healing, sustaining and life-giving.

Let us examine how the evangelist John presents the Word of God in Jesus under the two aspects of revelation and action: what Jesus says and what he does.[4] The evangelist pursues his task mainly through the use of symbols and symbolic gestures

[4] The discussion on symbols that follows contains some extracts from the published book of the author, *Symbols and Spirituality: Reflecting on John's Gospel* (Bolton: Don Bosco Publications, 2007).

such as wine, light, bread, water, vines, anointing, washing feet, being lifted up. The wonderful thing about symbols is that they can transcend time and transcend cultural differences. Also, they are things which we are very familiar with in our everyday lives; we can relate easily with the imagery.

The Symbol of Wine

It is always good to start with a glass of wine, so let us train our eyes on Cana in Galilee for a wedding celebration. For the fourth evangelist, steeped in the literature of his people, such a wedding setting is bursting with significance. There the image of the wedding or espousals is frequently used as a symbol of the relationship between God and the People (see Is 62:4-5; Jer 2:2; Ezek 16; Song). Hosea proclaims: "I shall betroth you to myself for ever, bestowing righteousness and justice, loyalty and love; I shall betroth you to myself, making you faithful, and you will know the Lord (Hos 2:19-20)."

The wedding banquet is also a favourite symbol for the eschatological or end-time banquet, the coming age of blessing and joy, the messianic days, an era which in the mind of poet and dreamer over centuries will be characterised by feasting and abundance. Frequently, the prophets take wine as the image of the joy and plenty of the "last days," the new age, the overflowing richness of messianic deliverance and new covenant. Isaiah, for instance, predicts: "On this mountain the Lord of Hosts will prepare a banquet of rich fare for all the peoples, a banquet of wines well matured, richest fare and well-matured wines strained clear" (Is 25:6). And according to the vision of Amos: "A time is coming, says the Lord, when the ploughman will follow hard on the reaper, and he who treads the grapes after him who sows the seed. The mountains will run with fresh wine, and every hill will flow with it" (Amos 9:13).

At Cana, the spoken word in the story line is the hushed message of Jesus' mother, aware of the embarrassing situation emerging for the young couple, a potential disaster: "they

have no wine" (Jn 2:3). The action of Jesus, after some initial hesitation, is to provide some, 120 gallons of it, of the best vintage around. At one level, that enables the distraught couple to save face; and the party, which normally lasts for a week, to continue. At another level, it indicates that in Jesus the ancient dreams and hopes of Israel are being fulfilled, the final banquet is under way, and also that the old inadequate dispensation is being transformed from water into wine, more abundant, better quality, and Jesus is at the centre of it all. A new world is dawning. This is God's word, God's message, in this episode.

The Symbol of Light

The Prologue states: "the true light which enlightened everyone was coming into the world." Again: "The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it." One of the key symbols which conveys the idea of God's communication is the symbol of light. And light, natural and artificial, is a reality very common in our lives in so many different ways.

From a Cana wedding, we now find ourselves in Jerusalem during the week-long celebration of the annual feast of Tabernacles. This was the most popular of all the pilgrimage feasts, and attracted large crowds to the Temple there. Originally it was called "ingathering," and was a harvest and vintage festival. The people lived in tents (booths, huts), and celebrated in the vineyards. Later, it took on a more clearly religious connotation, and was sometimes referred to simply as "the feast,"' or "the feast of Yahweh." It came to be associated with God's protection, care and guidance of the people during their Exodus wilderness journey and sojourn.

There were three main ceremonies throughout the celebration. The first consisted in processions, rituals and prayers connected with water. The second ceremony was the rite of prayer of allegiance by the priests, facing the Temple at first light. The third major aspect of the celebration was a ceremony of light, and this is of particular interest for our theme. Four very large candelabrae (*menorahs*) were set up in the court of

the women. At night the men danced under them with torches in their hands, whilst the Levites played instruments and sang Psalms 120-134. This went on for most of the night during the seven days. The light was reflected throughout the whole city and brightly illuminated it (see Zech 14:6-8).

