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The Verb *phaneroō* in the Gospel of John: A Christocentric Perspective

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Abstract

In this article I present the concept of the revelation of Christ in the Gospel of John. There are four hypostases in which Christ’s messiahship and divinity are explicitly proved, and the author is careful to point this out. The first has to do with John the Baptist’s mediation to the Saviour (1, 31); the second is in the first sign, when the water is changed into wine (2, 11); the third is enunciated by Jesus himself, in His prayer (17, 6); and the fourth in the context of Jesus’ resurrection, when He shows himself to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias (21, 1 and 14). These occurrences are analysed exegetically and then placed in the wider context of the whole Gospel. Through the verb *phaneroō*, the Johannine text brings Jesus to the forefront of the action.

Keywords

Gospel of John, *phaneroō*, Christology, Jesus in John, John the Baptist, John 17, miracles, resurrection of Jesus

The assertion that “one of the most striking features of John’s Gospel is its distinctive Christology”¹ is unanimously acknowledged. Expressed through the seven titles/offices (*Logos, God, “I am”, Son of God, Messiah,*

¹ M. M. THOMPSON, “Gospel of John”, in: Joel B. GREEN, Scot MCKNIGHT, I. Howard MARSHALL (eds.), *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. I, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, 1992, p. 376.

Son of Man, Prophet), the divine-humanity of Christ becomes an obvious fact in the Gospels². By every gesture, miracle and word, the Saviour made himself the bearer of a message of another Kingdom, which was not of this world and which - by His very Incarnation - had come among men³.

It is not by chance that “long afterwards, the Gospel of John is appreciated by Christians for the special way it describes Jesus”⁴. Thus, this Jesus “of John” is par excellence the Christ whose Messiahship is to be believed. “More than the other evangelists, John uses Jewish messianic expectations as a point of comparison for his presentation of Jesus”⁵. Highlighting Jesus as the Messiah is a definite redactional goal, with the evangelist usually using suggestive and eloquent verbs. One of these is *phaneroō*.

The verb *phaneroō* indicates the action of “making [something/someone] visible”⁶, i.e., bringing a person or circumstance to maximum attention. We are therefore dealing with the notion of “visible, reveal, expose publicly (with relatively more focus on the sensory aspect than on the cognitive)”⁷.

² For details on the seven notions, see: M. M. Thompson, “Gospel of John”, in: Joel B. GREEN, Scot MCKNIGHT, I. Howard MARSHALL (eds.), *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, pp. 376-379.

³ The pattern of thought of St John the Apostle and, by implication, of the recipients of his gospel remains under debate. Although progress has been made in recent decades, exegetes remain divided. For example, “until the 1960s, critics had espoused various theories. Many ruled out Palestinian Jewish influence, since the Gospel’s prominent dualism and logos-concept lack parallels in the Old Testament and Rabbinic writings. Among major commentators, C. H. Dodd and C. K. Barrett traced Johannine thought to Greek philosophy and Hellenistic Judaism. Rudolf Bultmann insisted on a Gnostic background. Raymond Brown, noting similarities between John’s Gospel and some of the recently published Dead Sea Scrolls, argued for an eclectic setting within Palestinian Judaism. Rudolf Schnackenburg posited a similar setting in Asia Minor, one that retained Syrian and Palestinian influences”. Jocelyn McWHIRTER, *The Bridegroom Messiah and the People of God: Marriage in Fourth Gospel*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2006, p. 124. However, the textual content of Christ’s manifestations remains important, especially since our analysis will be eminently exegetical.

⁴ M. M. THOMPSON, “Evangelhia după Ioan”, in: Daniel G. REID (ed.), *Dicționarul Noului Testament*, Casa Cărții, Oradea, 2008, p. 673.

⁵ L. W. HURTADO, “Cristos, I: evanghelii”, in: Daniel G. Reid (ed.), *Dicționarul Noului Testament*, p. 254.

⁶ J. P. LOUW, E. A. NIDA, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, 2nd ed., vol. 1, United Bible Societies, New York, 1989, p. 278.

⁷ William ARNDT (ed.), *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early*

Obviously, it is also used in other contexts without a direct connection to the life and work of the Saviour. We have, for example, the famous reference to the revealing light of the facts (3, 21) in the dialogue with Nicodemus. Then, on a different note, we have the exhortation of Jesus' brothers who send him to Jerusalem, for anyone who normally wishes to be known (7, 4). Finally, another case is that of the man blind from birth, where sickness is seen as a setting/medium for the manifestation of God's glory (9, 3).

Considered marginal from a strictly Christological perspective, we will identify only those occurrences that have a direct messianic meaning. The premise we start from is that, as far as Jesus is concerned, "His spiritual-sensory manifestation becomes absolute greatness. It will be announced... in His acts of salvation, which reach... an unsurpassable height"⁸. His Messiahship has been proven - in principle - by gestures and words, but - strikingly - it is only highlighted a few times, at key moments. If "Christology, from its beginnings, is the Church's confession and proclamation of Jesus as the divine and unique author of salvation"⁹, then all these moments have a predominantly soteriological content. It becomes more and more evident, as we go through the Johannine text, that "before being a systematic teaching, Christology is the prayer of faith"¹⁰.

The public ministry of the Saviour is seen in John as a display of glory: "We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father" (1, 14). For "glory" we have the Greek δόξα, which refers to "a state of being great and wonderful"¹¹. Reflecting on this notion, Hans Urs von Balthasar considers that what is meant by the notion of glory "must result directly from the demonstrated power of God's action in Jesus [and] be nothing other than the self-interpretation of this power"¹². In varying degrees, the presence of

Christian Literature, 3rd ed. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2000, p. 1048.

⁸ Hans URS VON BALTHASAR, *Slava lui Dumnezeu: o estetică teologică*, vol. 7: *Teologia Noului Testament*, trad. Maria-Magdalena Angheliescu, Galaxia Gutenberg, Târgu-Lăpuș, 2020, p. 173.