Against this rich liturgical and symbolic background, Jesus speaks to the people and says: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life" (Jn 8:12). Light and darkness are juxtaposed, and their link with life clearly articulated. In contrast with the confines of a city bathed in the glow of candles, Jesus claims to offer light for the whole world. In response to Jewish claims that the Law provided light to guide the steps of Israel, Jesus claims that it is now he who brings a light which confers life. He goes on to claim that it is his word which communicates truth. Knowledge of this truth liberates us from the slavery of ignorance, blindness, self-deceit and sin. Unfortunately, those listening to his words react violently, picking up stones with which to kill him. So Jesus makes a hasty exit from the Temple. Darkness again seeks to overcome the light.

The word of Jesus is followed by action. As Jesus walks along, he notices a man blind from birth. He repeats his claim: "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (Jn 9:5), and then spreads mud made with his saliva on the man's eyes, and sends him to wash in the pool of Siloam. The man does so, and is cured. He moves from physical darkness to a situation in which he can see his neighbours and friends and the world around him, and eventually, at the end of the story, can look on Jesus face to face. At the same time, he follows a different journey from inner blindness, darkness and ignorance to the insight and vision of faith. In his discussions with the religious authorities, he recognised the man Jesus, a prophet, a man from God, he finally acknowledges him as the Son of Man, the one who makes God known, the "sent one," the light of the world, and kneels in worship.

Whilst the man is journeying into the light, the religious leaders, in parallel but in the other direction, are plunging more and more into blindness and darkness. This twofold interconnected movement is one of the fascinating aspects of the drama.

The Symbol of Bread

Another important Johannine symbol is the bread of life. Again, we have action and word, this time the action comes first, and the words in the form of a lengthy discourse follow. The action is the famous incident when Jesus provides a meal, a banquet of bread and fish for the crowds in the vicinity of the lake. In John's version of the episode, it is a young boy who provides the initial wherewithal, and Jesus alone who feeds them, and there is more left over at the end than there was at the beginning – again we find the imagery of banquet and abundance as at Cana. It is a sign that the longed-for time of renewal has arrived in Jesus.

The incident is followed next day by a lengthy dialogue/ discourse. The crowds come to Jesus wanting more bread, but he tries to direct them onto a different level, and to a different kind of bread. In the background is the OT story of the manna in the wilderness, referred to as bread from heaven. Jesus claims that he is the bread from heaven. God through Moses provided manna in the desert, but he, Jesus, provides a new and different kind of bread. "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty" (Jn 6:35). Those who eat this bread, unlike the wilderness people, will never die, but will live forever. So, what is this bread?

The principal meaning of the symbolism of the bread of life in this first part of the dialogue/discourse of chapter six is the revelation which Jesus brings, the revelation he is, as Word of God enfleshed. In Jewish circles, the image of *manna* was often used to denote instruction, divine word, or wisdom. The Old

Testament often presents divine word or wisdom under the symbol of bread. The rabbis interpreted it as the Law, a source of revelation and life.

For John the old dispensation proved inadequate; its results were ongoing hunger and atrophy. The real, genuine bread from heaven is the revelation which the Father provides in and through Jesus. This bread satisfies hunger, gives true and enduring nourishment, and leads to "eternal life," bringing to fulfilment and replacing what Moses had offered. The highpoint of this revelation, as we shall see, takes place in the self-giving of Jesus when the "hour" has come, and the Son of Man is "lifted up," and as the Good Shepherd, gives his life for the sheep.

At this point in the discourse there is a change of perspective as Jesus states: "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh" (Jn 6:51). There is a clear change of vocabulary; instead of bread, we find the term "flesh." The language is now unmistakably eucharistic: bread, bread which is flesh, giving, for the world, and later blood and the invitation to eat and drink. These words, scholars maintain, reflect the eucharistic celebration of the Johannine community.

As the discussion continues, Jesus emphasises that the result of partaking of his flesh and blood is the complete reciprocal indwelling of Jesus and the believer. This is a participation in the communion existing between Father and Son. This indwelling is a present reality, and is an equivalent to having eternal life, being saved, now. As Jesus draws life from the living Father, so the believer now draws life from Jesus.

I find God's word here is so uplifting: now, already, you and I dwell in God and God in us. In John's gospel, this theme will be picked up again and further developed in the vine and branches imagery at the Last Supper.