⁹ John Anthony MCGUCKIN, *Dicționar de teologie patristică*, trad. Dragoș Dâscă și Alin-Bogdan Mihăilescu, Doxologia, Iași, 2014, p. 234.

¹⁰ John Anthony MCGUCKIN, *Dicționar de teologie patristică*, p. 234.

¹¹ J. P. LOUW și E. A. NIDA, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament...*, p. 735.

¹² Hans URS VON BALTHASAR, *Slava lui Dumnezeu: o estetică teologică*, p. 172. "If we do not follow this path from the center to the periphery, but the reverse path, which statistically establishes all that demonstrates glory in the New Testament, then we will

the incarnate God means, in good measure, closeness and attachment. The impetuousness of His presence goes beyond any imagined or real darkness. Thus, the fact “that he must not therefore stop before the grave nor before the judgment, this is the New Testament message, which transcends the Old Testament declarations of glory”¹³.

As will be seen, “to reveal is to make known that which was not known before (1, 18. 31; cf. I Jn 3, 2). [Therefore], divine realities can only become known to people through revelation (by the Son)”¹⁴, a fact that appears right from the beginning of the gospel (1, 18. 51; 3, 3-5).

In connection with the Parousia, which indicates the Second Coming of Christ, “the forms of the verb *phaneroō* appear fourteen times (Heb 9, 8. 26; I Pet 1, 20; 5, 4; I Jn 1, 2 (twice); 2, 19.28; 3, 2.5.8; 4, 8; Rev 3, 18; 15, 4); and forms of the verb *erchomai* occur numerous times in (seemingly) eschatological contexts (including Acts 1, 11; 3, 20; Rev 1, 7; 2, 5.16; 3, 11. 20; 22, 7.12.20)”¹⁵.

There are four places where the Johannine text emphasizes the revelation of Christ in His divinity and humanity. They are essential fragments for the Christology of the New Testament, as we shall see, especially because of the varied contexts in which these statements were made.

SHOWING: the manifestation of *presence*

“I myself [John the Baptist] did not know [*oida*] him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed [*phaneroō*] to Israel” (1, 31).

never find the true center; the individual traits will in no way come together” (Hans URS VON BALTHASAR, *Slava lui Dumnezeu: o estetică teologică*, p. 172).

¹³ H. URS VON BALTHASAR, *Slava lui Dumnezeu: o estetică teologică*, p. 173.

¹⁴ Cornelis BENNEMA, *The Power of Saving Wisdom: An Investigation of Spirit in Relation to the Soteriology of the Fourth Gospel*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, 2002, p. 117.

¹⁵ Larry J. KREITZER, “Parousia”, in: Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (eds.), *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, 1997, pp. 857-858. Also worth mentioning is Markus N. A. BOCKMUEHL’ article, “Das Verb *phaneroō* im Neuen Testament”, in: *Biblische Zeitschrift*, 1988, vol. 32, nr. 1, pp. 87-99, which - comparing the analysis of Bultmann and Muller - shows that the verb *phaneroō* is synonymous neither with *gnorizo* (in the Johannine corpus) nor with *apokalupto* (in the Pauline corpus).

The statement with which the passage opens – “I did not know Him” – is a contradiction, especially since it was uttered by John the Baptist.

“In the opening scene of the trial (vv. 19-28), the Jews, partly because of their lack of genuine interest, were unaware of the impressive presence that was at hand. In this scene, too, John admits that at first, he did not know Jesus either. But then, in part, it seems, because of his receptive disposition, and especially because of God’s revealing action, he became aware, even amid the sin of the world, of the presence of innocence, grace, and God”¹⁶.

Human inadequacy in the face of Jesus’ messiahship is, in fact, the central idea of the narrative. The Baptist - though intimately involved in the early work of Jesus - initially proves unable to understand his nature and mission. For this reason, he needed prior instruction: “The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit” (1, 33). The Holy Spirit would identify the Messiah, but also confirm that He would be the one to baptize with the Holy Spirit. John the Baptist, therefore, watched accurately for the sign to be fulfilled, and only then was he - truly - convinced. This certainty was also necessary for his own ministry.

In these circumstances, John’s (the Baptist) account of the Messiah is also strengthened by the role the former was to play in presenting Him to the world¹⁷. This is why

¹⁶ Thomas L. BRODIE, *The Gospel According to John. A Literary and Theological Commentary*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1993, p. 157.

¹⁷ For an analysis of the life and theology of the Baptist, see: Walter WINK, *John the Baptist in the Gospel Tradition*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1968; Catherine M. MURPHY, *John the Baptist. Prophet of Purity for a New Age*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, 2003; Daniel S. DAPAAH, *The Relationship between John the Baptist, and Jesus of Nazareth. A Critical Study*, University Press of America, New York, 2005; James A. KELHOFFER, *The Diet of John the Baptist*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, 2005; Carl R. KAZMIERSKI, *John the Baptist. Prophet and Evangelist*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, 1996; Jerome KODELL, *John the Baptist. Forerunner*, Little Rock Scripture Study, Little Rock, 2017; Andrew Phillip SMITH, *John the Baptist, and the Last Gnostics. The Secret History of the Mandeans*, Watkins Media Limited, London, 2016; Gary YAMASAKI, *John the Baptist in Life and Death. Audience-Oriented Criticism of Matthew’s Narrative*, Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield, 1998.

“the evangelist John interprets the figure of the Baptist exclusively from the perspective of his relationship with Christ as a *witness*... The Baptist is therefore only a tool in the hand of God, and not, as some might claim, the teacher and master of Jesus”¹⁸.

Textually, the statement fits into the “testimony [*martyria*] of John” (1, 19), which is - in a sense - the thesis of the first chapter of the Gospel. The concrete situation in which this testimony is given is occasioned by the untimely visit of the priests and Levites who questioned the Baptist, asking, “Who are you?” (1, 19). We are therefore in a formal situation, because “the formal nature of the inquiry is also reflected in the tone of the questions and answers”¹⁹. At stake is the identity of Jesus, and this is affirmed both from heaven (the voice of the Father) and from earth (the voice of John). Both testimonies were important and obviously complementary.

“They would not all have run to him in this way if the preaching had not been accompanied by baptism, nor would they have understood that Christ is above them. The crowds did indeed come, but not to hear what he was saying. But why? To be baptized, confessing their sins. Coming there, they learned about Christ and the difference between [his and John’s] baptism. John’s baptism was more significant than the Jewish baptism, and so they all ran to him, but it was not perfect”²⁰.

The testimony of John the Baptist was not for the Saviour, He did not need it, but contemporaries - and through the Holy Gospels - us, today.

Or, in Sergei Bulgakov’s words, John

“is a person who, renouncing himself, dedicates all of himself, his whole life, to another, to a person to come. The mission of the

¹⁸ Walter WINK, *John the Baptist in the Gospel Tradition*, pp. 89, 91.

¹⁹ Rinaldo FABRIS, *Evanghelia după Sfântul Ioan: traducere și comentariu*, trad. Cristian Ungureanu, Sapientia, Iași, 2016, p. 142.

²⁰ Sf. IOAN GURĂ DE AUR, *Omilii la Evanghelia după Ioan*, trad. Maria-Iuliana Rizeanu, new series, coll. *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești* 15, Basilica, București, 2016, p. 169.

Forerunner is specified and lived entirely in living humility, through love that goes as far as self-denial. The Forerunner gives himself with his whole being to the One who is to come”²¹.

“From the beginning he assesses accurately his own role as witness to someone greater who wallpapered him (1, 19-37), immediately confirming the narrator’s estimate of him in the Prologue (1, 6-9.15). Divine inspiration had made John aware of how to recognize his successor, and when the events took place, he was able to describe them as part of his confession that Jesus is both lamb and Son or chosen one of God (1, 29.34). Later, he confesses Jesus’ messiahship (3, 28)”²².

The reference to baptism as how John announces the Messiah (“the reason I came baptizing with water was that He might be revealed”) has particular emphasis in this gospel. Water is used recurrently in the text (vv. 26, 31, 33), each time in the instrumental dative. But unlike the benefits of earlier Jewish lustrations (and the idea of purification in Babylonian cults), John never offers an immediate benefit of his own baptism. Consequently,

“John limits the purpose of his baptism exclusively to enabling him to reveal Jesus to Israel... Neither the narrator nor John [the Baptist] refer to this baptism as a precursor to Christian baptism, a declaration of baptism for repentance, or any other impact on the baptized. While such silence does not reject or eliminate any of these possibilities, it does at best give them secondary status”²³.

The Messiah must show himself “to Israel” (τῷ Ἰσραὴλ), which refers to “the theme of Jesus’ universal mission. Israel no longer exists only for

²¹ Serghei BULGAKOV, *Prietenul Mirelui. Despre cinstirea ortodoxă a Înaintemergătorului*, trad. Ioana Anca Bogdan, Editura Reîntregirea, Alba Iulia, 2015, pp. 21-22.

²² Margaret DAVIES, *Rhetoric and Reference in the Fourth Gospel*, Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield, 1992, p. 38.

²³ Larry Paul JONES, *The Symbol of Water in the Gospel of John*, Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield, 1997, pp. 49-50.

itself, but its election is the way in which God wants to reach out to all”²⁴. A recurring theme in the Gospels, Israel is to be understood on the one hand as the exclusive *geography* of messianic activity, but on the other as the exclusive *history* of that activity. Jesus took into account, at an early stage, Jewish expectations and sensitivities about the restoration of the nation but, by the same token, overcame these expectations through challenging actions and speeches²⁵. The revelation of the Son of God to His people meant a double movement: “Jesus Christ is both *the revealer* whose words are the vehicles of the revelation of God and *the redeemer* who in self-sacrifice died on the cross for people’s sins”²⁶. Although, in the literal sense, Jesus did not find a large movement during his work, “there is no reason why Jesus cannot have been the revealer and redeemer while also having been engaged in interaction and conflict with other people in the concrete circumstances and particular social (political-economic-religious) forms of first-century Roman Palestine”²⁷.

The fact that Jesus shows up amid the land of Israel is in keeping with the battle for the faith waged by this people. A synthesis of this battle is found in Hebrews 11, where the faith of three categories of Jews is praised: the ancient (Abel, Enoch, Noah), the patriarchal (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph) and the national (Moses, Rahab)²⁸. Christ comes, then, as an ultimate, unprecedented, supreme Presence at the end of a whole line of people of faith. Though the people had gone through repeated periods of apostasy, they now share in God’s saving work in Christ. And John (the Baptist) only affirms all this in a concrete and encouraging way.

²⁴ Joseph RATZINGER, *Isus din Nazaret*, transl. Alexandru Mihăilescu, RAO International Publishing, București, 2010, p. 35.

²⁵ For more on this ambivalence, see: Steven M. BRYAN, *Jesus and Israel’s Traditions of Judgement and Restoration*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004.

²⁶ Richard HORSLEY, *The Prophet Jesus and the Renewal of Israel: Moving Beyond a Diversionary Debate*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids, 2012, p. 63.

²⁷ R. HORSLEY, *The Prophet Jesus and the Renewal of Israel...*, p. 63.

²⁸ For a breakdown of these periods and categories, see: Christopher A. RICHARDSON, *Pioneer and Perfecter of Faith. Jesus’ Faith as the Climax of Israel’s History in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, 2012, pp. 167-224.

CONFIRMATION: the manifestation of glory

“What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed [*phaneroō*] his glory; and his disciples believed in him” (2, 11)

After the manifestation of His *presence* - in the context of the baptism at the Jordan and the ministry of John - Jesus begins - effectively - His messianic ministry. In this context, the statement points to the beginning of Jesus’ public activity, occasioned by the miracle of the changing of water into wine (2, 1-10), “There was therefore a nuptial atmosphere at Cana of Galilee, which suggests the fullness of the messianic times and the realization of the messianic hope”²⁹.

In addition to the significance of the place (Cana, Galilee), the wider sequence is also suggestive.