The Symbol of Water

Water has always been a source of fascination and wonder. There is a comfort and familiarity about water, but water can bring terror and wreak havoc also, as floods have reminded us. Throughout our human story water has stimulated art and poetry, music and drama. Water has stirred the religious mind too, and in many religions has been used in ritual and ceremony, but also as a symbol, a symbol for cleansing, for quenching thirst, and for life-giving. This is particularly true for the Judeo-Christian faith and tradition. The fourth evangelist, drawing on a long literary and liturgical tradition, exploits the potential of this symbol as a vehicle for expressing the message and significance of Jesus. It is a "core symbol," a key theme. It courses through the gospel narrative like a stream in the hills; it ebbs and flows like the breathing of the sea.

In the course of John's gospel Jesus is identified through a number of symbols, as we have seen: he is, for example, the light of the world, the bread of life. However, he is never identified with water; rather, he is the one who provides water for us.

One of the most significant dialogues in the fourth gospel takes place in the Jerusalem encounter between Jesus and Nicodemus, a pre-eminent teacher in Israel, a Pharisee, and a member of the highest governing body of Judaism. He approaches Jesus by night, moving from the darkness into the light. He confidently acknowledges that Jesus must come "from God," given the signs which he is performing. His introduction seems to be leading up to an important question, but Jesus responds before he can articulate it. "Jesus answered him, 'Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.' Nicodemus said to him, 'How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?' Jesus answered, 'Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit'" (Jn 3:3-5).

This brief interaction is beautifully balanced. Jesus speaks, Nicodemus responds with two questions, which express his failure to understand and his incredulity, and Jesus speaks again, clarifying his position. The two parallel statements of Jesus are solemnly introduced by the typically Johannine double "Amen" (sometimes translated as "very truly," or "in all truth"). The first statement speaks of seeing the kingdom, the second of entering it. The first speaks of birth from above, the second of birth through water and Spirit. The phrase "the kingdom of God," which is at the heart of the message of Jesus in the other gospels, occurs only here in John. He prefers to use the term "eternal life." The theme of kingship is, however, touched on at the end of the story of the loaves and fishes, and it is central to the passion narrative.

The kind of misunderstanding of which Nicodemus is guilty, despite his theological training, is a typical literary feature of John's gospel. John frequently chooses words which have two or more meanings. Here, for instance, the Greek word *anōthen* can mean both "from above" and also "again," "for a second time." When faced with alternative levels of interpretation, Jesus' interlocutor usually takes the literal or superficial meaning, showing that he or she does not really understand what is at issue. This then enables Jesus to elucidate the true in-depth significance of what he is saying. In this case Nicodemus, confined to his limited mind-set, takes it that Jesus is talking about a second physical birth, and he expresses his surprise, naturally. Jesus, however, also intends the other meaning of the word – "from above;" he is indeed referring to a second birth, but a birth of a very different order.

The word translated as "Spirit" (*pneuma*) also carries other levels of meaning. Its normal meaning is wind or breath, and John exploits this possibility a few verses later, referring to the wind which comes and goes, blowing where it pleases, and comparing this to those "born of the Spirit." Here, water

is not mentioned; the emphasis in the rest of the discourse is on the Spirit.

In the context of this conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus, "water and breath" can at one level refer to the normal process of human childbirth. After the rupture of the amniotic waters, the child leaves the womb and breathes the breath of life, fresh air. But this combination of physical elements can also point to a different kind of birth, a new kind of birth, birth 'from above," birth through the action of the Spirit. It is through this birthing that a person can enter the Kingdom of God, and come to share a new dimension of life, "eternal life," the life of "the above," becoming a child of God. "Physical birth becomes a symbol of spiritual birth."[5]

New birth through the combination of water and Spirit is a pointer also to Christian baptism. Water baptism alone is inadequate. The accompanying gift of the Spirit "from above" transforms the significance of the water ritual. Through this twofold experience embracing heaven and earth, the sphere of flesh and the sphere of Spirit, the believer enters the Christian community and is caught up in the Kingdom or Reign of God. Here water is not so much a symbol of purification, but a symbol of new life.