“John 2, 1 - 4, 42 introduces Jesus as the bridegroom-Messiah. At Cana in Galilee (2, 1-11), he provides abundant wine for a wedding feast, assuming the role of the bridegroom and fulfilling messianic prophecy. At Aenon in Judea (3, 22-30), John the Baptist hints that Jesus is the bridegroom foretold by Jeremiah. At Sychar in Samaria (4, 4-42), Jesus imitates Jacob at the well and establishes a family of faith. As Jesus reveals his messianic identity, he gains more and more followers. His disciples believe in Him (2, 11), people flock to be baptized by Him (3, 23. 30), and the citizens of Sychar declare that He is the Saviour of the world (4, 42)”³⁰.

This is Christ’s “beginning of signs”, the first manifestation of His divinity. Thus, for “beginning” we have the Greek ἀρχή, a noun which means: “to initiate an action, process or state”³¹. A connection can be made between the notion of the beginning (the same ἀρχή) in John 1, 1, where Christ is depicted to us in His creative act, and here in His messianic one. For “miracle” we have the Johannine σημεῖον - “sign” which becomes the peculiarity of this gospel

²⁹ André SCRIMA, *Comentariu integral la Evanghelia după Ioan*, trad. Monica Broșteanu, București, Humanitas, 2008, p. 34.

³⁰ Jocelyn McWHIRTER, *The Bridegroom Messiah and the People of God...*, p. 79.

³¹ J. P. LOUW and E. A. NIDA, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, p. 654.

in relation to the synoptic ones. Now, if σημεῖον describes an event which has a special significance, then no miracle performed by the Saviour had its ultimate impact in its mere occurrence. It was all to be a sign, a reference to a beyond, an augmentation of a spectacular event, but one that reverberates on many levels.

“The sign at Cana is not only the first, but the archetypal series of signs to follow. At the end of the account of the healing of the son of a royal official in Capernaum, the evangelist reveals the progression of Jesus’ activity in Galilee with the following editorial note: *This was the second sign Jesus performed after coming from Judea to Galilee* (4, 54)”³².

The frequency with which John uses the phrase “to show signs” concerning Jesus can be related to “the biblical texts which present the figure of Moses, empowered by God through *signs and wonders* (cf. Ex 4, 8. 30; Deut 20, 1-3; 34, 11; In 12, 37). *Signs* are therefore the deeds and gestures done by Jesus, by means of which He can be recognized as the definitive envoy of God, because His glory is seen in them”³³.

Through the sign at Cana, Christ showed - in fact - *His glory*. The word *doxa* indicates “a place which is glorious and as such, a reference to heaven”³⁴. A link to the statement from the prologue, 1,14, is reasonable: “We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth”. Therefore, “Jesus’ glory consists both in His power to do mighty works and in the revelation of God which they disclose. The purpose of this display is thus to illuminate the minds of men, and so to produce faith”³⁵.

The manifestation of God’s glory is a recurring theme in the Old Testament. Beginning in the Garden of Eden (Gen 1; Ps 19, 1-2), continuing with the miracle of the exodus (Ex 3; 13, 31; 16, 10; 24, 9-18; 34, 29), and protection during the wilderness journey, divine glory is present both as a process and

³² R. FABRIS, *Evangelia după Sfântul Ioan...*, p. 162.

³³ R. FABRIS, *Evangelia după Sfântul Ioan...*, p. 162.

³⁴ J. P. LOUW and E. A. NIDA, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, p. 4.

³⁵ Barnabas LINDARS, *The Gospel of John*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids, 1982, p. 132.

as a circumscribed event (such as in the tabernacle or in connection with the Sabbath day). We also have references to God's glory filling the whole earth (Num 14, 20-23; Ps 19, 1-2; Is 6, 3), as it fills the Temple (1 Kg 8, 11) and, in general, all spaces considered holy. The God revealed in Ezekiel's visions is also glorious (1, 28; 3, 12; 8, 4; 9, 3; 10, 4; 11, 22), just as the people of Israel are glorious (Is 40, 5; 43, 6-7; 60, 1). In relation to all these events and promises, the glory of Christ is nothing other than a crowning of the divine presence among men, a definitive confirmation of God's power.

Like the entire Gospel of John, the ultimate (and intrinsic) purpose of Jesus' signs here is faith. They are all done so that those around will believe, that is, reach the highest state of the soul. Note the connection between discipleship and faith. They, newly chosen disciples, must first believe. Only after acquiring their own faith will disciples be able to pass on the saving message further.

St. John Chrysostom considers that "there were not many who took note of what happened [with the miracle at Cana], but only the servants, the master of the feast, and the bridegroom"³⁶. This manifestation of glory would be aimed at a small audience near the event. But things did not stay that way, because "later everyone would learn about this miracle, because even today it is still famous and has not been forgotten"³⁷.

It seems that - according to the Gospel account - it was necessary for the Saviour to (also) perform miracles, not just preach the Gospel. This is because "both the sound teaching, and the preaching, and the miracles penetrate the souls of the hearers, so that they take heed with proper disposition to what has taken place, because the soul has already acquired a familiarity". Being a deed *par excellence*, the miracle thus becomes the quickest method by which Christ proved his divinity, being received in an immediate manner by contemporaries, but also having a specific emotional charge.

It should be noted that "this is the first instance where the disciples' faith is pronounced collectively. But on the other hand, the readers know clearly that they had believed already, in 1,29-51 (where they confessed the various messianic titles)"³⁸. However, the motif of faith appears in a different way in

³⁶ Sf. IOAN GURĂ DE AUR, *Omilii la Evanghelia după Ioan*, p. 219.

³⁷ Sf. IOAN GURĂ DE AUR, *Omilii la Evanghelia după Ioan*, p. 219.

³⁸ Josaphat C. TAM, *Apprehension of Jesus in the Gospel of John*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, 2015, p. 58.

the narrative: “by placing their belief at the end of the pericope, they believed through seeing and knowing Jesus’ miracle... They believed now, not as a conversion faith, but in a reinforced manner. Thus, Jesus’ sign helped reinforce their faith”³⁹. This is the ultimate meaning of Christ’s miracle: to strengthen the faith of the disciples for their future service. It is more than a simple conversion or response to a call. The glory of Christ is therefore pedagogical, in the sense that its manifestation is intended to educate the disciples who will soon become apostles.

INSTRUCTION: manifestation of the *Word*

“I have revealed [*phaneroō*] you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me, and they have obeyed your word” (17, 6).

Jesus’ prayer in John 17

“presses the tension between present reality and future hope toward its resolution... The prayer lifts readers to a realm they cannot see, to a glory that can be affirmed in words but not perceived by the eye. Jesus’ unseen glory in the Father’s presence sharply contrasts with the situation of his followers on earth. The disciples are protected in God’s name, yet they experience ongoing conflict with the world”⁴⁰.

The placement of this fragment - vv. 6-8 - in the context of the whole prayer is very difficult. If we follow the classical division into four parts (I: vv. 1-5; II: vv. 6-8; III: vv. 9-19; III: vv. 20-26), then the fragment stands on its own, between the first and the third, “being a transitional element”⁴¹. Even so, the section is well defined, being framed by the noun *kosmos* (mentioned in verses 6 and 8), precisely in order to go beyond the cultural boundaries of Israel, offering a “complex historical-anthropological and ethnic-religious

³⁹ J. C. TAM, *Apprehension of Jesus in the Gospel of John*, p. 59.

⁴⁰ Craig R. KOESTER, *The Word of Life: A Theology of John’s Gospel*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 2008, p. 186.

⁴¹ R. FABRIS, *Evangelia după Sfântul Ioan...*, p. 676.

horizon”⁴², almost unprecedented. The term κόσμος is - in almost all places – “a figurative extension of the notion of the universe, usually people associated with a world system and alienated from God”⁴³.

The statement should be read in continuation of verse 2: “For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him”. Both revolve around the verb “to give” (attributed to the Father) and, implicitly, the verb “to receive” (attributed to the Son). People, thus, become the Father’s gift to the Son, a gift which the Son soteriological gives back to the Father. And so, verses 6-8 bring these details together:

“the work of Jesus glorifying God is a revelation of himself to those who have been given to him (Jesus). And this revelation is formulated in the sense of making known the name of God, this being the only chapter in John in which Jesus is explicitly said to have revealed the name of the Father”⁴⁴.

So,

“Jesus now proceeds to pray for his disciples, describing his mission in terms of revelation to those God had given him out of the world, resulting in believing obedience (v. 6). They have understood that Jesus was not self-appointed but that he came from God (v. 7)”⁴⁵.

It is evident that “He showed His name in word and deed” - as St. John Chrysostom says⁴⁶. The whole activity of the Son is a revelation of the unseen being of the Father. Acting as an envoy, down to the smallest detail, Jesus’

⁴² R. FABRIS, *Evangelia după Sfântul Ioan...*, p. 676.

⁴³ J. P. LOUW and E. A. NIDA, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, p. 106.

⁴⁴ Raymond E. BROWN, *The Gospel of John XIII-XXI*, Doubleday & Company, New York, 1970, p. 754.

⁴⁵ Andreas J. KÖSTENBERGER, *A Theology of John’s Gospel and Letters*, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, 2009, p. 446.

⁴⁶ Sf. IOAN GURĂ DE AUR, *Omiliile la Evangelia după Ioan*, p. 367. The author establishes a hermeneutical link between the statement “I have revealed your name to men” and the text of Isaiah 9, 5, where - prophetically - the Saviour was announced as: “Angel of great counsel”. Christ’s pedagogical activity had thus already been prophesied, and His messiahship is but a fulfilment.

contemporaries had to take note of this commission. In the context of Jewish monarchism, the frequent reference to the sending is as important as can be. The revelation of the divine name is therefore a mandate which Jesus fulfilled to the full.

As we note, “this section is marked by the repeated use of the verb *didōmi*, ‘give’ (*edōkas* [2x in v. 6], *dedōkas* [v. 7], *edōkas*, *dedōka* [v. 8]). The Son will glorify the Father and will himself be glorified through Jesus’ having brought to completion the task given to Him by the Father: He has made God known”⁴⁷. The atmosphere in which the statement is made is both solemn and warm.

“There is a close link between vv. 3-5 and vv. 6-8. Jesus has said that eternal life flows from the knowledge of God, the result of the acceptance of the revelation that takes place in Jesus Christ (v. 3). He has made God known, His revealing ministry is at an end (cf. 12, 36b), and he is about to return to the glory he had with the Father before the world was made (vv. 4-5). But Jesus can point to the group at table with him, disciples given to him by the Father “out of the world”⁴⁸.

The entire activity of Jesus is placed under the sign of the revelation of the Father: “I have revealed [*phaneroō*] you”. The Saviour did not reveal Himself, but the Heavenly Father. By word and deed, spectacularly, He presented God’s plan and character to the world. Beyond the immediate effect of His presence, everything had to point to the divine revelation which reaches - in Christ - its climax. This retrospective of all activity is exemplary, and the verb *phaneroō* indicates it in a very precise way. All that Jesus did during His messianic activity means to bring God the Father closer to man, closer to his history.

The disciples were given to Jesus (by the Father) out of the world. Although - according to the same prayer - they will remain in the world, spiritually they are outside it. Through the revelation they have experienced, through their relationship with the Father (mediated by the Son), they no longer belong to the world. “Although the narrative indicates Jesus’ awareness of the disciples’

⁴⁷ Francis J. MOLONEY, *The Gospel of John*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, 1998, p. 460.

⁴⁸ F. J. MOLONEY, *The Gospel of John*, p. 462.

lack of understanding, faith, and love in him, he gives a positive assessment about them in his prayer"⁴⁹. We understand from this that "the reason for their acceptance, knowledge, and faith lies not in their effort but in Jesus: it is because he has given them the words that were given to him by the Father"⁵⁰.