The water theme quickly flows into the subsequent chapter of the Gospel in which a significant encounter takes place between Jesus and a Samaritan woman. Jesus, weary from the journey is resting by Jacob's well at Sychar. The disciples go off into the town to buy food. A local woman, whose name we never get to know, comes to the well to draw water, a chore usually completed in the morning or evening. There are many important encounters at wells in the OT (romantic stories of Rebecca and Rachel, for instance). As is often the case in the fourth gospel it is Jesus who takes the initiative. Acknowledging

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[5] Lee, *Flesh and Glory*, 70.

his need, he asks the woman for a drink: "Give me a drink" (Jn 4:10). At first sight this seems quite a natural thing to do. He is thirsty, and she has access to the water of the well. But Jesus is disregarding religious and cultural convention. The woman is not slow to express her surprise that a Jew should flout the norms of his people and make such a request of her, a Samaritan. The relationship between the two peoples had been strained for centuries. Besides, in speaking with a woman in public, Jesus is choosing to disregard the cultural gender barrier. This the disciples later find quite shocking. Jesus replies to her with an invitation: "If only you knew what God gives, and who it is that is asking you for a drink, you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."

The woman points out some of the practical difficulties: the well is deep, and he has no bucket. She is thinking about ordinary water. But Jesus is really speaking about a thirst of a different order, a thirst and longing and need for God (see Ps 42:1-2a; 63:1; 143:6). Correspondingly, he is speaking of a different kind of water. Jesus replies: "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water that I shall give will never suffer thirst any more. The water that I shall give will be an inner spring always welling up for eternal life" (Jn 4:13-14).[6]

We leave the story line there, and ask ourselves what is this "living water" that Jesus offers as the "gift of God?" I believe that "living water" probably refers primarily to the revelation which Jesus brings, a revelation which is supremely life-giving. In the Old Testament water is found as a symbol for divine Wisdom nourishing the thirsty and satisfying their needs, providing insight and knowledge (Prov 9:1-5; 13:4; 18:4; Is 55:1; Sir 15:3; 24:21). In rabbinic tradition water is also the symbol of the Law.

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[6] Taken from *New English Bible* (Oxford and Cambridge University Press, 1970).

Some scholars suggest that "living water" probably refers also to the Holy Spirit.[7] In his dialogue with Nicodemus Jesus has already linked water and spirit in the new birth through which it becomes possible to enter the Kingdom and share in the gift of eternal life. "It signifies both the Spirit and the word/ revelation/wisdom which Jesus embodies in his own person and gives to those who are thirsty. No barrier of race or gender can stand in the way of such a gift."[8]

The next extract which contains this water theme comes from a section of the fourth gospel which deals with the Jewish feast of Tabernacles. Earlier we saw the light element of that celebration. Another key element was a daily ceremony connected with water. This consisted in a morning procession to the Pool of Siloam, where a priest gathered some water in a golden container, and the procession returned to the Temple through the Water Gate, where the ram's horn was sounded three times. The priests and people then processed around the altar, singing psalms and waving *lulabs* (a bunch of twigs of myrtle, palm and willow), and citrons. On arriving at the altar the presiding priest poured the water and wine into two vessels on the altar, allowing the water and wine to pour out onto the altar. On the seventh day of the feast the procession around the altar was repeated seven times. Against the background of the Temple, brightly illuminated each night, Jesus will claim to be the true light of the world. Similarly, against the background of daily processions and ceremonies connected with water and harvest, he speaks of himself as the solution to the deepest thirsts of our human heart.

The text reads as follows: "On the last day, the great day of the festival, Jesus stood and cried out: "Let anyone who is

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[7] See Brown, *John Vol 1*, 178-9; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to John Vol. 1* (London: Herder and Herder, 1968), 426; Dorothy Lee, *The Symbolic Narratives of the Fourth Gospel: The Interplay of Form and Meaning* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 76-78.

[8] Lee, *Flesh and Glory*, 76-77.

thirsty come to me! Let anyone who believes in me come and drink! As scripture says, 'From his heart shall flow streams of living water.' He was speaking of the Spirit which those who believed in him were to receive; for there was no Spirit as yet because Jesus was not yet glorified" (Jn 7:37-39).[9]

Once again we find the image of "living water," life-giving water, and water is again linked initially with the quenching of thirst. The invitation recently offered to the Samaritan woman is now offered more widely to the people of Jerusalem and the pilgrims from further afield, indeed to anyone. Here the meaning of "living water" is rendered explicit by the narrator's comment. It refers primarily to the Spirit.