Remarkably, according to the end of the prayer (verse 24), Jesus will be with His disciples forever.

"They will be with him where he is. Glory will no longer be given under the cloak of suffering; love will no longer be manifested through sacrifice and death. Instead, the glory of divine love, which Jesus shares with the Father, will come unopposed as the faithful share it in the presence of God. Such a future is beyond the present experience of the Christian community, but Jesus' prayer gives readers a glimpse of it. He points them to the outcome of the love that has already been given"⁵¹.

Therefore, the revelation they experienced - from the Father, through the Son - strengthened a relationship that goes beyond corporeality and even beyond the history of this world. They are united as the Holy Trinity is united. They continue to remain together even if the Son returns to the Father, linked in an unseen but eternal way. The impact that Jesus' messiahship had on the disciples meant both their salvation and - through the work of the Church - the salvation of so many people throughout time.

Christianity proves - once again - to be a religion totally dependent on divine revelation. The revelation of Christ - in the flesh, but with messianic evidence - signifies the beginning of the new creation, the finger of God reaching closer to man than ever before. The history of salvation reaches at that revelatory moment its long-awaited climax, which will germinate through the mysterious work of the Holy Spirit all future good.

⁴⁹ Marianus Pale HERA, *Christology and Discipleship in John 17*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, 2013, p. 138.

⁵⁰ M. P. HERA, *Christology and Discipleship in John 17*, p. 138.

⁵¹ Craig R. KOESTER, *The Word of Life: A Theology of John's Gospel*, p. 186.

EQUIPMENT: the manifestation of the *Resurrection*

“Afterward Jesus appeared [*phaneroō*] again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee. It happened [*phaneroō*] this way” ...”; “This was now the third time Jesus appeared [*phaneroō*] to his disciples after he was raised from the dead” (21,1 [2x] and 14).

If the Messiah shows Himself from the day of His baptism, and then continues to do so throughout His public activity, even more will He do so after the Resurrection. His two natures - divine and human - will appear before the disciples in a new light, in almost banal situations, but raised - by emotion and message - to the height of a theophany. Between the Resurrection and the Ascension, Christ appeared in many places and in many ways, with a frequency that escapes the records of canonical writings. As he had previously performed more miracles than are recorded, we are entitled to believe that even now - in his glorious body - he appeared frequently, exclusively to the disciples, to strengthen and command them⁵².

“In the apparitions of the Saviour, two fixed patterns or sequences can be recognized. The first has been labelled by scholars as *recognition apparitions* and has Jerusalem as its background. To the disciples gathered or on the road, Christ suddenly appears. Strangely, they do not recognise him immediately: paradoxically, this is especially true of Mary Magdalene, who mistakes him for the gardener of the cemetery where Jesus was buried... In addition to *recognition apparitions*, the Gospels also introduce encounters or *missionary apparitions*. The risen Christ entrusts the disciples with a mission, which is the core of the encounter. In this sense, the grand finale of Matthew’s Gospel (28, 16-20), set in Galilee, is the brightest example. The apostles will have to proclaim the gospel to the whole world, they will have to baptize, to pass on Christian morals: they are therefore given the mission of evangelizing and sharing the mysteries of salvation”⁵³.

⁵² For full exegetical details, see: Deolito V. VISTAR Jr., *The Cross-and-Resurrection*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, 2019.

⁵³ Gianfranco RAVASI, *Biografia lui Iisus: după Evangheliile*, transl. Smaranda Bratu Elian, Spandugino, București, 2023, pp. 301, 304.

In the case of the appearance described in John 21 we can consider that we are dealing with a missionary appearance. The risen Christ meets his disciples to empower them, to give them new energy for the work ahead.

The meeting follows the same structure as the others: *presence* (“to show oneself”), *conversation* (“to speak”) and *fellowship* (“to sit at table”). In this case, the seven disciples (five nominated, two not) went out to catch fish, with St Peter the Apostle (again) playing the role of leader of the group. The action is unsuccessful (they catch nothing), and the morning finds them tired, disappointed and hungry.

The narrative, organically linked to the previous chapter (20) - by that “again” - most likely has an apologetic purpose. By recounting several of the Saviour’s miracles, it shows, on the one hand, the recovery which Christ makes to his disciples and, on the other, their human helplessness in relation to the fact of the resurrection. The repetitive nature of the Lord’s teachings during the forty days is a necessary pedagogy given to disciples whose hearts are still trembling. It has been rightly observed that “the dialectic of the essence of the Risen One is presented in the accounts in an admittedly clumsy way”, but this very detail confirms it in such a natural and credible way⁵⁴.

Broadly speaking,

“the New Testament material on the Resurrection of Jesus reveals that what is being affirmed about Him is not the physicality of the risen body, about which the texts are extremely discreet and even ambiguous, but the fact and the significance of Jesus’ mode of presence among his disciples, a mode of presence that can only be affirmed in terms of body”⁵⁵.

⁵⁴ “If one wanted to invent the Resurrection, all the inconsistency would focus on full corporeality, on the immediate possibility of recognition, and, in addition, one would possibly imagine a special power as a distinctive sign of the Risen One. However, in the contradictory nature of what is experienced that characterises all the texts, in the mysterious mixture of otherness and identity, a new mode of encounter is mirrored which, from an apologetic point of view, appears rather dismaying, but which is revealed all the more as a rendering of lived experience” (Joseph RATZINGER, *Isus din Nazaret: de la intrarea în Ierusalim la Înviere*, p. 249).

⁵⁵ Sandra M. SCHNEIDERS, *Jesus Risen in Our Midst. Essays on the Resurrection of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, 2013, p. 22.

The disciples recognize the Jesus who had been their teacher before Easter, and just as he had been a distinct person then, so he was now. “They experienced Jesus as a person distinct from themselves and from everything else, someone who became really present (visible) to them and then ceased to be present (vanished from their sight) and whose presence and absence they did not control”⁵⁶.

However, “we realise that this is a special episode, treated differently from others, and that it has its own significance, a particular message to convey”⁵⁷. As for John, he

“understands Jesus’ death as the consummate expression of divine love, but recognizes that this is only apparent in retrospect, from the vantage point of the resurrection. In Johannine theology, the action of the risen Jesus is what brings people to the faith through which his life and death can be understood. The resurrection is essential for authentic faith because faith is a relationship with a living being. According to John, the crucifixion communicates the divine love that is the basis for a relationship with Jesus, and the resurrection means that this relationship is more than remembering one who has died. Faith is active trust in a Jesus who is unseen yet alive. Finally, the resurrection of Jesus defines hope for the future. The followers of Jesus face the prospect of a death that is as real as the death of Jesus himself. The message of resurrection is that the relationship with Jesus that begins now, in faith, has a future through the believer’s own resurrection”⁵⁸.

The manifestation of the presence of the Christ who would be dead and buried was imperative in the immediate plan of discipleship and in the distant plan of the economy of salvation. The Jewish mind of the age did not conceive of the resurrection as the posterity of the soul after the body had been left - forever - behind, but “designates a new bodily life after the period of bodily

⁵⁶ S. M. SCHNEIDERS, *Jesus Risen in Our Midst...*, p. 23.

⁵⁷ André SCRIMA, *Comentariu integral la Evanghelia după Ioan*, p. 403.

⁵⁸ Craig R. KOESTER, *The Word of Life: A Theology of John’s Gospel*, p. 123.

death”⁵⁹. Therefore, because “Jesus was fully and bodily alive again, even more fully and bodily alive than before”⁶⁰, all His appearances had this component of the transfigured body.

Here is the patristic perspective on this event. The Lord’s revelations are discussed from the perspective of the question:

“What happened after the Resurrection? Lest anyone should be unbelieving in the matter of the economy and think that the Lord dwelt bodiless in humanity, after his resurrection from the dead he appeared before his disciples and showed them the nail marks and the wound in his side which the soldier had made with the spear... And when they had eaten, He then commands Peter and the other apostles to shepherd mankind. Do you see the goodness of God? Do you see the Master’s love of mankind? He did not rebuke the apostles, nor blame them, nor call them to account, saying, ‘Why have you forsaken preaching and returned to catching fish?’ But he searched them, and comforted them, and helped them to fish, and prepared their food, and set before them bread and fish, that he might show by this also that he is the Creator of the earth and of the sea”⁶¹.

It is logical to consider that “He was not seen unless He made a concession, since His body was henceforth uncorrupted and undefiled”⁶². This *concession* is one of the most refined interpretations of the exhibitions, evaluated in their technical sense - if we can say so. As the Incarnation meant a first coming (accomplished through *kenosis*), the Resurrection predisposes the Son of God

⁵⁹ N. T. WRIGHT, *Ziua în care a început revoluția: regăsind sensul Crucii lui Iisus*, trad. Ioan I. Ică jr., Deisis, Sibiu, 2017, p. 179. Christ’s resurrection “was to be the starting point of God’s new world, His new creation” (N. T. WRIGHT, *Ziua în care a început revoluția...*, p. 179).

⁶⁰ N. T. WRIGHT, *Ziua în care a început revoluția...*, p. 180.

⁶¹ St. AMFILOHIE OF ICONIUM, *Scrieri*, transl. Oana Coman, Doxologia, Iași, 2015, pp. 229-230.

⁶² St. IOAN GURĂ DE AUR, *Omilii la Evanghelia după Ioan*, transl. Maria-Iuliana Rizeanu și Mihai Grigoraș, coll. *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești* 18, seria nouă, Basilica, București, 2019, p. 436.

to others, for 40 days. And ultimately, this was the only way for contemporaries to penetrate the mystery of His destiny. “Certainly, the resurrection convinced Jesus’ disciples that He was truly Israel’s Messiah, despite His shameful death. They quickly realized that any new meaning to be found would be found in the Scriptures”⁶³.

As Armand Puig says, “after the Resurrection and in its light, the episode of the profound revelation of Jesus, close and like the Father, will acquire its full meaning”. The disciples’ knowledge grows exponentially after the last - and most exalting - act of Jesus’ divinity has taken place: *the resurrection*.

“Not surprisingly, now, after the resurrection, doubt continues to assail them. In the face of doubt, Jesus’ words are few, as if it were enough for him to show himself to his disciples, as if his only concern were to assure them of his constant presence now, when a different time is beginning: the time of mission everywhere on earth, the time of building community, of establishing the Church”⁶⁴.

This is because, “if there is indeed a strong historical ‘proof’ for the resurrection of Jesus, it is not that of the empty tomb, but that of the courageous return of the apostles ...”⁶⁵.

There is another textual detail that should be considered. “These observations strengthen the case for the integral relation of chapter 21 to chapters 1–20. *Phaneroō* fits well with John’s thematic emphasis on revelation. Forms of the verb occur nine times in 1 John, making a total of eighteen uses in the Gospel and Johannine Epistles”⁶⁶. The last chapter of John is therefore - including this verb - closely (and naturally) related to the other chapters of the gospel.

Also, a comparison with the first use of the verb *phaneroō* (in the Gospel of John) is welcome. “The first scene where Jesus first showed, *phaneroō*, His glory, was the wedding feast at Cana where he performed the miracle of the

⁶³ N. T. WRIGHT, *Ziua în care a început revoluția...*, p. 182.

⁶⁴ Armand PUIG, *Isus. Un profil biografic*, transl. Jana Balacciu Matei, Editura Meronia, București, 2007, p. 596.

⁶⁵ Jürgen MOLTMAN, *Venirea lui Dumnezeu. Tratat de eshatologie creștină*, transl. Vasilică Mugurel Păvălucă, Presa Universitară Clujeană, Cluj-Napoca, 2015, p. 411.