There is some ambiguity in the Greek text, which has led to a debate amongst scholars concerning the source of this "living water."' Most adopt the view that the source is Jesus. It is from his heart that the living waters flow. For it is he who offers to provide the thirst-quenching drink for the Samaritan woman. He feeds the people by the lakeside and claims to be "bread of life." It is he who is the source of light for the world and the genuine Shepherd. In the course of the gospel he systematically brings the Jewish feasts to new levels of fulfilment. And it is through his death that salvation comes. This view is called the Christological interpretation.

Other commentators suggest that the waters flow from the heart of the believer; through being joined with Christ there is a sense in which the Christian becomes a life-giving source for others. The NRSV adopts this interpretation in its text: "As the scripture has said,' Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water'" (Jn 7:38). Koester observes that throughout the gospel John's symbols have two levels of meaning. They tell us primarily about Jesus, and in second place they tell us something about discipleship. It is therefore best to see

[9] Taken from Henry Wansbrough, ed., *New Jerusalem Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1985).

the two interpretations as an example of this; they are not alternatives but are complementary.[10]

Finally, an explicit link is made between the giving of the Spirit and the glorification of Jesus, his returning to the Father through being "lifted up" when the "hour" comes. It is then that the Spirit and the new life the Spirit brings become available to the believer. Jesus' words point back to what he said to the Samaritan woman, and forward to the piercing of his side on Calvary.

It is here that the theme of water reaches its climax. There are two references to water in this profoundly symbolic Calvary narrative: the thirst of Jesus, and the water flowing from his pierced side. "After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfil the scripture), 'I am thirsty.' A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the wine, he said, 'It is finished.' Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit" (Jn 19:28-30).

Once again Jesus acknowledges his thirst, this time brought about by his intense suffering and dehydration as death approaches. That is the word. But his thirsting also carries a symbolic significance. It may indicate his longing to return to the Father. It may express his intention to drink the cup of suffering which he mentioned in the garden (see Jn 18:11), his consuming desire to fulfil the Father's will, his yearning for the world's salvation. In the opinion of some scholars we are meant to understand that, now that the "hour" has come, Jesus is thirsting to complete his saving mission and fulfil the Father's will precisely by giving the Spirit.

[10] Craig R. Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 13-14, 199.

Two arguments are brought forward in support of this position. The first is based on the literary device known as parallelism. The statement that Jesus is aware that all is finished is in parallel with his word tha "it is finished" (Jn 19:30). His words "I thirst" (Jn 19:28) is in parallel with the statement that he handed over the Spirit. He thirsts to bestow the Spirit. The other argument stems from the presence of misunderstanding in the text, a literary technique which we have already met. Jesus speaks about his thirst. The soldiers take this literally at face value and, with a touch of genuine sympathy, respond by offering him a drink of the poor quality wine they have with them. The deeper meaning of his thirst Jesus indicates not by words, but by the action of bowing his head and handing over the Spirit.

This interpretation is supported by the way in which the evangelist describes the death of Jesus: "he handed over the spirit" (Jn 19:30). The term *pneuma* can mean breath or wind or spirit, and elsewhere in the gospel, as we have seen, John exploits the possibilities of these various meanings. Often the phrasing is rendered as a euphemistic way of stating that he died: "he breathed his last," "he breathed out his life," "he gave up his spirit." But the terms employed convey a deeper significance, indicating that Jesus completes his task, his mission, by bowing his head towards his mother and the beloved disciple at the foot of the cross and handing over to them the Holy Spirit. They are representative believers, the nucleus of the new covenant community, the new people of God, the Church. Now that he is uplifted and glorified, he can bestow the Spirit, who slakes our human thirsting and bestows the gift of new life, as the narrator indicated during the feast of Tabernacles.

The final words of the Johannine Jesus, "It is finished," ring out as a triumphant cry of victory, signifying "mission accomplished." Throughout the gospel narrative Jesus is deeply aware that he "has come" or "is sent" from above with a task

to fulfil. Mission is at the core of his identity. In every situation he is bent on fulfilling the Father's will (see Jn 4:34; 5:36; 6:38; 17:4). The coming of the "hour" provides the context for the completion of his life's work, his final surrender in love.

After the death of Jesus the issue of purification, broached at the beginning of the Pilate scene, again arises. To obviate the danger of defilement at Passover time, it is essential that the criminals should die quickly and their corpses be removed before sunset. The religious authorities prevail on Pilate to dispatch his soldiers to facilitate this by breaking their legs. To their surprise they find that Jesus is already dead, and so: "Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out" (Jn 19:34).