⁶⁶ Willard M. SWARTLEY, *John*, Herald Press, Harrisonburg, Waterloo, 2013, p. 477.

wine; the final scene where Jesus again revealed himself, *phaneroō*, was at the meal on the shore, where he came to the disciples, took the bread and gave it to them. Both scenes evoke the Eucharist⁶⁷. In the light of this interpretation, the Eucharist - in its mystical spirit - does nothing but cut across all the chapters of the Gospel, anticipating what the Church was to experience later.

Conclusions

We ground our teaching on the manifestation of Christ in the three formulations attributed by Hans Urs von Balthasar to the notion of glory in the New Testament. These give us a certain synthesis, summing up the exegetical hypostases elaborated above. First, if “every living being, especially the free person, creates a space of power in his environment, in order to control it, to radiate and appear in it”⁶⁸, then the same paradigm must be applied to the Saviour. Moreover, since He is the Being par excellence, His expression in the world of the people for whom He came *is a necessity*. Secondly, if the beautiful represents “a transcendental particularity of being, [all the more so], at the level of theology, the sovereign-the royal-the glorified is revealed as a particularity of the reason-to-be present in all being: of God”⁶⁹. Following this logic, then never was God more brilliant in the highest sense than in His Incarnation. Third, if the ultimate revelation of God was made in Christ, then “it should be revealed... ultimately in His absolute hiding on the cross and in the hell”⁷⁰.

The ascent of Christ’s revelations in the Gospel of John is nothing other than the journey “from theocentrism to Christocentrism” - as Hans Urs von Balthasar rightly pointed out⁷¹. We can consider this passage as *a dogmatic and spiritual ascent*, especially if we consider the patristic elaborations on this

⁶⁷ Margaret BARKER, *King of the Jews: Temple Theology in John’s Gospel*, SPCK, London, 2014, p. 600.

⁶⁸ Hans URS VON BALTHASAR, *Slava lui Dumnezeu: o estetică teologică*, p. 172.

⁶⁹ Hans URS VON BALTHASAR, *Slava lui Dumnezeu: o estetică teologică*, p. 173.

⁷⁰ Hans URS VON BALTHASAR, *Slava lui Dumnezeu: o estetică teologică*, p. 174. “Christ’s obedience unto death is not a myth, but God’s ultimate self-revelation in history” (Hans URS VON BALTHASAR, *Slava lui Dumnezeu: o estetică teologică*, p. 174).

⁷¹ Hans URS VON BALTHASAR, *Slava lui Dumnezeu: o estetică teologică*, p. 187.

subject. St Athanasius the Great and St Gregory of Nyssa - to give just two examples - have shown in their commentaries how Christ reveals himself, grows and matures throughout the life of faith on the one hand, but also how the Orthodox doctrine of Christ acquires breadth throughout the ages, through the mysterious work of the Holy Spirit⁷².

We understand from all this that “the work of Jesus Christ, both teaching and doing, is a work with a mystical continuation... Jesus’ deeds are arms stretched out to us”⁷³. We can therefore affirm that “for the community of the beginnings, the coming of Jesus, the paschal mystery and the foundation of the Church in Baptism and the Eucharist are the expected final gift: we are at the end of the ages, at the end of history, because the One who was to come has revealed Himself”⁷⁴. And since the Gospel of John belongs to a community of faith,

“it spoke the language of that community. It encouraged, consolidated and celebrated the faith of the community through its unique portrayal of Jesus. It reinforced the community’s identity as in, but not of, the world. It also challenged and confronted faith and understanding. Within all this its Christology played an important part”⁷⁵.

As Michael F. Bird rightly points out, Christological research should - at last - move beyond old concerns, especially those related to the Jewishness, dependence and polarization of Jesus on Old Testament texts (especially the Yahwist ones) and set a new trajectory. In the author’s view, this means a “comparative analysis of Jesus and ancient intermediary figures, with the aim of showing what is distinctive about his divinity in the discourse of early Christianity”⁷⁶.

⁷² For a development of the theme, see: Jaroslav PELIKAN, *Credo: ghid istoric și teologic al crezurilor și mărturisirilor de credință în tradiția creștină*, transl. Mihai-Silviu Chirilă, Polirom, Iași, 2010, pp. 50-53.

⁷³ Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Iisus Hristos sau restaurarea omului*, Basilica, București, 2013, p. 250.

⁷⁴ Gislain LAFONT, *O istorie teologică a Bisericii: itinerarul, formele și modelele teologiei*, transl. Maria-Cornelia Ică jr., Deisis, Sibiu, 2003, p. 35.

⁷⁵ William LOADER, *Jesus in John’s Gospel: Structure and Issues in Johannine Christology*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids, 2017, p. 675.

⁷⁶ Michael F. BIRD, *Jesus among the Gods. Early Christology in the Greco-Roman World*, Baylor University Press, Waco, 2022, p. 7.

But things can be taken even further, in a profoundly mystical sense, as we find in St Paul. Commentators have noted that the apostle

“use *phaneroō* in [2Corinthians] 2, 14 [as in] 4, 10–11, where it is used by Paul to describe how the ‘life of Jesus’ is made manifest in Paul’s own body. As such, he argues that by using the metaphor of fragrance in 2, 14 Paul wants to indicate that his very existence is somehow revelatory of Christ”⁷⁷.

Thus, the spiritual life is based on the revelation of God in Christ, as we know it from the testimonies of the canonical writings. However, if we were to pick out a maximum revelatory period, where Christ’s divinity reaches its climax, it is undoubtedly that between the Resurrection and the Ascension. Until this climax, all the others are somewhat preparatory, manifestations of the glory of the Saviour in a hidden form. The Evangelist John, however, notes these key moments, trying to convince us of their immediate importance, but also of their importance assumed - by faith - throughout the centuries.

Again, as we see in relation to other works of Christ, his presentations to contemporaries become paradigms of a relationship mediated by faith and hope. His coming into the world is an act of revelation that undergoes an impressive progression, synonymous with the soul’s ascent towards God in the spiritual life.

⁷⁷ Peter C. ORR, “Exalted above the Heavens: The Risen and Ascended Christ”, in: D. A. CARSON (ed.), *New Studies in Biblical Theology*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Apollos, London, 2018, p. 138.