The flow of blood and water confirms that Jesus is indeed dead. But it also points to the fulfilment of his Tabernacles' proclamation. The water gushing from within his body symbolizes the gift of the Spirit. There is a line of continuity between his thirst on the cross, his handing over the Spirit, and the flow of "living water." There is continuity also between the flow of blood from the heart of the dead Jesus and the self-giving service of his ministry, his love to the end and the utmost, his surrender to the Father, all summed up in his "It is accomplished."[11] Paradoxically, new life, "eternal life," becomes available through his death. His body is like the wilderness rock; it is the temple from which life-giving waters emerge in abundance, as Ezekiel foretold (Ex 17:6; Num 20:11; Ezek 47:1-12). A long Christian tradition sees in this flow of blood and water what Dorothy Lee calls "the icon of sacramental life."[12] It is through the sacrament of baptism (through water

[11] Ignace de la Potterie, *The Hour of Jesus* (Middlegreen, England: St. Paul Publications, 1989), 172-174.

[12] Lee, *Flesh and Glory,* 82. See also C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to John* (London, SPCK, 1978), 557; Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), 243.

and Spirit) that we come to share the life of God, and through the Eucharist that this life is sustained (Jn 6:53-56).

Two Symbolic Gestures

There are other symbols, like the vine, or the shepherd, but to conclude, allow me to dwell briefly on two symbolic gestures.

The first is the incident after the raising of Lazarus from death to life, when, at the celebratory meal provided by the family for Jesus and his disciples at the beginning of Passover week, Mary anoints Jesus' feet with costly perfume made of nard, and then wipes them with her hair. This self-forgetful and generous action is an expression of her gratitude to Jesus, her deep love for him. In response to Judas' criticism of her action, Jesus speaks his word, which reveals its significance, as it is caught up in the mystery of his self-giving love on Calvary: "She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial" (Jn 12:7).

The second gesture is, I believe, closely linked; it is Jesus' action in washing the feet of the disciples as the Last Supper begins. The episode is introduced as follows: "Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end" (Jn 13:1). The Greek phrase used here (*eis telos*) means both to the end of life and to the extreme, the utmost. The action is clear: Jesus does what only a slave would do, wash someone's feet; Peter is appalled by it, he can't cope with what is happening. This washing, this act of humble service, devotion and hospitality, performed for disciples who in their fragility and ordinariness do not understand, one of whom is a traitor, is symbolic. It is a prophetic gesture. It points forward to Jesus' coming humiliating death in response to the Father's saving design. It is a clear indication of his self-giving and his unconditional loving to the end and the uttermost. Jesus' word on all this is: "If I have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet" (Jn 13:14). Jesus, the self-giving servant, reveals

what God is like, and what it means to be a human being and to be a disciple.

So the most powerful word of God is Jesus hanging on the cross.

Talking to Nicodemus earlier in the narrative, Jesus says: "And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him'" (Jn 3:14-17).

This is the heart of the fourth gospel. God speaks through the action of sending / giving his Son, His only Son. God does so because he loves the world. Its purpose is clarified in two parallel phrases, negative and positive: that we may not perish, not be condemned; but that we may be saved, we may come to share the life of God "eternal life." This life becomes available when Jesus is lifted up on Calvary; and that being lifted up is the supreme revelation of God's love, and the love of Jesus the Shepherd. Word and action coalesce.

Having considered God's word to us, spoken through some symbols in John, it appears apt to conclude with a very brief word concerning responses.

Response

Usually, when one speaks to someone, a response is expected. We all prefer two-way communication, though silence can be a response, quite a strong response! So another key aspect of the gospel is how people respond to the Word of God enfleshed in Jesus. It is a facet of all the action stories and words of Jesus.

The theme begins in the Prologue: "He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did

not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God" (Jn 1:10-12).

There are always two options: to believe or accept, on the one hand, or not to believe and to reject, on the other. In speaking God's word to us today, as in his own day, the evangelist is trying to elicit a response of faith and love, deeper faith and stronger love, which lead to a fuller aliveness. And that positive response is shown by our adopting Jesus' mindset and way: self-giving service, loving one another as he loves us.